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A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT MOTIVATION IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN SHARJAH, UAE: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: This study investigates the primary factors influencing student motivation in private schools in Sharjah, UAE. Addressing the challenge of maintaining student engagement, the research aims to identify strategies to enhance motivation and improve academic outcomes. A quantitative research method was employed, utilizing a survey distributed among teachers to collect data on effective motivational practices. The findings indicate that strategies such as fostering strong teacher-student relationships, using relevant examples, offering specific and consistent praise, allowing student autonomy, incorporating technology, and implementing token or point systems significantly contribute to enhancing motivation. Internal factors influencing motivation include the learning environment, teacher behavior and responsibility, classroom layout, curriculum design, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, and peer relationships. External factors identified include family circumstances, student interest in learning, self-regulation, and intrinsic motivation driven by the aspiration for higher academic performance. The study concludes that applying targeted strategies while addressing internal and external factors can create a supportive learning environment that fosters greater student engagement. These findings offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers to develop interventions that enhance classroom participation, ultimately improving student performance and outcomes.

Keywords: student motivation, learning environment, teaching strategies, internal and external factors

Introduction

Student motivation is a critical determinant of academic success, influencing learners' engagement, persistence, and achievement across educational settings. Motivated students are more likely to participate actively, sustain effort in the face of academic challenges, and experience deeper learning (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2014; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). In secondary education, especially in private schools, understanding what drives motivation is essential for shaping effective instructional strategies and improving learning outcomes.

A wide range of factors can influence student motivation. These factors are generally classified as internal, such as interest in learning, goal-setting, and self-efficacy, and external, including teacher behavior, peer relationships, classroom layout, and home environment (Zhao, 2012; Radhwan, 2020; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). According to Self-Determination Theory, learners are more intrinsically motivated when they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their educational environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Additionally, empirical studies have emphasized the positive impact of motivational strategies such as personalized feedback, learner autonomy, praise, and relationship-building on student engagement (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Kim & Young, 2010).

In the context of the United Arab Emirates, the educational system has witnessed substantial reforms aimed at enhancing teaching quality and student outcomes. While international studies have provided

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valuable frameworks and insights into student motivation, there is an opportunity to expand localized research that reflects the distinct features of UAE private schools. Considering the diversity of the student population, the variety of curriculum models, and the influence of cultural and institutional dynamics, examining how teachers in Sharjah perceive and support student motivation offers timely and relevant contributions to both policy and practice.

The research problem addressed in this study is the lack of empirical data on the factors influencing student motivation in private secondary schools in Sharjah, along with limited insight into the motivational strategies commonly employed by teachers in these settings.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to:

- Identify internal and external factors that influence student motivation in private secondary schools;

- Explore the strategies teachers use to enhance motivation in the classroom;

- Provide context-specific recommendations for improving motivation practices in similar educational settings.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive survey design to examine internal and external factors influencing student motivation in private secondary schools in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. A structured questionnaire served as the primary data collection instrument, facilitating the efficient gathering of standardized responses across a diverse teacher population (Creswell, 2012).

The survey instrument was developed based on established motivational theories and prior empirical studies. Constructs were derived from research identifying key internal and external drivers of student motivation, including self-efficacy, goal setting, learner interest, classroom environment, teacher behavior, and assessment practices (Schunk et al. 2008). The questionnaire's content and structure were reviewed by academic experts to ensure face validity and alignment with the study objectives.

The finalized questionnaire comprised four sections:

1. Demographic Information: Captured background data such as years of teaching experience, subjects taught, and grade levels covered (Grades 9–12), allowing for analysis of potential correlations between teaching profiles and motivational perceptions.

2. Motivational Strategies: Employed a binary (Yes/No) response format to assess the extent to which teachers implement specific motivational practices, including building rapport with students, using specific praise, presenting real-life examples, promoting learner autonomy, integrating digital technologies, and applying token or point-based reward systems.

3. Motivational Factors: Utilized a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5), to measure teacher perceptions of various factors influencing student motivation. These were categorized into internal factors (e.g., student interest in learning, academic goal-setting, self-efficacy) and external factors (e.g., family issues, peer relationships, classroom layout, teacher behavior, assessment).

