

Investigating Causes that Affect Students' Motivation Toward Studies

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ABSTRACT

Although motivation is the most important factor influencing students' studies progress, some students remain disinterested to their school subjects and become behind in their studies. The present study investigates the factors that affect Afghan students' disinterest towards studies in the public high schools of the central district of Wardak province. The statistical population of the study consists of all teachers in the public high schools of the central district of Wardak, total 200 teachers. The data is collected from 100 teachers using a researcher-designed questionnaire containing 92 questions. This research employs a quantitative methodology to examine two key factors (personal and environmental) influencing student disinterest. The data were collected and analyzed using SPSS software. The findings of the study indicate that the factors affecting students' interest toward studies include their basic needs, such as physiological, belonging, security, respect, and self-actualization, as well as environmental factors like facilities, rewards, punishment, and teachers' professional competency. Among these, teacher professional competency and rewards have the greatest impact on student interest, while factors such as self-actualization, respect, security, punishment, belonging, physiological needs, and facilities also play significant roles. In order to foster students' interest in their studies, it is not only essential to fulfill their primary needs, but also to create an appropriate learning environment for them. Additionally, teachers who possess professional competency, mastery of subject knowledge, and strong ethical conduct are crucial for students becoming interested toward their learning.

KEYWORDS

Student motivation; personal needs; environmental factors; teacher competency; learning environment; Afghanistan.

INTRODUCTION

Every human being has a state of motivation. Motivation is a state of arousal that prompts an organism to take action, activates behavior, provides direction, and ultimately leads to goal-oriented actions and the generation of energy. Psychologists have offered various definitions of motivation. Some consider motivation as an internal state of the organism that drives behavior and thought, while others view it as an internal force that stimulates desire, and yet others define it as the factor that energizes individuals, propelling them toward specific actions.

Motivation is one of the most essential psychological concepts in education and plays a crucial role in learning. The presence of motivation facilitates learning, reduces anxiety, and fosters creativity. Academic success is often considered an indicator of high

motivation levels in individuals. In this regard, Shabani (2019, p. 48, cited from Gage & Berliner, 1984) argues that goals and motivations are highly influential factors in the learning process. Motivation is considered as a key driving force, guiding and sustaining learning activities.

Since interest and motivation are fundamental prerequisites for education and learning, understanding the factors contributing to students' disinterest in school subjects, as well as teachers' behaviors in relation to student disengagement, is of particular significance. In this regard, Seyrati et al. (2023) demonstrated in their research that low levels of academic motivation among learners are one of the widespread challenges in educational systems across many countries. This results in significant academic, cultural, and economic losses for governments and families and leads to academic decline within educational systems. If learners lack motivation for school subjects, they will never engage in learning process (Shabani, 2019).

Unfortunately, in recent years, it has been observed that Afghan students do not show significant interest in their school studies. This disinterest has led to students falling behind in their education and being unable to fully grasp the necessary lessons and topics. Therefore, in the present study, the factors contributing to students' lack of motivation in a province of Afghanistan were examined. The study aims to identify the factors leading to the lack of motivation and interest in school subjects among high school students in the central district of Wardak. For this research, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and the Environmental Factors (Behavior Reinforcement) theory were considered as the theoretical framework. Based on this theoretical framework, the study explores the impact of personal and psychological factors such as physiological needs, security needs, belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. As well as environmental factors like resources, rewards, punishments, and teacher professional competency, on students' interest in their school subjects learning.

Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs; according to him lower-level needs (physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, and esteem needs) must be satisfied broadly before higher-level needs (like knowledge, aesthetic, and self-actualization) are addressed. In the original form of Maslow's theory, lower-level needs were referred to as deficiency needs, while higher-level needs were categorized as growth needs or existential needs. Understanding this hierarchy aids educators in identifying the priority of students' motivations.

Additionally, based on behavior reinforcement theory, (environmental factors) also influences student motivation. In this theory, the internal state of the individual is overlooked, and focus is solely placed on the external events that occur to the individual during their actions. This theory is based on the principle of cause and effect, where behavior is determined by the outcomes achieved, and specific conditions serve to reinforce behavior, enabling individuals to learn. The law of cause and effect and the concept of behavior reinforcement help us justify the factors contributing to motivation. According to this theory, if an individual's behavior is reinforced, they are more likely to exert greater effort toward achieving their goals.

