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Motivation in Political Education Lessons

Georg Weißenö & Valentin Eck

1. Introduction

The development of political competence is an important task of political education in school. It requires volition and motivation to solve tasks that are presented in political education lessons or in daily life. Cognitive abilities and skills are needed for that purpose. Emotions can also play a role. Competences are social, emotional, volitional and cognitive achievement dispositions (Weinert 2001) required to cope with problems in the area or domain of politics. Thus, political competence is a complex construct that is not only based on subject-specific content knowledge, but also on other motivational and volitional factors, for example. This reflects the problem of the current paradigm shift from provider orientation to customer orientation, or from the input to the learning results as the outcome. Customer orientation means the focus on competences as a way of describing the outcome in concrete terms.

The “Teacher Empowerment to Educate Students to Become Active European Citizens” (TEESAEC) project which was supported by the European Union from the year 2006 to 2009 within the framework of the Comenius Programme has two objectives. On the one hand, lesson materials on the European Union were developed in the form of a WebQuest (<http://www.politikwiss.ph-karlsruhe.de/tee-saec/>). On the other hand, a knowledge and motivation test was conducted in participating countries (Germany, Netherlands, UK, Austria, Estonia, Switzerland). The results of the German study are reported below.

2. Competences in the didactics of political education

In the discussion on the didactics of political education, the focus of research and theory construction has shifted to concrete descriptions of the various dimensions of competence such as motivation, attitudes, political operational competence and political judgment. In this regard, a model of competence has been published which presents a proposal for discussion of a scientific, empirically substantiated description of political competence (Detjen, Massing, Richter & Weißenö, 2012). It takes up the previous methodological and conceptual discussion of the didactics of political education and describes a scientifically based model of the dimensions of political competence from the standpoint of cognitive psychology. Furthermore, based on research in the fields of political science, cognitive psychology and the

didactics of political education, it reveals what will be involved in a standardized review, nationwide comparisons and individual marking by the teachers.

Detjen, Massing, Richter and Weißeno (2012) distinguish four dimensions of political competence: political knowledge, political judgment, political operational ability, and attitudes/motivation. Like other specific ideas about teaching objectives, these dimensions cannot be logically derived from the educational goals of political education. Knowledge is a fundamental dimension of competence. In the didactics of political education, the consensus has long been that the ability to formulate a political judgment is an important goal. The political judgment of the citizens is the complementary element for both the communicative character of politics as well as for popular sovereignty (Detjen, 2007, pp. 434 ff.). The rationality of the political judgment is influenced by needs and interests, feelings and associations, expectations and experiences (Massing, 1995).

Political judgment paves the way for political action. Thus, the requirement for political operational capability is also an important dimension of competence, which is already being empirically studied by researchers in the fields of political culture and youth culture. In political science, political action is being discussed in conjunction with the requirements for citizens' competence (Buchstein, 2002). These discussions have frequently influenced the normative objectives of the didactics of political education.

Attitudes and motivation, which represent the fourth dimension of competence in the present model, are closely connected to these dimensions of competence. They are already being investigated by researchers in the fields of political culture, youth culture and systematically by researchers in the field of didactics in political education. The following presentation makes reference to this research.

The motivation to learn is of interest because it is a significant pupil characteristic used to explain performance. The long-term development of competence also depends largely on motivational orientation. Numerous studies on motivation in other subjects confirms that domain-specific self-concepts of ability and the interest in the subjects of the lessons have predictive effects for learning results (Artelt, Demmrich & Baumert, 2001). However, information about self-concepts for the school subject of politics is rare. Moreover, the domain-specific self-concept has not been taken into account in the debate on the didactics of political education so far. This is surprising, because the link between knowledge and motivational competences, for example, is the basis for the operational competence for mastering tasks in everyday school life (Klieme & Hartig, 2007, p. 18).

