



Research Article

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Self-Determination Factors and Their Impact Through the Relative Autonomy Index on Skills-Based Learning

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Abstract

Through this study, we aim to identify the relationships between self-determination factors and skills-based learning, as well as the impact of these relationships on increasing the quality of skills-based learning in lower secondary education. The methodology of this paper is the use of quantitative methods of descriptive and inferential statistics in order to study the principle of self-determination through statistical estimation of the RAI (Relative Autonomy Index) coefficient. The data for the conduct of the empirical study were made possible by the questionnaires of the academic self-regulation type. The study includes two samples of students divided by the learning difficulty level. The novelty of this study is precisely the inclusion of the students with learning difficulties and the comparison of their outcomes with those of progressive students. There are many studies on the latter, some of which have guided the idea of this study. The Relative Autonomy Index was built by assessing the motivation sublevels dependent on their position in the self-determination process. Consequently, the data were collected by the standard academic self-regulation questionnaire, for the students with learning difficulties (45 students) and progressive students (45 students). The content of the questions is mainly about the reasons that make students do their works at school. The study of the RAI variable was conducted by treating the data according to their classification in terms of students' level of learning difficulties. To conclude on the relation of controlled motivation to relative autonomous motivation, the results of cross-quartile and descriptive distribution of RAI variable were studied. According to the selected sample, the analysis of this empirical study does not give us a good picture of the implementation of the skills-based curriculum, a process, which should enable each student to master the key skills for lifelong learning.

Keywords: *relative autonomy, skills-based learning, controlled motivation, autonomous motivation, learning difficulties*

1. Introduction

Throughout this article, we think it is of interest to single out below how Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is held as the theory of recent years in the study of motivation issues, analyzes the idea

that people tend to engage in intrinsically motivated behavior, to intrinsic the behavior regulation, which, initially, may be provided externally and pursue intrinsic goals. SDT argues that the satisfaction of the basic psychological need functions as the primary "input" or contributor for the engagement in intrinsically motivated behaviors and intrinsic sizing of what is offered externally as well as pursuing the inner goal. In this way, the concept of needs plays a determining role within SDT and other motivation theories because needs help emphasize human behavior's energization (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

Achieving the inner goal is considered an aspect of the inner nature of people because internal goals tend to be complementary in their own right and because they produce more immediate satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for **autonomy, competence, and cooperation**. In this view, the purpose of this paper is to examine whether increasing the utilitarian value of the learning activity in itself is perceived as a sufficient condition to promote the optimal learning motivation or whether the content of the future goal is also essential to understand why some students are better motivated, perform better, and insist more (Çarka, M, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to study the principle of self-determination by the statistical assessment of the RAI (Relative Autonomy Index) coefficient:

$$RAI = (2InR + IdR) - (2ExR + IjR)$$

Where InR represents Intrinsic Regulation, IdR represents Identified Regulation, ExR represents External Regulation and IjR represents Introjection Regulation.

- *External Regulation*. Human behavior is regulated by influential factors in external regulation, which are entirely external to the individual. In this case, the behavior regulation is not internalized at all. (E-PLOC; deCharms, 1968)
- *Introjection regulation*. This type of motivation describes behaviors motivated by intrinsic needs and pressures, such as self-related factors, such as feelings of guilt and shame. Though the behavior regulation coexists with the person, in the sense that there is no need for other external factors, it is characterized by a strong self-demand and the behavior regulation is partially internalized. (Deci & Ryan, 1991,1995; Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2003)
- *Identified regulation*. This is the third type of external motivation and is considered as an internalized type of external motivation, which occurs when behavior value is recognized as personally valuable (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick & Leone, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2004)

The questions are based on the reasons why students behave differently at school? Each question is followed by several reasons representing the four regulatory styles used in this assessment unit. The validity of this assessment unit has been introduced by Ryan and Conell (1989). The first version is for progressive students and the second version is for students with learning difficulties. Each issue is formulated as a separate question and with more straightforward content, so that the school children understand them better.

During the analysis, we have seen the impact of SDT theory (*needs for autonomy, competence and cooperation are innate and universal tendencies of human consciousness*) in the drafting, developing, and implementing the Curriculum Framework of Pre-University Education in the Republic of Albania (Tirana 2014). It is built on learning with skills and areas of learning. Below we are quoting from this document what urged us to see the effective implementation of this document in school environments, to promote in each individual the self-assessment factors with the ultimate goal of lifelong learning.