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, this study considers the following two hypotheses:

- Personal and psychological factors (such as needs, including physiological needs, the need for safety, the need for belonging, the need for esteem, and the need for self-actualization) have a significant impact on students' lack of motivation toward their education and learning.

- Environmental factors (such as resources, rewards, punishments, and teacher professional competency) have a significant impact on students' lack of motivation toward their education and learning.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this study is descriptive in nature, as it identifies and articulates the factors that cause the lack of interest and motivation among students. To ensure the results of this research are applicable to educational organizations, curriculum planners, school administrators, teachers, students, and families, the study is classified as applied research. Since the aim of this study is to examine the factors behind students' lack of interest and motivation toward their studies, it follows a quantitative approach. Additionally, because the data was collected from the field and analyzed accordingly, the research is categorized as a survey study.

The population examined in this study includes all teachers working at public schools in the center of Wardak province, Afghanistan, who are engaged in teaching. There are nine public secondary schools in the center of Wardak, with a total of 203 teachers currently employed and teaching. The sample size was determined based on the Morgan table, which specifies that for a population of 200 individuals, a sample of 127 is appropriate. Despite considerable effort, the researcher was able to collect 100 completed questionnaires for this study.

In this study, a quota sampling method was employed, meaning that a fixed quota was assigned to each school based on the number of teachers at that school. Subsequently, simple random sampling was applied within each school. For data collection, a questionnaire was designed as the tool, having two dimensions and ten indicators, with a total of 92 questions. The overall validity of the questionnaire was determined using SPSS software, based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.888.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic Data Analysis

Teachers Age		Teachers Educational level		Teachers Teaching Experience	
Age Group	Percent	Education Level	Percent	Teaching Experience	Percent
20-25	8	Fourteen Pass	34	2 years	11
26-30	25	Bachelor	66	5 years	19
31-35	30	Total	100	10 years	32
36-40	13			15 years	20
41-45	8			Over 15 years	18
46-50	3			Total	100
51-55	2				
56-60	3				
60 and above	6				
Total	98				
Missing	2				
Total	100				

From Table 1, it is seen that the highest percentage of teachers are among the age group of 31-35, representing 30% of the total. The lowest frequency is in the age group of 51-55, with only two individuals. This suggests that there are a greater number of younger and

less experienced teachers compared to more aged ones. It can be inferred that the experience of teachers could significantly influence the interest and motivation of students.

Moreover, 66% of the teachers in the study population hold the Bachelor's degree, while 34% have completed a Fourteen Pass (two years studies after high school). This indicates that the majority of teachers have a Bachelor's degree. Notably, there are no faculty members with Master's or Doctoral degrees in the studied population. The higher frequency of Bachelor's degree holders indicates that the educational level of the teachers is generally satisfactory. It is hoped that, in the future, the academic qualifications of teachers will progress to Master's and even Doctoral levels.

As for as the teaching experience is concern, 32% of the teachers have 10 years of teaching experience, while the lowest percentage (11%) corresponds to those with only two years of experience. This indicates that majority of the teachers in the study population have enough teaching experience.

In this study, two highly influential and significant factors affecting students' interest and motivation have been investigated. The impact of personal or psychological factors (needs) as well as environmental factors on students' interest has been investigated. In the physiological dimension, the effects of human needs, based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, have been analyzed. These include fundamental human needs such as physiological needs, safety needs, belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. In the environmental dimension, factors such as facilities, rewards, punishments, and instructor professional competency have been discussed. The aim is to clarify which of the aforementioned factors has a significant influence on students' motivation and interest toward their studies. The main research question is: What are the factors influencing the lack of motivation among students in public schools at the centre district of Wardak province of Afghanistan? To address this question, a general hypothesis has been proposed: It is hypothesized that psychological or personal, and environmental factors significantly impact students' lack of interest and motivation towards their studies. This general hypothesis is divided into two sub-hypotheses.

