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Factors Increasing Motivation of Tertiary Level Learners' In-Class Participation

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Abstract

The prime purpose of this paper is to investigate the motivating factors that make university students participate in classroom activities and these factors correlate with their learning and grades. Furthermore, the study tried to identify whether intrinsic motivational factors drove them more to be part of in-class activities or extrinsic motivational factors. The topic under consideration required a qualitative case study with an exploratory design to identify these factors. The study was based at a renowned private sector university in Karachi. The research study used a purposive sampling method and gathered data by conducting semi-structured short interviews of students and faculty with some probing on the answers. The results led to a list of factors such as pedagogy, motivation, role of faculty attitude, role of student attitude, and marks-driven motivation. The findings support the notion that extrinsic motivators play a significant role in class participation of students at the tertiary levels.

Keywords: attitude, class participation, extrinsic, interaction, intrinsic, motivation

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is from the Latin word *movere* which means to move. Motivation helps us move forward and make efforts to achieve what we want (Tasgin & Tunc, 2018). Motivation is further stated as a mental state that gives rise to and sustains certain behaviours. Deci and Ryan (2008) describe motivation to be based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is an empirically-based theory of human motivation, development, and wellness. The theory focuses on types rather than just the volume of motivation. The theory also states the social conditions that can boost or reduce such types of motivation. SDT also examines people's life goals or aspirations showing variance of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivators and how they are related to performance and psychological health (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Motivation in terms of students' learning is the crux of education. Optimum learning comes with communication and interaction between students and the teacher. This idea is widespread especially in the developed countries, but can also be seen in some developing ones. Some studies analysed teacher-student communication in terms of social interactions too (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). In Pakistan's context, Naureen, Ahmed and Esmail (2015) studied the relationship between students' motivation and their behaviour at the high school level and found that a relationship exists in motivation and learning.

Research Problem

Both as a teacher and student, I have come across similar situations. As a student, I have always noticed that there are students who know answers to the questions and problems given in the class activities, but they do not share and show reticence, and need encouragement to share their point of view. Similarly, as a teacher, I noticed that students waited for the teacher to feed them before they participate and contribute in class activities. Therefore, this paper explores the factors that help university students participate in any type of class activity, be it answering simple to complex questions, arguing a viewpoint or agreeing/ disagreeing during any healthy discourse.

Research Questions

For the present study, the following research questions have emerged:

1. What factors/ reasons motivate a tertiary-level student in in-class participation?

2. To what extent does intrinsic or extrinsic factor motivate the students more to partake in classroom activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation is said to be grounded in Self-Determination Theory by Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991). They elucidate that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have different motives or aims; intrinsic motivation speaks of doing something because it is fundamentally interesting or enjoyable and extrinsic motivation is in play when one feels externally pushed into action. Another relevant theory is of student learning, which is very well explained in the Theory of Students' Involvement (Astin, 1984). It explains about the influence of the environment on the psychological and overall development of students. This theory serves as a guide to researchers and can help faculty of any educational institutions to make teaching learning more interactive. Students' learning motivation inside classroom facilitates them to learn better, express their ideas and beliefs, and make others understand it (Astin, 1984).

In the above context, there are researches that divide students' participation and engagement into the following categories:

1. Behavioural engagement: Students' behaviour can show that engaged with positive attitude, they follow norms such as attendance and involvement and keep off any disturbance that might disrupt classroom interaction.

2. Emotional engagement: These involve students who give clear signals of taking interest and emotional attachment on their own.

3. Cognitive engagement: This includes those students who are mentally ready for any interaction and show that they are motivated to take difficult tasks to enhance their learning (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer 2009; Wang, Bergin & Bergin, 2014).

Moreover, when it comes to developing motivation skills, Zhou and Winne (2012) have established that students' learning to develop their motivation skills in their classrooms is the reflection of their interest in studies. A proficient teacher can always adopt and adapt innovative ideas for implementation, which make students learning meaningful and beneficial and the outcomes of which becomes evident in students' achievements (Jones, 2008).