3. Theoretical background

The present study aims to contribute to conceptual knowledge of the specialised concept of European players - a sub-facet of political knowledge. To this end, a comprehensive model of competence which normatively describes the domain-specific knowledge to be learnt in school is first required. Such a theoretical model is now available and underpins the concept employed in the lesson series (Weißeno, Detjen, Juchler, Massing, & Richter, 2010). It specifies the specialist concept "European players" and further terms which are necessary for the conceptualisation of the lessons. The theoretical model describes "European players" as elements of the political system of the European Union: besides the institutions and their members (European Parliament, Commission, Council, European Court of Justice), a growing number of players who address their claims to the system have established themselves: trade unions, political parties, industrial, financial and automobile organisations, associations for environmental protection, and so on. The citizens can address their claims to the EU via national elections, European election, legal actions and by joining parties or lobbies. The decisions of the EU affect a multitude of political areas like, for example, social, environmental, landscape and financial policy, external trade, defence and transport policy. Meanwhile, European legislation and financial policy have great impact on the distribution of power and resources among citizens, groups and states. In this process the political competences of the different EU organs/institutions are intermingled with each other as well as in regard to their relations with EU member states (p.108). With this enumeration, the contents are named that must be imparted to the students in class. All German students take part in lessons about the EU's political system and its connection to the German political system.

Before the hypothesis was tested, influencing factors (predictors) for learning motivation were theoretically derived. Post-test knowledge is only one predictor. Another goal is therefore the investigation of the characteristics of the pupils who have influence in the political science lessons. Thus the motivational orientation was assessed as a dependent variable in each case in order to increase the knowledge of the influencing parameters in school lessons. Table 1 lists all of the predictors used with their reference theories and expected effects.

Table 1: Summary of the variables and their expected effects on the criterion variables

	Theoretical back-ground	Expected effect of the domain-specific concept	Expected self-effect of the interest in political lessons
Sex	Westle, 2002		+
Class level	Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2010	+	+
Migration background	Baumert, Stanat, & Watermann, 2006	+	
Number of books	Bourdieu, 1979	+	
Membership in associations/ clubs	Putnam 1994, 2001; Coleman, 1988	–	+
Domain-specific self-concept	Köller, Schabel & Baumert, 2000		+
Democratic classroom climate	Watermann, 2003		+
Media use	Maiello, 2003	+	+
Interest in the subjects of the lessons	Köller, Schabel & Baumert, 2000	+	

4. Hypothesis

The central questions of the study arise from the aims of the study and the references to empirical research:

How are class levels, club membership, class atmosphere and interest in the subjects of the lessons associated with the domain-specific self-concept when performance is monitored?

How are class levels, club membership, class atmosphere and domain-specific self-concept associated with interest in the subjects of the lessons when performance is monitored?

5. Procedure

The employed lesson series was a self-learning project in the form of a WebQuest which is accessible via internet. Ultimately, the students are required to create their own networks of terms on the European Union based on the interlocked networks of terms and materials provided. Learning tasks pursue the sole aim of promoting the systematic development of knowledge. The series comprises four learning units and five lessons. Knowledge of the European Union was assessed

using a standardised questionnaire which was completed in written form. The questionnaire comprised a knowledge test with multiple-choice questions which were to be answered by selecting one of four presented response options. On both measurement occasions, questionnaire completion lasted 45 minutes.

The questions about domain-specific self-concept and interest in the domain were posed during the post-test after the series of lessons was completed. Pupils expressed the domain-specific self-concept by means of the degree of agreement with four statements (Although I certainly try, I find civics more difficult than many of my classmates"; "Nobody can do everything. I simply have no talent for civics"; "With regard to some things in civics that I didn't understand, I know right from the start that I will never understand them"; "I'm not particularly good at civics") on a four-point scale (1 = do not agree, 4 = agree). Pupils expressed their domain-specific interest by means of the degree of agreement with five statements ("It's simply fun to work out a problem in civics"; "It's important to me personally to be good at civics"; "When I'm working on a problem in civics, I sometimes don't even notice how time flies"; "When I can learn something new in civics, I am prepared to use my leisure time for this as well"; "Civics is one of the most important things to me personally") on a four-point scale (1 = do not agree, 4 = agree).

6. Sample

The TEESAEC project comprised an intervention study in which lessons with WebQuest were compared with teacher-directed lessons in 9th-grade classes from middle-track secondary schools (Realschule) and 10th-grade classes from high-track secondary schools (Gymnasium) (n=22). A total of 572 students were assessed on the first measurement occasion and 502 of these were identified on the second measurement occasion. The sample comprised 292 boys (58%) and 210 girls. In 122 cases (24%), at least one parent did not originate from Germany. This distribution deviates a little bit more from the distribution in the age group. In the German Federal Republic there are 51.6 % male and 48.4% female students.

