

THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN STUDENT MOTIVATION: WHY IT ACTUALLY MATTERS

Ruhshona Usmonaliyeva

Fergana State University

2nd course of Foreign language and literature faculty.

D. Murotova

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19152764>

Abstract. *Let's be honest - motivation is everything when it comes to school. You can have the smartest kid in the world, but if they do not care, they are not going to do well. This paper looks at how teachers actually influence whether students want to learn or not. I went through a bunch of research on this topic and found some pretty interesting stuff. Turns out, teachers have way more power than most people realize. The paper covers things like why students get motivated in the first place, how teacher-student relationships matter, why feedback is so important, and what makes a classroom feel like a place where students actually want to be. At the end of the day, it is pretty clear that teachers who put in the effort to connect with their students and make learning meaningful can completely change how motivated those students are.*

Keywords: *student motivation, teacher influence, classroom environment, why students care, intrinsic motivation.*

The Teacher's Role in Student Motivation

I have always found it kind of funny how some teachers seem to have classes where everyone is engaged and actually wants to be there, while other teachers struggle to get anyone to pay attention. Same school, same students, totally different results. What is the difference?

After looking into this topic for this paper, I am pretty convinced it comes down to motivation - and more specifically, how teachers affect it.

Think about your own experience. Everyone has had at least one teacher who made them actually want to learn. Maybe it was a science teacher who made experiments fun, or an English teacher who got you into reading, or even a math teacher who somehow made algebra make sense.

On the flip side, we have all had teachers who made us dread going to class. The crazy thing is that the subject was often the same - it was the teacher who made the difference.

That is what this paper is about: figuring out why some teachers can get students motivated while others cannot.

Research backs this up too. Skinner and Belmont (1993) did a study that followed students and teachers over a whole school year, and they found that the way teachers behaved directly affected how engaged students were. When teachers were more involved and supportive, students got more into their work. When teachers checked out, so did the students.

It is kind of a two-way street - teachers affect students, but students also affect teachers.

Either way, the teacher's role is huge.

What Even Is Motivation?

Before we get into what teachers can do, we need to talk about what motivation actually means. It is one of those words everyone uses but few people really think about. Basically, motivation is just the reason you do something.

In school, it is why you bother to study for a test, finish your homework, or participate in class discussions. Without motivation, none of that happens.

Psychologists have broken motivation down into two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation is when you do something because you actually want to, not because someone is forcing you or because you will get something out of it. Like when you keep playing a video game even though no one is making you - that is intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation is the opposite. It is when you do something because of external rewards or punishments. Studying so you do not fail a class is extrinsic. So is working hard to get a good grade or make your parents happy (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Both types matter in school, but here is the thing - intrinsic motivation usually works better in the long run. If you are only studying because you are scared of bad grades, you are probably going to forget everything as soon as the class ends. But if you actually find the subject interesting, you are way more likely to remember it and maybe even keep learning about it on your own. Good teachers understand this and try to build intrinsic motivation instead of just relying on grades to push students.

There is also this theory called self-determination theory that is worth mentioning. Deci and Ryan came up with it, and it says people have three basic needs when it comes to motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is feeling like you have some control over what you are doing. Competence is feeling like you are actually capable of succeeding.

Relatedness is feeling connected to other people (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When teachers help students meet these needs, motivation goes up. When they ignore them, motivation tanks.

Why Relationships Matter So Much

If there is one thing that stands out from all the research I read, it is that relationships between teachers and students are super important. Like, way more important than I realized.

Students are not robots who just absorb information - they are people who have feelings about who is teaching them. If a student feels like their teacher actually cares about them, they are going to try harder. If they feel like their teacher does not even know their name, they are going to check out.

Pianta and Hamre (2009) did research on this and found that the quality of teacher-student relationships is directly connected to how engaged students are. When students feel supported and respected, they are more willing to take risks, ask questions when they are confused, and keep trying even after they fail. But when students feel like their teacher does not care or plays favorites, they mentally shut down. It is not rocket science - people work harder for people they like and respect.

The good news is that building these relationships does not require some special talent.

Small things make a big difference. Learning students' names quickly (which is harder than it sounds with big classes), asking how their weekend was, remembering details about their lives - all of that stuff adds up. I had a teacher in high school who would ask about my soccer games, and honestly, I worked way harder in that class because I did not want to let her down. That is the power of a relationship.

Feedback Can Make or Break You

Here is something that really surprised me when I was researching this: the way teachers give feedback matters almost as much as the feedback itself. You can tell a student they got a C, but depending on how you say it, you can either motivate them to do better or make them feel like giving up entirely.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) wrote this whole paper about feedback, and they found that effective feedback answers four questions: Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?

Good feedback tells students what they are working toward, how they are doing so far, and what they need to do to improve. Bad feedback is just a grade with a few red marks and no explanation.

