

The Role of Motivation in the Better Learning of Students

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ABSTRACT

Psychological research has shown that among various factors influencing learning and academic progress, students' motivation plays a prominent and perhaps the most important role. Proper recognition and analysis of students' motivation are crucial for the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning activities. Motivation is a factor that stimulates and directs specific behavior, or it refers to the internal states of living beings that lead to guiding or sustaining their behavior towards a certain goal. It is, in essence, an answer to the question of what the basis of scientific learning is. Even psychologists consider motivation more important than intelligence, and teachers still need motivated and enthusiastic students to achieve successful and effective learning, and they demand such students. The aim of this article is to enhance the reader's knowledge and understanding of the importance and influencing factors of motivation and to assist in applying this knowledge in the field of teaching and learning. To this end, some relevant scientific sources have been studied, and the content of this article has been gathered and summarized from them. This article begins with the concepts of motivation, incentives, learning motivation, and progress, emphasizing the importance of motivation in the learning process, and concludes with a brief description of techniques for creating motivation in students.

Keywords- Motivation, Learning, Incentive, Progress, The Role of Motivation in Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning is an ongoing process that occurs throughout our lives, beginning with birth and ending with death. Therefore, if we want to motivate students, especially those who lack enthusiasm for learning, we can summarize all of these efforts in the discussion of motivation. It is evident that motivation is one of the most fundamental factors affecting learning, as it represents the willingness and desire individuals show to achieve a goal. The more motivation is accompanied by willingness and desire, the more effort individuals exert. Motivation is a very important factor and often the most important condition for learning. In fact, psychologists believe that motivation is the fundamental basis of learning. They argue that without sufficient motivation to learn, learning in schools and universities is unlikely. The motivational issues of students in education and their impact on academic performance are considered an important aspect of effective learning. Even

psychologists believe that motivation is more important than intelligence, and teachers still need motivated and enthusiastic students to achieve successful and effective learning. The goal of this article is to enhance the reader's knowledge and understanding of the concept, importance, and influential factors of motivation based on various theories and to assist in applying this knowledge in the field of teaching and learning. To this end, some relevant scientific sources have been studied, and the content of this article has been gathered and summarized from them. This article begins with the concepts of motivation, incentives, learning, and progress, emphasizing the importance of motivation in the learning process. Motivation serves as the driving force to achieve specific goals, providing energy and guidance to behavior. If a teacher can create the necessary and appropriate motivation in students, they will become more interested in the lesson and the learning environment, resulting in better performance in the learning and teaching process.

II. DEFINITION OF MOTIVATION AND INCENTIVE

There are various definitions of motivation, one of the most comprehensive being as follows: motivation is said to be the force that creates, maintains, and directs behavior. Incentive is defined as a specific need or desire that causes motivation. The term “motivation” is derived from the Latin word “Mover,” as it refers to the cause and reason behind behavior. Motivation can be described as the driving force that propels an individual forward, keeps them moving, and determines where they should go. While motivation and incentive are often used synonymously, motivation can be understood more precisely than incentive. Motivation is considered the general generative factor of behavior, whereas incentive is seen as the specific cause of a particular behavior. For example, when we ask why a certain person engages in a specific behavior, we are seeking their motivation. The term “motivation” is more commonly used in reference to human behavior. Motivation is derived from the verb “to motivate,” which means to initiate movement. Motivation refers to the cause, reason, or factor that compels someone to do something, whereas incentive refers to stimulation and encouragement. Therefore, as mentioned above, motivation is an internal factor that moves an individual, or living being in general, to action, while incentive is a state that arises as a result of the involvement of motivation in the living being. For example, the lack of food in the body or the need for food is motivation, and the feeling of hunger or the state of hunger is incentive; the lack of water in the body or the need for water is motivation, and the feeling of thirst or the state of thirst is incentive; the need for a mate is motivation, and falling in love and feeling attracted to the opposite sex is incentive. In this context, the efforts of a living being to obtain food, water, or a mate are called behavior. The difference between motivation and incentive is somewhat analogous to the difference between stimulus and stimulation. We know that stimulation is a state that arises as a result of the involvement of a stimulus, such as the contraction and dilation of the pupil of the eye, the secretion of saliva, the trembling of the eardrum, trembling, and sweating, which reflect states of stimulation and arise as a result of stimuli such as light, food, sound, cold, and heat. Hunger and thirst are states of incentive that manifest as a result of the involvement of motivations for the need for food and water. (Ganji, 2013, p. 181).

