

Introduction

Motivation is a key element of education and plays a crucial role in the success and enjoyment of the learning process for individual students. There are many factors, which influence motivation, some positive and some negative.

What is Motivation?

The term "motivation" refers to the reason for someone to take action. The reason may be intrinsic or extrinsic.¹

Individuals are generally motivated intrinsically, when they do something that they enjoy. A person, who enjoys reading biographies, for example, may read of their own volition.

Extrinsic motivation occurs, when an individual takes action to satisfy an external influence. A student may read a novel to satisfy the requirements of a course, for example, but not actually enjoy reading the novel.

Understanding Motivation

Educators need to find a balance between intrinsic factors of motivation and extrinsic factors. It would be difficult to find students that are continuously motivated to complete structured courses. Each student is more likely to enjoy some parts of a course more than other parts.

Students may identify with an external goal and complete part of their program of study for that purpose, such as the completion of a recognised tertiary qualification. The student needs to believe that the study will lead to a desirable result and that they possess the competence to complete the tasks, otherwise the student may take a more negative attitude to motivation.

Motivation Theories

There are several theories of motivation, such as those that focus on the educational goals of students.² The achievement goal theory explores both the social and cognitive factors that influence a student's attempts to either perform well or engage in work avoidance.

A student that participates in academic activity in an attempt to perform better or to become more competent may be regarded as having a *mastery goal orientation*. The student will measure success by the level of personal understanding or competence at the task.

Performance goals are educational goals that are generally measured against external criteria. These include normative standards, such as grades and the ranking of performance relative to other students.

Students with *work avoidance orientation* may act as if they are incompetent so that they will have an excuse to disengage from the tasks. Similarly students may ask unnecessary questions in an attempt to delay participation in academic activity or seek assistance, which will reduce the requirements for their personal cognitive engagement.

Social motivation may complement or conflict with a student's academic goals, cognitive engagement and academic accomplishment. Groups of students may provide mutual support, when engaging in academic activity. More capable students may provide assistance to students that need help with particular tasks. Students may also complete work so that they will not "let the team down". This type of interaction may give students more confidence because they continue to have social acceptance within their group of peers.

Implications

Education will continue to benefit from further research into the characteristics of motivation. The competing influences on students need greater understanding, such as the self-efficacy of individual students and the effect of social orientations.

¹ R.M. Ryan and E.L. Deci, *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions*, Contemporary Educational Psychology 25, 54-67 (2000)

² M. Dowson and D.M. McInerney, Psychological Parameters of Students' Social and Work Avoidance Goals: A Qualitative Investigation, Journal of Educational Psychology, 2001, Vol. 93, No. 1, 35-42