

STUDENTS' INTENTIONS FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES: WHAT SELF-DETERMINED MOTIVATION TELLS US ABOUT IT?

Vali Khalkhali*

Department of Psychology, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran

Summery

In some cultuers religious practices are very important educational goals. One factor in a student's decision to practice religious exercises may be motivation. Teachers play important role in helping students develop motivational resources through the provision of autonomy-supportive classrooms. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship among students' perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction and behaviour regulation style with their intention for religious practices, on the basis of self-determination theory. Correlational method was conducted. Participants were 357 students. Questionnaires were used to assess perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction, perceived locus of causality scale and intention for religious practice. The results of multivariate regression analysis showed that perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction and more self-determined forms of behavioral regulation predict the intention of students for religious practices. The findings highlight the importance of perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction and self-determined behavioral regulation in fostering more self determined forms religious practices at university.

Key Words: *Self-determination theory; basic psychological needs; behavioral regulation; religious practices*

1. Introduction

A great variety of religious beliefs and practices play a significant role throughout most, if not all, cultures. Religious practices can be motivated by very different reasons. For instance, religious activities can be driven by personally endorsed religious values (e.g., compassion, brotherly love, etc.), they can be instigated by threatening guilt feelings or they can be performed to meet external norms and demands [1]. Central in the present research is the question whether and how students' reasons for engaging in religious practices are related to the way they perceive their basic psychological needs satisfaction and behavioral regulation. Teachers can nevertheless provide classroom contexts that foster situational engagement, nurture interest, and promote the development of internal motivational resources [2]. Of particular importance is how motivating classes are for the students, and how much teachers are able to increase the young people participation in religious activities. When teachers support their students' interests (rather than control their behavior), students are more likely to find value in their religious practices and are less likely to formulate dropout intentions. Once nurtured and developed in the classroom, motivation can therefore function as a student-owned internal resource that contributes significantly to the decision to persist in religious practices.

A motivational theory that has been successfully applied in educational settings is self-determination theory [3,4,5,6]. Self-determination theory [7] can be used as a framework to understand the motivational influences underlying students' intentions to religious practices. Self-determination theory [4] distinguishes three kinds of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation, situated along a continuum ranging from high to low self-determination, and which vary according to the degree of behavioral regulation. Thus, amotivation refers to the absence of the intention to act and this may be because the person does not feel competent, cannot see the contingencies between the behaviors performed and the expected results, or does not value the activity. Intrinsic motivation represents the highest degree of self-determined motivation and occurs in the situations in which individuals feel free to commit to activities they

find interesting and/or fun and that offer them the chance to learn. Lastly, extrinsic motivation, in contrast, takes place when people carry out a task because they value the results associated with it (e.g., public acknowledgement, extrinsic rewards) more than the activity itself. However, within extrinsic motivation there is a continuum. Self-determination theory [3, 8] distinguishes four types of extrinsic reasons for engaging in (religious) activities as a function of the degree in which they are internalized. External regulation is when the behavior is controlled by external conditionalities (e.g., “I do religious practices because I am forced to”). Introjected regulation is when the external conditionalities have been internalized to some extent, (e.g., “I do religious practices because I would feel guilty otherwise”). Identified regulation is when the outcomes of the behavior are consciously valued by the individual (e.g., “I do religious practices because I value the religion”). Integrated regulation is when the outcomes of the behavior are fully congruent with the individuals’ other values (e.g., “I do religious practices because it is part of who I am”). External and introjected regulations are relatively controlled forms of regulation, whereas identified, integrated, and intrinsic regulation are relatively autonomous forms of regulation [7].

According to the SDT [8], the transformation of external regulation into self-determined forms of regulation, as well as the stability of self-determined (intrinsic) motivation depends on three aspects: The satisfaction of the basic, innate psychological needs for support of autonomy, support of competence, and social support. SDT proposes that human beings have innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. People are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, doing an activity simply for the enjoyment they derive from it, when they can freely choose to pursue an activity (autonomy/choice), when they master the activity (competence) and when they feel connected and supported by significant people, such as a manager, a parent, a teacher or teammates (relatedness). Yet, the significance of the three basic needs for the explanation of action and experience can vary depending on the situation and the cultural context. Intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts that support the satisfaction of these needs will promote a person’s enjoyment of activities and the autonomous self-regulation of behaviors [4].

