



The Influence of Learners: Motivation on Academic Achievement in Selected Primary Schools in Lusaka District, Zambia

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Abstract

Learner motivation is an important component of effective teaching and learning because it influences learners' attention, participation, persistence, goal orientation and engagement with academic tasks. This study investigated the influence of learners' motivation on academic achievement in selected primary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. Specifically, the study identified motivational techniques used by teachers, examined factors influencing learners' motivation and explored the influence of motivation on academic achievement. The study adopted a descriptive research approach and involved 80 respondents comprising four headteachers, 36 teachers and 40 learners from four selected primary schools. Simple random sampling was used to select teachers and learners, while purposive sampling was used to select headteachers. Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to facilitate triangulation. Quantitative responses were summarised using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative responses were organised thematically. The findings showed that teachers used several motivational techniques, including prizes, reinforcement, classroom competition, effective teaching methods, positive teacher–learner relationships and collaborative learning. Learners additionally identified gamification, making lessons relevant, connecting learning to real-life experiences, providing support and autonomy, and building strong relationships as useful motivational strategies. Major factors influencing motivation included parental involvement, teacher behaviour and personality, assessment practices, classroom and curriculum structure, peer relationships, learning environment, family circumstances and learners' self-perceptions. The findings further indicated that motivation was perceived to improve academic achievement, sustain learners' interest, encourage learning, facilitate conceptual understanding, and increase classroom liking and support goal attainment. The study concludes that learner motivation is an important contributor to academic achievement in primary schools and recommends strengthening positive teacher–learner relationships, using appropriate rewards and reinforcement, making lessons engaging and relevant, supporting learner autonomy, and providing teachers with professional

development in motivational strategies.

Keywords: *learner motivation, academic achievement, primary education, motivational techniques, teacher–learner relationship, Zambia*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Learner motivation occupies a central position in the teaching and learning process. It determines, to a considerable extent, whether learners initiate academic tasks, sustain effort, respond to challenges and remain engaged until learning goals are achieved. Motivation influences the amount of energy learners invest in learning, the tasks they choose, the degree of persistence they demonstrate and the strategies they employ when confronted with academic difficulties. Pintrich (2003) views motivation as an important component of learning and teaching contexts because it influences learners' engagement and achievement. Similarly, Bakar (2019) explains that motivation is reflected in learners' choices, effort, persistence and responses to obstacles during learning.

Motivation may be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation arises from an individual's interest, curiosity and satisfaction derived from the learning activity itself, whereas extrinsic motivation is associated with external outcomes such as rewards, grades, recognition or avoidance of undesirable consequences. The distinction is important because learners may participate in academic activities for different reasons. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination perspective emphasises the importance of internal motivation, while external

reinforcement can also influence learners' effort and behaviour.

At primary school level, motivation is particularly important because learners are developing foundational academic skills, attitudes towards schooling and perceptions of themselves as learners. A motivated learner is more likely to participate actively in lessons, complete assignments, persist with challenging tasks and develop positive attitudes towards school. Conversely, low motivation may manifest itself through reduced participation, poor concentration, absenteeism, lack of interest and weak academic engagement.

The literature reviewed in the study indicates that motivation can influence attention, persistence, learning behaviour and academic performance. Phan and Nguyen (2016) argue that motivation helps learners sustain attention and provides the energy needed to complete tasks. Brophy (2014) similarly emphasises that classroom motivation involves not merely attracting learners' attention but creating conditions that enable them to become active participants in learning. Motivational strategies such as collaborative learning, gamification, guided autonomy, positive feedback and meaningful classroom activities can therefore contribute to learner engagement.

The Zambian context makes the issue particularly relevant. The study notes that motivation is

associated with classroom engagement, attendance, concentration and academic performance among primary school learners. Previous Zambian studies cited in the project indicate that teacher behaviour, teacher–learner relationships, classroom conditions and school facilities can influence learners' motivation and academic performance (Chisanga, 2018; Chungu, 2018; Phiri & Chisala, 2017). Consequently, understanding how learners are motivated and the factors that shape their motivation is important for improving educational outcomes.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the importance of motivation, academic underachievement remains a concern in primary education. The study identifies lack of interest, inadequate motivation, teacher pedagogy, classroom management and poor teacher–learner relationships among the issues that can contribute to underachievement. The project further associates inadequate motivation with truancy, school dropout, examination malpractice and poor academic performance.