Moreover, from an educational perspective, motivation serves both as a goal and as a means. Our goal with students and learners is to instill interest in various scientific and social subjects (to be motivated). Therefore, all educational programs that include activities related to emotional aspects are motivated. As a means, motivation acts as a prerequisite for psychological readiness for learning, and its impact on

learning is quite apparent. If students are disinterested in a subject, they have low levels of motivation; they will not pay attention to the teacher’s explanations, will not diligently complete their assignments, and ultimately will not make much progress. However, if they are interested in a subject, they have high levels of motivation; they will pay careful attention to the teacher’s explanations, diligently fulfill their academic responsibilities, seek further information in the subject matter, and ultimately make significant progress (Saif, 2008, p. 230).

Many definitions of motivation have been proposed, two of the most famous by Baron and Robertson, and Asmar. Baron states that motivation is an internal process that actively guides and sustains our behavior, especially goal-directed behavior. Robertson and Asmar define motivation as a psychological concept related to energizing and directing human behavior. A comprehensive definition, associated with Atkinson and Wolff, states that motivation is a set of factors that typically initiate and direct behavior towards a goal (Dartaj, 2012, p. 130).

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTIVATION

1. Motivation is a response to the why of behavior; if you see someone running, you may realize they are either trying to reach something or trying to get away from something.
2. Motivation refers to those internal processes that cannot be directly observed. It is activating and energizing, motivating individuals to perform tasks; it is more likely that a motivated athlete will win compared to a demotivated athlete.
3. Motivation directs behavior and makes us focus on achieving our goals.
4. Responses to motivational processes are usually visible; motivation makes behavior observable. External motivation and internal motivation: Internal motivation is defined as motivation where individuals engage in activities for their own sake. For example, an athlete who plays basketball because they enjoy it has internal motivation. Conversely, if an athlete plays basketball to win first place in the league, they have external motivation.
5. External motivation is motivation that is controlled by external factors. Another point is that for many years, internal and external motivation have been considered to increase. In other words, optimal motivation was considered to be a combination of high levels of internal motivation and moderate levels of external motivation. This is not true in all cases; several studies have shown that external rewards can decrease internal motivation in certain conditions (Dartaj, 2012, p. 314).

IV. DEFINITION OF LEARNING

A suitable starting point for studying learning is defining the term. Different definitions of this term have been proposed in scientific literature, and it is necessary to examine several of these definitions to understand the concept of learning. Although everyone agrees that learning is important, they have different views on the causes, processes, and consequences of learning. In fact, there is no universally accepted definition of learning that is endorsed by all theorists, researchers, and practitioners, despite people having differing opinions on the nature and definition of learning. Based on Biggs' theory, learning is a stable change in humans that individuals do not inherit from their genetics. In other words, learning is not the product or result of genetic changes (Dartaj, 2012, p. 1).

Learning is defined as a stable change in behavior or the capacity for behavior in a specific manner resulting from practice or other forms of experience. It is necessary to examine this definition a little more deeply. One criterion for defining learning is a change in behavior or the capacity for change over time that is stable. This criterion negates temporary changes in behavior, such as agitated speech caused by factors like drug use, alcohol, or fatigue. These are temporary changes because when the cause is removed, the behavior returns to its original state. However, learning may not necessarily last forever, as forgetting occurs. How long changes should last or be classified as learning is debatable, but most people agree that short-term changes (e.g., a few seconds) are not considered learning. The second criterion is that learning occurs through practice or other forms (e.g., observation) (Hergenbahn, 2008, p. 93).

