



## Driving Key for Effective Learning: Motivation

Sevilay Şahin

University of Gaziantep, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences, 27310 Gaziantep

**Abstract.** In this article the importance of motivation for effective learning and teaching is discussed. The topic is approached from the perspectives of teacher's activities in the classroom. Teachers should know the strategies and principles of motivation, their application according to the readiness level of students by giving frequent, early, positive feedback that supports a student's belief that they can do well, or by helping students find personal meaning and value in the material. Furthermore, teachers should know the properties for creating the best motivating environment for students.

**Key words:** Motivation, Strategies of motivation, Effective learning and teaching environment.

### Etkili Öğrenmede Sürükleyici Güç “ Motivasyon”

**Özet.** Bu makalede motivasyonun eğitim ve öğretim açısından önemi tartışılmıştır. Konu öğretmenlerin sınıf içerisi etkinlikleri açısından ele alınmıştır. Öğretmenler motivasyon stratejilerini bilmeli ve bunu öğrencilerin hazır bulunuşluk düzeylerine göre sık sık, zamanında ve pozitif dönütler vererek hem öğrencilerin öğrenebileceklerine dair inançlarını arttırmalı hem de çalışılacak konu ya da materyalin anlamlı olmasına yardımcı olmalıdır.. Öğretmen motivasyon sağlamak amacıyla oluşturulacak ortamın özelliklerini de çok iyi bilmelidir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Motivasyon, Motivasyon stratejileri, Etkili öğrenme ve öğretme.

“The greatest thing you can do  
for another is not just to share  
your riches, but to reveal to him  
his own”

**Benjamin Disraeli**

### I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the term ‘motivation’ has taken on a variety of definitions. It is the driving force which underlies every conscious behaviour of the human being. In other words, to do anything in life some form of motivation needs to take place, from basic human needs to more comprehensive and complex ones. Traditionally, motivation has always been in two forms. “The carrot” and “the stick”, that is, the outcome will be either punishment or pleasure of some form. Motivation has been widely used for learning. Learner motivation has been a tool that teachers have depended on to “provide behavioural change in a student”. If we do not consider special cases, every student is motivated to learn something and, unfortunately, many students are motivated to learn something different than the topics we are trying to teach. If we ask this

question to ourselves “What can we do to motivate our students?”, we may be asking the wrong question. Motivation is an internal state or condition that serves to activate or energize behaviours (Kleinginna and Kleinginna, 1981:263). So the right question should be “how do I create a learning environment that will provide opportunities to motivate learners and increase their desire to learn?”

We do not motivate student but rather create, through our teaching, opportunities that can evoke motivation in students. Intrinsic motivation occurs when the learning activity and the learning environment elicit motivation in students (Chance, 1992:200) Extrinsic motivation refers to activities which are done in order to obtain a reward or to avoid punishment (Woolfolk, 2001).

Intrinsic motivators can be categorized as motivation that comes from within the person himself or herself. In this case motivation may come from the self-satisfaction of the learning.

As accepted or seen in many related literatures, extrinsic motivators have more impact on learning than intrinsic ones. In fact, effective learning can be reached by increasing the learners’ desire to learn because in a research conducted by Rogers et al. (1979) indicated following results:

- Over time extrinsic motivators tend to result in lower quality performance and behaviour.
- There is a tendency for students to focus on the extrinsic motivators (e.g. grades, points, rewards) while decreasing their focus on desired behaviours.
- Extrinsic motivators tend to become insufficient over time.
- Extrinsic motivators tend to be ineffective in:
  - Improving long-term quality performance
  - Promoting self-directed behaviours
  - Developing values such as integrity, honesty, respect, caring.
  - Promoting self-confidence.

In brief, extrinsic motivators can be considered to have their place in the classroom under certain circumstances. They work well for, short term, single event and physical responses. In the process of designing courses or programs these two motivators, intrinsic and extrinsic, should be mixed carefully and used effectively in the classroom.

### **General Principles of Motivation**

*The environment can be modified to focus the student’s attention on what needs to be learned.*

Teachers who create warm and accepting yet business-like atmospheres will promote persistent effort and favourable attitudes toward learning. This strategy will be successful in children and in adults. Interesting visual aids, such as booklets, posters, or practice equipment, motivate learners by capturing their attention and curiosity.