The problem is therefore not simply whether teachers motivate learners, but whether the motivational approaches used in schools are appropriate, sustainable and responsive to learners' different needs and circumstances. There was a need to investigate the motivational techniques used in selected primary schools in Lusaka District, the factors influencing motivation and the perceived relationship between motivation and academic achievement.

1.3 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of learners' motivation on academic achievement in selected primary schools in Lusaka District. The objectives were to:

- Identify motivational techniques used by teachers on learners in primary schools.
- Identify factors influencing learners' motivation and academic achievement.
- Investigate the influence of learners' motivation on academic achievement.

2. Literature Review

Motivation is a complex psychological process involving needs, goals, beliefs, emotions, effort and persistence. The literature reviewed in the study describes motivation as a force that directs behaviour towards particular goals. Pintrich (2003) notes that motivation affects learners' attention, effort and engagement, while Luthans (2014) conceptualises motivation as a process originating from psychological or physiological needs that activates behaviour directed towards goals.

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is particularly relevant. Intrinsic motivation encourages learners to participate because they find learning interesting or satisfying, while extrinsic motivation encourages participation because of external outcomes. Ryan and Deci's work suggests that learners may engage in activities for different forms of motivation, ranging from genuine interest to external regulation. The literature included in the study indicates that

intrinsic motivation may contribute to deeper engagement, while appropriately designed extrinsic incentives may reinforce desired academic behaviours.

Teachers have a major role in creating motivating learning environments. Brophy (2014) argues that effective classroom motivation requires strategies that make learners active participants. The study identifies gamification, collaborative learning and guided autonomy as approaches that can make learners feel valued and encourage participation. Peetsma and Volman (2015) further emphasise positive teacher-student relationships and personalised attention.

Motivation is also influenced by factors outside the classroom. Learners' family circumstances, parental involvement, peer relationships, self-perception and learning environment can either support or weaken motivation. Phiri and Chisala (2017), as cited in the project, identify teacher behaviour and personality as important influences. Positive feedback, encouragement and kindness can strengthen learners' attitudes, whereas fear, humiliation and perceived teacher favouritism can reduce motivation.

The literature therefore suggests that learner motivation should not be understood as an isolated learner characteristic. Rather, it emerges from the interaction between the learner, teacher, classroom, family, peers, curriculum and wider learning environment.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by B. F. Skinner's conditioning theory. The theory emphasises the role of reinforcement and consequences in shaping behaviour. Positive reinforcement involves providing desirable consequences following a behaviour, thereby increasing the likelihood that the behaviour will occur again. In the educational context, praise, prizes, recognition and other forms of reinforcement can encourage learners to repeat desirable academic behaviours.

The framework was relevant because several motivational techniques identified in the study, particularly prizes and reinforcement, involve responses to learners' academic behaviours. The conceptual framework linked motivational practices such as prizes, reinforcement and classroom competition with academic achievement.

However, the findings also demonstrate that motivation extends beyond external reinforcement. Learners identified autonomy, relevance, collaboration, real-life connections and strong relationships as important. This suggests that motivational practice in primary schools should combine appropriate reinforcement with strategies that encourage meaningful participation and internal engagement.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research approach. Although the original project describes the design as quantitative, it also employed interviews and focus group discussions. For

purposes of the article, the study is therefore presented as a descriptive triangulated study incorporating quantitative and qualitative data. The research design was intended to obtain information concerning motivational techniques, factors influencing motivation and the influence of motivation on academic achievement.

4.2 Population and Sample

The study targeted headteachers, teachers and learners in selected primary schools. A sample of 80 respondents participated in the study: four headteachers, 36 teachers and 40 learners. Teachers and learners were selected through simple random sampling, while headteachers were selected purposively.

The study was conducted in four selected primary schools in Lusaka District, Lusaka Province. The project explicitly recognises that the findings should not be generalised automatically to other geographical areas.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were used: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The use of multiple instruments was intended to facilitate triangulation. Questionnaires provided structured responses, while interviews and focus group discussions enabled participants to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences.

4.4 Data Analysis and Ethics

Quantitative responses were organised using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative

responses were organised around themes corresponding to the research objectives. Ethical procedures included seeking permission, obtaining participant consent, maintaining confidentiality and protecting anonymity.