When students have autonomy supportive teachers [9,10] or when students perceive their teachers to be relatively autonomy supportive [11,5], students report relatively high levels of self-determination, competence and valuing of school [6]. The more the regulation of an activity is internalized, the more the activity will be enacted in a psychologically free and volitional manner [7]. Enacting an activity for well-internalized or autonomous reasons has been found to predict a variety of positive outcomes, including physical and psychological well-being [e.g., 12, 13], effective performance [e.g., 14] and behavioral persistence [e.g., 6,14]. In contrast, enacting an activity for externally or internally controlled reasons has been found to predict impaired functioning and ill-being [see 7 for reviews].

According to the theory of planned behavior [15], people’s overt statement of intention is the strongest predictor of behavior. Hagger, Chatzisarantis, Culverhouse, & Biddle [16] proposed that intention summarized a person’s general affective and cognitive orientation towards the behavior (attitude), the perceived pressure placed on them by significant others to participate in the target behavior (subjective norm), and their competence-related evaluation of their faculties and capacities towards the behavior (perceived behavioral control). As such, more self-determined forms of behavioral regulations (which effect more positive consequences or adaptive outcomes) are more likely to enhance stronger intentions from a person.

A few SDT-based studies have been conducted in the domain of religious behaviors as well. A subsequent study by Ryan, Rigby, and King [17] focused on introjected and identified regulation, thereby showing that an introjected regulation was positively related to ill-being, as indexed by anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints, and negatively predicted well-being, as indexed by self-esteem, identity integration and self-actualisation, whereas the opposite pattern of results emerged for identified religiosity. Furthermore, identified regulation was found to yield positive effects on behavioral outcomes, such as church-attendance and the amount of financial donation to churches [18]. In a study among Jewish individuals, Assor et al. [19] report positive relations between an internalized regulation and the performance of typical Jewish-orthodox practices, such

as keeping the sabbath and keeping kosher. In short, these studies suggest that a more internalized regulation of religious practices has a significant positive effect on domain-relevant behaviors and general psychological well-being. Neyrinck, et al., [1] In a study among Belgian sample of active believers shown that the internalization of one's reasons for performing religious behaviors was positively associated with an open, symbolic interpretation of religious belief contents and a stronger adherence to Christian beliefs. Moreover, internalization was also positively related to general well-being and frequency of prayer but unrelated to church attendance.

These results show that the students' self-determination for religious practices is associated with positive outcomes. So the examination of Iranian university students' self-determination (as a religious country) in classroom and its relation with their intention for religious practices it is of great interest. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship among students' perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction and behaviour regulation style with their intention for religious practices. Based on the SDT framework, we hypothesized that: a) Perceived basic psychological needs will predict intentions for religious practices, b) Intention will be positively predicted by intrinsic motivation and identified regulation while negatively predicted by external regulation and amotivation.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

As perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction and behaviour regulation style were used to predict students' intention for religious practices, a correlational research used. The initial student sample contained 382 Iranian collage students. Students who did not complete the entire questionnaire were excluded from the analyses. Hence, all analyses were based on a final sample of 357 students (age: $M = 21.15$, $SD = 1.9$, range = 19–25 years).

2.2. Measures

Firstly, all measures were translated into Persian language and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess their internal reliability. Finally, in the last part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate their age, student identification number, gender, and date of birth.

Perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction. Firstly, measure was translated into Persian and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to assess its internal reliability. Students were asked to report the degree of satisfaction of their three psychological needs at school by responding to items. We measured satisfaction of autonomy using six items previously employed by Standage et al. [20] that followed the stem "When I am at school____." An example item is, "I can decide what activities I want to practice." We measured competence at school using the five items that comprise the perceived competence subscale of the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory [21], adapted to the religious practices. An example item is, "I am pretty skilled in religious practices." We measured relatedness using five items from the acceptance subscale of the Need for Relatedness Scale [4]. These five items were modified to reflect the religious practices. An example item is "In this school I feel supported." All responses were indicated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The three subscales have demonstrated acceptable internal reliability in previous studies [20]. In the present study the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were $\alpha = .73$ (autonomy), $\alpha = .79$ (competence), and $\alpha = .81$ (relatedness).