*Incentives motivate learning.*

Incentives include privileges and receiving praise from the instructor. The instructor determines an incentive that is likely to motivate an individual at a particular time. In a general learning situation, self-motivation without rewards will not succeed.

Students must find satisfaction in learning based on the understanding that the goals are useful to them or, less commonly, based on the pure enjoyment of exploring new things.

*Internal motivation is longer lasting and more self-directive than is external motivation, which must be repeatedly reinforced by praise or concrete rewards.*

Some individuals “particularly children of certain ages and some adults” have little capacity for internal motivation that’s why they must be guided and reinforced constantly. The use of incentives is based on the principle that learning occurs more effectively when the student

experiences feelings of satisfaction. Caution should be exercised in using external rewards when they are not absolutely necessary. Their use may be followed by a decline in internal motivation.

*Learning is most effective when an individual is ready to learn, that is, when one wants to know something.*

Sometimes the student's readiness to learn comes with time, and the instructor's role is to encourage its development. If a desired change in behaviour is urgent, the instructor may need to be supervised directly to ensure that the desired behaviour occurs. If a student is not *ready to learn*, he or she may not be reliable in following instructions, they must be supervised and have the instructions repeated again and again.

*Motivation is enhanced by the way in which the instructional material is organized*

In general, the best organized material makes the information meaningful to the reader. One method of organization includes relating new tasks to those already known. Other ways to relay meaning are to determine whether the persons being taught understand the final outcome desired and instruct them to compare and contrast ideas.

### **Creating the Best Environment for Motivation**

So, how do we create the best environment for motivating learners? Unfortunately there is no single magical formula for motivating students. Many factors affect a given student's motivation to work and to learn (Bligh, 1971; Sass, 1989) interest in the subject matter, perception of its usefulness, general desire to achieve, self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as patience and persistence.

It is the role of the teacher to provide or create the best environment possible for learning. This includes designing curriculum, classroom climate, learning activities, etc.

The best environment for student to learn in a classroom setting is an environment where the students feel valued, important, safe, secure and respected. All these make students self-motivated. As teachers, in order to encourage students to become self-motivated independent learners the following facts should be taken into consideration (Lowman, 1984; Weinert and Kluwe, 1987; Lucas, 1990):

- Give frequent, early, positive feedback that supports student's beliefs that they can do well.
- Ensure opportunities for student success by assigning tasks that are neither too easy nor too difficult.
- Help students find personal meaning and value in the material.
- Create an atmosphere that is open and positive
- Help students feel that they are valued members of the learning community.

In order to create this climate, the classroom teacher should also know the strategies which give way to successful motivation. These strategies are:

1. Capitalize on students' when they satisfy their own needs such as the need to learn something in order to complete a particular task or activity, the need to seek new experiences the need to perfect skills, the need to overcome challenges the need to become competent, the need to succeed and do well, the need to feel involved and to interact with other people. Satisfying such needs is rewarding in itself and such rewards sustain learning more effectively than grades. In order to address these kinds of needs, design assignments, in-class activities and discussion questions (McMillan and Forsyth, 1991).