Taking class conversation and interaction a step ahead, Anwar (2019) opines that students show better results if they interact with others during the teaching-learning process. Such students do not need to rote memorise answers for exams if they properly participate in class activities and discussions. This further increases their learning output as they take communication as a natural process to retain information. When a discussion is open, everyone can share different perspectives; therefore, students can have ideas matching the number of students in a class. Encouraging association between student-teacher and student-student also requires active strategizing, which calls for teachers to plan classroom activities requiring dynamic participation. As a result, bringing in a variety of teaching, tools, and techniques to capture students' attention and interest should be the teacher's responsibility (Anwar, 2019). At the tertiary level, Dancer and Kamvounias, (2005) recognize the fact that communication in university graduates is the most important skill to enhance students' learning motivation.

In the backdrop of education in Pakistan, students in ESL classrooms are often engaged in teacher-fronted activities having limited opportunities to speak in the target language and thus it is difficult for them to prompt participation (Sarwar & Bhamani, 2018). Being present in such classrooms means that students are less likely to participate during the on-going activities (Sarwar, 2001). Therefore, opportunities to participate in the oral discussion are minimal, though oral engagement is considered the main indicator of students' learning motivation (Rasheed, Aslam & Sarwar, 2010).

In a nutshell, amongst the most practiced pedagogical strategies, classroom discussion is the most frequently used. According to a study, students who were less inclined to participate voluntarily, the faculty used different strategies like participation grades, extra marks or high ranks. However, students' responses indicated that expressing their own experiences and creative ideas, teachers' prompt facilitation, posting meaningful questions and reinforcing classroom environment are those strategies which can motivate students to learn (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2004). The most important aspect amongst students in classroom participation is motivation, and positive or negative effects of which engage or disengage students in the class. Their emotional or behavioural dissatisfaction is dependent on their motivation whether intrinsic or extrinsic (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009).

Taking into consideration the objectives, research questions and literature review, the following conceptual framework was developed to guide the research:

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework
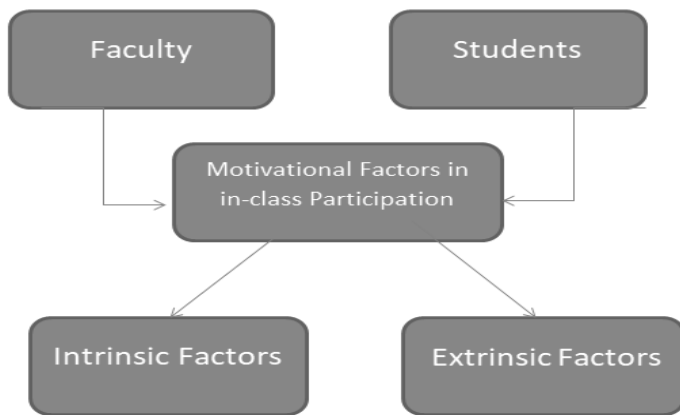
METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This was a small-scale research study with the aim of investigating the meanings and perceptions associated with motivation in classroom participation. It further aimed to explore what types of factors were available to enhance motivation in class participation. To fulfil the mentioned purpose, a qualitative methodology was used deploying purposive sampling technique. Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2015) define the phrase qualitative method as one which is meant to give the researcher a very detailed data. This data is formed by recording written or spoken words of people as well as their behaviour. They further elucidate that qualitative researchers try to explore what meanings people have for the things concerned with their lives. This method is used to

understand people's experiences from the way they know it. Qualitative researchers; therefore, should relate to and identify with the people they study so that they can understand how those people see things differently (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015). As this study required faculty and students' experience, the researchers found it most adequate to use.