The learning process is a continuous process and varies from individual to individual. The whole personality of the individual is affected during the learning process, so the desired expectation is that in the process of teaching and upbringing, the teacher should try to bring about a change in behavior and, of course, the personality of the students instead of transferring the subject matter to their minds (Afrouz, 2005, p. 21).

The second criterion in this definition is that the change in behavior or the ability to change must be stable over time. This criterion dismisses temporary behavioral changes (e.g., agitation caused by factors such as drug use, alcohol, or fatigue) as learning is a continuous process. Temporary changes occur when the cause is removed, behavior returns to its original state. However, learning may not necessarily last forever, as forgetting occurs. How long changes should last or be classified as learning is debatable, but most people agree that short-term changes (e.g., a few seconds) are not considered learning. The second criterion is that learning occurs through practice or other forms (e.g., observation) (Hergenbahn, 2008, p. 93).

Behaviorists define learning as a change in observable and measurable behavior, while cognitivists define learning as acquiring new insights or changing past insights. What is common in these two definitions is the discussion of change (Hosseini, 2006, p. 71).

V. THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN LEARNING

Many teachers recognize the characteristics of good students such as diligence, cooperation, and enthusiasm and some attribute these traits to having motivated students. Many teachers talk about diligent students who slowly but steadily complete the academic semester. Research has also shown that student motivation is more important in learning compared to intelligence. Furthermore, research on the impact of motivation on learning indicates that strong motivation leads to stable learning, while low motivation results in poor learning. In fact, motivation is the driving force that motivates effort and activity for learning and maximizes students' learning. Indifferent students not only show no desire to study and learn but may also interfere with the work of other students in the classroom with their indifference and inattention. In this regard, there is an English proverb that says you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. The issue of motivation in students is similar; we must make students thirsty for learning because by doing so, they will pursue learning (Karimi, 2017, p. 87).

It should be noted that although motivation plays an important role in teaching, it is not the case that learning cannot occur without motivation. In this regard, Azoubel writes that the relationship between motivation and learning is reciprocal, not one-sided; it is not necessary to postpone learning activities until interests and motivations grow. Often the best way to teach students without motivation is to temporarily ignore their motivational state and effectively teach them as much as possible. Given the importance of motivation in learning, we strive to discuss the existing theories in this area and mention some strategies for creating motivation in learning.

VI. HOW TO CREATE MOTIVATION IN STUDENTS

So far, we have briefly discussed motivation and its nature and importance in human activities and provided information. In this discussion, we want to examine how positive and guiding motivation can be created in students. The methods commonly used to achieve positive motivation in students are as follows (Karimi, 2017, pp. 88-94).

1: Predictability:

One way to increase motivation and control students is to create predictable environments. When

individuals enter a new environment, they need preparation because they usually show unfamiliarity and feel inadequate in front of new environments. If this situation persists, it may affect the individual's behavior and lead to mental pressure. Some students may face emotional difficulties when entering school. They may not feel belonging to this school, but schools can arrange sessions for such students and familiarize them with the new environment.

2. Balancing Between Difficult and Easy Tasks:

In this regard, it should be noted that there are some tasks that a student can handle alone, but there are also tasks that the individual cannot accomplish without the help of others. These two situations have been referred to by a prominent researcher as the "zone of proximal development" and the "current growth zone." Balancing and equilibrium between these two zones are essential for maintaining students' intrinsic interest. When a student faces a difficult task beyond the zone of proximal development, they encounter failure and their intrinsic motivation is naturally damaged. However, tasks within the current growth zone provide experiences where the student is in charge. In fact, these experiences increase the individual's perception of ability and intrinsic motivation.

3. Providing Educational Support:

If students are expected to engage in activities beyond the zone of proximal development, they need educational support to ensure their success. Successful performance is one of the most effective ways to increase perceived competence among them. However, this educational support is often provided in the form of teacher lectures. Although this method can be useful if students listen carefully to the teacher's statements, due to the abundance of course materials, this result is not achieved well, and educational support is not provided in this regard. Educational support is a type of assistance that a capable individual provides to another individual in the process of educational activity that he needs. Two types of these supports that cause the least damage to students' motivation and control over situations are mentoring and goal-setting.

