

## Positive Psychology in Helping Students to Be More Motivated in the Class

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**Abstract:** Positive psychology is a systematic analysis of one's strengths in being able to find personal fulfillment in their life experiences. Even though the concepts of positive psychology have been explored, there is little information on the interaction between different constructs in fostering motivation within the classroom. This paper focuses on how positive psychology can be used to possibly strengthen students' motivation and academic performances within the classroom. The findings of this paper suggest that an instructor must be able to integrate multiple motivation strategies in order for positive psychology to have any impact on students' performances in the classroom.

**Key words:** motivation, academics, students, classroom, personal fulfillment

### 1. Introduction

Positive psychology is a systematic analysis of the abilities that help people and the society to succeed. Concepts of positive psychology are established on the notion that people strive to lead significant and satisfying lives (Boniwell & Ryan, 2012). People nurture their best capabilities and improve the experiences of work, association, and play. In the field of education, motivation among students has mostly been insufficiently addressed in distinctive basic courses. This discussion focuses on the concept of motivation and its relationship to learning. Central to this discussion is the way a university faculty can use the ideas of positive psychology to improve learners' motivation in the classroom situation.

### 2. Conceptual Framework

Motivation is not the same as achievement, and motivation among learners cannot be contingent to attaining scores in a test (Ambrose, 2010). Instantaneous success and test performance depend on various aspects. Some activities geared towards success can have negative implications on the interest of learners in the learning process as well as their long-term engagement in learning. Motivation as an outcome focuses on the students' enthusiasm to learn. When a teacher stresses on triggering incentive for learning among students, the main objective is whether students instigate and sustain an engagement in learning in addition to dedication to the learning process. Efficiency in university faculties can be achieved by developing goals, attitudes, and values among learners to maintain a long-term engagement because will add to quality engagement in the learning process.

In the event evaluation of schools and classrooms is strictly based on student achievement, it is possible to overlook important educational objectives and beliefs. While it is crucial for learners to achieve, the value should

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be placed on the learning process and the enhancement of skills. Students should be encouraged to embrace efforts that develop and apply knowledge and skills willingly so that they can have a long-term dedication to education. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to nurture an understanding of the significance of motivation. Positive psychology has revolved around intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students in education (Boniwell & Ryan, 2012). However, these two forms of reinforcement should be used keeping in mind that they affect different learners differently.

In most cases, motivation has been described from a quantitative point of view. It has been exemplified as the amount of behavior, the course of behavior, and the duration of which a specific behavior is exhibited. Classroom teachers should focus on making learners undertake tasks and do them constantly. As opposed to considering the duration of behavior, it is important to think in line with the quality of task involvement. As a result, learners should cultivate inspirational psychological patterns that foster self-regulated learning (Donovan & National Research Council, 2005). Looking at the time taken by learners on a specific task does not necessarily reveal what they are dealing with. It does not also reveal students' reactions to their performance and their interpretation of feedback. The important thing is the quality of time involved as opposed to the length of time engaged.

Furthermore, instead of looking at the course of behavior, teachers should consider the objectives and needs for learning (Harpine, 2011). It is possible for two students to work on the same project, but have different goals. A learner who is extrinsically motivated to carry out a specific task may possess very different processes of ideas and behaviors compared to someone who is intrinsically motivated to get new information about a subject. As a result, learners' reasons for the learning process have critical implications in the way they approach and involve themselves in the process.

Learners focused on getting new information and enhancing their skills and capability are referred to as mastery-oriented. Such students are ready to put in the necessary efforts to learn new information and face challenging activities. The mastery-oriented students are intrinsically motivated and mostly achieve better results (Ambrose, 2010). The goal of mastery-orientation results in independent learning and maintained engagement in the learning process. On the other hand, performance-oriented students believe that normative performance is integral. They work to demonstrate their ability or protect it when threatened through poor performance. These learners have no interest in learning the process of doing a specific task.

Lastly, enthusiasm is not all about increasing the intensity of behavior. Teachers are not supposed to maximize or optimize the level of inspiration, implying that motivation is a state of awakening or vigor. It has been a wrong notion that maximizing the level of motivation improves performance (Harpine, 2011). Notably, learners can have the equal motivation, but for diverse reasons. Instead of focusing on distinguishing low, high, and optimally inspired learners, teachers should define adaptive and maladaptive behavioral patterns. They should also understand the rationale behind such patterns when they arise.

### **3. Improving Motivation**

Most studies about applying positive psychology to enhance student motivation usually stop at basic constructs. After covering motivational theories, it is not a surety that educators are ready to translate such concepts into the classroom learning process (Boniwell & Ryan, 2012). Little attention is given on the way motivation theories relate to instructional programs. It is even worse when there is no emphasis on how social interactions in the classroom can hinder or foster the growth of learners' enthusiasm to learn.