2. Make students active participants in learning: students learn more effectively by doing, making, writing, designing, creating and solving. Try to encourage students to suggest approaches to a problem or to guess the results of an experiment.
3. Ask students to analyze what makes their classes more or less motivating. Ask your students to list the characteristics that make their lesson more motivated or less motivated. In this study, Sass (1989) identifies eight characteristics that affect the level of motivation in the classroom. These are:
  - Instructor's enthusiasm,
  - Relevance of the material,
  - Organization of the course,
  - Appropriate difficulty level of the material,
  - Active involvement of students,
  - Variety,
  - Rapport between teacher and students,
  - Use of appropriate, concrete, and understandable examples.
4. Incorporate instructional behaviours that motivate students:
  - Hold high but realistic expectations for your students:  
Teacher's expectations have a powerful effect on a student's performance. If you want your students to be motivated, hardworking, and interested in the course they are more likely to do so. Your standards should be high enough to motivate students to do their best but not so high that students will be frustrated in trying to meet those expectations (Bligh, 1971; Lowman, 1984; Forsyth and McMillan, 1991; American Psychological Association, 1992).
  - Help students set achievable goals for themselves:  
Make students feel that the important point is not getting higher grades but improving themselves. Give opportunity to evaluate their progress by encouraging them to critique their own work; analyze their strength and overcome their weaknesses (Cashin, 1979).
  - Tell students what they need to be successful in your course:  
Do not let your students struggle to find what is expected of them.  
Try to make them find out what they must do NOT to succeed in your course. Assure students that you can help them solve the problems while studying the materials that will be learned.
  - Strengthen students' self-motivation:  
In order to strengthen their self-motivation try to communicate in a more moderate way. That is, instead of saying "I require", "you must" or "you should" say "I think you will find..." or "I will be interested in your reaction" (Lowman, 1990).
  - Avoid creating intense competition among students:  
Since competition produces anxiety it can interfere with learning. Reduce students' attitudes to compare themselves to one another because when students work cooperatively in groups rather than compete as individuals, they will be more attentive, display better comprehension, produce more work and be more favourable to the teaching method.
  - Be enthusiastic about your subject:  
Teacher enthusiasm is an important factor in motivation. If you become bored, students will reflect the same feeling. In fact, teacher enthusiasm comes from self-confidence, excitement about effective and efficient content, and pleasure in teaching. If you are using material which you consider boring and if you have to use it in your lesson try to devise the most exciting way to present the material in

order to prevent your students from being bored or disinterested by structuring the course material to motivate students effectively.

### **Structuring the Course to Motivate Students Effectively**

In your first lesson find out what your students know about your topic. Then relate your topic with their daily life. For example, if you are teaching chemistry, devote some lecture time to examine the contributions of chemistry to resolving environmental problems. Briefly explain how your lecture will help students achieve their educational, professional or personal goals. Before structuring your course content to motivate students some conditions necessary for creating the best learning environment need to be created. These are:

1. The thing you teach should be valuable.  
Learners do not want to waste their time on non-important topics. In order to involve students in the activity in a meaningful way, you should make your students feel that the topic is really important to them. There are various ways to achieve this, which depend on the needs of the students and the content being taught.
2. There should be opportunity for the involvement of all students.  
During learning, students should feel that they are included in the learning activities. How you achieve this depends on your observations of your students. There are various ways to have students involved in the process. Some of them may be:
  - Have your students set the classroom expectations.
  - Give alternatives about your teaching process and give them opportunities to make meaningful choices and decisions.
  - Try to answer all questions asked by students.
3. There should be a “sense” that the classroom is a safe place to learn.  
Students will be more motivated if they have a feeling of safety and security. The point here is that they should feel not only physically safe but also emotionally safe. That means they will not be embarrassed for their input responses, and participation.
4. You should use all learning styles and multiple intelligences.  
When considering learning styles and intelligences, students’ being treated as individuals and meeting their needs are highly important. Instructors should be willing in trying to serve all the learners’ needs. In order to achieve this, the instructor should carefully review lesson plans, learning activities and analyze how they cross over the different learning styles and intelligences.
5. You should provide your students with evidence of progress.  
Students will stay motivated when there is a sense of success or mastery. They should feel that learning is challenging but possible. Students will understand real learning when they have opportunity to follow their successes.
6. You should be sincere in the classroom.  
Having others care about you can be powerful motivator. It can create a sense of belonging and safety, which affects learning positively.  
Now you can prepare your course content. In order to develop meaningful content, an instructor should keep the following in mind:
  - Work from student interests and strengths. For effective learning and teaching, try to find out what their expectations are and then try to devise examples, case studies or assignments that relate the course content to student interests and experiences.
  - When possible, let students give their ideas about the topic which will be studied. That is, have them select which topics to explore in greater depth. If possible, include optional or alternative units in the course (Ames and Ames, 1990).
  - Increase the difficulty of the material as the semester progresses.

If the instructor gives opportunities to succeed at the beginning of the semester, students feel they can succeed and the instructor can easily increase the difficulty level. If an exam includes easier and harder questions, every student will have a chance to experience success as well as challenge (Cashin, 1979).

- Vary your teaching methods. If you use various methods this re-awakens student involvement in the course and their motivation (Forsyth and McMillan, 1991).

