
How to Improve Learner's Motivation for Primary Students in Vietnam

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Abstract

Hitherto, the concept of innovation in education has not been new and changed for over years. Educators and teachers are becoming aware of the importance of innovation in teaching methodology, materials, curriculum, assessment... One of the intriguing questions is how we could improve the quality of teaching and learning and make sure to stimulate aspiration for the learners. In fact, the aspiration of learners is very essential and is required for each class to make the lesson interesting. Without this aspiration, it is impossible for teachers to engage with their students and enhance the importance of students' voice in constructing knowledge. It is also a continuing action that makes student have a foundation for finding their knowledge by themselves, thinking critically and solving problems effectively. From this useful perspective, there is a necessity for educators and teachers in Vietnam to raise awareness of this issue to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This paper aims to investigate the primary students' motivation. The study was conducted with fourth grade students at three primary schools in Thua Thien Hue Province. Data analysis involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings revealed that family factor affected on young children, the reasons why students are not fond of studying. In addition, the findings represented the motivation of learners affected by the frequency of using teaching methods and materials. Based on the findings, the study also discusses deeper on factors affecting Vietnamese student's motivation and suggests improving motivation for primary- grade students in specific context of Vietnam country.

Keywords: Motivation, Primary-grade students, Teaching methodology, Performance, Behaviorized tests, Interest

Introduction

It can be said that learner motivation is probably the most crucial element that teachers need to considerate in teaching and learning process (Williams & Williams, 2011). Motivation has been accepted as one of the key factors contributing to the success of students' learning. Especially for primary-aged students, motivation plays an important role in engaging them in every classroom activities as well as affecting on their learning outcomes. Barlia (1999) also supports this opinion when stating that thanks to motivation students can promote new learning and performance of prior skills, strategies and behaviors. According to

Scrivener (2011), it can be divided into two types of learner motivation namely external motivation and internal motivation. External motivation is made from strong reasons from outside contributing to why they want to study, for instance, they want to obey their parents, pass examination, receive rewards from teachers or parents and so forth. On the contrary, internal motivation to study is a desire to get rewards within the work itself. They could be personal challenge, the fun of learning, (Scrivener, 2011), the fun of completing or getting good results, efficient use of energy focus, purposeful connection with work (Williams & Williams, 2011), etc. In learning process,

these motivations could increase, maintain, or decrease due to some factors. For example: the types of tasks students are offered would generate a greater or lesser degree of motivation because classroom tasks affected directly to the student's internal motivation. In addition, learning outcomes could change motivation of learners since good results act as a reward and reinforce motivation while failure diminishes their expectations. Apart from that, the type of interaction between teacher and students, possible anxiety states, and many other factors also impact on the learners' motivation. Since motivation is a complex phenomenon and affected by a variety of elements.

Aims of the Study

This study aims to:

- explore the primary students' motivation.
- investigate how family factor affected on young children and the reasons why students are not fond of studying.
- find out how motivation of learners affected by the frequency of using teaching methods and materials.

Methodology

The methodology of the research includes the participants, tools of data collection and tools of data analysis. The participants of the study included the students in grade 4 in 3 primary schools in Thua Thien Hue Province. There were two different methods namely questionnaires and interviews used to accumulate data for investigating the learning motivation in primary schools context.



Learner's Motivation for Primary Students

It is worth understanding the definition of motivation since motivation is a complex psychological concept to explain behavior and the effort of learners at different activities (Cavaş, 2011). It is also defined by some researchers that motivation is related to various elements namely curiosity, persistence, learning and performance

(Barlia & Beeth, 1999; Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal & Vallieres, 1992). More specifically, Brophy (2004) considers motivation is a concept that is used to explain beginning, direction, force and insistence of goal-oriented behavior.

Based on these definitions, we should know why motivation is important for students. Firstly, motivation directs behavior of learners toward particular goals since it

determines the specific goals toward that learners endeavor to attain (Maehr & Meyer, 1997; Pintrich et al., 1993). Thus, based on this point, learners can make choice when studying or doing any activity, for example, they can choose to complete a challenging homework assignment or to watch TV at home. Secondly motivation makes effort and energy of learners enhance in learning process. Specifically, motivation increases the amount of effort and energy that learners expend in activities directly related to their needs and goals (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1989; Maehr, 1984; Pintrich et al., 1993). Students implement a task enthusiastically or apathetically thanks to their motivation. Thirdly, the initiation of and persistence in activities that students perform could be increased owing to motivation. It depends on learners' persistence whether they want to begin a task, complete or stop working. Therefore it has led to the fact that motivation can improve student's achievement, since motivation increases students' time on task, (Brophy, 1988; Larson, 2000; Wigfield, 1994). Last but not least, motivation often enhances performance. Motivation affects what learners pay attention to and how efficiently they process it (Eccles & Wigfield, 1985; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Pugh & Bergin, 2006) leads to improved performance. From this reason, I think the attention and effectivity of learners determines their performance and thus, the highest achievers are generally the students who are most motivated to learn and excel in classroom activities. In contrast, learners who do not pay attention to study or have little interest in academic studying are often achieve low results or are often at high risk for dropping out of schools.