Mentoring: Mentoring involves indicating to students what is expected of them. It should be noted that displaying and explaining an activity are two different things. But usually, these two are done simultaneously, meaning that when a teacher mentors a behavior, he/she can also explain how to act. Mentoring allows students to recognize the characteristics of the activity flow and take charge of it themselves, but this mentoring is not able to decide for students, but only explains how to do it. In fact, it is these students who determine how and to what extent they will respond to these mentors.

Goal Setting: Breaking down goals is another strategy for increasing educational support without harming students' motivation and control. Teachers who benefit from this strategy divide relatively difficult activities into smaller and more practical components, which

naturally require fewer cognitive skills. Therefore, when the goal is broken down, the likelihood of students' success in difficult tasks increases. Moreover, by dividing a large task into three smaller tasks, the possibility of succeeding from one time to three times increases. Since successful experiences have a high impact on students' motivation and their perception of ability, it can be said that multiple successes are better than one success. A teacher should know how and from what methods to use to increase students' motivation by breaking down activities.

VII. INCREASE NECESSARY OPPORTUNITIES

It's evident that students need education to learn. To increase students' intrinsic motivation in learning, it's essential for them to perceive their abilities and maintain control without being harmed. Moreover, for the continuity of this matter, they need opportunities to choose their academic goals and have control over them. It's also necessary to know how to provide these opportunities to them so that they have a proper understanding of their abilities without harming their motivation. In fact, teachers must be aware of how to provide students with opportunities for choice and control so that their abilities remain intact. If a student makes the wrong choice, they will face failure, and they may lose the necessary competence. Students usually have two choices: one is content-related, where the teacher asks the student to prepare a report on a book, and the student chooses the book themselves. The second choice is method-related, which concerns how a task is done, such as solving a math problem, which the student can solve in any way they want.

VIII. AVOIDING SOCIAL COMPARISON AMONG STUDENTS

Today, competition is more prevalent than anything else in schools. Students compete with each other to achieve high grades, succeed in sports activities, and even to gain the teacher's attention. This competition leads students to engage in social comparison, which results in self-engagement rather than task engagement. Individuals do difficult tasks not because they desire to do them well but because they want to outperform others. A teacher who wants to encourage students to engage in task involvement and reduce self-engagement must help them avoid social comparison. Students' current performance should be compared to their previous performance in similar tasks or based on fundamental criteria. While competition should not be completely eliminated, it should not increase to the extent that nobody thinks about improving their own work and only cares about being

better than others. In this regard, teachers should avoid some things and do others. However, what should teachers avoid? Teachers should not rank students by comparing them to others because this tells the student that their success relative to others is important, and the quality of their work is not significant. Therefore, if all students perform well, only the best ones receive the highest score.

IX. THEORIES OF MOTIVATION

What matters in the educational process is that the learner has a desire to perform the required tasks and is willing to strive for them. What causes humans to have different opinions about motivation is the various theories that have been developed. Generally, motivational theories can be divided into two main categories:

A. Determinists: They believe that an external force beyond human control is the cause of their behavior. This group says that humans do not have freedom and choice to choose their activities, and it is the environmental conditions or instincts that shape their behavior.

B. Free Will Theorists: They believe that human behavior is under their control, and individuals are free to choose the type of behavior they want. This group attributes human behavior to the individual themselves and considers them to have a will to choose their own path. Humans are always faced with choices and decisions in their lives and choose their own path based on their freedom and choice. This group, while not denying the influence of external stimuli and instincts and childhood conflicts on human personality, does not consider humans as victims of these forces. The image they have of human nature is optimistic and hopeful. They consider the driving force of humans to be internal and self-generated, which emerges from within and leads to their activity (Mousavi Pour, 1382, p.27).

Beyond this classification, major motivational theories are further divided into other important sections, each discussing different aspects of student motivation in learning in detail.