As for the grades an intelligent instructor can use the grades as powerful motivators.

- Emphasize mastery and learning rather than grades.

The study done by Ames and Ames (1990) indicates the importance of emphasizing mastery and learning rather than grades. In two different classes teachers apply different strategies for homework assignments. The first counts homework as 30 percent of a student's final grade. The second teacher grades homework assignments as satisfactory or unsatisfactory ; makes students bring questions to class about problems they can not complete; gives students opportunity to redo their homework assignment and grades homework as 10 percent of the final grade. In the second class, mistakes were considered as acceptable and something to learn from.

Avoid using grades as threats. As McKeachie (1986) points out, the treat of low grades may prompt some students to work hard but other students may resort to academic dishonesty, excuses for late work, and other counter-productive behaviour.

One other way of motivating students is to respond their work. In order to achieve this, the following can be used as useful motivators:

Give students feedback as quickly as possible. Return tests and results as soon as possible and reward students who show success in front of his/her friends. Tell them how well they have done and how to improve herself/himself. Both positive and negative commands influence motivation but it is generally accepted that students are affected by positive feedback and success. Praise builds student self-confidence, competence, and self-esteem. Recognize sincere efforts even if the product is not brilliant. In this case, try to show your confidence in students' ability to succeed (Cashin, 1979; Lucas, 1990).

- Introduce students to the good work done by their peers.  
Share the ideas, knowledge and accomplishments of individual students with the class as a whole:
  - Make available copies of the best papers and essay exams.
  - Provide class time for students to read papers and assignments submitted by classmates.
  - Have students write brief critique of a classmate's paper.
  - Schedule a brief talk by a student who has experience or who is doing research paper on a topic relevant to your lecture.
- Be specific when giving negative feedback.  
As all teachers know, negative feedback is very powerful and can lead to a negative class atmosphere. When you make your criticism make it clear that all criticism are for a particular task or performance, not for the student as an individual. Try to imply your criticism by emphasizing the aspects of the task in which the student succeeded.
- Avoid demanding commands. While making your comments try to be sensitive. Avoid off-hand remarks which make the student feel inadequate.

## DISCUSSION

None of the techniques will produce sustained motivation unless the goals are realistic for the learner. The basic learning principle involved is that *success is more predictably motivating than failure*. Ordinarily, people will choose activities of intermediate uncertainty rather than those that are difficult (little likelihood of success) or easy (high probability of success). For

goals of high value there is less tendency to choose more difficult conditions. Having learners assist in defining goals increases the probability that they will understand them and want to reach them. However, students sometimes have unrealistic notions about what they can accomplish. Possibly, they do not understand the precision with which a skill must be carried out or have the depth of knowledge to master some material. To identify realistic goals, instructors must be skilled in assessing a student's readiness or a student's progress toward goals because learning requires changes in beliefs and behaviour, it normally produces a mild level of anxiety.

This is useful in motivating the individual. However, severe anxiety is incapacitating. A high degree of stress is inherent in some educational situations. If anxiety is severe, the individual's perception of what is going on around him or her is limited. Instructors must be able to identify anxiety and understand its effect on learning. They also have a responsibility to avoid causing severe anxiety in learners by setting realistically high goals for them. To do this, it is important to help each student set goals and to provide informative feedback regarding progress toward the goals. Because setting a goal demonstrates an intention to achieve and activates learning from one day to the next. It also directs the student's activities toward the goal and offers an opportunity to experience success. Both affiliation and approval are strong motivators.

People seek others with whom to compare their abilities, opinions, and emotions. Affiliation can also result in direct anxiety reduction by the social acceptance and the mere presence of others. However, these motivators can also lead to conformity, competition, and other behaviours that may be negative.

It is recognized that no grand theory of motivation exists. However, motivation is so necessary for learning that strategies should be planned to organize a continuous dynamic and interactive motivational program for maximum effectiveness. The general principles of motivation are interrelated. A single teaching action can use many of them simultaneously.

Finally, it should be said that an enormous gap exist between knowing that learning must be motivated and identifying the specific motivational components of any particular act. Instructors must focus on learning patterns of motivation for an individual or group, with the realization that errors occurring during learning process will be common place.

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