There were 45 students (8.96%) with one parent not originating from Germany and 77 students (15.34%) with both parents not originating from Germany. Thus, the proportion of students having a migration background is below the national average of 29.7%. From Germany originate 492 students, 80.9 % of the students state that they speak only German at home and 3.2% of the participants spoke only one different language at home, while 15.9% of them speak one different language besides German. There was only a small proportion of 3.4% adolescents having ten books or fewer available in their parental home. Here, the modal category is the number of books from 22 to 100.

7. Method

The present study tries to empirically examine the domain-specific concept of “European players” with the help of a test booklet (34 items). Two aspects of migration background were assessed: Students were asked to state their mothers’ and fathers’ country of origin as well as the languages spoken at home. In cases where at least one parent did not originate from Germany, students were assigned to one of the following categories: “Turkey”, “Southern Europe”, “Eastern Europe”, or “other”. Combinations of these categories (e.g., father originating from Turkey and mother from Eastern Europe) did not occur in the present sample. This classification is based on the three migration groups that are highest in number in Germany. With regard to languages spoken at home, of interest was whether students reported that only German, only a different language, or both German and a different language was spoken. Thereby it must be considered that migration background is a far more complex phenomenon than measuring it only with these two variables.

Data on families’ cultural practice was also collected using only a single variable. The book question was an indicator to collect data on affinity to the bourgeois life-style. Further questions, for example about music or theatre visits, could not be asked due to the reasons mentioned. Since it can be assumed that social background is characterised by multidimensionality, social background has been determined only to a limited extent by a total of four variables in this study.

Data were analyzed using the software MPlus under consideration of the two-parameter logistic Birnbaum model. The fit values for the measurement of interest in the subjects of the lessons (CFI = .986, TLI = .984, RMSEA = .061) and domain-specific self-concept (CFI = .996, TLI = .993, RMSEA = .087) are acceptable. The one-dimensional structure of the scales can be confirmed.

8. Results

The following results were computed using a multivariate regression analysis and an ordinary-least-squares (OLS) estimation approach. Including the independent variables step by step provides insight into the causal structure between the factors influencing motivation.

The domain-specific self-concept of one’s own talent as an aspect of motivational orientation had positive significant effects on the class level across all models. This corresponds to the formulated assumptions. However, the effect decreased from model to model. Gender had no effect in any of the models, which did not correspond to expectations. The parents’ country of origin had no effect in

any of the models. There was a weak significant negative effect starting with the second model when a different language was spoken at home. No assumptions were formulated for these results.

In Model 2 the question of books and interest in the subjects were added. Although the book question is an excellent predictor for domain-specific knowledge, it showed no effect on the domain-specific self-concept in any of the models, as expected. Effective immediately, interest in the subjects had the strongest effect on the domain-specific self-concept. The effect remained consistently high and was expected.

In Model 3, the social networks, class atmosphere and media use were added. Social networks appear to be conducive to the dissemination and processing of knowledge data, but they had no effect whatsoever on motivational orientation. No assumptions were made in this regard. In contrast to the assumption, a democratic class atmosphere had no effect on self-concept. The effects of the media in models 3 and 4 were weakly significant and not very large. No assumptions were formulated regarding the positive effects of reading newspapers in models 3 and 4 or of television use in model 4.

The post-test knowledge was added in model 4. As expected, it had a large effect and this led to a notable increase in the explained variance. With regard to media use, television additionally showed a constant positive effect. No assumptions were made with regard to this result.

In model 1, the school form and class level showed a weakly significant effect, which however vanished in the following models. To this extent, this corresponds to expectations. Contrary to the assumption, gender had no effect in any of the models. As expected, a migration background had no effects in any of the models.

In model 2 the factors of books and domain-specific self-concept were added. While the book factor had no effect in any of the models as expected, the domain-specific self-concept had a strong significant effect in all of the models. The effect remained consistently very high and was expected.

In Model 3, the social networks, class atmosphere and media use were added. As expected, the organisations consistently had no effect. Only the use of the television had a small positive effect with respect to the media. No assumptions were made in this regard. The significant negative effect of the democratic class atmosphere ran contrary to the assumptions. Instead of the expected furtherance of interest in the subject, a decline was noted.