"Skills are expressed through the use of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in the complete and understandable treatment of contextual situations. The developments mentioned above and the need for educational change clarify the necessity to learn throughout life. Citizens of the knowledge society need to develop their knowledge, skills, values, personal and social attitudes, and those related to the work and free-market world". (Curriculum Framework, Tirana, 2014).

Throughout the paper, students value their commitment-work, but significant is the extent to which kind of values they strive during their activities. Thus, the findings have substantial impacts on

designing optimal skills-based learning environments in lifelong learning.

This paper is an excellent opportunity to expand it nationally, given both the limitations of this paper and the possibilities for future research.

2. Literature Review

Some papers or experiments based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) were reviewed to realize this paper and the Curricular Framework of Pre-University Education in Albania (KKAPSH) based on skills served as a starting point.

SDT adheres to the idea that people are endowed with three born basic psychological needs (Ryan, 1995): *The need for autonomy or the desire to feel voluntary about the behavior of the individual* (deCharms, 1968; Deci, 1975), *the need for competence or the desire to feel effective in the actions taken by the individual* (White, 1959), and *the need for cooperation or the desire to care for or by others*. (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

More specifically, the SDT *advocates the idea that the achievement of intrinsic goals reflects the third degree of the growth-oriented trend of people and the processes of intrinsic motivation and internalization*. Achieving the inner goal is considered an aspect of the inner nature of people because internal goals tend to be complementary in their own right and because they produce more immediate satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for **autonomy, competence and cooperation** (Deci & Ryan; Kasser, 2002).

The need for competence. This need has been addressed by many other researchers many years ago, who proposed that human beings have a natural tendency to explore, manipulate, master the environment and actively seek challenges (White, 1959). This idea was further deepened by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which states that such research contributes to developing people's ability to grow. It helps them adapt to the complex world around them and that is changing (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In contrast to it, when people are less likely to own the environment or when their sense of competence is not supported, it results in demotivation and less optimal functioning. The need for competence is best included in similar theories, which deal with people's needs for trust, self-efficacy, and control (Bandura, 1989), though these theories do not rely on a basic need.

SDT's emphasis on interpersonal and intrapersonal variability *in the need satisfaction* is significantly different from the views of other researchers, who focus on the strength of need rather than its satisfaction.

In contrast to this view of needs, SDT adheres to the idea that people do not need to express a desire for autonomy, competence, or cooperation to satisfy the drive for productivity. SDT also adheres to the idea that *the fulfillment of autonomy, competence and collaboration would be invigorating for all people, regardless of the extent to which these individuals experience a desire to meet their needs. According to the Self-Determination Theory, this is because the needs for autonomy, competence and cooperation are innate and universal tendencies of human consciousness, the fulfillment of which should foster positive experiences for everyone*.

The document of the Education Curriculum in Albania states that:

"The education process will enable each student to master key skills (*Communication and expression Skills, Thinking Skills, Skills of learning to learn, Competence for life, entrepreneurship and environment, Personal skills, Civic skills, Digital skills*), *necessary for life and work*. The ways and means by which people access information and services today are constantly changing. For this reason, all ages need to be equipped with new skills that help them adapt to today's digital world, not only through the acquisition of technical knowledge and skills but also through a deep understanding of ethical, legal and social opportunities, challenges and issues, which give birth to or accompany the new economic, social and technological developments. These changes necessitate the mastery of skills that enable individuals to manage the recent changes and situations.

The choice and elaboration of this topic are dictated by the need to make professional reflections and evaluations about the effective implementation of skills-based curriculum, to show concrete ways

and techniques how they can be used to increase the productivity of teaching and learning. Based on this choice, we wanted to shed further light on motivational issues due to their importance in the field of teaching or education. To achieve this, we had to rely on several theories that establish the motivation concerning its type, intensity, level, quantity or quality.

In this view, this topic is gaining more and more current value, as it is relating, first of all, to the professional skills and skills of teachers and educators, about whom so much is said today.

3. Study Methodology, Instruments and Sampling

The methodology of this paper is the use of quantitative methods of descriptive and inferential statistics in order to study the principle of self-determination through statistical estimation of the RAI (Relative Autonomy Index) coefficient. To conclude on the relation of controlled motivation to relative motivation autonomy, the results of descriptive and its cross-quartile distribution of RAI variable were studied. To realize the above methodology, we have used the quantitative and qualitative statistical analysis of the data.