5. Results

5.1 Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved 80 respondents, of whom 50 (62.5%) were female and 30 (37.5%) were male. In terms of instruments, 40 respondents participated through questionnaires, 36 through interviews and four through focus group discussions.

5.2 Motivational Techniques Used by Teachers

The findings demonstrated substantial awareness of motivational techniques among teachers and headteachers. All four headteachers reported awareness of motivational techniques. Among the identified techniques, giving prizes was reported by 11 respondents (27.5%), reinforcement by nine (22%), classroom competition by seven (17.5%), good teaching methods by six (15%), positive teacher-learner relationships by four (10%) and collaborative learning by three (7.5%).

Among learners, 30 (75%) indicated that they were aware of motivational techniques, six (15%) were unsure and four (10%) were not aware.

Focus group participants identified additional learner-centred approaches. Eight participants (26.6%) mentioned gamification, seven (23%) suggested making lessons relevant to learners, five (16.6%) identified connecting learning to real-life

experiences, four (13.3%) highlighted support combined with autonomy, while collaborative learning and strong teacher–learner relationships each received 10%.

These findings suggest that motivation in the participating schools was not limited to material rewards. Although prizes and reinforcement were prominent, learners also valued pedagogical and relational strategies.

5.3 Factors Influencing Learners' Motivation

The findings identified a broad range of factors influencing learners' motivation. Parental habits and involvement were the most frequently reported factor, identified by 11 respondents (13.7%). Teacher behaviour and personality followed with 10 respondents (12.5%), while assessment practices were identified by nine respondents (11.3%). Class and curriculum structure and peer relationships were each identified by eight respondents (10%).

Other factors included the learning environment and family issues or instability, each reported by seven respondents (8.7%). Learners' self-perception was reported by six respondents (7.5%), while self-will and living area were each reported by five respondents (6.3%). Family and friends were identified by four respondents (5%).

The findings demonstrate that learner motivation is multidimensional. It is shaped by school-based factors as well as family, peer and individual circumstances.

5.4 Influence of Motivation on Academic

Achievement

All respondents indicated awareness of the influence of learner motivation on academic achievement. The most frequently reported influence was the potential to improve academic achievement, identified by 25 respondents (31.3%). Fifteen respondents (18.7%) associated motivation with achieving academic excellence, while 14 (17.5%) indicated that it sustained learners' interest in learning. Twelve respondents (15%) stated that motivation encouraged learners to learn.

Other reported influences included improved conceptual understanding (8.8%), increased classroom liking (5%), energy to achieve goals (2.5%) and inspiration to work hard in different learning situations (1.3%).

Overall, the findings indicate that motivation was perceived as contributing to academic achievement through several interconnected mechanisms: increased engagement, persistence, interest, conceptual understanding and goal-oriented behaviour.

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that learner motivation is a significant dimension of primary school teaching and learning. The prominence of prizes and reinforcement among teacher-reported strategies is consistent with the study's Skinnerian theoretical framework. Rewards can reinforce desirable behaviours such as completing assignments, participating in lessons and demonstrating academic effort.

However, the findings also show that motivation cannot be reduced to rewards. Learners highlighted gamification, relevance, real-life connections, collaboration, autonomy and positive relationships. This is consistent with Brophy's (2014) argument that effective motivation involves creating conditions that enable learners to become active participants in learning. The finding also corresponds with Peetsma and Volman (2015), who emphasise the importance of teacher beliefs, contextual factors and positive teacher-learner relationships.

The prominence of parental involvement as a motivational factor is particularly important. Learners spend substantial amounts of time outside school, and family expectations, encouragement and stability can influence their attitudes towards learning. The finding suggests that interventions aimed at improving learner motivation should not focus exclusively on teachers. Schools should also promote meaningful parent-school partnerships.

Teacher behaviour and personality emerged as the second most frequently identified factor. This finding supports the argument of Phiri and Chisala (2017) that teacher behaviour can either promote or undermine motivation. Learners are more likely to engage when teachers demonstrate kindness, encouragement, optimism and positive feedback. Conversely, humiliating language, fear and perceived favouritism may discourage participation.

Assessment practices were another important factor. This finding suggests that learners' motivation can be affected by how academic progress is measured

and communicated. Fair, transparent and constructive assessment can encourage learners to recognise progress and identify areas for improvement. Assessment that is perceived as excessively punitive may instead contribute to anxiety and disengagement.