Furthermore, this was an exploratory case study as it was used to obtain students views of factors that help them interact and speak about their opinions. In addition, social science research should be exploratory in cases where a researcher wishes to understand or clarify an already existing case that might lead to further exploration (Stebbins, 2001). A case study was used as a strategy, since the study aimed at a first-hand inquiry that uses a single real-life context to generalize the findings (Gerring, 2004).

Participants

The target participants were tertiary students at a chosen institute using purposive sampling. This technique allowed the researchers to make deliberate choices of participants due to the qualities the participants possess (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The target was to interview 22 students and five faculty members to record the data from two angles. Permission was asked before setting the interviews on a mutually agreed time.

Instrument

The tool used for data collection was a self-developed semi-structured interview protocol with two open-ended questions with room for in-depth probing. Semi-structured interviews were used because this tool gave room to the interviewers to talk to the interviewees and elicit their experiences, feelings, and observations (Whiting, 2008). The participating students were asked to answer the questions in line with their own perceptions and experiences without challenging their opinion on the matter; though they were probed to shed some light on their outlook and views too.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were transcribed, then analysed with the help of thematic analysis in which the data were divided into different possible categories, codes and patterns, and subsequently themes. This method helped to categorize the findings comfortably and hence, were used because thematic analysis is an appropriate method that can be used when analysing large qualitative data sets.

FINDINGS

The researchers took the research questions and literature reviewed as the guiding principle. Similarly, findings were arranged as per the research questions. Therefore, the results for the study will be discussed according to the key themes that emerged for the research questions. Following are the themes that were extracted from the data gathered through interviewing the faculty and students at the university.

Pedagogy and Motivation

One theme that surfaced from the data was the methodology or pedagogy used. Every interviewee emphasized that the way a teacher teaches, keeps students motivated to participate. The faculty replies included attributing to pedagogy, style and mode of teaching.

"First of all, teaching method … pedagogy…like students make presentations in the classroom, ahh… have role-plays in the classroom, this type of pedagogy …"

"Like sometimes subject is interesting, but the delivery and mode of communication is not up to the standard that …ah… students feel(s) uncomfortable. So, the mode the teaching style actually matters."

Students expressed their thoughts on the matter this way:

"That I think really depends on the teacher…."

"Jaise… jaise… koi dry course hota hai to [like if it is a dry course], I think it is a boring class. To na chahte hoe bhi [unwillingly] … mentally you are not present."

"Mostly teachers interact. Teacher samjha kay [chale jate hen][teacher comes and makes you understand and leave] … and they just you know stop them won't go any further."

On asking what should a teacher do [in terms of pedagogy] to make students participate and what should be the teaching style of the faculty, they responded:

"Activities like videos etc so that they start feeling motivated and they start participating."

"Giving case studies, letting them think, letting them come up with their own responses or answers or solution to the problems…these kinds of things."

"Activities aisi bhi honi chaheye jo students k liye catchy hon, jis me wo interest waghaira show kren aur mm aur wo khud motivate hon un activities ko perform kerne me [activities should be such that these are catchy for students, which make them interested to participate]."

"Ye samajhta hoon k students ko ek practical approach dia jae [I think students deserve to have a practical approach]."

"I teach experiential based learning, activity-based learning so experiential and activity based learning …ah… is tarah ki classes me students interest lete hen [students take interest in such classes]."

Students emphasized a variety of expectations from their faculty.

"Making the class interactive. I think that motivates me to go to that class and participate in it."

Students were concerned about content, examples and materials too, and wanted that to be according to their time and age, that is, updated and according to the new trends. As one confided:

"For example… meri kisi mother ya father k zamanay ka koi brand [brands from my mother and father's time]… so I cannot relate to that kion k mene uskay baray me kabhi suna nahi [because I haven't heard of that] … Teacher should give examples of the same brand which is related to us … same like hamari age k[from our age], will be able to relate to such things better and understand them better."

Some students felt motivated when they had tasks of problem solving.

