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Investigation and research on the motivation of college students' participation in academic competitions: Taking the English competition of Panzhihua University as an example

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Abstract

Participating in academic competitions is an important way for college students to enhance their innovative abilities, broaden their professional horizons, and cultivate the ability to solve practical problems. However, from the current situation of Panzhihua University's participation in academic competitions, the enthusiasm and proportion of students participating in academic competitions are not ideal. This article uses a questionnaire survey method to study the current situation and motivation of Panzhihua University students participating in academic competitions, and proposes some methods to improve students' motivation to participate. This research has certain reference value for the management of competitions in universities.

Keywords: Academic competition, enthusiasm, motivation

1. Introductions

Academic competitions are one of the important means to cultivate students' innovative ability, practical ability, and comprehensive quality. They serve as a powerful engine to stimulate collaborative and exploratory learning among college students, and also act as a booster for the reform of experimental teaching and laboratory construction in universities^[1]. In recent years, with the rise of comprehensive quality education and comprehensive talent cultivation, universities across the country have been using various types and levels of academic competitions to improve the effectiveness of students' comprehensive quality cultivation, demonstrate the teaching level and achievements of universities through competition-based practice, learning, and teaching. Academic competitions are characterized by strong competitiveness, professionalism, and operability. They play an important role in improving students' psychological qualities, innovative abilities, analytical and problem-solving skills, as well as fostering teamwork spirit. They are also one of the important ways for universities to cultivate comprehensive practical abilities and innovative abilities in the new era. Despite the implementation of various incentive policies and measures to encourage students to participate in academic competitions, students' initiative to participate in academic competitions remains low. In order to explore the motivation of college students to participate in academic competitions and enhance their participation, this paper investigates the influencing factors of college students' participation in academic competitions and analyzes the results.

2. Objects and Methods of Investigation

2.1 Research Objects

The subjects of this survey are a group of students who are enthusiasts of English. A total of 272 questionnaires were randomly distributed, including 59 males and 213 females.

2.2 Research Method

Statistical analysis method.

3. Content and Results of the Investigation

3.1 The current situation of the school holding academic competitions: Panzhuhua University held 81 various academic competitions in 2019; 100 in 2020; 111 in 2021; and 170 in 2022. The number of competition award winners was 2404, 2310, 2408, and 2990 respectively. The average number of winners per competition was approximately 29 in 2019, approximately 23 in 2020, approximately 22 in 2021, and approximately 18 in 2022. On average, there were 10 English competitions held each year from 2019 to 2022, with an average total number of winners around 215 per year and an average number of winners per competition around 22.

3.2 The current situation of students participating in academic competitions: Among the 272 respondents, there

were 41 freshmen, 118 sophomores, 72 juniors, and 41 seniors. Regarding the English competition, there were 142 people who had not participated in any competition yet, 65 who had participated once, 48 who had participated twice, and 17 who had participated three times or more. The percentage of people who had not participated in the English competition was 52.20%.

3.3 External motivation for students participating in academic competitions: External motivation for participating in academic competitions refers to factors outside the individual that usually manifest as material rewards, social pressure, or aiming to achieve specific goals. Common external motivational factors include: prizes and honors; personal advantages; teacher expectations; enhancing resumes; peer influence; credit policies.

Table 1: The statistical results are as follows

External Motivation	Male	Female	Total Number	Percentage of Total
Prizes and Honors	19	102	121	44.48%
Personal Advantages	11	63	74	27.20%
Teacher Expectations	4	11	15	5.51%
Job Opportunities	17	26	43	15.80%
Peer Influence	2	7	9	3.30%
Credit Policies	6	4	10	3.67%
Total Number	59	213	272	

Based on the above data, it can be seen that factors such as prizes and honors, personal advancement, and increased job opportunities are the main external motivators. Teacher expectations, peer influence, and credit policies are not the primary external motivational factors for students to participate in competitions.

Academic Competitions: Students participating in academic competitions usually have various intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Intrinsic motivation refers to factors such as interest, passion, and satisfaction that originate from deep within an individual. We investigated students' intrinsic motivational factors from the following 5 aspects: interest and passion, self-challenge, self-realization, learning opportunities, and social needs.

3.4 Intrinsic Motivation for Students Participating in

Table 2: The statistical results are as follows

Intrinsic Motivation	Male	Female	Total Number	Percentage of Total
Interest and Passion	19	56	75	27.57%
Self-Challenge Purpose	10	62	72	26.47%
Self-Realization	5	21	26	9.55%
Learning Purpose	23	70	93	34.19%
Social Purpose	2	4	6	2.20%
Total Number	59	213	272	

It can be seen that college students participate in competitions more for the purpose of learning. Although we commonly assume that participation in competitions should primarily be driven by interest, the data indicates that interest is not the primary intrinsic motivator for participating in competitions. Apart from the social purpose and self-realization, the differences in the number of participants for the other four motivators are not significant.

3.5 Obstacles for College Students Participating in Academic Competitions: Numerous factors hinder students from participating in academic competitions, but those that are most closely related to students' learning, life, and psychological needs often deserve the utmost attention [2]. Among the surveyed students, we have identified four factors that constitute obstacles for students to participate in competitions, including: academic pressure, lack of confidence, insufficient interest, and lack of guidance.

Table 3: The statistical results are as follows

Obstacles	Male	Female	Total Number	Percentage of Total
Academic Pressure	13	31	44	16.17%
Lack of Confidence	22	75	97	35.66%
Insufficient Interest	19	90	109	40.07%
Lack of Guidance	5	17	22	8.08%
Total Number	59	213	272	

The above data shows that the main reasons students are unwilling to participate in competitions are insufficient interest and lack of confidence. That is, students often do not participate in competitions for subjects they are not interested in. Insufficient confidence in a subject often leads to students being unwilling to participate in competitions. The proportion of lack of guidance is the lowest, indicating that the work of the guidance teachers for such competitions is relatively effective. The guidance teachers are the direct facilitators and responsible individuals for students' competition^[3].