The study also found that learners associated motivation with improved academic achievement. The largest proportion of respondents, 31.3%, directly identified improved academic achievement as an outcome of motivation. This finding is consistent with the literature reviewed in the project, including studies suggesting that highly motivated learners demonstrate stronger persistence and academic performance.

Motivation was also reported to sustain learners' interest and encourage learning. This is important because academic achievement is not simply a product of ability; it also depends on learners' willingness to invest sustained effort. Motivation can encourage learners to remain engaged with tasks even when those tasks are challenging.

The findings further indicate that motivation can support conceptual understanding. Learners who are interested in a lesson are more likely to attend to explanations, ask questions, participate in activities and connect new information with previous knowledge. Thus, motivation may operate indirectly by increasing the quality and duration of learners' engagement with learning activities.

Another important finding concerns classroom liking. A positive emotional relationship with school and classroom activities can strengthen

learners' willingness to participate. The study's findings therefore support a holistic understanding of motivation in which academic, behavioural, emotional and social dimensions interact.

The findings are also consistent with the study's conclusion that motivation is shaped by learners' goals, beliefs and emotions as well as by their environment. When learners believe they can succeed and experience supportive learning conditions, they are more likely to remain engaged and persist through challenges.

7. Implications for Primary Education in Zambia

The study has several implications for primary education. First, teachers need to move beyond an exclusive dependence on prizes and material rewards. Rewards can be useful, but motivational practices should also develop learners' interest, autonomy, confidence and sense of competence.

Second, teacher professional development should include learner motivation as an important pedagogical competency. Teachers should be equipped with strategies for positive reinforcement, collaborative learning, gamification, differentiated classroom activities, constructive feedback and learner-centred teaching.

Third, schools should strengthen positive teacher–learner relationships. The classroom should be a safe environment in which learners can ask questions, make mistakes and participate without humiliation or fear.

Fourth, parents should be encouraged to support children's learning through positive expectations, encouragement, monitoring of schoolwork and communication with teachers. Since parental involvement emerged as the strongest reported motivational factor, family participation should be considered an integral component of motivational interventions.

Finally, curriculum and assessment practices should be designed to make learning meaningful. Connecting classroom concepts with learners' real-life experiences can help learners understand why learning matters and can increase their willingness to participate.

8. Conclusion

The study concludes that learner motivation has an important influence on academic achievement in selected primary schools in Lusaka District. Motivation was associated with improved academic achievement, academic excellence, sustained interest, active learning, conceptual understanding, classroom liking and goal attainment.

The findings demonstrate that motivation is multidimensional. Teachers use prizes, reinforcement, classroom competition, effective teaching methods, collaborative learning and positive relationships. Learners additionally value gamification, relevant lessons, real-life connections, autonomy and supportive relationships.

The study further demonstrates that motivation is influenced by a combination of school, family, peer and individual factors. Parental involvement,

teacher behaviour, assessment practices, classroom structure, peer relationships, learning environment and learners' self-perceptions all contribute to the motivational climate.

Therefore, improving academic achievement in primary schools requires more than curriculum coverage and assessment. It requires the creation of learning environments in which learners are interested, supported, challenged and encouraged to believe in their capacity to succeed.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. **Learner self-motivation should be strengthened.** Learners should be encouraged to take responsibility for their academic development while recognising differences in ability, background and attitude.
2. **Positive teacher-learner relationships should be prioritised.** Teachers should create respectful, supportive and inclusive classroom environments.
3. **Appropriate rewards and reinforcement should be used.** Schools should employ recognition, praise, prizes and other appropriate reinforcement strategies to encourage desirable academic behaviours

without making external rewards the sole basis for learning.

4. **Teachers should communicate high but realistic expectations.** Learners should be encouraged to believe that they can improve through effort, persistence and effective learning strategies.
5. **Lessons should be made interesting and relevant.** Teachers should incorporate real-life examples, collaborative activities, games and other learner-centred approaches.
6. **Teacher professional development should address motivation.** Schools should provide opportunities for teachers to develop skills in motivational pedagogy, classroom management, positive feedback and learner engagement.
7. **Schools should strengthen parent-school partnerships.** Parents and guardians should be encouraged to provide emotional and academic support and to communicate regularly with teachers.

1. **Further research should be undertaken.** Similar studies should be conducted across a larger number of primary schools and districts in Zambia to determine whether the findings are consistent in different educational and socio-economic contexts. The original study itself recommends extending research to schools across the country.

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