

The competition versus cooperation education essay



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Competition is prevalent in all human cultures around the globe and its origin rests concealed in an undetermined past. Humans encounter competition in their daily life. From sports, business to relationships, competition has eventually become embedded in people’s lives and it is undeniable that between competition and education a close link can be drawn.

It is well-recognized that before 2001, the Mauritian educational system has been triggering a ‘rat race’ (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, 2001) competition since the lower primary years. The national ranking system was the basis which determined which secondary schools children would be admitted to. Some colleges were known as the ‘star’ schools carrying higher prestige and reputation than the ‘less-performing’ schools

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and this was based mainly on the laureateship system at Higher School Certificate (HSC) level.

In 2001, the ranking system was abolished and the regionalization together with the grading system was introduced, which meant that pupils would obtain a school in their locality. Yet, the new practice is far from being dissimilar to the ranking system; instead of ranking each pupil, the 'A+' approach operates as a way to admit pupils into the 'National Colleges', many of which were formerly deemed to be 'star schools'. Parents whose children are sitting for the Certificate for Primary Education (CPE) exams may choose whether they prefer their child to compete for a highly demanded seat in a national college or go to a regional school. Due to the elevated competition in the educational sector, there is heavy dependence upon private tuitions as from early classes in order to achieve success and to be among the best. At the end of the seven years of secondary schooling, the best ranked HSC students win scholarships to pursue their tertiary education.

1. 1 Statement of Problem

There is the general belief that competition renders learning a significant process, whereby students are allowed to experience feelings of success, discouragement. However, the inclination to compete may breed a tendency towards extreme, unhealthy competition, thus leaving by the wayside crucial aspects of education like overall physical, mental and emotional development, creativity, moral values and the importance of learning how to live as responsible citizens.

It has been my observation that in the secondary school where I have been posted for School-Based Experience, for many students, competition may signify motivation or stimulus to learn, but for others, it may represent a causal factor for a number of problems and illnesses. Hence, a key aspect of competition in school is how it impacts on the learning process of students, for whom and how it leads to positive or damaging results.

1. 2 Aim and Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to investigate on the extent, severity and possible effects of a competitive learning approach on the performance and attitudes of the learners. The following research questions provide the specific focus for the study:

For what reasons do learners compete with themselves and with their peers?

In what ways does fierce competition to excel or to be the ' elite' act as a stress factor and a motivating factor?

What are the implications of competition on the frame of mind, health and personality of students?

1. 3 Rationale of the Study

One of the main issues in the rationale for this research is the opportunity to study students in their natural environment, interacting with their friends and teachers. The study may help me in the future, to identify factors influencing classroom dynamics, to better understand the relationships that students share and learn how to foster and facilitate a conducive classroom

climate, with specific focus on enhancing student well-being, especially the vulnerable. The study would also be useful to me in effectively setting up situations and contexts where they can learn how to combine their individual egoistic strivings with the interest of other people, where they can help others and learn empathy.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter which presents an overview of the competitive nature of Mauritian educational system, the background of the study and the research problem.

Chapter 2 summarizes the recurring themes from the literature on competition. Different opinions of influential academics on issues pertaining to competition are elaborated. The chapter also provides an exposé on the benefits that competition carries. The demerits and the hindrances that are derived from the notion of competition are also highlighted.

Chapter 3 expounds on the methodology of the research. It provides a detailed account of the different steps undertaken in the inquiry. The limitations of the survey are also included in this chapter.

Chapter 4 attempts to present an analysis on the findings of the survey conducted.

Chapter 5 spells out the conclusions that have been drawn out of the results of the study.

Finally, chapter 6 discusses the results as presented in chapter 5 and puts forwards some suggestions and recommendations.

2. 0 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the arguments supporting competition. The notion of competition is then discussed in terms of its demerits and the hindrances that are engendered.

2. 1 Support for Competition

Marcus Verrius Flaccus, a Roman freedman, became a famous teacher since he introduced the principle of competition among his students as a pedagogical aid. He awarded books as prizes. In his “*De ordinedocendi et studendi*”, Battista Guarino (1434-1513), an Italian scholar, has put forward appropriate educational techniques, and argued that teachers should avoid inflicting physical punishment to pupils. Instead, learners are best motivated by competition, which can be strengthened by allowing them to work in pairs (Verhoeff, 1997).