Behavioral regulations. Students reported their motivational regulations using Perceived Locus of Causality scale (PLOC), a questionnaire developed by Goudas, Biddle, & Fox [22]. The questionnaire begins with the stem, "The reason I do religious practices is . . .," and provides a list of 16 different reasons to go to school, each with its own 1–7 response scale. Each motivational regulation contained four items. Subscales in the questionnaire were intrinsic motivation (e.g., "Because I enjoy do religious practices"), identified regulation (e.g., "Because I think that religious practices will help me better prepare for the life"), introjected regulation (e.g., "To show myself that I am an God fearing person"), external regulation (e.g., "Because I need do religious practices in order to find some points on"). Again, previous research has demonstrated the internal

consistency of the five subscales [e.g.,23]. In the present study the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were $\alpha = .83$ (external regulation), $\alpha = .82$ (introjected regulation), $\alpha = .85$ (identified regulation), $\alpha = .83$ (intrinsic motivation).

Formal religious participation [24]. A single item was used to measure respondents formal religious participation. Respondents were asked about the frequency they "usually attend religious or spiritual services. Response categories included (a) more than once a week, (b) about once a week, (c) one to three times a month, (d) less than once a month, and (e) never. Respondents who reported usually attending religious services more than once a week or about once a week were coded 3; respondents who reported usually attending one to three times a month were coded 2; respondents who reported attending less than once a month were coded 1; and respondents who reported never attending religious services were coded 0 on this variable.

2.3. Procedure

The questionnaires were administrated in the fall. Permission for the study was obtained by the teachers and students. Authors administered the questionnaire during students' regular class periods and in their regular classrooms. The administrators used standardized instructions, and explained that the purpose of the study was "to understand students' perspectives on religious practices." Subjects were assured about the confidentiality of their answers. Questionnaires were administrated with the absence of teacher. Only, participants who were volunteer completed questionnaires.

3. Results:

The data collected were analyzed in two parts. Firstly, descriptive statistics were computed. In addition, analysis of regression was computed followed by descriptive statistics.

Findings

Table 1 presents the correlations matrix among the five behavioral regulations and intention. As table 1 show, the positive correlation was observed between intrinsic and perceived competence and intention to persist in, high school, and negative correlation between introjected, external motivation and amotivation and intention. For verification of multiple correlation between predictor (independent) variables and dependent variable, a statistical multiple regression methods has been used in survey.

Table 1. Correlation between intrinsic, identified, introjected, external regulations, amotivation, perceived competence and intention

	Intention for religioeus practices
External motivation (1)	-0.256**
Introjected regulation (2)	-0.536**
Identified regulation (3)	0.827**
Intrinsic regulation (4)	0.791**
Psychological needs satisfaction (5)	0.688**

**P< .001

Correlations among the four motivational regulations (Table 1) were consisted with the self-determination theory, that is, the motivational regulations which are nearby in the self-determination continuum had higher correlation in comparison with the others.

Table 2. Square value of coefficient of multiple correlation for predictor variables

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error of the Estimate
0.65	0.42	0.39	3.19

As can be

seen in above

table, behavioral regulations were accounting for an additional 0.39 of e variance of intention.

Table 3. Sum of square analysis and results

Source	SS	MS	df	F	Sig
Regression	1370.655	274.131	5	22.154	0.000
Resident	1959.743	5.583	351		

The F value was significant, $F(5, 351) = 49.101, p < 0.000$. It shows predictor (independent) variables can predict variance of dependent variable significantly.

Table 4. Coefficients of Regression Equations based on psychological needs satisfaction and behavioral regulations with intention for religious practices

Variables	Un-standardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
	β	SE β	β		
intrinsic regulation	0.214	0.054	0.437	4.12	0.000
identified regulation	0.020	0.012	0.461	3.05	0.000
introjected regulation	-0.243	0.082	-0.364	-2.48	0.000
external regulation	-0.312	0.036	-0.216	-3.63	0.000
psychological needs satisfaction	0.303	0.073	0.429	3.69	0.000
Constant	13.86	0.62	-		0.000

Table-4 shows introjected regulation is negatively strongest predictor of intention to religious practice. On the other hand, identified regulation is positively strongest predictor of intention. Intrinsic regulation and Psychological needs satisfaction have positive and significant relationships with intention. External regulation is negatively weakest predictor of intention.

