



Student Motivation

Definition of Motivation: Motivation is the driving force behind human behaviour, involving our inner desire and willingness to engage in activities aimed at achieving goals. It encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes that guide us toward desired outcomes (Lai, 2011).

Theories of Motivation

Social Cognitive Theory:

- Social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and modelling in shaping behaviour and motivation. Individuals learn by observing others' actions and the consequences of those actions, which can influence their own beliefs, attitudes, and motivation.
- Central to social cognitive theory is the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform a specific task or achieve a desired outcome. High self-efficacy is associated with greater motivation, effort, and persistence in the face of challenges (Mahoney, 2015).

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Goal-Orientation Theory :

- Goal theory examines how individuals approach and pursue goals, focusing on two primary orientations: mastery goals and performance goals.
- Mastery-oriented individuals are driven by a desire to acquire new knowledge, develop skills, and improve their understanding of a subject, emphasizing learning and self-improvement.
- Performance-oriented individuals are motivated by a desire to demonstrate competence and outperform others, focusing on achieving favourable judgments of their abilities relative to others (Pintrich, 2000).

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Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation:

Intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual, driven by internal factors such as curiosity, interest, and enjoyment derived from the activity itself. It involves engaging in an activity for the inherent satisfaction or pleasure it brings, rather than for external rewards or incentives.

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, stems from external factors such as rewards, praise, or avoidance of punishment. It involves engaging in an activity to attain a separable outcome or reward, rather than for the enjoyment of the activity itself (Bénabou & Tirole, 2003).

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Self-Determination Theory (SDT):

- SDT proposes that humans have innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for fostering intrinsic motivation and well-being.
- According to SDT, environments that support individuals' autonomy, provide opportunities for competence development, and foster meaningful relationships are conducive to intrinsic motivation and optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Classroom Environment and Culture:

- Psychological Safety: A supportive and inclusive classroom environment, characterized by mutual respect, trust, and acceptance, promotes students' sense of belonging and engagement, which are essential for sustaining motivation.
- Positive Relationships: Strong lecturer-student relationships, as well as peer interactions characterized by cooperation and collaboration, contribute to a positive learning environment that nurtures motivation and well-being.
- Clear Expectations and Structure: Clear communication of expectations, consistent routines, and well-organized learning activities help create a sense of predictability and control, reducing anxiety and enhancing motivation to engage in learning.



Feedback and Recognition:

- Timely, specific, and constructive feedback provides valuable information to students about their progress, clarifies expectations, and guides future actions, thereby enhancing motivation and learning.
- Acknowledging and celebrating students' efforts, progress, and achievements fosters a sense of accomplishment and motivation to continue striving for excellence.
- Encouraging words, gestures of support, and expressions of belief in students' abilities can boost confidence and motivation, particularly during challenging or uncertain times.
- Self-efficacy is one's belief in one's capability to succeed in a particular task or situation. It significantly influences motivation and performance. Constructive feedback and encouragement from lecturers, peers, and mentors can bolster students' self-efficacy by validating their efforts and providing guidance for improvement.

Factors Influencing Motivation

Interest and Relevance of the Topic:

- Individual Differences: Students vary in their interests, preferences, and prior knowledge, which influence their level of engagement and motivation for different subjects or topics.
- Personal Connection: Motivation is heightened when students perceive the material as personally relevant or applicable to their lives, goals, or interests.
- Variety and Choice: Providing opportunities for students to explore topics of interest or to have a say in their learning can enhance motivation by increasing autonomy and investment in the learning process.



(see Davis, 2009 & Lai, 2011)

Strategies to Foster Student Motivation



General Strategies

- Address students' basic needs and desires to sustain intrinsic motivation.
- Create opportunities for active participation to engage students in learning.
- Set high but realistic expectations for students to encourage achievement.



Starting the Term on a Positive Note:

- Clearly communicate what students need to succeed in the course.
- Help students set achievable goals for continuous improvement.
- Avoid fostering excessive competition among students.



Maintaining Motivation throughout the Term:

- Be enthusiastic about the subject to maintain student motivation.
- Build on students' strengths and interests in course content.
- Establish a supportive classroom atmosphere that celebrates successes and acknowledges mistakes. Foster a sense of belonging and responsibility among students.
- Offer tasks that challenge students without overwhelming them.
- Provide students with choices whenever possible to foster self-regulation.
- Use a variety of teaching methods to keep students engaged.
- Assist students in finding personal significance in the content.
- Highlight the intrinsic rewards of learning over extrinsic rewards.
- Design tests to encourage deeper learning and skill development.
- Avoid using grades as threats to motivate students.



Offering Feedback and Advice:

- Provide timely feedback on student performance.
- Use praise judiciously, focusing on task-related accomplishments.
- Cushion negative feedback with positive reinforcement.



Motivating Students to Do the Reading:

- Establish clear expectations for reading assignments.
- Provide guidance on effective reading strategies.
- Assign readings well in advance with study questions.
- Encourage students to generate questions based on the reading.
- Use graded assignments or quizzes to incentivize reading.

(see Davis, 2009)

Sources

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- Pintrich, P. R. (2000). Multiple goals, multiple pathways: The role of goal orientation in learning and achievement. *Journal of educational psychology*, 92(3), 544.

Further Resources

- Yarborough, C. B., & Fedesco, H. N. (2020). Motivating students. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved from [Link](#)