Preparing Higher Education Teachers for Successful Online Teaching:
Where Does Your Students' Motivation Come From?

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Abstract

The present study aims to 1) discover the source of higher education (HE) students' motivation and explore the basis of their motivation from their point of view, and 2) discuss the best practices and strategies employed by HE teachers to motivate their students in online or remote learning environments. The study's objective is to listen to the students' voices and suggest adding the best practices of motivating students to the teachers' professional development programs. For this purpose, the researcher organized a focus group of six experienced HE teachers from several HE institutions to find the best practices in online teaching environments and designed a students' survey to find the source of students' motivation from their point of view. A sample of 344 students responded to the survey, and the general results revealed that certain factors affected the students' motivation, such as their need for the course or the teachers' way of instruction. The results also showed that HE teachers found specific motivation strategies to be more successful than others in the online learning environment, these strategies include but are not limited to online collaboration, technology utilization and gamification, as well as other strategies. Based on the study's findings, it is recommended to update the HE teachers' professional development programs in terms of understanding the source of their students' motivation to cope with future teaching and learning challenges and changes with the overall aim to increase their students' motivation, especially in the online environments.

Keywords: Motivation, Higher Education, Online Learning, Remote Learning, Motivation

Introduction

Motivation is defined as "a theoretical construct to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of behavior, especially goal-directed behavior" (Brophy, 2010, p. 3). There are different types of motivation, and it is essential to have motivated students in any classroom, especially in higher education, to achieve better results. Without motivation, the teacher's job becomes very challenging. It is worth mentioning that the concept of motivation is related to many theories such as "self-efficacy, goal theory, theories of intelligence, choice theory, self-determination theory, and flow, among others." (Irvine, 2018, p.1). Although motivation is important for both teachers and students, this study focuses on students' motivation and the strategies that HE teachers can employ to increase their students' motivation, especially in online classrooms.

There has been a disagreement on the source of students' motivation. In the existing literature, and there were two types of discussions. The first one assumed that students had intrinsic motivation, which was what kept them going. The second one assumed that the course design and the teachers' performance played the most crucial role in motivating students, and these are some of the factors that represent extrinsic motivation. The main aim of the current study is to find out the factors that might lead to an increase or decrease in students' motivation in the online classroom. The study also aims to find the techniques and strategies that were found helpful by teachers to increase students' motivation in the higher education context with a focus on the online environment. The research questions proposed for the current study are (1)What is the source of students' motivation in HE online classes? (2)What are the best strategies and techniques employed by HE teachers in online classes?

Literature Review

1. Types of Motivation and their Significance in Higher Education

As stated earlier, there are two types of learning motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is based on the students' enjoyment or need for the topic or the class being delivered. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is activated by external factors that might be introduced in the class, such as the course design, a reward system (Usmanovna and Oybekovna, 2018) or others. Both types of motivation are important because they can impact the students' behaviour as well as their academic performance (Tokan and Imakulata, 2019). The focus of this study is to explore the factors that might impact students' motivation when it comes to online learning. According to Afzal, et al. (2010), if students are motivated, this leads to better academic performance, which is the target of almost every educator. Therefore, HE teachers must be aware of the best strategies to motivate their students, especially in the online classroom. It is also essential for those teachers to listen to the students' voices to understand their perceptions and preferences to create an enjoyable, beneficial and motivational online classroom experience. This way, not only will the students' motivation increase, but their academic performance will also improve.

2. The Role of HE Teachers in Motivating Students

Teachers play a vital role in teaching and learning, especially in a student-centred environment. They are responsible for designing their lessons, enriching them with external elements such as using technology and gamification and then following up with the development and the pace during the class. Teachers support and help students by motivating

them to acquire new knowledge and finish their tasks on time. However, the teachers' job might become more challenging in online classes because of several other factors like communication and technical issues. Therefore, there is an ongoing discussion about the best practices to motivate students, especially in online environments. Also, the number of studies looking at motivation in online learning environments has dramatically increased during the last decade (Esra and Sevilen, 2021). This reflects the importance of this kind of studies as they focus on what I believe is the future of teaching and learning; therefore, HE teachers need to prepare themselves for the future and develop different strategies to improve the online teaching experience of their students. These new techniques and strategies need to be based on the teachers' deep understanding of online pedagogy and technology (TWT) as well as understanding the source of students' motivation.

