

The Power of Beliefs in Impacting Motivation

Motivating the Academically Unmotivated

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Students' performance in school reflects their level of motivation and reasons for doing school work.
2. Believing that intelligence can increase with effort (adopting a growth mindset instead of a fixed one) predicts subject mastery and learning enjoyment.
3. The way teachers teach reflects their beliefs, which are correlated to students' intrinsic motivations and goals set.

BACKGROUND

Three motivational theories are combined to explore the relationship between learning engagement and academic performance, particularly among students disinterested in schoolwork.

- The self-determination theory (SDT) focuses on intrinsic motivation—engaging in academic activities out of interest and enjoyment—as the primary driver of self-regulated learning (Deci & Ryan, 2008).
- Achievement goal theory states that students set either mastery or performance goals relative to others in doing tasks (Nicholls, 1989). Mastery goals lead to more adaptive motivational outcomes in students than the latter.

- Dweck (1999) believes goal adoption is shaped by a student's implicit theories of intelligence. Students who believe that intelligence can grow experience better learning outcomes than those who believe their intellectual ability is fixed.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The study seeks to find out what students are driven by: it establishes their motivational profiles, and reports the school-related cognitive and behavioural differences between the profiles. Links are established between the motivational theories; specifically, whether intelligence beliefs predict goal-setting, which may in turn predict students' interest in school. We find out if teachers' intelligence beliefs and teaching methods impact students' intelligence beliefs and motivational outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

- Students' motivation impacts their performance in school. Self-driven students enjoy, value, feel competent, and put in more effort in school. They spent more time on homework and revision. Students driven only by external reasons (e.g., rewards, punishments, feeling guilty) are less likely to enjoy, value, feel competent, or invest effort in school.

- Students with growth mindsets aim to master Mathematics and enjoy the subject more than those with fixed mindset.
- Students who enjoy, value, or feel competent enough to do their school work are more likely to do better in tests compared to students who do not. Enjoyment and perceived competence are vital to performance.
- Teachers teach in ways that reflect their beliefs, which are correlated to students' intrinsic motivations and goals set. Note that these findings are not causal.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for Practice

Teachers need to be aware of how their beliefs about their students' abilities influence the way they teach, as this may affect student motivation. Teachers may employ strategies to boost student autonomy and motivation, such as the language they use and the actions they take while teaching.

Implications for Policy and Research

Policies to improve pedagogy and teacher education should encourage the nurturing of incremental belief, mastery goals, and intrinsic motivation in both teachers and students.

Proposed Follow-up Activities

Explore how broader educational structures in school affect teacher motivation and influence teaching strategies.

PARTICIPANTS

30 Secondary Schools, 222 teachers, 7734 students.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A two-phased study with questionnaire administration was conducted. In phase 1, students' intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, achievement goals, theories of intelligence, perceived autonomy support, and time invested in schoolwork were assessed, along with teachers' theories of intelligence and preferred teaching methods. In phase 2, 6 months later, a subset of students were assessed on the same variables as in phase 1.

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