4. Discussion

According to SDT, students' perceptions of self-determination constitute students' internal motivational resources that support their engagement and persistence in religious practices. Schools play important role in helping students develop these internal motivational resources through the provision of religious practices which are interesting for students, relevant to their lives, and affirm their competencies. In this study, we tested the hypothesis that perceived psychological needs satisfaction and internal behavioral regulations would have positive relationship with intention to persist in religious practices and external behavioral regulations would have negative relationship with intention. Results supported the hypothesis. We found that when students perceived that needs for self-determination are being neglected or frustrated, and then they become vulnerable to begin formulating dropout intentions. Students' perception of classroom as autonomy supportive climate nurture critical motivational variables (i.e., self-determined motivation, perceived competence and relatedness) that predict their intentions to persist in religious practices. Self-regulated motivation can help predict intention to persist in religious practices positively, whereas external regulations did negatively. These findings are consistent with previous research [17, 18, 19,1]. Assor et al. [19] report positive relations between an internalized regulation and the performance of typical jewish-orthodox practices. Neyrinck, et al., [1] In a study among Belgian sample of active believers shown that the internalization of one's reasons for performing religious behaviors was positively associated with an open, symbolic interpretation of religious belief contents and a stronger adherence to Christian beliefs.

On the basis of SDT, we reasoned that perceived psychological needs satisfy and more self-determined forms of behavioral regulations would predict intention to persist in religious practices

positively by reducing an external perceived locus of causality for engaging in, which can satisfy their needs for self-determination and autonomy. In contrast, when students feel less self-determined in classroom, that is, pressured to participate in instructional activities (external and introjected regulations) or feel that instructional activities are a waste of their time (amotivation), they are more likely to adopt controlling intentions which are less likely to be translated into actual behavior.

In classroom, the onus is on the teachers to adopt appropriate motivational strategies that may satisfy psychological needs and enhance more self-determined forms of behavioral regulations. The implication here for teachers, the importance of being autonomy-supportive in order to foster more self-determined forms of behavioral regulations. According to Ryan and Deci [4], experience of autonomy facilitates internalization. On the other hand, non self-determined forms of regulations do not result in adaptive behaviors and also lead to outcomes which are not persistent over time [e.g., 25].

5. Conclusion

According to the findings, students' perception of psychological needs satisfaction and self-determined forms of behaviour regulation are positive predictors of their intention for religious practice. This finding is important and shows that religious practice is a motivation issue. These variables for about 40% of the variance in religious practice intentions, which show substantial portion of religious practice intentions also arise from motivational resources. This findings are particularly important considering the significant role of schools and colleagues in promoting motivational resources and how this can in turn increase religious practice intention. From an applied perspective, our findings insist on motivational intervention strategy to enhance persistence. When teachers provide their students with autonomy-supportive environments, they provide a classroom climate which nurtures students' perceptions of psychological needs and more self-determined forms of behavioral regulations that in turn increase religious practice intention. Nevertheless, these motivational resources should be encouraged to promote persistence. Teachers must find ways to support students' interests, connect lessons to students' lives, and affirm students' psychological needs. In practice, doing so means providing opportunities for choice, provide increased opportunities for student input, respect students' agendas, and empathize and acknowledge the students' concerns, feelings and questions.

Limitations and Future Research. The current study is not without its limitations. First, we conducted a cross-sectional research and the cross-sectional nature of research design which only allowed for a slice-in-time study, but as getting perception of self-determination and psychological needs takes time and formulating an intention to religious practice occur over time, it would be better use a longitudinal research design. Second, we used a single measure of intention for religious practice. That is, we did not assess students' actual religious behaviors. Third, we studied students' perceptions of only their teachers and colleague climate and didn't study their perception of parents and friends. Hence, future research might use a longitudinal research design in dropout study, and assess students' actual dropout behaviors. Future research might study students' perceptions of parents and friends.

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