

Teacher and Parental Views Regarding Learner Motivation in a Rural School Setting of Lesotho

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Abstract: *Research studies in general show that high levels of learner achievement are difficult to attain when little or no motivation is present in encouraging learners to achieve scholastically. It should further be noted that learner motivation and the issues related to learner demotivation are of universal concern. Lesotho school settings, located in rural areas are not exempted by issues related to learner motivation or demotivation. Learners appear to demonstrate various behavioral and learning challenges, both in and out of classroom settings. Letele (2009) also found that poorly qualified teachers are among the factors contributing to poor academic achievement of learners in Lesotho, especially in rural schools. The focus of this exploratory study was therefore to ascertain the views of various stakeholders (teachers and parents) regarding the possible reasons for learners' apparent lack of motivation at a rural school. A qualitative research approach, framed in a case study design was used to investigate the phenomenon at hand. Findings revealed that aspects such as passiveness and boredom; disruptive behaviour and inattentiveness; lack of discipline and failure to take responsibility for own learning, were factors that contributed mostly to learners' perceived lack of motivation. The study suggests that the principal and management team attached to rural school settings should make use of focused staff-meetings to develop teachers' skills and competencies as to improve learner motivation, parental involvement and constructive classroom behaviour.*

Keywords: Learner motivation, Teacher and Parent Views, Demotivation, Expectancy Value Theory

Introduction

Motivating individuals to achieve scholastically and developed holistically, is critical to any learning situation. Creating ideal conditions for all learners to succeed in various school contexts are therefore a precondition for learning and motivation (Very, 1993). Motivation leads to an increase in effort and energy that learners expend in activities, directly related to their needs and goals (Weller, 2005). The manner in which learners approach their tasks enhance their performance. Learners who appear to be motivated initiate learning activities on their own;

prefer challenging learning tasks; make connections between learning activities and the real world; excel beyond the minimum standards and persevere in challenging tasks (Stipek, 1998). On the other hand, Cowley (2006) and Renchler (1992) hold the view that learners can become demotivated in learning because of specific barriers to learning they might experience. They might have been taught that learning is important or that it can be fun. Even parents have to be conscious about how aspects of motivation have bearing on their children's learning. Motivation must be rewarded, increased and sustained at all levels (Alexander, 1997).

With the above said in mind, the focus of the study is to ascertain the views of various stakeholders (teachers and parents) regarding the possible reasons for learners' apparent lack of motivation at a rural school. It also needs to be noted that this research study was an exploratory investigation (pilot study) as to generate data for a follow-up study, that would probe the use of intervention strategies to support the teaching and learning of learners who seemingly lack motivation.

Literature review

Motivation is an internal state of arousal that often precedes behaviour. The relationship between motivation and behaviour is only 'approximate' in a sense that an individual may behave without being motivated or conversely, be motivated to behave (Epstein & Rogers, 2001). Ormrod (2008) views motivation as something that energizes, directs, and sustains an individual's behaviour. Within the school context, motivation should channel learners' behaviour in a particular direction and as such keep them engaged in the teaching and learning situation (Ormrod, 2008). Learner motivation should as such prompt learners' desire to participate meaningful in the learning process- their goals should direct their active involvement in academic activities (Ames, 1990).

Motivation to learn is a competence acquired through general experience but stimulated most directly through modelling, communication of expectations and direct instruction or socialization by significant other individuals, such as parents and teachers (Ames, 1990). Holbeche (1998) on the other hand argues that most people can motivate themselves given the right conditions. He therefore suggests that it is better to focus less on finding ways to motivate people and then to focus more on finding ways to eliminate the 'known' factors that demotivate people. Furthermore, Wakefield (1996) describes motivation as a collection of causes that engage someone in activity. Motivation can be described as an energizer or driving inner force, a desire or an urge that causes individuals to engage in certain behaviours. This inner force may be described as an attempt on the part of individuals to satisfy their needs and to establish and maintain a state of equilibrium or balance (Mwamwenda, 2004). A learner's motivation to learn can therefore be viewed as a tendency to work hard on academic activities. Woolfolk (1990) argues that the state of motivation to learn exists when learners are seriously engaged in school related activities; when these individuals attempt to understand and improve on their performance; when they complete their activities successfully; when they pay attention and work persistently, even if they are not particularly interested in the task at hand. Motivation is a mechanism that empowers a person in setting and achieving an immediate or future goal (Krishman, 2007).

People lacking in motivation and enthusiasm are usually passive in a learning situation which means that they are not actively involved. These learners normally give vague reasons as to why they cannot do what they are supposed to do (Sasson, n.d).