3.   Motivation Issues in HE Online Classes

Several studies have been conducted on the use of online platforms in higher education, especially during the pandemic (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Gustiani, 2020; Hysaj and Hamam, 2020). These studies reveal that several issues can be encountered during online classes. One of these vital issues could be the issue of motivation. With all the social isolation imposed by the nature of online classes (especially during the pandemic) and the new pedagogy used, students might become demotivated to participate or engage in the discussion. Although students have positive attitudes toward online group work (Hysaj, Hamam, and Baroudi, 2021), sometimes, students can be demotivated to work with their colleagues on their projects. This lack of motivation might leads to severe consequences when discussing students' comprehension and development. Once a student is demotivated to participate in the online class, they will cease to acquire new knowledge and will not be able to practise anymore. So basically, the students' low motivation levels negatively impact the teaching and learning process. While HE classes encourage the learners to be autonomous and self-directed, the lack of motivation can cause the exact opposite to occur. Students become uninterested in the subject they are studying and blame the teacher for its level of difficulty and complexity if any. They become more dependent on the teacher and stop working independently. Therefore, several issues that involve motivation have emerged in online classes. Esra and Sevilen (2021) stated that students had negative perceptions and a lack of motivation in online classes mainly because of the lack of social interactions with their peers and their teacher.

On the other hand, Gustiani (2020) discovered that students' intrinsic motivation was led by their need to acquire new knowledge and the fact that they wanted to enjoy the new teaching method after shifting to online classes during the pandemic. The extrinsic motivation comes from external regulation. But Gustiani (2020) also mentioned that the lack of motivation occurred because of the lack of supporting facilities. Also, Elshareif and Mohamed (2021) researched the association between the main aspects of eLearning and students' motivation. Students appeared to be more motivated in the assessment-related activities but were less motivated when it came to group discussions and feedback. Moreover, several studies showed that students' motivation decreased in online classes because of technical difficulties or the lack of social interactions, in addition to the absence of eye-to-eye connection, along with other reasons (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Agustina and Cheng, 2020; Esra and Sevilen, 2021; Hysaj and Hamam, 2020).

Methods

The study utilized mixed methods for data collection; therefore, qualitative and quantitative data were collected. First, for the qualitative data, the researcher organized a focus group with six experienced higher education (HE) teachers from several HE institutions to discuss students' motivation and the best practices they found to motivate their students in online or remote classes. Then, the reasons behind students' motivation and the best practices emerging from the focus group were thematically divided. Second, for the quantitative data, the researcher designed a survey to explore the students' views about their source of motivation in online classes. The survey included 12 Likert scale items, and it was based on the themes identified through the focus group discussions. The survey was advertised through social media platforms and targeted undergraduates who came from different majors and studied online in several higher education institutions. The age group of the participants was 19-24, with a median of 21.5 years old. The participants had to give their consent at the beginning of the survey to participate in the research and were assured confidentiality and anonymity of data. A sample of 344 students responded to the survey, and the results were analyzed using computer software. The extracted results from the focus group and the survey are presented in the next section.

Results

The results were extracted from two sources: qualitative data from the teachers' focus group and quantitative data from the students' survey. For the first source, three teachers believed that it is entirely a teacher's job to motivate students. One teacher explained that if enough effort is made in designing the lesson, this will contribute to the increase in students' motivation. Most teachers believe that the students should have their internal motivation since they are college students and they are supposed to know what they are doing. Another teacher mentioned that students' motivation could be increased if teachers encourage student-centered learning in their instructional methodology. Four out of the six teachers confirmed that a feeling of isolation and the lack of interaction between the students and their peers, and the students and their teachers, are the main reasons for the students' lack of motivation. Teachers suggested using different strategies to increase the students' motivation, such as using interactive platforms, turning the camera on during class, designing group work and collaboration activities, creating quizzes and challenges, in addition to asking the students to prepare parts of the lessons and explain them to their peers. According to the teachers, more strategies that seem to work are creating a reward system, setting clear goals for each lesson, taking short breaks during the online session, encouraging the students to work together even outside class time, designing interactive and interesting lessons, as well as using technology and gamification.