In case a learner lacks self-belief in his or her capability to achieve, it can be inferred that the low self-esteem requires increased doses of success experience. However, much literature on learned vulnerability and credit retaining has revealed that accomplishment alone cannot eliminate the syndrome of helplessness. As opposed to what is deduced, the provision or emphasis on successful results or feedback does not necessarily boost learners' confidence in their capabilities. Such a notion disregards the function of psychological motivational aspects in determining how students look at their classroom learning experiences (Donovan & National Research Council, 2005).

In most cases, success is not enough to construct or sustain a notion that students have the power to reverse failure. Students who hold a strong belief that they have no ability to complete school tasks do not take responsibility for breakthrough (James, 2007). They even underrate their performance in the event they do well. For this reason, it is not all about convincing learners that they can do well or even assuring it. However, the teaching process should focus on giving students short-term objectives and techniques that can help them work towards the set goals. Immediately students understand how to achieve an objective and concentrate on the methods as opposed to results, there is a high likelihood for them to own the results.

Closely related to focus on achievement is the notion of trying to find something positive to talk about a student's work. Acknowledging students' work, even if it is to a small degree, should be a move towards instilling confidence in the learners. However, for the particular students who mostly require positive reinforcement, something positive can be at times insignificant and inappropriate to the needs of the task (Ambrose, 2010). For instance, if a teacher gives an activity for students to write a book report in a particular format, positive comments on the good handwriting of the learners may not accomplish the intended impact. Generously using praise would appear to be an obvious and prominent means of encouraging poor performers in the class. On the contrary, research has shown that the way such praise is used in classroom situations can weaken the achievement of learners because students mostly receive praise on irrelevant matters of a given activity. In this case, most of them discount praise. Learners can interpret praise as evidence of their inability, especially when that praise is not consistent with the learner's effort (James, 2007). This leads to unintended negative implications on the self-esteem of the student.

Praise as a positive psychology concept should be perceived from the point of development. Younger learners perceive praise differently compared to older ones. In essence, acknowledging a young learner's performance gives them a positive expectation that they have the ability to carry out the task, hence improving their viewpoints of personal competence. Since older learners have differentiated notions of capability and performance, praising them may be perceived as low expectations for their efforts (Donovan & National Research Council, 2005). Therefore, teachers must understand the way developmental stages in psychology arbitrate the impacts of well-meant behaviors. Applying basic psychological concepts by university faculties surpasses just an ordinary understanding of the way cognition places meaning to actions and classroom experiences.

#### **4. Extrinsic Motivation**

Among the many controversies of research on learning is the influence of gifts and inducements on the motivation of students. It is widely held in psychology that for one to increase the recurrence of behavior, he or she must apply reinforcement (Boniwell & Ryan, 2012). In fact, educators have been made to believe in this principle so effectively that they end up overusing extrinsic reinforcement. Irrespective of the learners' level of

interest, external incentives are widely preferred to other techniques as a means of sustaining or heightening the interest of the learner. It should be noted that older students prefer larger rewards compared to small incentives. Such students believe that large rewards vary with the level of interest. Programs that involve extrinsic incentives seem to be menacing in most schools as a strategy to increase the behavior of achievement. Teachers perceive extrinsic motivation as a requirement to encourage students to focus on different activities and lessons. Studies establish that most learning experiences in schools involve concealed syllabus of management and social limitations (Harpine, 2011). As learners continue with education, they become more extrinsically controlled. There is a hidden implication of relying on extrinsic rewards to inspire learners. This does not imply that rewards are not efficient in some cases and for different learners. The main challenge is that there is a uniform system of rewarding students in the learning process.

Therefore, teachers should not look at incentives as detrimental or inefficient in motivating learners. Extrinsic rewards have multiple impacts on the motivation of students. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze several aspects to predict the particular effects of incentives (Donovan & National Research Council, 2005). Firstly, consideration should be given to the relationship between extrinsic rewards and other variables of motivation. In some cases, incentives may increase self-efficacy among learners, which positively affect learners' inspiration or readiness to learn. Furthermore, the link between extrinsic incentives and individual differences is of vital relevance. During learning, such incentives are meant to inspire less attentive learners or those who occasionally perform dismally. However, a hidden cost is evident when these rewards are given to the entire class or the whole school because larger groups possess personal differences in performance and interest, which ignores the aspect of ability.