Two types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation also fulfills a role with regard to learner success. Intrinsic motivation originates within the learner while extrinsic motivation

arises from sources outside the learner or within the learner's environment (Woolfolk, 1990; Hamachek, 1990). Guay, Chanal, Ratelle, Marsh, Larose and Bolvin (2010) clearly distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to these scholars, learners who are intrinsically motivated tend to be more persistent and cognitively involved in their tasks, they experience more positive emotions and achieve better grades. On the other hand, Stipek (1998) indicates that intrinsic motivation is also worth promoting in schools. It appears to foster creativity, conceptual learning, desires for challenge and enjoyment. Intrinsic motivation is associated with initiative towards and exploration of a task because the person is interested in the task itself and again an intrinsically motivated learner is not primarily dependent on the approval of the educator but is motivated by the intrinsic value of the learning task (Engelbrecht, Kriegler and Booysen, 1996; Noordin et.al., 2010). A student who is intrinsically motivated undertakes an activity for his/her own sake, for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes (Lepper, 2009). Intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to expend effort based on interest and enjoyment of the work that is being performed (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Weller (2005) further states that intrinsic motivation is longer lasting and more self-directive than is external motivation. Extrinsic motivation must be repeatedly reinforced by praise or concrete rewards. Intrinsically motivated learners are furthermore characterized by a need for academic achievement and appears to be more superior and preferable to extrinsic motivation (Engelbrecht, Kriegler & Booysen 1996; Mwamwenda, 2004).

Extrinsic motivation is commonly defined as the desire to perform a certain behaviour based on potential external rewards that may be received (Noordin et.al, 2010). This kind of motivation comes from outside the person and depends on extrinsic factors such as approval, reward, disapproval and punishment. Learners who are extrinsically motivated are therefore dependent on external consequences for being motivated to learn or to achieve (Engelbrecht, et. al., 1996; Noordin et.al., 2010). The use rewards is one of the most effective ways of encouraging appropriate behaviour amongst learners (Cowley, 2006). Cowley (2006) points out that rewards assist teachers in motivating their students, particularly those who do not have a natural inclination to work hard. He further adds that using rewards is one of the most effective ways of getting better behaviour. A disadvantage to rewards as an extrinsic source of motivation is that learners prone to this approach will have to be provided with constant rewards and the reassurance thereof for their learning success. These type of learners seemingly lack inner drive and find it difficult to keep themselves motivated. Rewards such as sweets, prizes, high marks and certificates are viewed as a powerful source of motivation for most individuals, irrespective of their age, gender or social status (Mwamwenda, 2004).

Certain external forces appear to reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention on a continuous basis (Dornyei, in Kikuchi, 2009). A lack of motivation affects all aspects of family, social, work and school life. Demotivated individuals appear to be unaware of the capabilities they seemingly waste due to their inability to achieve anything in life. Self-pitying or the rendering of petty excuses for these individuals self acclaimed inability to do things, may be reasons for their perceived learned helplessness (Alexander, 1997). Learners who display signs of disinterest in their school work, have lost interest in learning and are displaying a severe lack or no motivation to learn in school- this situation may become a source of frustration to the teacher. Even teachers who are highly effective in the regular classroom might encounter challenges with learners who appear to be demotivated (Kikuchi, 2009).

This state of affairs is of concern for teachers who need to be consciousness of how classroom dynamics, school environment and surrounding impact on effective learning. All learners,

including the ones who displays challenging behaviour in the classroom are entitled to the teacher's attention and the same standard of education (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005).

There also seems to be various reasons as to why learners can be demotivated towards learning. The demotivating factors can be of either external origin or factors or they may be intrinsic in nature, meaning that they may originate within individual learner (Keller, 1998). Fallis and Opotow (2003) illustrate how the education system may also contribute towards the demotivation of learners. Learners might show signs of boredom in the manner activities they execute certain tasks at schools. Examples of this practice may include inter alia: high staff turn-over, excessive teacher absence, passive teaching styles.

Other school issues, such as ineffective teaching strategies and poor classroom management approaches can have significant effects on the learners' motivation (Bojuwoye, 2010). Unhealthy family issues, hostile parent interactions and conflicts with peers may also contribute to learners' levels of demotivation. Low test and assessment scores may cause learners to experience feelings of helplessness and embarrassment and could further exacerbate demotivation amongst learners (Darnyei, in Kikuchi, 2009). Therefore, learners' perceptions of competence and self-determination appear to be diminished when their intrinsic motivation decreases (Svinicki, 2004).