"People come up with different solutions for one problem given in the class, which is wonderful but a lot of times teachers only focus on solutions that is given in the book which is, I personally think not good, because books are out-dated and marketing is all about ... all about the stuff that exists right now... happening right now. You should ask people who are aware of the trends right now that the young people ...latest."

A participant praised a teacher saying:

"He brings case studies in the class and then he makes us all solve those case studies and then he relates it to the topic that's really interesting or he would tell us the... you know...real lifetime problems that he faced in his career."

Role of Faculty Attitude

Many faculty members related students' motivation to behaviour, attitude and openness of faculty and shared:

"Attitude of a teacher, positive or negative or warm attitude of teacher and acceptance of students' responses... be open to new information."

"Good behaviour is a reason for students to participate in the class...."

"Teacher encouragement. Because teacher should never ever discourage a student that's the point."

"As you know...agr aap kisi ko bar bar bolenge tou they become frustrated. [if you scold them repeatedly, they will be frustrated]."

"So, sometimes with the rude teachers they are reluctant to participate they just pass their time."

Students were very sensitive about the teacher's attitude and connected it with quite a few other factors like age and friendliness of a faculty to participate. They expressed this matter by sharing that:

"Koi teacher thore se young se hon, unsey chilling ho to unse comfort level hota he apka to aap unse sawal pooch sakte Hen [if a teacher is comparatively young and fun-loving; then you feel comfortable and ask questions]."

Mostly students related motivation to a faculty that is considerate and understands their problems too and expressed:

"Unka lehja, unki activities her cheez me friendly environment tha, unkay sath student –teacher nahi, it was like having a discussion with a friend."

"University level pe (pause) ... ah... teachers ko friendly bhi hona chaheye aur teacher ko strict bhi hona chaheye [a teacher should be both friendly and strict at the university level]."

Participants further pointed out a very important aspect that motivation to call for participation can also signpost to fear of authority of faculty. They suggested that they can't say anything especially disagreeing with faculty or sharing their point of view, some revealed.

"In university culture, students think that the teacher is the final ..hmm.. aa.. authority figure… you know …to give marks…."

"But students also ... ahh… k teacher se baat khrab na hojae. [students don't want to offend teachers]."

Bringing in new and latest information and sharing this in class is doubted with fear given how a teacher might take it or reject that feeling. Informants also said that they shared a lot in schools.

"I think teacher should have more than one outlook for anything that they are teaching."

Both students and faculty brought up the issue of favouritism in the class that sometimes can demotivate students and keep them aloof from participating.

"It is disappointing to feel that even teachers can be biased towards a particular student. This happens and it actually demotivates the neglected students."

"So there was a bit of favouritism. Teachers you know… wo un bachon se zayada sawal poochte they [they asked the question more from them]."

"I adore participating in class, but the teacher bus favourite se he poochte hen. [teachers focus on favourite ones]."

Role of Student Attitude

Students' participation and motivation due to their self-interest that includes a variety of factors and they exhorted:

"My motivation is actually to study…."

"To be honest agr me class me participate na kroon to I get lost. [if I don't participate, I feel lost]."

However, others included factors like personal preferences and interest in a subject. They spoke that their subjects and likes-dislikes kept them motivated.

"Jaise jo mere maths k subjects jo k compulsory hen, usme me motivated feel nahi kerti. [like my maths compulsory subjects, I'm not motivated in that]."

"Zayada meri motivation meri likes or dislikes se hoti hai [my motivation comes from my likes and dislikes]."

"What motivates me to participate in the class depends on the course itself, since my major is marketing my courses are based on marketing, uske ander bus interest he [I take interest in these only] because they are my courses, so I know what I want to learn and that motivates me to participate]."

Shyness of students and lack of self-confidence emerged as a factor for students to refrain from participating and they expressed as follows:

"Aisa bohat kam hota he classroom k me bolo, lekin bohat farq parhta he k teacher aisa environment banata he classroom me [I want to participate and contribute in the classroom, subject to the teacher creating a harmonious environment]."