## 5. Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic deals with a student's personal drive to learn new concepts in a specific subject. It can be concluded that intrinsic motivation gives learners choices and a sense of individual control in the learning process (Harpine, 2011). Choosing activities fosters the belief in individual control in addition to increasing interest and engagement. The strategy is easy for teachers to implement and give a great application of the theory in classroom experiences. While intrinsic motivation is hailed as the best strategy to inspire students in a learning environment, it has a challenge concerning framework of many classrooms. If normative assessment and public contrasts are needed, learners' decisions show an avoidance of conflict and inclination on activities that ensure success. Essentially, a particular choice in a situation is not the same in another context. For example, when the evaluation is based on a person's ultimate product, decisions are not in line with interest; they rather reflect protection of a student's capability and concern for his or her level of performance. As such, the theory of motivation cannot be applied without looking at the situation of the classroom.

Regarding attribution theory, it can be inferred that the best idea is to try to convince learners that their hard word is not good enough. Teachers will normally encourage their students to work harder in the event of failure or poor performance. In this case, learners' perception of an outcome depends on their effort. An increase in effort will yield more positive results. Teachers ought to remember that admonishing learners to work harder is meant for those students who believe they are already trying hard (Wiseman & Hunt, 2008). The situation is more applicable for young learners who understand that they always try to improve because it is not good not to put in more effort. When a teacher tells such learners that they failed to work hard, there are high chances that these

students will have a low sense of efficacy.

Another challenge evident in intrinsic motivation is educators focusing so much on the effort. Teachers want to show learners that maintaining maximal effort leads to success. As such, learners attain a point of satisfaction only after working hard and accomplishing their goals. They may reach a point when they feel that there is no need to work harder after succeeding. In short, giving the impression to students that maximized effort is crucial can only trigger their involvement occasionally because they eventually withdraw from working hard. In a learning process where the objective is to show a student's capability over the long-term, consistent maximization of one's efforts is undesirable (Donovan & National Research Council, 2005).

In any learning institution, students fail to see the hierarchy in class as effort-determined. Historically, research has indicated that learners at the bottom of the performance hierarchy do not find themselves there due to complacency (Wiseman & Hunt, 2008). Making them believe that effortless engagement in learning is the result of the poor performance has little credibility. For teachers to apply the attribution theory to classroom learning, it is imperative to understand that whether they suggest to learners that effort is vital depends on how tasks are structured, assessment is done, and rewards given.

## **6. Recommendations**

Understanding that motivation occurs within a context is important if teachers have to use different positive psychological concepts to enhance inspirational patterns in learners. Context, in this case, refers to the classroom, school and family environment. Experts in the field of psychology of learning have spent much time discussing personal differences in motivation. They perceive motivation as a character and forget to look at how the institution and framework of classroom affect and socialize adaptive and maladaptive patterns of motivation. Additionally, establishing a positive motivation disposition in learners is significantly an aspect of dealing with differences in learners within the classroom context (Harpine, 2011). Educators should understand ways of handling such diversity, and the techniques should involve a complex analysis of the classroom.

University faculties should be guided by objectives meant to assign critical significance to growth in learners' drive to learn. A structure to identify the factors of the classroom that can be altered is integral. The frameworks should reflect the organization of the classroom and align with instructional planning (Snowman, McCown & Biehler, 2012). Similarly, positive psychological concepts can be applied to improve students' motivation through the identification of methods that serve to improve all students. It is important to establish these strategies in theory and research. The assessment of performance needs to be in line with developmental factors and other constructs of motivation besides personal differences.

The classroom has six areas that can be manipulated, and they require motivational concerns. These areas include authority, activity, grouping, recognition, time, and assessment. Although there are many motivational techniques that can be used to alter the six areas, a teacher must be keen to incorporate most suitable strategies consistently (Wiseman & Hunt, 2008). Therefore, motivation should not be concentrated in one or just two areas of the classroom.

## **7. Conclusion**

As established in the introduction section, positive psychology systematically analyzes the abilities that help people and the society to succeed. Concepts within this field are founded on the basis that every human being

works hard to emerge successful in life and become a constructive member of the society. Motivation plays a central role when it comes to people accomplishing their goals. While most concepts of positive psychology have been explored through research, there is little information on the interaction between different constructs in fostering motivation. The discussion offers a preliminary point for motivating students through research and theory. Regardless of the strategies chosen to motivate learners, teachers should ensure that they relate to all areas of classroom organization and planning for instructions. The framework is crucial since fostering motivation is not selective because it is not done at a specific time or during free time. Therefore, students require motivation during the entire learning process up to the time of evaluation. It has been established in the discussion that irrespective of the strategy chosen by a teacher to motivate learners, it is important that students cultivate a habit of maintaining and engaging in the learning process (Snowman, McCown & Biehler, 2012). Learners develop low self-esteem when they try to succeed and eventually fail. It is up to the teacher to bring on board some effective techniques that will put such learners in the mood to work harder. Based on most studies, teachers use two major forms of motivation — extrinsic and intrinsic. These strategies have their strengths and weaknesses. Younger learners perceive extrinsic motivation as a way of appreciating their efforts, but older students may perceive it as a mockery of their efforts.

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