Sub-hypothesis 1: Personal factors (needs) have significant impact on students' lack of motivation toward their studies. This hypothesis is generated from the theory of Maslow which focuses on human basic needs such as physiological needs, security needs, belonging needs, respect needs, and self-actualization needs impact students' level of interest.

Table 2. Analysis of Overall Indicators related to personal needs

Indicator	Physiologi cal Needs	Security Needs	Love and Belonging Needs	Esteem Needs	Self- Actualization Needs
Number o participant	100	100	100	100	100
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	4.2827	4.3604	4.2875	4.4239	4.4703
Std. Deviation	0.31337	0.38477	0.42707	0.38596	0.35955
Skewness	-0.879	-0.693	-0.955	-1.769	-0.784
Std. Error of Skewness	0.241	0.241	0.241	0.241	0.241
Kurtosis	0.525	0.899	1.740	7.179	0.653
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.478	0.478	0.478	0.478	0.478
Minimum	3.25	3.20	2.56	2.36	3.11
Maximum	4.80	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Based on the data from the sample population, as presented in Table 2, the impact of five key personal and psychological factors (needs) on student interest and motivation in the research community has been examined. These factors include physiological needs,

security needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. The effect of these factors on students' interest is assessed using the sample mean. The data for these five types of needs are a five-point scale (1 to 5), the mean values for the various indicators are as follows:

- Physiological needs: 4.2827
- Security needs: 4.3604
- Love and belonging needs: 4.2875
- Esteem needs: 4.4239
- Self-actualization needs: 4.4703

It is seen that self-actualization, respect, security, belonging, and physiological needs have the greatest impact on students' motivation. The results indicate that students' fundamental needs, such as physiological needs, security needs, belonging needs, respect needs, and self-actualization needs, have not been sufficiently met, leading to lack of interest in their studies.

These findings align with the work of Totakhil conducted a study in 2017 titled "Investigating the Factors Contributing to the Disinterest of Students in Primary Schools in the Subject of Mathematics" and found that the unmet basic needs of students led to their disinterest in studies. She also discovered that the structure of the educational system and the role of teachers significantly influenced students' engagement with the subjects. Additionally, results align with the work of Leila Rahimi, who, in 2021, conducted a study titled "Investigation of Motivational Factors and Their Impact on Student Learning in Rabia Balkhi High School in Kabul." Her findings show that factors such as the fulfillment of students' basic needs, professional development of teachers, use of diverse teaching methods, encouraging students, fostering cooperation among students, assigning homework appropriate to students' abilities, teachers' punctuality, and educational facilities all play a significant role in motivating students.

Sub-hypothesis 2: Environmental factors (behavior reinforcement) affect students' Interest toward their studies. This hypothesis investigates whether environmental factors such as facilities, rewards, punishment, and teacher professional competency influence students' motivation and interest toward their studies.

Table 3. Analysis of Environmental Factors

Indicator	Facilities	Rewards	Punishment	Teacher Professional Competency
Number of Teachers	100	100	99	99
Missing	0	0	1	1
Mean	4.1886	4.4917	4.3299	4.5746
Std. Deviation	0.48523	0.37926	0.56625	0.32232
Skewness	-0.667	-0.401	-1.619	-0.369
Std. Error of Skewness	0.241	0.241	0.243	0.243
Kurtosis	0.353	-0.751	3.486	-0.568
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.478	0.478	0.481	0.481
Minimum	2.78	3.71	2.00	3.75
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Based on the data obtained from the sample population, as presented in Table 3, the impact of four key environmental factors (Facilities, Rewards, Punishment, and Teacher Professional Competency) on student disinterest toward learning has been analyzed. These factors are considered as influential variables affecting students' interest and motivation. The mean values for the four indicators, based on a five-point scale (1 to 5), are as follows:

- Facilities: 4.1886
- Rewards: 4.4917
- Punishment: 4.3299
- Teacher Professional Competency: 4.5746

The responses indicate that factors such as the attitude of teachers, rewards, and punishment have significant impacts on student interest. Given the relatively high mean values, it is observed that the attitude and professional competency of teachers and rewards, for which respondents completely selected the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" options, have the greatest impact on student interest. Additionally, factors such as punishment and facilities also influence student interest, albeit to a lesser degree as compare to former two variables. The above table provides detailed information on the means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, as well as the minimum and maximum values for all indicators.