Tom Verhoeff (1997) is convinced that “the availability of good competitions is beneficial for education in almost any discipline. A good competition should challenge the participants to give their best, or preferably more than that. If the regular curriculum is not sufficiently challenging, then good students should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular competitions”.

Lawrence (2004) introduced a new pedagogical technique which does not involve students working independently but it rather allows students to <https://assignbuster.com/the-competition-versus-cooperation-education-essay/>

evaluate their code against other students and benchmarks during the assignment. 'The competitive programming' is believed to encourage active learning and increase student motivation. Besides increasing motivation, the introduction of the competitive tournament reduces procrastination. The competitive atmosphere also increases the interaction between students having different learning styles (Felder and Silverman, 1988).

Ismail Fulu (2007) postulates that competition creates the ideal environment for promoting increased learner responsibility which eventually enables effective learning to take place. Fulu (2007) recognizes several positive outcomes of competition, for instance, students gain recognition of their learning, motivation and higher self-esteem. In Fulu's (2007) view, "students have gained many important skills that would not be possible if I had conducted conventional classes". Fasli and Michalakopoulos (2005) explain that the notion of competition acts as a spur for students to dedicate more efforts. Moreover, even weaker students persevere and participate in activities.

The chief focus of these authors' approach has been to show how competition acts as a stimulus to learn.

The findings from the studies carried out by Verhoeff (1997), Lawrence (2004) and Fulu (2007) demonstrated that competition can lead to increases in the efforts, dedication and motivation levels of students. These data provide valuable and useful insight for my study as I will investigate on the possible beneficial aspects of competition.

The classification of Type A and Type B personality were originally described in the work of Rosenman and Friedman (1974). Type A individuals tend to be very competitive, self-critical; they tend to be easily aroused to anger or hostility. The type A behavior pattern has been defined by Friedman & Rosenman (1974) as: ' an action-emotion complex that can be observed in any person who is aggressively involved in a chronic, incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time, and if required to do so, against the opposing efforts of other things or other persons.'

2. 2 Hypercompetitiveness

Horney (1937) explains that an attitude of ' hypercompetitiveness' can be generated when competition takes an extreme and unhealthy dimension (Ryckman, Thornton, Butler 1994).

Quite similar to the ' hypercompetitiveness' of Horney (1937) is the concept of ' Type A personality' put forward by Friedman and Rosenman (1974).

The type-A personality and hypercompetitive people have a highly aggressive personality, wanting to compete and win at any cost in order to safeguard their self-esteem.

The foregoing studies put a spotlight on how competitive behavior can slide into a destructive scenario such as hypercompetitiveness and aggressiveness. These authors' standpoints would allow me to explore and discover the consequences when students are too much into winning.

2. 3 Criticisms of Competition

Some studies, however, have taken a different approach by investigating on the drawbacks of competition rather than on the merits of competition.

2. 3. 1 Egoistic Competition

Gandhi argues that egoism, rivalry and competition are characteristics of a person having ' rajasic ego', that is a person who is eager to dominate, thus resulting in an egoistic competition. Interpersonal and international conflict, followed by war and violence are triggered when such traits are left unchecked or praised. Gandhi advocates that in a non-violent society, competition has no place. Instead, it should be characterized by service, mutual love and cooperation, whereby people overlook their personal gain, do not strive to achieve success and victory over others, but rather cooperate and serve for the welfare of others (Parmeshwari Dayal, 2006). It has also been pointed out that competition alienates people from one another (Buchanan, 1982). This idea goes in line with Marx's view on the capitalist system which is seen to foster ' competition and egoism in all its members and thoroughly undermines all genuine forms of community.

Gandhi's arguments about egoistic competition shed light on the importance of aspects of life other than competition.

2. 3. 2 Competition versus Cooperation

What may deserve further attention is Kohn's (1987) viewpoints on the detrimental consequences of competition on the lives, thoughts, attitudes of students.

Kohn (1987) has explored several areas of education and has found that with regards to competition, Americans held two opinions. The first opinion being the 'enthusiastic support' presumes that the more children are engaged in rivalry, the better it is since competition fosters character and breeds excellence.

The second opinion - 'qualified support' maintains that a right dose of competition can be fun and healthy even if the constant need to be winners and Number 1 implies learners being pushed too hard and too fast. After several years of investigation on the issue, Kohn deduced that the statement 'healthy competition' is purely contradictory since competition is essentially harmful.

Kohn (1987) holds that "competition is to self-esteem as sugar is to teeth". He meant that instead of improving people's sense of worth, competition causes self-doubt and reduces the chances of developing healthy self-esteem.