4. Analysis and Conclusion

4.1 Regarding External Motivation: Prizes and honors are the primary external motivators for students to participate in competitions, with 121 individuals (44.48% of the total) indicating this as their main motivation. This indicates that most students aim to enhance their self-worth and sense of achievement by winning prizes and gaining recognition. This indicates that the school policy level places a high degree of emphasis on students' award-winning achievements. The greater an individual perceives support for winning awards in the environment, the stronger their motivation to participate will be, and consequently, the higher their performance will be^[4]. Personal advancement is the second most important external motivator, with 74 students (27.20% of the total) participating to enhance their skills and abilities, with a relatively higher participation rate among female students in this aspect. Teacher expectations have a relatively minor influence on participation decisions. Increasing future job opportunities is another important external motivator, with 43 students (15.80% of the total) participating for this reason, indicating that some students aim to enhance their competitiveness in the job market through competition participation. Peer influence and credit policies have the least impact on participation decisions. Only 9 students (3.30% of the total) were influenced by peers, and 10 students (3.67% of the total) were influenced by credit policies, suggesting that school or course credit policies have limited influence on students' competition participation decisions. Among all external motivators, female students generally have higher participation rates than male students, especially in prizes and honors, personal advancement, and teacher expectation factors. In terms of increasing job opportunities and peer influence, male participation rates are slightly higher than female, while in credit policy motivation, male and female participation rates are similar.

In summary, prizes and honors, personal advancement, and increasing job opportunities are the main external motivators driving student participation in competitions, while teacher expectations, peer influence, and credit policies have relatively minor impacts. In terms of gender differences, female students have higher participation rates in most motivators, but male participation rates are slightly higher in increasing job opportunities and peer influence. These findings are valuable for understanding student competition motivations and for formulating corresponding incentive strategies.

4.2 Regarding Intrinsic Motivation: The primary intrinsic motivation for students to participate in competitions is the purpose of learning, with 93 students (34.19% of the total) indicating this as their main motivation, and in this aspect,

female students have a relatively higher participation rate. Interest and passion are the second most important intrinsic motivator, with 75 students (27.57% of the total) participating due to a strong interest and passion in the field of competition. The purpose of self-challenge is also an important intrinsic motivator, with 72 students (26.47% of the total) participating to challenge themselves and enhance their abilities. This indicates that in this aspect, female students' participation is significantly higher than male students. Self-realization is an intrinsic motivator driving some students to participate, with 26 students (9.55% of the total) hoping to achieve self-worth through participation. The impact of social purpose on participation decisions is relatively small, with only 6 students (2.20% of the total), indicating that the primary purpose for most students participating in competitions is not for social reasons. Among all intrinsic motivators, female students generally have higher participation rates than male students, especially in learning purpose, interest and passion, and self-challenge. In self-realization motivation, male participation rates are slightly higher than female, while in social purpose motivation, male and female participation rates are similar.

In summary, the main intrinsic motivators driving student participation in competitions are learning purpose, interest and passion, and self-challenge. The impact of self-realization and social purpose is relatively small. In terms of gender differences, female students have higher participation rates in most motivators, but male participation rates are slightly higher in self-realization motivation.

4.3 Regarding Obstacles: Insufficient interest is the primary obstacle for students not participating in competitions, and in this obstacle, the proportion of female students is significantly higher than male students. Lack of confidence is another important obstacle, with 35.66% of students choosing not to participate due to insufficient confidence in the field of competition. Academic pressure is also a factor influencing students' competition participation decisions, with 16.17% of students choosing not to participate due to concerns about how competitions might affect their studies. Lack of professional guidance is a relatively minor obstacle, with 8.08% of students unwilling to participate in competitions due to a lack of effective guidance. Among all obstacles, the proportion of female students is generally higher than male students, especially in insufficient interest and lack of confidence as obstacles. In terms of academic pressure as an obstacle, the proportion of male students is slightly lower than female students, while in the lack of guidance obstacle, the proportion of male students is even lower.

In summary, insufficient interest, lack of confidence, and academic pressure are the main obstacles preventing students from participating in competitions, while the impact of lack of professional guidance is relatively small. In terms of gender differences, female students have a higher proportion in most obstacle factors, which may be related to their characteristics in learning and self-expectations.

5. Conclusion

Through the above analysis, we can clearly see that the most direct external motivation for students to participate in competitions is to gain honor and rewards, while enhancing

their professional skills. The most direct intrinsic motivation is the purpose of learning and hobbies. The least important external motivation is peer influence and credit policies. The least important intrinsic motivations are social purposes and self-realization. For schools to motivate students to actively participate in subject competitions, they should increase the honor and material rewards for award-winning students, allowing students to fully utilize their strengths while gaining recognition in competitions. The weakest external motivation, credit policies, is likely due to schools lacking policies for converting competition awards into academic credits. Universities implementing proactive encouragement policies or reward mechanisms will increase college students' enthusiasm for participating in subject competitions, while inadequate competition mechanisms within universities will hinder students' participation in subject competitions^[5]. Therefore, schools should establish policies for converting competition awards into academic credits to enhance students' external motivation to participate in competitions. Schools should strengthen competition promotion to familiarize students with competitions, eliminate unfamiliarity with competitions, and better cultivate students' interest in competitions. Through appropriate training, this can enhance students' confidence in participating in competitions.

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