Table 2: Regression analyses for the prediction of the domain-specific self-concept

DV: Domain-specific self-concept	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Class: Gymnasium	.370***	.287***	.262***	.127**
Sex: Female	-.017	-.043	-.011	.000
Parents' country of birth (reference category: Germany)				
- Turkey	-.024	-.013	.001	.034
- Southern Europe	-.014	-.010	-.006	.014
- Eastern Europe	-.076	-.053	-.067	-.055
- other	-.054	-.027	-.020	-.016
Languages spoken at home: (reference category: only German)				
- German and other	-.041	-.035	-.028	-.023
- only other	-.089	-.095*	-.100*	-.094*
Number of books at home		.081	.070	.025
Interest in the subjects of the lessons		.556***	.492***	.509***
Membership in				
- youth organisations			-.002	-.025
- political & social organisations			-.033	-.041
- sport clubs & cultural organisations			.003	-.001
Democratic class climate			-.058	.057
Media use				
television			.086	.087*
daily newspaper			.154**	.104*
magazine			-.047	-.036
radio			.042	.032
internet			.048	.017
Post-test knowledge				.373***
R ²	.148	.426	.429	.518

The post-test knowledge was added in model 4 and showed the expected significant positive effect. However, it was not very large, and this time the post-test knowledge led to a minor increase in the explained variance.

Table 3: Regression analyses for the prediction of the interest in the subjects of the lessons

DV: Interest in the subjects of the lessons	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Class: Gymnasium	.131*	-.049	-.065	.026
Sex: Female	.052	.059	.057	-.066
Parents' country of birth (reference category: Germany)				
- Turkey	.002	.012	.020	-.008
- Southern Europe	.001	.006	.008	.002
- Eastern Europe	-.014	.018	-.010	.014
- other	-.030	.006	-.021	.024
Languages spoken at home: (reference category: only German)				
- German and other	-.027	-.007	-.009	.015
- only other	.006	.052	.026	-.022
Number of books at home		-.018	-.029	.012
Domain-specific self-concept		.608***	.503***	.621***
Membership in				
- youth organisations			-.073	.168
- political &. social organisations			.007	-.048
- sport clubs & cultural organisations			-.030	.039
Democratic class climate			-.235***	-.237***
Media use				
television			.146**	.108**
daily newspaper			.031	.020
magazine			.053	.040
radio			.029	.019
internet			-.060	-.073
Post-test knowledge				.227**
R ²	.019	.380	.434	.451

9. Summary and discussion

Until now, the motivational influence factors have been discussed only generally in the philosophical-normative discourse on the didactics of political education. No one has disputed their significance, but up to now no one has provided any specific information on the diagnosis and promotion of positive feelings. However, knowledge of the individual prerequisites of the pupils is important for the adapta-

tion of instruction and feedback on the part of the teacher. Pupils with low domain-specific self-concepts of their abilities require moderately difficult assignments that are just beyond their current level, and positive feedback on their performance. Supportive, individual feedback from the teachers leads to the pupils gaining orientation to a realistic level of performance. This requires the teachers to give more attention to each individual pupil and the ability to assess the level of difficulty of assignments in the subject correctly. Up to now, there have been very few, indirect, rather unsatisfactory individual observations in qualitative research on the teaching of domain-specific subjects.

The results for the influence of the class level on the domain-specific self-concept with monitoring of the pupil's own performance supports the hypothesis (most recently stated by Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2010), that the pupils at a "Gymnasium" (secondary school leading to a qualification for university entrance) are not only older, but in a more selective and more prestigious type of school, which has a positive influence on the pupils' domain-specific self-concept. The expected results can thus be an indication that the pupils integrate social comparison information in their self-concepts, which goes beyond the direct context of the performance comparisons in their own school class (Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2010).

The findings on the reference group effects with regard to interest in the subject must be interpreted with caution. Here the expected decrease in interest in the subject appears to have occurred due to age. The adolescents had a greater variety of competing interests. The initial, weakly significant positive effect vanished very quickly when further variables were added. Age and type of school had no effect on interest in the subject in this study. Pupils at a "Realschule" (a type of German secondary school leading to a vocational or technical secondary school diploma) were just as interested in the subject as pupils at a "Gymnasium" (secondary school leading to a qualification for university entrance).

The findings show that there was no gender-specific effect on the domain-specific self-concept of the pupils. This contradicts our expectations. Boys and girls did not differ in their domain-specific self-concept when their performance was monitored. Likewise unexpected was the insignificance of the effect of gender on interest in the subjects of the lessons. According to sociological research, the boys should have been more interested in politics. The topic's lack of relevance to everyday life and politics in general did not lead to the girls showing less interest. The appreciation of the subjects of the lessons did not differ between boys and girls.