The data for the implementation of the empirical study were made possible by the questionnaires. The study includes two samples of students divided by the level of learning difficulties. Consequently, the data were collected by the questionnaire for students with learning difficulties (45 students) and progressive students (45 students). The values of the variables that participate in the RAI value establishment are calculated as the sum of the values of respective indicators (Table 1), which take ordinal values according to the scheme: (i) *Very true* - evaluated with 4 points; (ii) *More or less true* - evaluated with 3 points; (iii) *Not so true* - evaluated with 2 points; (iv) *False* - evaluated with 1 point.

The questionnaires in this study were translated from English into Albanian, taking into account that the mother tongue of 100% of the participants was Albanian. The questionnaires were translated independently by two teachers who had taught English for at least five years. The issues that arose during translation were discussed and we agreed on a solution.

This sample of students from lower secondary education was chosen because the skills-based curriculum was initially piloted in the first and sixth grades. In completing questionnaires, this curriculum is officially applied in the entire lower secondary education.

Table 1. Variables and indicators that they represent

Variables	Indicators (Respective questions in questionnaires)	
	Progressive students	Students with learning difficulties
MB	3, 7, 13, 15, 19, 22, 27	3, 7, 13, 15
RI	5, 8, 11, 16, 21, 23, 30	5, 8, 11, 16
RB	1, 4, 10, 12, 17, 18, 26, 29, 31	1, 4, 10, 12, 17
RJ	2, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 25, 28, 32	2, 6, 9, 14

The study of the RAI variable was conducted by treating the data according to their classification in terms of students' level of learning difficulties. To conclude on the relation of controlled motivation to relative motivation autonomy, the results of descriptive and its cross-quartile distribution of RAI variable were studied. To conclude on the relation of controlled motivation to relative motivation autonomy, the results of descriptive and its cross-quartile distribution of RAI variable were studied.

4. Data Analysis and Study Results

For progressive students, it is noted that mathematical expectation is Mean = - 13.2444, a value that is too low to claim a relative autonomy of motivation of these students. Referring to the results presented in Figure 1, we may conclude that only 13.3% of students across the threshold of possession of relative autonomy of motivation. In comparison, 86.7% of them possess a controlled motivation.

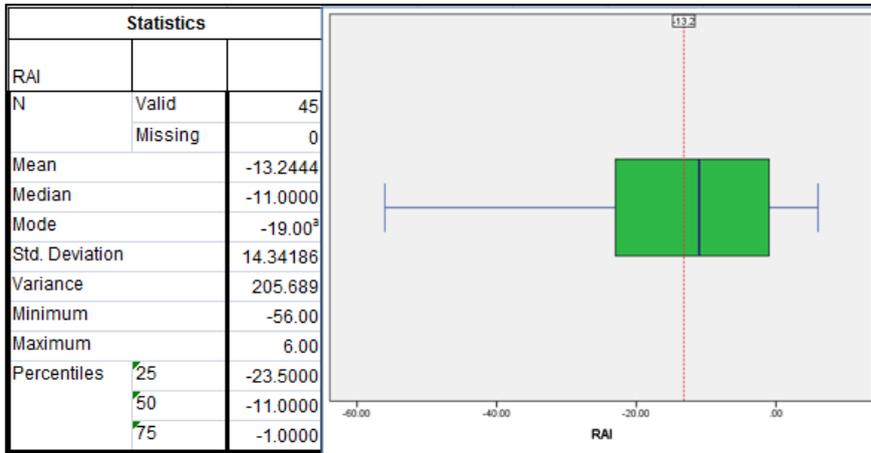


Figure 1. Cross-quartile distribution of RAI for progressive students

For students with learning difficulties, it is noted that the mathematical expectation is Mean = - 4.1556. This value is below the relative autonomy threshold of motivation, but compared to progressive students, it is three times higher. This comparative conclusion remains in the same direction in all descriptive parameters and those of cross-quartile distribution. Referring to the results presented in Figure 2, we conclude that 20% of students across the threshold of possession of relative autonomy of motivation, while 80% of them possess a controlled motivation. Here, too, we have the regulation of behavior by forces that are not part of oneself. Still, the relation of intrinsic pressure to external pressure has begun to improve by up to 20%.

