

Learning for Life, Learning with Fun: Igniting Students' Intrinsic Motivation to Learn in the Classroom

Wang Chee Keng John, Liu Woon Chia, Nikos Chatzisarantis, Richard Ryan, Lim Boon San
Coral and How Yew Meng

KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. All students possess inner motivational resources that may be nurtured, such as intrinsic motivation and self-set goals.
2. Students who receive autonomy-supportive teaching show higher self-efficacy and self-regulation, and are more likely to stay motivated and maintain their grades.
3. Teachers are encouraged to support students' autonomy by providing choices, rationales, and using non-controlling language when communicating with students.

BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Education in Singapore has been encouraging teachers to provide students with greater choice and ownership in learning. Teachers are encouraged to apply new educational theories and practices in the classrooms. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1985) proposes that motivation in education is enhanced with the fulfilment of the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in students. Research has shown that teachers are the best source of social support for facilitating self-regulated learning in the classroom, especially by being autonomy-supportive (Reeve, 2009).

FOCUS OF STUDY

Based on SDT, this study developed and evaluated a school-based intervention to

influence students' motivation in Mathematics, Science, and Design & Technical subjects. A 5-week intervention was conducted to promote student's motivation in these subjects, comparing the effectiveness of: (a) an autonomy-supportive intervention that provides rationale, feedback, choice, and acknowledgement of personal conflicts, and (b) an environment where these are not provided.

KEY FINDINGS

The intervention successfully increased perceived autonomy-support, competence, and relatedness. Students in the intervention group showed higher self-efficacy and self-regulation. Effort and intrinsic interest in the subjects were maintained, as opposed to the decreased levels seen in the control group. Grades in the control group dropped significantly, whereas the intervention group maintained their academic performance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for Practice

- Coordinate instructional activities to take account of students' interests, challenge, competencies, and choice-making.
- Offer a rationale when asking students to engage in potentially uninteresting activities or rule following.
- Use informational and non-controlling language to support autonomy when communicating requirements.

- Display patience for students learning unfamiliar tasks. Listen, encourage initiative and effort, provide time, and offer help when students seem stuck.
- Accept and welcome expressions of negative feelings. This communicates understanding of students' perspectives.

Implications for Policy and Research

Focus on teacher training and development in autonomy-support. Identify factors in the education system that drive teachers to adopt a controlling style and address them.

Learning Gains (for studies involving intervention)

Teachers may be trained to provide autonomy in class. Students with autonomy-supportive teaching are more likely to stay motivated.

Proposed Follow-up Activities

Educating teachers about how SDT serves to improve teacher-student relationships while addressing any practical concerns in classroom management would greatly benefit teachers and students.

POPULATION

Three hundred and ninety-three secondary students (213 males, 175 females) from 8 schools with age range 13 to 17 participated.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Using Reeve's (2009) Five Acts of Instructional Behavior as a framework, all teachers in the intervention were trained to adopt an autonomy-supportive style by providing positive feedback, rationale, acknowledgement of inner conflicts associated with their lessons, and enhance the sense of choice by using neutral modal operators (e.g., doing Maths may be fun) when communicating to students. Teachers in the control condition were instructed to provide rationale by using the same meaningful arguments; however, they were not taught to use positive feedback, be empathetic, acknowledge inner conflict, or to communicate feedback in the context of choice.

REFERENCES

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About the authors

WANG Chee Keng John, LIU Woon Chia, LIM Boon San Coral and HOW Yew Meng are with the National Institute of Education, Singapore. Nikos CHATZISARANTIS is with the Faculty of Health Sciences in Curtin University, Australia. Richard RYAN is with the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education in Australian Catholic University, Australia.

Contact John at john.wang@nie.edu.sg for more information about the project.

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