1. Instinct Theory:

The origin of instinct theory dates back to one of the great thinkers of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin. He was the first to study and research the instinctive and motivational force of human beings. The instinct theory states that every human action has its own specific motivation, which is instinctual and innate. Instincts exist in human beings. For example, if someone is aggressive, the cause is the aggression instinct, and if we are jealous, the cause is the jealousy instinct. This theory considers one instinct for each human action to the extent that it counts up to two hundred instincts for human actions. Weaknesses of the instinct theory can be pointed out as its simplicity beyond the limit, and also that some instincts exist strongly in some individuals,

while in some cultures these instincts do not exist at all. For example, some tribes are violent, and others are very peaceful (Mousavi Pour, 1382, pp.35-36).

2. Behaviorism Theory:

Motivation, as the driving and guiding force of human behavior, can have multiple factors. Sometimes, motivators are stimuli present in the external environment of the learner. These stimuli lead to the creation of specific behaviors. Examples of such stimuli include a teacher's smile, friendly relationship with a student, punishment by the teacher, classmate's admiration, and watching entertaining movies. Followers of the behaviorist approach perceive motivation as dependent on reinforcement and avoidance of punishment. This interpretation of motivation is rooted in the core idea of behaviorists, who argue that the consequences of actions and behaviors guide and control them (Saif, 1388, p. 231). Behaviorists fall into the group of determinists, as they believe that there is nothing innate in humans, and people's behavior is influenced by social conditions and the result of societal or familial manipulation. Environmental stimuli and forces create behaviors in humans, whether they involve pain, pleasure, or other feelings (Mousavi Pour, 1382, p. 35).

3. Cognitive Theory:

In contrast to behaviorists who believe in external motivation, cognitivists argue that the motivating factor for behavior lies within the learner. For example, a child who enjoys playing with toys in a kindergarten environment has intrinsic motivation. This child internally desires to engage in this activity. In reality, intrinsic motivation depends on the activity itself rather than being performed because of an external factor. In the cognitive approach, motivation is believed to originate from the individual's thoughts. Cognitivists also argue that behaviors are created and guided by individual goals, plans, expectations, and attributions. Therefore, they emphasize internal motivation more than external motivation. (Saif, 1388, p. 231).

4. Humanistic Theory:

Humanists focus on enhancing human abilities in motivation. In the educational system, it is emphasized that students value themselves and develop their personalities. Having positive self-perceptions is essential for motivation. Humanists believe that students should be free in their learning and that the teacher should not be authoritarian but rather someone who meets the students' needs well. Humanists also believe that much more attention should be paid to students than to teachers. The importance lies entirely with the students, not the teachers. Generally, humanistic theories in motivation suggest that the learning environment for students should be supportive, emotional, and free from any kind of fear and threat. It is in such an environment that true learning takes place. In the humanistic approach, emphasis is not placed on reinforcement and punishment to create motivation in students but rather on

focusing more on the individual and their unique abilities. Humanists believe that positive human characteristics such as self-esteem, autonomy, and competence should be increased in students. One of the most famous theories in the humanistic approach to motivation is Abraham Maslow’s theory. Many psychologists consider Maslow the founder of humanistic theory. He proposed a hierarchy of needs, initially considering five levels of needs, which he later revised to seven levels. (Figure 1-1)

1. Self-actualization need
2. Aesthetic appreciation need
3. Need for knowledge and understanding
4. Need for respect
5. Need for belongingness
6. Need for security
7. Physiological needs

Figure 2-2 – Hierarchy of Needs according to Maslow’s Theory (as cited in Kudiyar).

According to this hierarchy, lower-level needs are called deficiency needs, and higher-level needs are called being needs. Attention to this hierarchy helps teachers determine the priority of students’ motivation (Slavin, 1994, as cited in Kudiyar, 2006, p. 202)

Maslow’s theory emphasizes the difference between physiological needs (hunger, sleep, and thirst) and psychological needs (self-esteem, emotions, and belongingness). Humans cannot live as mere physiological beings without food, water, and sleep, nor can they fully grow as psychological beings without satisfying higher-level needs. Maslow believes that psychologists have focused more on physiological needs and have proposed theories based on which humans only respond to deficiency and seek tension reduction. However, Maslow does not deny the existence of motivation and encourages us to strive to understand the motivation for our actions. The theorists argue that humans are motivated by a force that directs human behavior, but the response to what this force is and the origin of the shaping force of human behavior guide us, which is not necessarily deficiency. This type of motivation often increases tension and is manifested when a person is creative and realizes their hidden abilities.