4. Open-Ended Recommendations: Invited teachers to offer suggestions and practical insights for enhancing student motivation based on their classroom experiences. Responses were analyzed thematically to identify recurring trends and context-specific strategies.

The survey was distributed electronically via Google Forms in both Arabic and English to ensure inclusivity across subject areas, particularly for educators teaching Ministry of Education subjects such as Arabic, Islamic Studies, and Social Studies. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the data collection process, adhering to ethical research practices.

Quantitative data from the closed-ended sections were exported to Microsoft Excel for descriptive statistical analysis, including frequency distributions and percentage calculations. Responses to open-ended items were subjected to basic thematic content analysis to extract commonly recommended motivational strategies. This analytical triangulation enhanced the validity of findings and supported the interpretation of trends across both structured and narrative data sets (Creswell, 2012).

Results and Discussion

The analysis of responses from 360 teachers in private schools in Sharjah revealed key factors influencing student motivation, categorized into internal and external domains. Teachers' perceptions were measured using a Likert scale and supported by qualitative feedback. The results offer a comprehensive understanding of how instructional practices, environmental conditions, and socio-emotional factors interact to influence student engagement.

Internal Factors Influencing Motivation

Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that internal school-based factors significantly influence student motivation. The highest-rated elements were teacher behavior (94% agreement), teacher responsibility (91%), and teaching methods (89%). Teachers noted that their emotional support, consistency, and clear communication encouraged students to engage more actively. These results are consistent with Guilloteaux & Dörnyei (2008), who demonstrated that teacher behavior and affective strategies directly impact motivational climates.

Teacher responsibility, including lesson preparation and attentiveness to students' needs, was recognized as a key factor in maintaining student interest and effort. This supports findings by Bakhtiarv, Gholamreza & Majid (2011), who emphasized that students are more motivated when teachers show dedication and adaptability in instructional delivery.

Teaching methods were particularly influential when they involved relevance, interactivity, and a focus on real-world applications. These findings align with Oliver, Osa & Walker (2008), who argue that motivation improves when content connects meaningfully to learners' goals and everyday experiences.

Assessment practices were also cited by 79% of teachers as influencing student motivation. Constructive feedback and clear performance expectations were seen as essential to sustaining learner engagement. Mertler (2004) highlighted this through the concept of "assessment literacy," where assessments serve both evaluative and motivational functions.

Classroom layout, curriculum structure, and the overall learning environment were also seen as strong motivational factors, with 97% agreement across these items. Coyle (2013) supports this, noting that motivational classrooms are organized, emotionally safe, and structured to foster peer interaction and autonomy. These findings are particularly relevant in the UAE, where education policy encourages flexible, inclusive, and innovation-oriented learning spaces (Derbashi, 2024).

External Factors Influencing Motivation

In addition to internal school-related elements, several external factors were identified as significant influencers of student motivation. The most highly rated were students' interest in learning (97%), the desire to get higher grades (88%), and the influence of peer relationships (91%).

Teachers noted that students who are curious and goal-oriented tend to engage more consistently and show greater resilience. This aligns with Zhao (2012), who found that intrinsic motivation is deeply rooted in personal interest and a sense of self-efficacy.

Peer dynamics were also seen as critical. In classrooms where students worked collaboratively or supported one another socially, motivation was reportedly higher. Hamjah et al. (2011) support this by showing that students are more motivated when surrounded by peers who are engaged and academically focused.

However, not all external influences were positive. A significant 77% of teachers indicated that family-related issues, such as lack of support, stress at home, or parental pressure, negatively affected student motivation. Whitaker et al. (2012) found that emotional and familial instability often results in decreased academic focus and lower engagement levels, especially in younger or more vulnerable learners.