Aside from the importance of motivation, it is worth noting different characteristics motivation in young learners since motivation affects on student's performance differently according to individuals and different factors. Primary students generally enter school with high levels of internal motivation, and it tends to decrease as

children progress through school afterwards. In addition, while very young children cannot concentrate on one activity for a long time such as one hour or more, there are still measurable differences in the length of time that young children do their activities. Students with a lower level of motivation will give up very easily when he cannot solve his problem, however, children with strong internal motivation will keep working in a longer period of time. Furthermore, dependency on adults is an indicator of motivation in primary students needs to be considered. Indeed, an unmotivated child is extrinsically motivated needs continuous attention from adults and cannot function individually whereas a highly motivated child does not need help from teachers because he wants to find the way to do it by himself. Lastly, emotion is a fundamental sign of motivational level. Learners have a positive display of emotion are the ones who are highly motivated. The way they show their enjoyment in the classroom activity and satisfaction with their performance after completing tasks is one of the proofs proving they are motivated learners. On the contrary, children seem to be quiet, tired and bored in classroom or unexcited when doing tasks are learners without suitable motivation. They are not pleased to do their activity and often complain or want to interrupt while they are doing tasks.

Methodology

Participant and Research Sites

In this study, 230 students in grade 4 and 29 teachers in Le Quy Don, Huong Vinh 1, Huong Xuan 2 primary schools were invited to participate in completing the questionnaire.

Data Collection Tools

In this article, two different methods named questionnaires and interviews were used to accumulate data. All the collected data from these methods were analysed carefully for investigating the learning motivation in primary schools context. Regarding questionnaire, 230 copies of

questions were delivered to 230 students. There are fourteen questions including two five- point scale questions and the twelve yes /no ones. In addition, 29 copies of questions were delivered to 29 teachers. Concerning interview, in this study, interviews were used to fill some gaps are left by questionnaire method. Its purpose is to investigate how teachers activate motivation for students through teaching methods. Interview aims to collect more responses from the participants. It lasted about 10 minutes and was conducted at the teacher's convenience.

Findings and Discussion

This part shows the result from the data analysis with interpretation and discussion of the study. All the findings and discussions of the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the questionnaire and interviews.

There was 80,5% the number of students having motivation in learning Mathematics, Literature, Science and English and have

little incentive to study other subjects such as Ethics, Fitness, Art, Music... Besides, there were some students who have not decided which subject they like studying (15.5%) and the rest of them (4%) did not like any subject.

Preparation before class is utmost important for each students. Indeed, there was up to 87.2% the number of student preparing before class which was due to parental guidance and control and only 12.8% the number of learner doing it by themselves. When dealing with difficult problems, the majority of students still tried hard to overcome by themselves or received some suggestions from others (97.4%). In addition, there was 2.6 % the number of student asking for help to solve problems.

To consider why learners do not like studying, there are some reasons summarized in Table 1 below. This table summarized the responses in terms of three main scales: *Strongly Agree and Agree*, *Neutral* and *Strongly Disagree and Disagree*.

Table 1. Summary of Students' response to the reasons why they do not like studying

No	Statement	Strongly disagree and Disagree	Neutral	Agree and Strongly agree
1	The thinking of students about lessons and exercises which are not interesting, motivating and unrealistic	12.7%	10.5%	76.8%
2	Learning materials are overloaded and difficult for students	38.6%	48.9%	12.5%
3	Teaching methods used in class are boring	10.5%	9.0%	80.5%
4.	Pressure from the test and examinations	10%	5%	85.5%

This tables shows that lessons and exercises in textbooks are not interesting, motivating and unrealistic (76.8%). Additionally, there were some students stating that exercises in learning materials were overloaded (12.5%) and boring teaching methods used in class was another reason why they were not fond of studying

(80.5%). Most importantly, there were up to 85.5 % students shared that they felt pressure from the tests and examinations in schools.

The type and frequency of teaching method reported by the interviewed teachers are presented in table 2 and 3.