For the second source of data, the students' survey, the results revealed the percentage of each survey item based on the students' responses. The survey was designed using a 5-point Likert scale with the following options: (1=Always, 2=Often, 3=Sometimes, 4=Rarely, 5=Never). The survey items were based on the focus group results and the themes identified. The findings indicate that most students are aware of the reasons behind their motivation in online classes, with 75% choosing "Always" and 21% choosing "Often". The results also showed that students believe that they should have intrinsic motivation to participate and engage in the online classes, with 73% choosing "Always" and 15% choosing "Often". When the students were asked whether their teacher is responsible for their motivation, 51% chose "Always". Also, students believed the teacher's teaching style could improve their

motivation level in the online class, with 69% choosing "Always" and 18% choosing "Often". However, students indicated that some actions or practices in the online classroom might lead to their lack of motivation. For example, the majority of students (53% of students chose "Always" and 41% chose "Often") mentioned that they would lose their interest if the class is boring, while 19% of students chose "Rarely" and 35% chose "Never" which indicates that their motivation is not very much affected if the teacher is demanding or gives many tasks. Students also mentioned (43% of students chose "Always" and 26% chose "Often") that they might lose motivation if the topic is not useful or interesting, and 44% of students chose "Always" and 35% chose "Often" when asked if they might lose their motivation if the teacher is too critical or very strict. Finally, 35% of students chose "Rarely", and 45% chose "Never" which indicated that their motivation might be affected by other external factors like family issues or internet connection. For the last survey item, students showed that factors like using technology, mobile learning and games in class might increase their motivation, with 57% who chose "Always", and 35% who chose "Often".

Discussion

The study's main findings indicate that HE students are aware of the source of their intrinsic motivation. However, they believe that the role of their teachers is crucial in motivating or demotivating them in online classes. This finding concurs with the findings of Anderman, Andrzejewski, and Allen (2011), who stated that teachers played an important role in motivating their students through their teaching practice, and with the findings of Liu (2010), who mentioned that teachers were able to increase the students' motivation through class activities, as well as the findings of De Naeghel, et al. (2014) who also emphasized the importance of the teachers' role in increasing their students' motivation. The findings also show that the quality of the lesson and its pace might have an impact on the students' level of motivation and this finding agrees with the Chan and Ahern (1999), who stated that instructional design and the fact that lessons are not complex or distracting play an essential role in motivating students. This finding also agrees with Könings, Brand- Gruwel, and van Merriënboer (2011), who found relationships between the students' perceptions and preferences about the lesson and their level of motivation. Although students indicated that they are aware that they need to have their own intrinsic motivation, they also explained that their teachers' attitudes and how they deliver the class might increase or decrease their motivation. Students also revealed that they were more interested in the lesson and motivated when it was technology-based or when it included mobile learning or games. This finding agrees with Estapa and Nadolny (2015), who found that the use of technology (augmented reality) motivated students in mathematics classes, and the findings of Purba, et al. (2019), who stated that using games like the Kahoot game increased the students' learning motivation in the classroom, and the findings of Divjak and Tomić (2011), who discovered that the use of games increased students' motivation. However, this finding disagrees with Huizenga et al. (2009), who stated that there was no difference in the students' motivation level after using mobile learning in class. The results also showed a marginal impact of other factors such as the teachers' attitude towards the lesson, if there are many tasks, and the nature of the topic being delivered in the online class. Also, a small percentage of students believed that other external factors like family issues or internet connection might impact their motivation in the online classroom.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper looked at both the intrinsic and the extrinsic motivation for HE

students in online or remote learning environments, and it also discussed the best strategies employed by experienced HE teachers to motivate their students. Knowing that motivation is an integral part of teaching and learning, it is crucial and vital for HE teachers to understand the reasons for their students' motivation and know the best strategies to increase their motivation, especially in online classrooms, as such classes have a unique nature. The findings revealed that several factors might affect the students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels, such as their need for the course or the teachers' way of instruction. The study also revealed the best strategies found by HE teachers to increase their students' motivation. These strategies include but are not limited to online collaboration, technology utilization and gamification, as well as other strategies. The findings of this study should offer contributions to the professional development programs of HE teachers, which should lead to improvements in the teaching and learning process, especially in online classrooms.

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