"Personally I don't think k I could participate that much as people in my class can."

".... Nahi kerti [chuckles] interesting na ho to lagta he aap bus cell me lag jaen, bus time guzar jae, we are sleeping in the class [chuckles] we sleep with our eyes open, and no concentration in the class."

"Apka self-confidence bhi matter kerta hai [one's self-confidence matters]."

However, regarding students' role in motivation to participation, faculty talked about intrinsic motivation to be almost non-existent. Though, they also sympathized with some working students whose jobs make them lethargic and non-participative.

"I've had really ...hmm… active and activity-based sessions and students were drained out, sleeping, you know with their heads down."

"Ye becharay thakay hoe aate hen aap kitni activity kraenge k wo active hojaen class k ander? [these poor souls come from offices all worn out; how many activities can be done to make them active]?"

Students negative attitude even in very energetic and activity-based classes were mentioned along with stress and social problems:

"Teachers ko ye idea hojatee hai k ye sirf behas kerne k liye aya hain [teachers understand that this student is there only to argue for the sake of arguing]."

Marks and Grade Driven Motivation

When asked about whether marks have any connection with class participation, replies came both in favour and against it. Interviewees recalled that there are marks for class participation and sometimes this is a driving force for them to participate in class activities. There were participants who affirmed these factors by recalling as under:

"Marks are the biggest motivation."

"Phir wohi baat ajati he k inka focus hota he sirf grades and not learning par [so focus is grade and not learning]."

"If you give them an indication that this objective will be included in the exam, it motivates them."

"We have marks for participation and this helps the students to pull up their grades."

On the contrary, many students denied that marks or grades have anything to do with class participation. They pointed out that marks for participation are there, but it is upto the teacher mostly; they suggested that exams are for final marks. A student explained:

"Kion k obviously paper k liye jate hen to ham parh k chale jate hen, kisi se notes le lete hen kisi se samajh lete hen [because for papers, we study and understand via notes]."

"Nahi nahi… grades ka participation se koi rishta nahi… koi asar nahi. Kuch courses hen jisme mene bilkul nahi participate kia mgr marks achay they. [No, no grades aren't linked with participation, no effect, in some courses I didn't participate at all, but got good marks.]."

These ideas emerged because faculty does not share marks for participation separately, rather students are given projects, assignments and presentations and marks for these are inclusive of final marks.

DISCUSSION

Findings support the idea that motivation to participate comes from a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors; however, extrinsic factors are more important, like pedagogy, teachers' attitude and temptation to get better marks than a student's personal interest and traits like shyness. This paper was inspired by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which further describes motivation to have internal or external stimuli depending on the purpose of an activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Pedagogy and Motivation

Motivation to participate by students primarily came from pedagogy, since it provides a niche for students to be part of the teaching process. It seems that students would wait for the faculty to start a discussion in class, give them presentations or case studies and ask questions in the class. The present study indicates that experiential and student-centred teaching were appreciated and were prone to draw students' attention to class happenings rather than a method that allowed only faculty to speak and then leave the class assuming that students had understood. Sessions with room for interaction with teachers and peers was the most important for students to participate, which confirmed the Theory of Students' Involvement by Astin (1984).

A very valid factor to motivate students was that of updated content of teaching material. Learners wanted faculty to give them activities on examples from their time and era so that they could relate to it and interact sharing their knowledge. Such faculty members who were closer to students' age groups shared their hands-on and personal experiences and thus drew participation. Problem solving activities were appreciated much more than dependence on out-dated books. This finding affirms the claim made by Anwar (2019), that the role of a teacher as a mentor is crucial to introduce students to attention-grabbing and interesting instructional tools and techniques. This also upholds Skinners' cognitive engagement theory supported by Skinner, Kindermann, and Furrer (2009), Towler (2010), and Wang (2014).