Disruptive behavior by learners are less likely to occur if lessons are engaging, varied and enjoyable. A variance in teaching styles support the promotion of learners' personalities, intelligences and learning styles. This in turn stimulates effective learning and the attainment of increased motivation amongst learners (Copley 2006). This further confirms Engelbrecht, Kriegler and Booysen (1996) stance as these scholars demonstrate teachers' ability to enhance motivation for learning through their choice of teaching methods and learning techniques. Teachers guide events that occur in their classroom setting and may as such influence learner motivation (Very, 1993). Wlodloski and Jaynes in Nordin, Azizi, Jamuludin, Sharin and Zurinhanmi (2010) are in agreement of teachers contribution in motivating learners to learn. Teachers are therefore at the forefront of knowing and applying the best strategies which support learner motivation (Svinicki, 2004). Gray, Miller and Noakes (1994) highlight that teachers need opportunities to develop skills without having their existing skills devalued. Eventually all relevant stakeholders have a role to fulfill in enhancing learner motivation. According to Renchler (1992), parents need to track the education progress of their children; teachers need to become effective practitioners of their profession whilst the school principal's job is to discover and nurture motivation among all involved parties. Concerning issues relating to learning and motivation, teachers also assert similar and in some cases more powerful roles as parents. By using selected teaching strategies, teachers can assist and guide learners. Thorough planning and the setting of lesson aims for different learning experiences may enhance effective learning (Engelbrecht, Kriegler and Booysen (1996). Teacher comments and feedback rendered to learners should be developmental, supportive and motivational in nature. Encouraging learners to focus on their progress and providing continued support amidst challenges and frustration, may lead to higher levels of motivation amongst learners. Learners tend to progress with their learning and search for more knowledge under the influence of an enthusiastic teacher. Wlodkowski and Jaynes (in Noordin, et al, 2010) postulate that enthusiastic teachers are mindful of what they are teaching. Teachers who create warm and accepting, yet business-like atmospheres will promote favourable attitudes towards learning. This strategy will yield success if learners' attention can be kept through the use of interesting visual aids, such as booklets, posters, or practice equipment. These teaching and learning material provoke learner's attention and curiosity (Weller, 2005). Teachers should therefore assist students in recognising their successes and to treat their mistakes as learning opportunities (Svinicki 2004). Tomey (2000)

further asserts that teachers can only motivate learners if they themselves, are motivated. Teachers who feel valued and secure will attempt to create conducive, warm and nurturing teaching and learning atmospheres where their learners will become enthusiastic about teaching.

Problem statement

Frederick-Recascino (2002) points out that high levels of learner performance are difficult to achieve when little or no motivation is present in encouraging learners to perform academically. Although learner motivation and the issues related to learner demotivation are of universal concern, Lesotho schools, located in rural contexts are not exempted by issues and challenges related to learner motivation or demotivation. Learners appear to demonstrate various behavioral and learning challenges, both in and out of the classroom settings. This situation often creates stress and frustration for teachers (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker, & Engelbrecht, 2004). Various initiatives are needed to bring about change in Lesotho's Education system and to respond to national imperatives. Educators need to be equipped with some skills and knowledge so that they may effectively support learners (Lesotho Times, 2011:1). Letele (2009) also found that poorly qualified teachers are among the factors contributing to poor academic achievement of learners in Lesotho, especially in rural primary schools. .

The focus of the study is therefore to ascertain the views of various stakeholders (teachers and parents) regarding the possible reasons for learners, apparent lack of motivation at a school, located in a rural area. The study further attempts to make suggestions as to how learners can be motivated to a higher level of scholastic achievement.

Theoretical framework

Expectancy value theory is used as theoretical framework for this study. Motivation is viewed as a function of the value that the individual places on what is learned and the expectancy for success for that sample of learning he or she is engaged with. Both value and expectancy must be present in a situation for the learner to have any motivation to continue with a task or learning activity, he or she is occupied with (Svinicki, 2004). Within the parameters of the expectancy value theory, motivation is viewed as the product of two forces. The first one is the individual's expectation of reaching a goal and the second one, is the value of that goal to him/her. If either factor is zero, there is no to very limited motivation to work hard in achieving a specific goal (Woolfolk, 1990).

The application of expectancy value theory assists in providing an explanation of the challenges teachers experience with learner motivation and to provide a rationale for the perceived lack of motivation amongst learners. Various factors, whether internal and/or xternal to the learner may affect his or her motivation towards learning. The various stakeholders involved in this study therefore use aspects of the expectancy value theory to understand demotivated learners within the context they are functioning. Teachers and parents should also be aware of factors responsible for the learners' perceived lack of motivation to learn, for which something can be done.