Table 2. Teaching Method Reported by the Interviewed Primary Teachers Who Are Teaching Grade 4

Teaching method	Percentage of using
Game-based learning/ play activities	60%
Using interactive devices such as DVDs, computer, projectors, Ipad, etc.	10%
Using supportive learning materials such as pictures, additional white board.	63%
Group working	53.1%
Role playing or using drama activities/ techniques	30.5%

As is shown by the table 2, the most popular teaching method was using supportive learning materials such as pictures, additional white board. Next came 60% of game-based learning/ play activities used. In addition, more than half (53,1%) of

teachers shared they organized group work. In contrast, there was only 10 out of 100 teachers used interactive devices such as DVDs, computer, projectors, Ipad, etc while role playing or drama activities/techniques accounted for 30.5%.

Table 3. Frequency of Teaching Method Reported by the Interviewed Teachers

No.	Question	Very often	Often	Occasionally
1.	How often do you use learning devices and learning strategies in class?	8.5%	26%	65.5%
2.	How often do you use extra- curricular activities?	3,4%	36.6%	60%
3.	What is the frequency of using game-based learning in class?	20%	60%	20%

When asked how often they used these kinds of teaching methods and strategies, 65.5% the number of teacher said that they used them occasionally. The rest of them used often (26%) or very often (8.5%). Moreover, there was 3,4% the number of teacher organizing extra- curricular activities very often, the rest of them implemented this sometimes (60%) and often (36.6%) While game- based learning in Mathematics, Literature, Science... was students' favorite, there was almost 20% the number of teacher organizing game-based activities very often and nearly 60% the number of teacher implementing this often, the rest of them was the number of teachers who organizes games- based activities in class occasionally. After being interviewed, for the teachers used them very often and often, all of them said that they used them in every lesson and

at different stages. They also said that these methods are beneficial for activating motivation for primary- aged learners.

Factors Affecting Vietnamese Student's Motivation

From the useful perspective, there is a necessity for educators and teachers in Vietnam to look at various factors affecting Vietnamese student's motivation. Regarding external motivation, in Vietnam the motivation to learn to meet course requirements and get good results seems to be very strong. Although students and their parents complain about overloaded exercise, homework or difficult tests, they still work hard and try hard to overcome these difficulties. This means that in the Vietnamese context, learning and academic achievement are highly valued in society, students have to endeavor to handle the most

difficult situations so that they could meet social approval and gain esteem. Therefore, Le (2001) contended that in Vietnam, “education is considered a ticket to ride” (p. 35). As a result, in order to achieve high results with the goal of attaining the expectations of society, Vietnamese students expended considerable amount of effort on exam preparation. That is a reason why Le (2000) also states Vietnamese students are bound to external motivation as a result of the pressure to pass examinations.

Another factor contributing to motivation of primary students is parental control. Children are expected to respect, honor, show submission toward the elder in family, and seek their guidance and advice from their parents. Additionally, children are expected to fulfill obligations to the family in return to support and care from their family members. They need to take consideration carefully for whatever they do, to make sure the benefits of the family and maintain face for their family. Therefore, this considerable authority and control from their parents is a strong motivation of children in studying and get high performance. On the other hand, aside from parental control, Vietnamese parenting also emphasizes love and caring for their children. Therefore, parental authority and parental provision of affection and love in the Vietnamese context have a significant impact on good academic results children’s positive outcomes. According to Phan (2004) the Vietnamese parents have influenced their children to attain high academic results by using both control and affection. They often tell their children stories about the benefits of achieving academically in the future such as: get a high salary job, get promotion or have a high status in society if they get a good marks in schools. In addition, they educate and make their children be aware of the responsibilities for making parents proud and happy, as well as teach them about Vietnamese cultural values and traditions if they could satisfy their parents by good achievements. Thus, by these influences

they push primary students study hard in schools. Apart from that, they also exercise their control over their children by supervising their academic activities and peer relationships. For instance: They want their children to make friend with the peers who are high achievers in class so that their children could learn from those positive role models. In this way, the children of these Vietnamese families internalized their responsibilities to their parents and were motivated to do well at school (Phan, 2005). Subsequently, primary students are mainly influenced by their internalized obligation and duty for achieving positive outcomes to please their parents and are willing to sacrifice their own wishes, desires, and aspirations to meet their parents’ expectations. In other word, it could be concluded that Vietnamese students’ internal motivation is affected by external motivation.

Thirdly, extra class which is a debatable issue in Vietnamese society is another factor causing motivation decrease. Parents want their children to study better by sending them to extra class organized by their classroom teacher. They think those classroom teachers know more about what students need to learn and how the knowledge will be assessed in examinations. In Vietnamese primary curriculum, standardised test is regarded as the most privileged assessment which aims to measure the results of learners. Consequently, students think high mark in these standardised tests is their ability to show to their parents, teachers and peers. Other think their children cannot catch up with ability of other classmates so that they assume their children would make progress if they study more in these extra- classes. The point is teacher often teaches the lesson in curriculum before the official lesson in school. As a result, they are not motivated to explore the knowledge they have already known.