As expected in this study, a migration background, subject to monitoring of performance, had no effect overall on self-concept or interest in the subjects of the lessons. Pupils with migration backgrounds do not strive to achieve top perform-

ance in politics in order to be successful. On the other hand, their somewhat poorer performance only with regard to self-concept led to a slightly significant negative motivation effect in those who spoke a language other than German at home. The encouragement received at home appears to have no effect on learning motivation. It is conceivable that pupils with migration backgrounds do not have a different appreciation of lessons in politics, as their motivation differs little overall from the motivation of other groups of pupils. However, it is also possible that the teachers generally do not succeed in generating and fostering motivation in individual groups of pupils.

The cultural capital of their parents (books question) had no effect whatsoever on their interest in the subject and their self-concept. No expectations were formulated in this regard. There are also no indications for the regulation of motivation by means of parental reinforcement. Rather, motivation appeared to be self-determined. Due to the study design, no statements can be made about effects due to the teaching.

The strong connection between interest in the subject and domain-specific self-concept corresponds to expectations. The emotional aspect in the exploration of political subjects had a positive effect on self-concept. Subjects perceived as important not only promote efforts to acquire competence but a positive self-concept as well. Subject to performance monitoring, the reciprocal effects of self-concept and interest in the subject provide evidence that there is a strong correlation between pupils' involvement in politics and their own goals and desires.

In this study, contrary to expectations, the influences of the democratic learning environment did not result in an enhancement of the domain-specific self-concept. Subject to performance monitoring, there was no influence of a participatory ethos. A democratic classroom environment even had a negative effect on the interest in the subject. The pupils may perceive that too little knowledge is conveyed in such an environment (Nelson, Watt & Kerr, 2010). This reduces the importance of the subject in the perception of the pupils. In this study, no evidence of the positive effects noted by Watermann (2003) was found. One possible explanation is that an open atmosphere for discussion tends to lead to circular expressions of opinion rather than to effective teaching with clear results. The pupils may not value the discussion format, as it already exists in their lessons anyway (see also Oesterreich, 2003).

In contrast to this, knowledge has a strong positive effect on self-concept and subject knowledge. The results indicate the importance of knowledge transfer emphasised in the field of didactics of political education and the accompanying reinforcement of the subjects.

The effects of the media showed that being informed about current political events possibly promoted not only political knowledge but to a limited extent the perception of self-concept as well. However, the effects were only slightly significant and not very large. The inconsistent picture was not improved by looking at the interest in the subject, either. Daily newspapers had no effect and television only a weak, minor effect. In contrast, with regard to prior political knowledge, the expected effects did exist and these correspond to the assumptions of political science and educational research. However, with regard to motivation, television use is the only remaining, if weak, constant. Thus, the data available for this study cannot contribute to clarification of these effects on motivation. Further research is necessary.

As expected, the results provide evidence that a positive domain-specific self-concept accompanies the experience of competence that greater knowledge facilitates. The subjective assessment of the pupils' own abilities and talents also depends on their cognitive performance, according to the present results. The image of a connection between performance, domain-specific self-concept and interest in the subject of the lessons (Köller, Schnabel & Baumert, 2000, p. 76) is confirmed here for the first time for political science lessons. Successes and failures influenced the pupils' knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses. When pupils assumed they could be successful, their performance was better.

Their interest in the subject of the lessons was likewise closely tied to performance and the domain-specific self-concept. Their interest in the subject of the lessons declined during their school years, but the effect was still retained subject to performance monitoring in the class levels studied. It was assumed that pupils had to decide in which subjects they would invest their resources (Brunner & Krauss, 2010, p. 113). Subject to monitoring performance, the optimisation of the competences specific to politics was highly significant, measured by interest in the subject of the lessons and self-concept.

The pupils' own success is an important predictor for success and the experience of competence in political education classes. The teachers need to convey knowledge in a structured manner and support pupils' motivation with appropriate individual feedback. When the pupils believe they can solve the problems assigned, they muster the necessary persistence and cognitive resources. A poor domain-specific self-concept and low level of interest in the subject result in the pupils' avoidance of tackling the problems. Good feedback on performance and a high level of interest are mutually dependent on each other (Sjoeberg, 1985), as do the perception of and behaviour in political education classes. A positive overall self-assessment also develops via the fostering of personality and learning development and not only via the class composition. The teachers can support the

pupils in their search for the causes of success and failure and set new, moderately difficult goals for individuals.

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