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Approach to Learning of students in teachers' training institutions in Israel and its relation to their cultural dimensions, career choice motives, and academic experience

The aim of the present study is to characterize Israeli students' approach to learning. Students' approach to learning conceptualizes their learning intentions and the context in which learning takes place. Focusing on students in teachers training institutions, it is suggested that cultural dimensions play a significant role in their approach to learning as well are their motives for choosing to become teachers, and their perceived academic experience during their studies. The presented study may be regarded as multidisciplinary as it is located in pedagogy (e.g., teachers' training, students' Approach to Learning, and academic experience) while also considering theories and concepts from sociology (e.g., Hofstede's cultural dimensions, socio-cultural career choice motives).

There are three distinguished approaches to learning. *Surface Approach to Learning* (Surface ATL) refers to passive learning, unengaged and unreflective, and in which strategies to minimize effort, such as rote learning, isolated task completion with little real interest in content, are used. *Deep Approach to Learning* (Deep ATL) is motivated by real personal interest, desire to understand, and vocational relevance in which deep strategy (i.e., relate ideas to evidence, integration of ideas and concepts across tasks and courses, identifying general principles) is used. *Achieving Approach to Learning* (Achieving ATL) is motivated by a desire to be successful, achieving high grades, and competing with others in which students' strategy is to use any technique that achieves these goals, even with patchy and variable level of understanding. To this end, students' approach to learning serves as a proxy for their subsequent learning quality and academic achievements, as well as a means for better understanding the teachers training process.

Better understanding of Israeli teaching students and teachers' training process can shed light on some of the salient characteristics of future teachers in Israel, the nature of Israeli education system and Israeli society as a whole. Such an understanding is required in light of the socio-cultural challenges Israel is expected to face.

Israel's culturally diverse society, both nationally, ethnically, and religiously, is unsustainable and foreboding for Israel's future with lower labor force participation rates, widening socio-economical gaps, and increased poverty. Disparities in Israel's education are already evident with the existence of separate education systems, some of which are almost unregulated by the state and most of which lag behind the official education systems in their education quality and performance.

To successfully mitigate its social challenges, and since culture and education are interrelated, Israel must improve its education to improve its human capital. Thus, it holds that to better understand Israel's education system and its ability to support the future needs of Israeli society, one must better understand the agents of the education system – i.e., its teachers – their training process and learning quality. It is argued that students' approach to learning cannot ignore the experiential context in which their studies take place, and similarly that their cultural orientation and personal preferences influence this experience.

For this purpose, a quantitative research approach, based on validated questionnaires and correlational statistical inference was used. The sample consists of 314 students from three pluralistic and secular students' training institutions in northern Israel, which are representative of sampling students in teachers' training institutions in Israel.

Descriptive analysis of students' approach to learning scores suggests a hierarchy between the three approaches. Students scored high on the Achieving approach to learning, slightly lower on Deep ATL and medium on Surface ATL. Furthermore, while no significant correlation was

documented between Deep ATL and Surface ATL, students' Achieving ATL is positively correlated with Deep ATL and, conversely, negatively correlated with Surface ATL. These findings place Achieving ATL as a pivotal approach to learning, as it embodies some of Deep ATL's most desirable aspects and diminishes undesirable aspects associated with Surface ATL.

Multiple regression analyses suggest that students with Achieving and Deep ATLs are similar in that both positively associated with learning environments that promote critical thinking. Thus, critical thinking is the main experiential academic learning aspect to promote desirable aspects of learning such as high levels of thinking and the ability to connect concepts and build new knowledge.

However, the analyses also suggest that students scoring Deep ATL embody an intrinsic motivation to learn, Deep ATL is not associated with any other experiential academic learning aspect and instead is associated with students' perceived innate ability as a motivator for choosing a teaching career, and negatively associated with cultural orientations associated with masculinity (e.g., materialism and competitiveness). Conversely, as Achieving ATL is associated with cultural long-term orientation and perceived academic learning experience promoting professional alignment (but not with any subjective motive to become teachers), Achieving ATL should be better viewed as long-term, strategic oriented learning designed to promote professional alignment.

Students' Surface ATL was found to be associated with their personal utility motives for choosing teaching career (i.e., a career which will enable them to allocate more time and resources to personal needs and wants). However, supportive teaching may help in diminishing some of the negative aspects attributed to Surface ATL.

Additional findings suggest that students find it hard to maintain high levels of Deep ATL as they progress with their studies and that some of the variation in students' Surface ATL

can be attributed to students' ethnic and religious background characteristics (i.e., Muslims and

Jewish ultra-Orthodox students), but not to their cultural orientation.