Motivational Strategies Used by Teachers

The survey revealed that teachers in Sharjah's private schools employ a wide range of strategies to motivate students, blending both intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. The most commonly reported strategies were:

- Building relationships with students (97%)

- Using real-life examples (94%)

- Providing specific praise (94%)

- Encouraging student autonomy by handing over control (91%)

- Using technology such as videos and simulations (91%)

- Setting up point or token systems (88%)

Teachers indicated that strong relationships helped establish trust and openness, especially in culturally diverse classrooms. These findings support Al Murshidi, Al Khatib & Alshihi (2024), who reported that emotional connection and understanding between teachers and students were among the top motivators in UAE schools.

Technology was also widely used to support engagement. Teachers reported using digital whiteboards, simulations, and instructional videos to make content more accessible and engaging. Zeidan et al. (2022) found that video-based, activity-driven instruction significantly improved student motivation and understanding in UAE STEM programs.

Additionally, many teachers used praise and choice to foster a sense of autonomy, aligning with principles from Self-Determination Theory. Derbashi (2024) and Kim & Lee (2015) both support the value of these approaches in enhancing motivation across diverse learning environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that student motivation in UAE private schools is shaped by a set of internal and external factors, with teachers playing a critical role in sustaining and enhancing engagement. This aligns with findings by Guilloteaux & Dörnyei (2008), who highlighted the importance of motivational teacher behavior and strategies in promoting learner engagement across classroom settings. In the UAE context, Zeidan et al. (2022) found that the use of media-based instruction and activity driven methods significantly enhanced student engagement in preparatory programs, particularly in STEM courses. The consistency in motivational strategies across teachers suggests a shared understanding of best practices, especially regarding emotional support, instructional relevance, and technology integration. Teachers in this study used praise, examples, autonomy, and relationship-building techniques that mirror those described by Hamjah et al. (2011), who found that such strategies improved emotional and cognitive engagement across multiple learning settings. Moreover, this study shows how teachers in Sharjah's private schools are localizing global motivational practices such as flipped classrooms, game-based learning, and student-led tasks to meet the needs of UAE learners. Zeidan et al. (2022) documented how localized applications of global teaching methods, such as video enabled and activity based instruction, helped foster greater motivation and engagement among UAE students. This supports the idea that culturally responsive teaching is essential for aligning international pedagogical models with regional educational goals.

The findings also align with ongoing UAE education reforms emphasizing innovation, personalization, and student well-being. For example, the UAE Ministry of Education (2022) highlights the role of

personalized learning and digital tools in improving educational engagement and equity. These national initiatives provide a strong framework for the professional development of teachers and emphasize the importance of school-wide strategies in sustaining learner motivation, particularly in managing external barriers such as family pressures or social-emotional stress (Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley, & Gooze, 2012).

Conclusion

Student motivation is a critical factor in ensuring academic achievement and fostering long-term engagement in learning. This study explored the perspectives of teachers in private schools in Sharjah, UAE, and found that both internal and external factors contribute significantly to student motivation. Teachers reported employing strategies such as fostering positive relationships, promoting learner autonomy, integrating technology, and adapting teaching methods to meet individual needs. These findings emphasize the importance of a multidimensional understanding of motivation, influenced by classroom dynamics, teaching practices, student characteristics, and external support systems.

The major outcome of the study is the identification of practical strategies currently used by teachers to enhance student motivation within the local context. This is particularly important given the diversity of student populations in private schools and the increasing demand for inclusive and personalized learning environments. The study also brings attention to the importance of contextualizing motivation strategies to align with the cultural and institutional characteristics of the educational setting.

A key limitation of this study is its exclusive focus on teachers' perspectives, which provides valuable insights into classroom practices but does not account for the broader institutional, parental, or policy-level influences that may also shape student motivation. Additionally, the research was limited to private schools in Sharjah, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to public schools or other emirates within the UAE.

Despite these limitations, the study holds relevance for educators, school leaders, and policymakers who aim to improve student outcomes through enhanced engagement and motivation. It contributes to the broader discourse on educational improvement by offering contextually grounded insights into how teachers can influence motivation in practical and impactful ways.

The application of these findings can support targeted teacher training programs, inform school improvement plans, and guide the development of supportive learning policies. Future research is recommended to include a wider range of educational stakeholders and school types to build a more comprehensive understanding of motivation across different educational contexts.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this research.

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