Additionally, young children motivation may be affected by the relevance of tasks (Brown, 1981), teaching methodology and

material to the interests and the needs of the learners, to their need for achievement and social connection. (Crookes and Schmidt 1991). It means that authentic materials can generate interest in the lesson for learners. According to Burden (2000), the difficulty of the classroom activity and task must match the ability levels of the learners and the materials should provide useful structure and captivate the interest of the children. However, the contents of subjects in Vietnamese primary curriculum are still overloaded and are mainly focused on textbooks. The main reason of these overloaded contents is some contents which are so difficult compared to the conditions of teaching and learning in Vietnam country. For example regarding writing skill of this curriculum, at the end of year 1 students have been provided how to arrange characters, however, in the beginning of year 2 they have to write a short paragraph. It is difficult for them to jump from the easy task to the very more complex one. In addition, each grade has one textbook under the control of Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training. There is no option for textbook so that the majority of the students just reference in their textbooks without having many opportunities to approach different sources. One important point is the content of knowledge and skills in materials is not really realistic and appropriately so that it concentrates providing knowledge through rote-learning rather than developing skills. For instance: In Mathematics 5, geometry, especially solid geometry and movement mathematics are provided for students too soon. It makes difficult for students since they have not been aware of instinct of those issues. In Nature and Science 3, lesson 7: circulatory activities content has some points which are not suitable for students' level and age. In addition, the amount of time for extracurricular activities in teaching primary students is only one lesson each week. This is not enough for primary students can develop their active and corporative learning

environment to activate their motivation in learning.

Recommendations Foster the Vietnamese Student's Motivation in Learning

Although the study is only conducted in a small scale, it can contribute to some points of learning motivation in primary context. From those issues above, some recommendations could be given to foster the Vietnamese student's motivation in learning.

Firstly, it needs to be raised awareness for student's parents to avoid too much expectation on students. This pressure needs to be removed thanks to the frequent combination between school and student's parents.

Secondly, regarding the role of teacher, teacher's knowledge of the subject and the motivational level are one of the important elements to motivate primary students. In this age, students tend to admire their teachers and think they know everything in the world. In addition, teacher skills includes staying calm, removing negative feelings, disengaging stress, etc are also contribute to learner's motivation. The teachers also need to know their students and build on their strength, organize learner-centered classroom in which the students are the center of learning, and take an active role in their own activities including determining, planning, organizing, implement and evaluating the subject content. Additionally, from my point of view, teachers need to make sure the engagement which plays a crucial part in learning and teaching process due to its impact on achievement and aspiration of the learners. Therefore, teacher is a guide who encourages students by giving them opportunities to engage in spontaneous and purposeful activities. By doing this, concentration, joyful self-discipline and motivation of the learners could be developed naturally.

Thirdly, content and method of teaching, educators and teachers should focus on the relevance and usefulness of content to students and the appropriateness in teaching

method. The content might include tasks that involve a personal response, and value and appreciate that personal response by giving personal feedback. Students need to be provided choice to do what they want to learn under the instructions of teachers. In addition, the relevance of content to real life can increase the motivation of learners and thus teachers should focus on the connection between the reality and subject matters, assignments or experiments in class. In respect of teaching method, the teachers should be more active and flexible when using of materials and presenting activities based on an assessment of the child's requirements. They should know how to observe constructively and identify when and how much to intervene learning process rather than giving too much explanation when transmitting knowledge. It needs to make sure for students to take responsibility for their own learning, fosters collaboration among students and promotes self-directed learning.



Lastly, it is useful for students' motivation if they engage in a favorable and

effective learning environment. In classroom context, students come to understand and integrate learning strategies through observing and participating in social learning activities. Different educational situations provide different levels of structural, motivational, social and emotional support. Thus, the tasks that teachers select and the learning environment may or may not capture or maintain student interest. Some students like group work while some students prefer working individually. Therefore, the learning environment needs to aim to balance between engaging tasks and environments and the individual preferences.

Conclusion

In summary, motivation plays a crucial role in primary learner's studying. These above mentioned analyses can be a proof for the correlation between motivation and performance of primary students. Students who are highly motivated can get better result than those with lower level of motivation. It is worth pointing out that we are aware of the characteristics of young learners and elements causing motivation in primary- aged students such as parental control, examination pressure, teaching methods of teachers, etc.

As a result, suggestions have just been drawn from the principles given. They also need to be modified to become more adaptive to the local context of Vietnam to decrease the weaknesses and maximize the benefits of application of these suggestions for the welfare of the learners.

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