Respondents indicated that environmental factors had the greatest impact on students' interest, where reward and teacher professional competency being the most influential. Professional teachers, who have master the subjects they teach, maintain good conduct and ethics, and understand how to interact with students, enhance students' interest and motivation. A professional teacher knows how to adjust their appearance, how to interact with students, and which methods to employ during teaching. Additionally, material and immaterial rewards contribute to increasing students' interest in their studies.

These results align with the research of Mahmodi (2022) conducted a study titled "An Investigation of the Causes of Learning Difficulties among High School Students in the Subject of History in the 13th District of Kabul from the Perspective of Teachers." The aim of his study was to identify the causes of learning difficulties among high school students in the subject of history. His findings indicate that certain teaching characteristics of teachers, which reflect their teaching skills, as well as certain ethical and personal characteristics of teachers, which reflect their human relations, are crucial factors contributing to students' lack of interest and motivation in the subject, and these are fundamental causes of students' learning weaknesses. Some aspects of the findings of this research align with the study by Serati et al., (2023) conducted research titled "Investigation of Academic Motivation and Associated Factors among Students at Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran." The aim of that research was to increase the educational motivation of students at the mentioned university. In conclusion, they suggested that to enhance educational motivation, it is recommended to empower teachers in applying various motivational theories and to place more focus on students' well-being. At the end they suggest for the education system that, students studying in their loved fields they are passionate about and securing their future career prospects could create conditions that foster greater educational success.

However, the findings of the present study contrast with some results from other studies. For instance, Amini, in 2022, conducted a study titled "An Investigation of Students' Interest in the Subject of Geography and the Related Influencing Factors at Abu Bakr Siddiq High School." The goal of his research was to clarify the factors influencing students' interest in the subject of geography. His findings indicated that factors such as engaging teaching methods and developing a curriculum that aligns with the needs of students and society were influential in fostering interest in the subject. Additionally, the present study's findings differ from those of Hosseini and Qasemzadeh, who, in 2022, conducted a qualitative study titled "An Exploration of the Causes and Contexts of Demotivation among Student Teachers in Basic Sciences." Their findings suggest that to enhance motivation among basic science students, it is necessary to apply some motivators



such as comprehensive exams and final assessments, which can stimulate the required motivation for further studies and credible research. Participants in their study believed that placing more emphasis on research and valuing academic and scientific activities would strengthen students' educational motivation. In my view, this discrepancy arises because Hosseini and Qasemzadeh research was conducted at higher educational institute.

CONCLUSION

The analysis has demonstrated that both personal and environmental factors have significant impact on students' disinterest toward learning. The findings of the study indicate that students' primary needs have a significant impact on their interest in learning. The unmet basic needs, such as food, water, clothing, and shelter, play a role in students' disinterest. Additionally, students who do not feel secure in their learning environments show less interest in their studies. Moreover, students who lack emotional belonging and face ridicule or disrespect tend to lose their motivation and interest in their lessons.

Beside personal factors, environmental factors also have a significant impact on students' interest and motivation toward their studies. Based on the responses from participants, schools that lack proper school buildings and standard classrooms lead to a loss of interest in learning among students. Additionally, material rewards, such as providing students with notebooks and pens, contribute to increased motivation. Encouraging words, such as praise and congratulations, motivate students to attend school with enthusiasm, which in turn enhances their interest in studies. The findings suggest that physical punishment, insults, humiliation, and calling students by derogatory names lead to a loss of interest and motivation toward their studies.

The findings of the study indicate that teacher professional competency, like mastery of the subject; behavior and ethics have significant impact on students' interest in their studies. A teacher's mastery of the subject matter, as it helps to better explain and facilitate the material for students, contributes to fostering students interest in their studies. Importantly, emotional engagement and providing students with a sense of importance and respect makes them feel valued, which inherently increases their motivation and interest in their studies.

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