I think about this with my own experience. The best feedback I ever got was from a professor who wrote detailed comments on my essays, pointing out exactly what worked and what did not. It took her forever to grade probably, but I actually learned from it. The worst feedback was just a number at the top of the page with no explanation. That taught me nothing except that I was bad at whatever the subject was.

There is also this whole thing about praise that is interesting. Carol Dweck (2006) found that praising students for being smart can actually backfire. If you tell a kid "you are so smart" when they do well, they start to think intelligence is fixed. Then when they hit something hard, they think they are not smart anymore and they give up. But if you praise effort instead - "you worked really hard on that" - students keep trying even when things get tough. It is called having a growth mindset, and it is become a huge deal in education for good reason.

Making It Actually Matter

One of the biggest motivation killers in school is when students have no idea why they are learning something. I cannot tell you how many times I have sat in a class thinking "when am I ever going to use this?" And honestly, sometimes teachers do not have a good answer. But when teachers can actually explain why something matters or connect it to real life, it makes a huge difference.

Brophy (1999) wrote about this idea of helping students develop appreciation for what they are learning. It is not just about forcing information into their heads - it is about helping them see why it is worth knowing. A math teacher who can show how algebra is used in video games or sports is going to have way more engaged students than one who just makes kids solve equations with no context.

Giving students some choice helps too. When students get to pick a topic for a paper or choose how to present a project, they feel more in control. That autonomy we talked about earlier kicks in. I know I always put more effort into assignments where I got to choose what to focus on, compared to ones where I was just following a prompt. It makes sense - when you feel like it is your thing, you care more about doing it well.

The Vibe of the Classroom

The overall feeling of a classroom - the vibe, for lack of a better word - has a massive impact on motivation. Some classrooms feel safe and supportive. Others feel stressful or boring or even hostile. Teachers create that atmosphere, whether they realize it or not.

Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that the best classrooms are ones where teachers are warm and supportive but also have clear expectations. It is that balance between being nice and being structured. Students need to know what is expected of them, but they also need to feel like their teacher wants them to succeed. When classrooms are too chaotic, students get anxious. When they are too rigid, students get bored or resentful. The sweet spot is somewhere in the middle.

Patrick and her colleagues (2007) also found that when students feel like they belong in the classroom, they are way more likely to engage. That means teachers need to pay attention to who gets called on, how groups are formed, whether different perspectives are valued - all that stuff. If a student feels like an outsider in a classroom, they are not going to participate no matter how good the teacher is at explaining things.

Let's Be Real Though

I want to be honest here - teachers are not miracle workers. Sometimes people write about education like if teachers just tried hard enough, every student would be motivated and successful.

That is not true. There are so many factors that affect motivation that teachers have zero control over.

Some students come to school dealing with serious stuff at home - family problems, money issues, and mental health struggles. You cannot expect a teacher to fix all of that. Some students have had such bad experiences with school in the past that they have completely shut down. That is not the current teacher's fault. And some students just are not going to be motivated no matter what a teacher does.

But here is the thing - that does not mean teachers should stop trying. Even if you cannot motivate every single student, you can still make a difference for a lot of them. And sometimes the students who seem the most unmotivated are the ones who need a good teacher the most. It is worth the effort even when it does not work out perfectly.

Wrapping This Up

So after all this research, what have we learned? Basically, teachers matter way more than most people think when it comes to student motivation. The relationships they build, the feedback they give, the way they make learning relevant, and the environment they create - all of it affects whether students want to learn or not.

The research all points to the same ideas. Students need to feel capable, they need to feel like they have some control, and they need to feel connected. Good teachers find ways to make those things happen in their classrooms. It is not always easy, and it definitely takes work, but it is possible.

I think the most important takeaway is that motivation is not just something students either have or do not have. It can be built up or torn down by what happens in the classroom.

Teachers who understand this and use strategies to support motivation can change their students' whole experience of school. That is pretty powerful when you think about it.

At the end of the day, being a teacher is about way more than just knowing your subject and explaining it well. It is about connecting with students, making them feel capable, and creating a place where they actually want to learn. That is the teacher's role in student motivation, and it is one of the most important parts of the job.

References

1. Brophy, J. (1999). Toward a model of the value aspects of motivation in education: Developing appreciation for particular learning domains and activities. *Educational Psychologist*, 34(2), 75-85. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3402_1
2. Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
3. Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81-112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487>
4. Patrick, H., Ryan, A. M., & Kaplan, A. (2007). Early adolescents' perceptions of the classroom social environment, motivational beliefs, and engagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(1), 83-98. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.1.83>
5. Pianta, R. C., & Hamre, B. K. (2009). Conceptualization, measurement, and improvement of classroom processes: Standardized observation can leverage capacity. *Educational Researcher*, 38(2), 109-119. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09332374>
6. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
7. Skinner, E. A., & Belmont, M. J. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85(4), 571-581. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.85.4.571>