5. Theory of Motivation-Hygiene:

Frederick Herzberg conducted numerous interviews with various individuals, such as accountants, engineers, workers, chefs, etc., asking them to recount memories of their work environment that had created a completely good or bad feeling about their work and express the effects of these feelings on their attitudes and performance. Herzberg found that pleasant feelings were often accompanied by events in which individuals performed their work satisfactorily, and bad feelings

were associated with undesirable behaviors imposed on them. Based on these studies, in 1996, he proposed a theory called the motivation-hygiene theory. Although this theory has been presented from a business and industry perspective, it is highly relevant to the leadership role of teachers, whose duty is to satisfy and serve the motivational needs of students. Herzberg divides people into two categories: motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators make people happy and have an excellent effect on people’s attitudes and performance about a task. Hygiene factors are generally restrictive and reduce efficiency in individuals’ attitudes and performance regarding a task. In general, these factors reduce productivity. Hygiene factors are not necessarily latecomers and are often caused by the work environment rather than the work itself. A teacher plays an important leadership role and must be aware of these factors. The teacher is responsible for creating an environment that is compatible with the students’ needs and task requirements. The teacher must design appropriately with knowledge of motivators and hygiene factors to increase students’ motivation (Davis, 1972, as cited in Mousapour).

6. Social-Cultural Theory:

According to this approach, a significant motivational source for some individuals is being with others and having mutual friendly relationships with them. In this approach, having friendly and reciprocal relationships among friends and classmates, as well as between the teacher and the student, is very important. Some students prefer to work alone, but others prefer to participate in groups and engage in activities with intimate relationships.

7. Motivation and Progress Theory:

Motivation and progress are said to need progress as well. A group of learners who are motivated to progress make more effort than others to achieve their goals and success. This group of learners does not fear failure and continues after failure, but others do not. Motivation for progress is discussed against motivation to avoid failure. Learners who are motivated to avoid failure do not make much effort, are afraid of difficult situations, and do not pursue the task diligently (Saif, 2009, p. 227).

X. CONCLUSION

Since the main goal of this article was to examine the effects of motivation on student learning, considering various theories and the continued importance and value of motivation in different fields, it is evident that the importance and value of motivation in the matter of learning is inseparable and one of the fundamental requirements in education. Based on the findings of this scientific article, it has been explicitly stated that without creating motivation in thinking and contemplation, it may be difficult to make students interested in learning, and to adapt the learning process

to the successful adaptation of students. Since motivation has a direct and close relationship with improving the quality of teaching and student learning, it is up to teachers and educational mentors to create a motivational environment for students so that through it, they can keep the creativity and perseverance of students alive in learning and students can decide how to learn, what to learn, and what they need to learn. Interesting and effective theories about motivation have been presented, one of the prominent theories in learning being Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, which can be a good model in the field of education for teachers, educational mentors, and even parents. This is because by using this theory, educational authorities will pay attention to this important point that if the primary needs of students are not addressed, efforts should not be made to address the secondary needs of students because otherwise, such efforts in the direction of student learning will be in vain. Another important theory among the theories presented is the socio-cultural theory, which according to this theory, there must be interaction and friendly relationships between students and their social environment, peers, classmates, and most importantly, the teacher. Because the existence of such interaction creates a peaceful and enthusiastic atmosphere in students and creates motivation in education and especially in learning. In general, we have reviewed many important and valuable scientific theories that all in some way emphasize the value and place of motivation in learning. From the results of the discussion and examination of this article, it can be inferred that motivation has been identified as a very important and valuable tool in learning, and educational mentors need this tool to succeed in the learning process of students, as it is the best helper in achieving the learning goals of students.

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