Research Methodology

In order to achieve the stated purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach, framed within a case study design was used for this investigation. Qualitative research method is a method that uses natural setting as the source of data and it involves an in-depth understanding of human behaviour as well as the reasons that govern human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

For the proposed research, a case study design was employed to make comparisons, build theory or propose generalizations. In this manner more can be known about identifying, understanding and supporting demotivated learners at a rural school Lesotho (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Two learners, perceived to display symptoms of extreme demotivation were purposively selected as participants for this research investigation. Teachers and parents views regarding these learners perceived demotivating behaviour, were ascertained for the purpose of this study.

Additionally, to ensure trustworthiness, more than one interviewee was involved in obtaining information. The fact that the research interviews were based on participants' own experiences assisted, to increase the reliability of the research. Reliability refers to the extent that a measure or concept would deliver the exact same results no matter how many times it is applied to random members of the group (Cherry, 2011).

A thematic analysis was used to interpret interview data gathered from teachers and parents. In qualitative research, unique strategies for analysis which consist of identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns, were found in the data (Bryne, 2011).

Findings and Discussion

The transcription of interview data gathered through teacher and parent interviews brought the following themes to the fore, namely: passiveness and boredom in the classroom; disruptive behaviour and inattentiveness; continuous failure and repeating of many classes; continuous failure and repeating of many classes; lack of discipline; learners' failure to take responsibility for their own learning; effective teaching and parental involvement.

Passiveness and boredom in the classroom

Learners who lack motivation to learn may be identified as being passive and bored in the classroom. Sasson (n.d) and Alexander (1997) highlight that people lacking in motivation and enthusiasm are usually passive and tend to shift the blame to other individuals for their circumstances.

Teacher A stated that the major challenge she encountered with learner A was this learner's virtual non-communication in class. Teacher A remarked as follow: *"I don't know whether she fears to speak or not. She whispers when a question is asked. Generally she does not want to speak."* Concerning learner B's disinterested in classroom activities, Teacher B echoed the following sentiment: *"At times, I get the feeling that this learner doesn't know why she is attending school and what she should do whenever I give her tasks to complete"*.

People lacking in motivation and enthusiasm are usually passive in a learning situation which means that they are not actively involved. They may even give vague reasons as to why they cannot do what they are supposed to do (Sasson, n.d).

Disruptive behaviour and inattentiveness

Disruptive behaviour by learners are less likely to occur if lessons are engaging, varied and enjoyable. A variance in teaching styles support learners' personalities, intelligences and learning styles. This stimulates effective learning and the attainment of motivation amongst learners (Copley 2006).

Both teacher participants alluded to learners disruptive behaviour and inattentiveness during lessons. Teacher A had the following to say about learner B. *"She always looks far fetched and most of the times stares outside the window. I have moved her to the front of the class, but still she seems disinterested. She just stares at me"*

With regard to learner A, teacher B alluded to the following: *"For three consecutive days she was disruptive and doesn't seem to care when I speak to her. She will speak and laugh with the other learner who sits next to her"*

Teachers can enhance learning and motivation through their choice of teaching methods and learning techniques (Engelbrecht, Kriegler and Booysen, 1996).

Continuous failure and repeating of many classes

A guardian and parent of both learners hold the view that continuous failure of learners seems to have a negative effect on their motivation. The guardian (grandmother) of learner B had the following to say: *"She was not good at learning in her primary school; she was still lazy to read and only loved to play. She kept on repeating so many classes. She is lazy to do school work."*

Learner A's parent articulated the follow: *"My daughter doesn't take things seriously at school. She will always complete her homework in the morning before she is supposed to leave for school"*

Gathering from the above stated, it appears that the two learners take very limited responsibility for their own learning.

Lack of discipline

Parent participants were of the view that a lack of discipline displayed by their children, seems to be contributing to their demotivation. Learner B's guardian who responded as follow: *"Help my daughter and discipline her in any way possible so that she learns. Do not just look at her please; do not allow her to practice her rights without taking responsibility at the school."*

Parent B further commented on the issue of discipline: *"Teachers should discipline my daughter. I don't get angry when she is disciplined. I believe action should be taken to ensure that she does the work."*

Parents need to become involved in educational issues and should also be in a position of tracking the progress of their children.