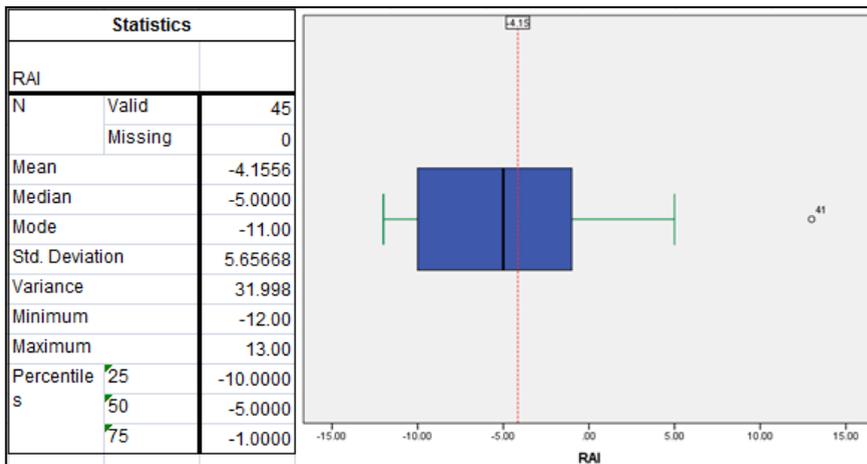


Figure 2. Cross-quartile distribution of RAI for students with learning difficulties

For progressive students, the results of the study of statistical relationships with Pearson coefficients have shown that not all variables involved in the study provide sufficient statistical significance to confirm the level and direction of the correlative relationship between them. The results referred to in Table 1 show that the statistical relationship between "Intrinsic Regulation" and "External Regulation"

is strong (PCC = 0.626) and significant (Sig. = 0.000). Since PCC > 0, the variables "pull" each other. In other words, the increase in the value of the "Intrinsic Regulation" variable is associated with the increase of the value for the "External Regulation" variable and vice versa.

The statistical relationship between RAI and "Intrinsic Regulation" is very strong (PCC = -0.788) and significant (Sig. = 0.000). Since PCC < 0, the variables "push" each other. In other words, the increase in the value of the "Intrinsic Regulation" variable is associated with the decrease in the value for the RAI variable and vice versa. This mediation of the relative autonomy of studying affects the relation of motivation to autonomous learning instead of the controlled one, which foresees the learning strategies, the self-learning mode, academic failure and success in students differently. The older the age, the less the correlation occurs.

The statistical relationship between RAI and the "External Regulation" variable is very strong (PCC = -0.819) and significant (Sig. = 0.000). Since PCC < 0, the variables "push" each other. So, as expected, the increase in the value of the "External Adjustment" variable is associated with the decrease in the value of the RAI variable and vice versa. In External Regulation, people's behavior is regulated by influential factors, which are completely external to the individual. Such factors are, for example, the promise of a reward or the threat of punishment. In this case, the adjustment of the behavior is not internalized at all. We find here that self-regulation is being oriented towards external rewards in this sample.

Table 2. Correlative relationships between variables for progressive students

		Correlations					
		RJ	RB	RI	MB	RAI	Mosha
RJ	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
RB	Pearson Correlation	.626**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
RI	Pearson Correlation	.067	-.013	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.662	.935				
MB	Pearson Correlation	.180	.151	.145	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.237	.321	.341			
RAI	Pearson Correlation	-.819**	-.788**	.124	.269	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.418	.074		
Mosha	Pearson Correlation	.182	.292	-.203	-.153	-.334*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.232	.052	.182	.317	.025	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The statistical relationship between RAI and the "Age" variable is moderate (PCC = -0.334) and with sufficient significance to provide a statistically acceptable correlative relationship (Sig. = 0.025 < 0.05). Since PCC < 0, the variables "push" each other. So, the increase of the "Age" variable value is associated with decreasing the RAI variable value and vice versa.

For students with learning difficulties, the statistical relationships by Pearson coefficients reflect an entirely different picture from that of progressive students. Referring to the values of Pearson coefficients presented in Table 2, it is noticed that the variables do not create very strong statistical relationships. They remain at "moderate" levels except for the statistical link between RAI and "Intrinsic Motivation," which jumps in its "strong" level (PCC = 0.622 > 0.500).