Competition is also considered as being "a recipe for hostility" (Kohn, 1987) - one person can win only if others fail, and this may lead to bitter relationships to be developed and others may be regarded as rivals instead of 'potential friends'.

Johnson & Johnson (1989) also share the opinion that competition is a destructive force and should be eliminated as much as possible from the environments in which children and adolescents grow. Johnson & Johnson (1989) and Kohn (1987) support cooperation and group work as healthy ways of learning. Kohn even shares the belief that in order to
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increase school achievement and improve the relationships among students, educational practices that result in competition should be eliminated.

Johnson and Johnson (1989) argued that cooperative learning enhance more positive attitudes toward the teaching and learning experiences than competitive processes.

The relationship between learners' attitudes and cooperation and competition were examined by Johnson and Ahlgren (1976). The study's results showed that students' motivation to learn was not linked to competitiveness but to cooperativeness.

Humphreys, Johnson, and Johnson (1982) point out that learning experience was rated higher by students studying physical science in a cooperative learning climate than those studying in competitive and individualistic environment.

The picture that Kohn (1987), the Johnsons (1989) and Johnson and Ahlgren (1976) presents, reveals a number of important issues with regards to the negative and damaging effects that competition can give birth to.

Investigating this aspect of competition will be part of my study.

2. 4 Social Comparison

In his theory of social comparison, Festinger (1954) argues that it exists in individuals a natural urge to know themselves, get feedback regarding their abilities thus allowing self-evaluation.

One of the motives behind social comparison is self-enhancement. This is when individuals seek more to create and maintain a positive self-image
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than seeking feedback about themselves. Thus they engage in social comparison, which precisely makes the foundation of competitive processes. An important element of the process is the selection of 'comparative other' (Festinger, 1954).

People with low self-esteem and with a threatened self-view are more likely to engage in downward comparisons (Wills, 1981). This involves the selection of inferior standards, therefore the protection and enhancement of the self-image. An example of downward comparison would be to compare one's exams results to those who worked less well or even to failures' results. Two types of downward comparisons have been distinguished.

A passive downward comparison occurs when an individual takes advantage of a preexisting situation and makes a comparison (Wills, 1981).

An active downward comparison occurs either through derogation or actively causing harm to others (Wills, 1981).

Derogation takes place when an individual attempts to belittle the target of his/her comparison in order to create distance between him or her and the target. Actively causing harm to others would involve creating situations in which others will be more inferior than themselves, thus giving the opportunity to make downward comparisons (Wills, 1981).

A second reason to have social comparison is for self-improvement (Taylor & Lobel, 1989). To gain information and hints on how to advance, people seek comparisons particularly with upward standards - others who are better than themselves.

Thirdly, the need to make self-improvement is another justification of having social comparison and this is done through upward comparison. In this case, the comparison standard selected would be individuals who are slightly better than oneself as this would bring about motivation and provide information on how to make progress (Bandura, 1986).

3. 0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology that underpins my study and it gives an explanation of how the study has been carried out to fulfill its objectives. It provides a framework describing the several steps that have been followed, involving examination of the whole research process from the beginning to the end. The validity and reliability is explored.

Defining the Research Question and Research Objectives

The first step consists of formulating the research question that needs to be explored, and then the research objectives must be stated. The broad and general aim of the study is to analyze

Developing the Research Plan

Once the research problem and the principal objectives have been clearly specified, the research effort understandably turns to developing the research plan, which is made up of the following issues:

Gathering Secondary Information

A good point of departure for research starts with the gathering of secondary data. In the present study, the secondary data is justified by an extensive

literature search undertaken. In addition, past reports and studies related to this project were used to get a better picture of the topic.

The following sources were consulted:

Internet and electronic journals, including Emerald Library, EBSCO

Library - magazines, textbooks

Planning Primary Data Collection

To meet the need of this study, primary data related to the research was also collected. This was meant to be more contributive in providing a better understanding and framing of the research situation. Primary data collection calls for main decisions like:

Target Population

establishes the focus of the study by forming questions about the situation or problem to be studied and determining a purpose for the study.

The selection of the group of people to be studied is a crucial step and that portion of people has the advantage to be studied intensively. In the study at hand, the target population was the students of Upper VI in a girls' Secondary School, which is one of the National Colleges.