Faculty Attitude

The findings witnessed how the role of a teacher's attitude and behaviour motivated or demotivated students' interest in participating in classroom. This is related to the theory of behavioural engagement and suggests that learners' behaviours are directly affected by a faculty's openness to accept and encourage different viewpoints and new information shared by the learners. Rude remarks targeted on learners, unfriendly environment, and personal biases usually put off students to ask questions or participate. Some students also attribute their participation to faculty's respect or fear of authority. They suggest that they cannot say anything especially disagree with faculty or share their point of view because it could be considered a negative behaviour of the students. This finding aligns with the theory of Behavioural Engagement by Skinner, Kindermann and Furrer

(2009); Wang (2014); and as well by Dallimore, Hertenstein and Platt (2004). Being present in such classrooms means that they are less likely to participate during the on-going activities. Hence, opportunities to participate in oral discussions are very less though oral engagement is considered the main indicator of students' learning motivation.

Student Attitude

When it comes to intrinsic motivation to participate, Zhou and Winne (2012) have established that the students' learning motivation in their classroom is the reflection of their interest in studies. This idea was confirmed by the findings that many students participated because of self-interest, passion for studies and factors like personal preference, and interest in a subject. Such students took interest in their major subjects as a matter of attraction. Personal traits like being talkative and extrovert helped students to ask questions, volunteer for speaking, and actively coming forward to contribute. Some even urge to be popular in the class by showing confidence so that they could be appreciated by faculty and classmates. Other personality traits like being shy, introvert, or lack of confidence marred students' willingness to participate on their own.

Faculty opinion was diverse in this regard, as they found learners to be without any self-motivation at times. Learners usually showed a total lack of energy especially those who were with jobs or opted for too many courses during the semester. Students' personal and social problems negative attitude and scepticism also kept few from participating. These findings strengthen the intrinsic motivation factors of Self-Determination Theory. This also endorses the emotional engagement motivation in which students engage enthusiastically, show sentimental reactions, and a sense of belonging.

Marks and Grade Driven Motivation

Marks and grades are important extrinsic factors that motivated learners to participate in class activities. Many students support the idea that since marks are allocated for class participation, it acts as a force for them to participate even if they are not self-motivated. This confirms Jones (2008) findings that the outcome of which (class participation) becomes evident in students' achievements. This is further enhanced and corroborated by Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) that communication is the most important skill to enhance students' learning and Astin (1984) provides evidence that learning motivation inside classroom facilitates better learning.

Some students refuted the association of class participation with marks and shared that marks and grades mostly depended on hourly and final exams, and questions in papers could be attempted if a student was well prepared for exams and not because they were good participants.

Hence, a number of factors like methodology, teaching style, relevance of content, faculty and students' attitude, better grades, and other factors helped students to participate. Sessions devoid of these qualities caused students to feel bored, divert attention to other interests like cell phones or be indifferent to classroom teaching.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The research in hand aimed at investigating the factors that motivated a tertiary-level student in in-class participation and further explored, which factors had more impact on students' motivation at the university level. The study took inspiration from Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (2008) and the three dimensions of motivation by Skinner (2009). The findings of the study resulted in four important factors that helped learners feel motivated, namely; pedagogy, faculty attitude, student behaviour in terms of self-

motivation, and marks and grades. Out of which pedagogy with a variety of sub factors, like teachers' behaviour with attitude and biases, and marks were the extrinsic factors; whereas, students' attitude including personality traits, and personal choices were the intrinsic motivators in class participation. Therefore, it can be concluded that extrinsic factors play a more significant role in motivating learners towards class participation.

In the light of the above, it is highly recommended that the instructors should choose a variety of student-centred activities with updated examples and teaching styles. Faculty focus should be on students' learning with fairness and thus, they should keep their attitude in check so as not to discourage anyone. Institutes should offer training for faculty in new teaching methods, strategies and techniques. Marks of classroom participation should be reminded to both students and faculty and this should have a separate inclusion in transcripts.

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