The statistical relationship between the "Intrinsic Regulation" variable and the "External Regulation" variable is moderate (PCC = 0.461) and significant (Sig. = 0.001). Since PCC > 0, the variables

"pull" each other; therefore, the increase of the "Intrinsic Regulation" variable value is associated with the increase of the "External Regulation" variable value and vice versa. Comparing it with the statistical relationship of these variables for the case of progressive students, we conclude that the direction of the relationship is maintained. Still, the level of its strength is weakened.

The statistical relationship between RAI and the "External Regulation" variable is moderate (PCC = -0.429) and significant (Sig. = 0.003). Since PCC < 0, the variables "push" each other. So, the increase of the "External Adjustment" variable value is associated with the decrease of the RAI variable value and vice versa. Comparing it with the statistical relationship of these variables for the case of progressive students, we conclude that the direction of the relationship is maintained. Still, the level of its strength is weakened.

The direct positive effects of autonomy support versus psychological control are mediated by the motivation of the relative autonomous studying. Compared to the case of progressive students, the statistical relationships between RAI and the "Intrinsic Regulation" and "Age" variables for students with learning difficulties do not provide a sufficient level of statistical significance. The results of Table 2 show that the study of the data for the students with learning difficulties concludes insignificant statistical relationships which were not seen for progressive students.

The RAI variable provides significant statistical links with two other variables, "Identified Adjustment" and "Intrinsic Motivation". The statistical relationship between the "Intrinsic Motivation" variable and RAI is strong (PCC = 0.622) and significant (Sig. = 0.000). Since PCC > 0, the variables "pull" each other. So, the increase the of "Intrinsic Motivation" variable value is associated with increased RAI variable value and vice versa. The statistical relationship between the "Identified Regulation" variable and RAI is moderate (PCC = 0.365) and significant (Sig. = 0.014). Since PCC > 0, the variables "pull" each other. So, the increase the of "Identified Regulation" variable value is associated with the increase of RAI variable value and vice versa.

Table 3. Correlative relationships between variables for students with learning difficulties

		Correlations					
		RJ	RB	RI	MB	RAI	Mosha
RJ	Pearson	1					
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)						
RB	Pearson	.461**	1				
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.001					
RI	Pearson	.229	.210	1			
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.131	.166				
MB	Pearson	.251	.381**	.216	1		
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.096	.010	.154			
RAI	Pearson	-.429**	-.263	.365*	.622**	1	
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.081	.014	.000		
Mosha	Pearson	-.050	.401**	-.015	.500**	.270	1
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.744	.006	.923	.000	.073	
**.		Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					
*.		Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					

It is also noticed that the "Age" variable provides significant statistical links with two other variables, "Intrinsic Regulation" and "Intrinsic Motivation". The statistical relationship between the "Intrinsic Motivation" and "Age" variables is at the minimum limit to be strong (PCC = 0.500) and significant (Sig. = 0.000). Since PCC > 0, the variables "pull" each other. So, the increase of "Age" is associated with

increasing the "Intrinsic Motivation" variable value and vice versa. The statistical relationship between the "Intrinsic Regulation" and "Age" variables is moderate ($PCC = 0.401$) and significant ($Sig. = 0.006$). Since $PCC > 0$, the variables "pull" each other. So, the increase of "Age" is associated with increasing the "Intrinsic Regulation" variable value and vice versa.

In addition, another significant statistical link that is noticed is that between the "Intrinsic Motivation" and "Intrinsic Regulation" variables. This relationship is moderate ($PCC = 0.381$) and significant ($Sig. = 0.010$). The Pearson coefficient value is positive and therefore the variables "pull" each other in the same direction. Thus, the increase in the value of "Intrinsic Motivation" is accompanied by a moderate increase of the "Intrinsic regulation" level.

5. Discussion of Results

According to the *Self-Determination Theory (SDT)*, autonomous and controlled motivation may reflect high motivation and involvement in the activity. Still, these two types of motivation are of a different nature or quality. Autonomous motivation means behavior regulation by forces that are part of oneself. That is, external and intrinsic pressures regulate behaviors. So, we can say that autonomous motivation represents self-regulation, while controlled motivation means a lack of self-regulation. The data on progressive students show that they still lack self-regulation.

While people are motivated intrinsically, they engage in an activity not just to perform it but also to bring out and achieve a result independent of the activity in question, as in the case of external motivation. Externally regulated activities are characterized by an externally perceived cause (E-PLOC; deChams, 1968).