To ensure a better understanding of the subject matter, efforts were made to acquire the views of teachers regarding the negative and positive dimensions of competition, as well as the foreseeable challenges that lie ahead.

a qualitative explanatory research was conducted at first with two teachers working in the same school. Through unstructured interviews, efforts were made to acquire their views on the

Research Approach

I adopted a qualitative approach for my study as it is in keeping with my research questions and aim of understanding the effects of competition on attitudes of learners. The subject I selected to study required an access to students' perceptions and meanings and motives attached to behavior. Since my study is a small-scale one, specific to one subject at one point in time and in one setting, the essential technique I decided to use is case study. I believed this approach would allow a detailed, in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the group under study that is students, in relation to a particular phenomenon which is competition.

Research Instruments

The basic methods I employed in my research are questionnaires, focus group interviews with students, interviews with teachers and observation in classrooms.

I thought that questionnaires would provide valid data since the risk of interviewer bias was minimised, whereby my presence would make respondents feel embarrassed, ill at ease and this would have influenced in one way or another the responses.

Moreover, being of unstructured format, the open-ended questions allowed students to express the intensity of their views, convey their personal

feelings in their own words. I felt this would allow me to unlock students' subjective state of mind with regards to specific given issues related to the central point of study. Please note that a copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The questionnaires were administered to students and collected afterwards. This method was thought to be the most appropriate as it would allow the respondents to fill in the questionnaire at a time convenient to them and this would add to the quality and validity of responses.

As a second data-gathering tool, I made use of focus group interview which. By firstly developing a rapport with my respondents, I was able to gain their trust so that they felt safe to open up and share their experience and feelings which then allowed me to gain an understanding of how competition impacts on their lives.

As the focus group interview went in unforeseen directions to uncover unexpected circumstances, I noted down the arguments as they were presented and then I organised these into recurring themes.

I also felt that observation would be an appropriate research method in a naturalistic setting, as it provides

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 teachers in the school. I used a check-list to guide interviewers during the interview process so that uniformity and consistency could be maintained in the data, which could include valuable opinions and unexpected insights.

Sampling Plan

The next task involved making a sampling plan, which included the following procedures:

Sample Size

In the present study, a sample of 6 students has been taken for the administration of questionnaires. I believed this number could facilitate to meet the objectives of the research. Moreover, given the limited time frame for the completion of the project, a larger sample size was considered difficult to be studied.

Sampling Procedure

The quota and the non-probability snowballing sampling techniques were used. Regarding the handing-out of questionnaires, students were chosen at random to participate in the survey.

Convenience sampling

Collecting Data

Pilot testing

A pilot study among 3 students was conducted in order to reveal the flaws in the questionnaire. During this pilot test, the following were detected:

(i) Some wordings were complex, ambiguous and incompatible with the respondents' level of vocabulary.

(ii) Some questions were too long, hence were left unattempted by students.

Eventually, based on the responses of the pilot study, the questionnaire was fine-tuned. A lot of questions were rephrased or dropped because they did not revolve around the research problem. Others were put into simpler words so that they could be clearly understood by the respondents.

Ethical Considerations

Practical principles of research ethics have been considered throughout the study in order to minimize the risk of harm by eliminating the possibilities whereby participants could be harmed or put in a position of discomfort. Participants were given the right to withdraw from my research at any time.

One of the foundations of research ethics is the idea of informed consent. Students took part in the study only after their parents have filled consent forms to approve their participation. The two parties were given explicit information including the purpose of the research, the methods used. Another element of informed consent is that the participants were volunteers and took part willingly without being coerced or pressurized.

However, the use of observational research methods made it impossible to obtain informed consent from participants to take part and it was not feasible to let students who were being observed know what I was observing or recording.

Another important ethical issue maintained throughout the research is the protection of anonymity and confidentiality. When I reassured to hold all

information in confidence, only then participants volunteered to share information of a sensitive and 'embarrassing' nature.

In an attempt to ensure confidentiality, I did not use the students' names or those of teachers

Validity and Reliability

allowed me to form a relationship with the participants but at the same time remain detached from the study in order not to let my own judgements contaminate the data

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Critics of the case study method believe that the study of a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability or generality of findings.

Since the quota and snowballing are non-probability and judgmental sampling techniques, the selection of the respondents was therefore subjective rather than objective since it is based on personal judgments.

The collection of data was carried out during the period of HSc examinations. As a result, to get in touch and persuade the students to participate in the survey and fill in the questionnaire with precise and relevant data was no easy matter.

Sharpened understanding