Learners' failure to take responsibility for their own learning

Educators and parents are of the opinion that learners' failure to take responsibility for their own learning contributed to their lack of motivation and poor school performance (Alexander, 1997). Concerning learner B's failure to take responsibility for her own learning, her guardian (grandmother) raised the following: *"She was not good at learning in her Primary school and she was still lazy to read. She only loved to play. She kept on repeating so many classes. She is lazy to do school work even now and she does not care about it."*

Both participating teachers agreed that learners A and B appear to be very playful. Learner A's parent confirmed her view regarding her child's playfulness as follow: *"At times I do think she starts playing and that's why she fails or performs poorly sometimes."*

Learners who lack motivation to learn fail to take responsibility for their own learning. The decision to learn depends largely on the learner as an individual. Learners may therefore either commit themselves to the actualization of learning motives or might for various reasons, remain passive in the teaching and learning situation (Engelbrecht, Kriegler & Booysen, 1996).

Effective teaching

A conducive classroom environment refers to the mood and atmosphere inside of a class that motivates learners to participate actively in learning activities and to be engaged in the classroom (Longren, 2010).

Teacher participants alluded to the possibility of poor classroom practices that might be the cause of a lack of motivation amongst learners. Teacher A is of the belief that effective teaching is a prerequisite for motivating learners to perform academically. Her response is as follow: *"There must be activities that involves the learners and make them to enjoy learning, the learners should not be in a formal situation all the time."*

Teacher B lamented as follow: *Subject-teachers should vary their ways of teaching if they didn't want their learners to be unmotivated to learn"*

Teacher participants were also in agreement about learners lack of knowledge of study skills. Teacher B highlighted the following with regard to learner B:

"I think she does not know some effective ways to learn. She needs to be taught some effective ways to learn such as working with the other learners and approaching educators whenever encountering some problems in her learning."

The approach how teachers interact with learners may contribute to the learners' motivation to learn. Teacher A stated:

"The students feel it when we are not good towards them; a motivating school is a school where teachers and the learners make an enjoyable environment for teaching and learning."

This state of affairs is of concern for teachers who need to be consciousness of how classroom dynamics, school environment and surrounding impact on effective teaching. All learners, including the ones who displays challenging behaviour in the classroom are entitled to the teacher's attention and the same standard of education (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005).

Parental involvement

Jaynes and Wlodloski (1990) state that the family and parents in particular appear to be the primary influence on child's motivation to learn. The family's and parents' formative influence on their children's motivation to learn seem to have an effect on their stages of development. The teacher and parent participants are great supporters of parental involvement in education matters. Teacher A commented as follow: *"There is a need to involve parents in the learners' education. Forgetting to involve the parents might make the learners not to take their education or schoolwork seriously."*

Teacher B also highlighted the need for parents' to fulfil a more significant role in the education of their children. Teacher B echoed the following sentiment: *"Parents must care for their children's schoolwork as well as tell their children why it is important to attend school"*

Mopeli (2009) confirms that learners whose parents are more involved in their education achieve higher levels of academic performance than those learners whose parents appear to be less involved.

The challenge of an apparent lack of motivation to learn amongst the two learners in this rural school setting, might be minimised via a concerted effort from all educators and various stakeholders involved in their teaching and learning of the identified learners. Amongst all the stakeholders who can contribute in eradicating the perceived lack of motivation experienced by these two learners, is the combined role and contribution to be made by teachers and parents in initiating constructive school and classroom activities in supporting learners in excelling holistically.

Conclusion

The recommendations stated below are aimed at improving learner motivation and teacher practices in rural schools and at this institution in particular. The implementation of some of the said recommendations may result with learners taking responsibility for their own learning and become motivated and enthusiastic about the teaching and learning situation. Teachers needs to take ownership for creating a teaching and learning setting which will motivate learners to develop and holistically and progress in their scholastic tasks.

The following recommendations are made with regard to the findings of this study.

The Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training should hold regular `refresher workshops` aimed at supporting teachers with knowledge and skills with regards to learner motivation. The principal and management team attached to rural school settings should make use of focused staff-meetings as to develop teachers' skills and competencies around issues of learner motivation, parental involvement and the constructive classroom behaviour strategies. This might lead teachers to reflect on their current practices and fulfil a more progressive role in supporting motivated learners, demotivated learners and learners with various barriers to learning and development.

Limitations of this study and recommendations for further study

One of the limitations of this study is that it dealt with a small number of participants (two learners, two teachers and two parents). The findings of this study can therefore not be `generalized to other contexts and the wider population of learners with motivation related school challenges. The participation of additional learners and teachers, attached to the selected case school, could yield more research rich information. A similar study can be employed to

investigate the use of creative intervention strategies to support demotivated learners in rural school settings.

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**ALEXANDER, RAMOHAI & MOKHOTLONG: TEACHER AND PARENTAL VIEWS REGARDING
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