Identified regulation is considered an internalized type of external motivation, which occurs when the value of behavior is recognized as personally valuable (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick & Leone, 1994). When people manage to support personal behavior, they are prone to engage in activities with a sense of will. For this reason, the identified regulation in empirical studies is often combined with intrinsic motivation to form a summary of autonomous motivation (Vansteenkiste, Lens, Dewitte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004). Autonomous motivation faces controlled motivation, which contains both external and intervening regulation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

The direct positive effects of autonomy support, as opposed to psychological control over both adaptation and learning, are mediated entirely by the motivation of relative autonomous study. But as age grows, we see that this group of individuals is more influenced by external factors such as reward, etc.

Autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between the intrinsic purpose content and the learning-related outcomes significantly. Still, the intrinsic purpose content would provide significant variability in learning outcomes after avoiding the autonomous motivation mediating effect.

RAI (relative autonomy index) weakens the possible independent effects of the two main types of motivation. Within *Self-determination theory (SDT)*; Ryan & Deci, 2000), that is, autonomous (identified and intrinsic) motivation and controlled (external and introjection) motivation, their independent effects are seen by multiple analyses (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

6. Paper Limitations

The small sample size and the difficulty in testing more students with learning difficulties made this paper have some collisions and thus making it difficult to find the reasons for these situations in both teachers and students.

The study did not measure the good time management of some students compared to others as well as the management of anxiety and stress. Future studies may help shed light on the direction of this effect at the national level.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Autonomous motivation means the regulation of behavior by forces that are parts of oneself. That is, external and intrinsic pressures regulate behaviors. In other words, *autonomous motivation represents self-regulation, while controlled motivation represents a lack of self-regulation*. Precisely for this, even in the Albanian reality, as everywhere in the world, greater attention is being paid in recent decades to the acquisition of sustainable knowledge, practical skills and independent choice of future professional career. The more people experience their behavior as self-reliant and voluntary, the more they will function more optimally, regardless of the culture in which they live.

- In Albanian reality, teachers still use mainly the control strategies in the learning process. Despite the lack of spontaneous interest, teachers may try to increase pupils' motivation or students' performance and perseverance in study-related activities, emphasizing how relevant the study material is to achieving the future goal. In other words, they should strive to promote optimal learning, increasing the utilitarian value of the current learning activity (Çarka, M, 2010).
- The curriculum framework and the core curriculum in Pre-University Education reflect very well all the elements of a contemporary curriculum that will make it possible for each student at the end of a school level to focus on learning that fits the future, ensuring the development of new knowledge and skills, learning that is essential to the academic careers of the younger generations and their lives in society.
- The curriculum allows it with all its elements, but it correlates negatively in the implementation of the aspects of this curriculum in the sample that we have selected.
- The implementation of the skills-based curricular reform requires a change in the role of teachers and the school and expectations from them. Competent teaching and skills-based learning should not take place in a "vacuum". Still, it requires qualitatively capable teachers to facilitate the understanding of their students, be dedicated to them and their needs, and provide them with appropriate strategies, tools and resources to make learning as effective as possible.
- The learning and teaching environment seems to be implemented more carefully for students with learning problems and difficulties.
- This positive implementation is also in the context of inclusive education. But based on this fact, all students should be sidelined, out of focus, regardless of age, difficulties, and talents.
- In this great dynamic that the Albanian educational system faces with changes and reforms towards the quality improvement with a common goal, raising individual citizens rich in values who know their skills well, with the desire to make them available to the country, we encounter an insufficient level of knowledge about the inclusion phenomenon, which leaves much to be desired.
- This perspective should be regulated in some guidelines or training sessions organized by MEYS in the framework of qualitative education for all, such as Guideline No. 38 of 07.10.2014 "On the criteria of the assistant teacher for the students with disabilities in preuniversity institutions".
- From this modest analysis, we suggest that the training of teachers should have a priority in order to strengthen all self-regulatory factors not only for children with learning difficulties but for all children and their learning styles and talents.
- The use of intrinsic goals for structuring activities and providing a learning climate in the conditions of autonomy support has a significant impact on optimal learning environments. General feelings of relative autonomy in relation to studying provide different results during the process of learning.
- Based on this, we suggest that students' ways of learning and behavior according to the age should orientate them towards values, attitudes and not towards rewards. In this way,

behavior regulation is influenced by the forces that are parts of oneself, external and intrinsic pressures regulate, i.e., behaviors.

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