

FOCUSING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AT SYSTEMIC LEVEL FOR IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING

What is intrinsic motivation? - Understanding the construct

Motivation drives and influences the behavior of an individual. It is the key for engagement in any activity, and therefore a discourse on motivation is highly relevant in educational contexts. While *extrinsic* motivation relates to performance of an activity for outward reward (such as recognition, awards, monetary gains and promotion), *intrinsic* motivation is akin to performance of an activity for the contentment one draws from the engagement in and completion of the activity itself. Intrinsic motivation is characterized by a desire to engage with and improve mastery of some specific activity of interest despite of any separate outward rewards or accolades.

The concept of intrinsic motivation emerged in the latter part of the 20th century, where a number of experimental studies suggested that offering rewards for an activity often correlated with a loss of interest and curiosity. The dominant framework for studying intrinsic motivation is Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Much of the literature within SDT¹ highlights that for intrinsic motivation to cultivate and thrive, three basic psychological needs are to be fulfilled; the need for autonomy, mastery and purpose.

'Autonomy' is connected to a sense of ownership and initiative in one's actions whereas 'Mastery' relates to the feeling that one can enhance one's skills and knowledge, thereby growing and succeeding. The need for 'Purpose' draws from the basic need to feel connected and be able to see the goal. The crucial part is that thwarting any of these three basic needs is seen as damaging to motivation and wellness, and thus leaving an impact on the way an individual responds to an activity of importance or interest. In the context of educational settings, it is important to configure the extent to which these settings meet or frustrate/undermine these basic needs, that is indicative of their effectiveness.

¹ Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum Publishing Co.

Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. (2000). Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being. *American Psychologist*, 55 (1), 68-78.

Pink, D.H. (2011). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. London, England: Penguin

Why does intrinsic motivation and behavior change matter in the specific context of teacher professional development in India?

Policy perspective and research evidence

In the context of teachers and teaching, *teacher motivation* refers to reasons that emanates from individuals' intrinsic values to choose to teach and sustaining teaching, and the intensity that is indicated by efforts expended on teaching-learning². The central importance and mediating role of teacher motivation has been highlighted in various policy documents both within and outside of India. *SARTHAQ* (2021)³, the implementation plan for NEP 2020 mentions the target pertaining to teachers as 'ensuring that all students at all levels of school education are taught by passionate, motivated, highly qualified, professionally trained, and well- equipped teachers' (p.120); thereby bringing the focus on not only the content and skill competency of teachers but also on their motivation and passion towards teaching-learning.

The efficiency and resilience of an educational system is contingent on a number of factors. Perhaps, one of the most crucial factors among these is the motivation that drives the teachers, the education officials and the students towards quality teaching and learning. The significance of *intrinsic motivation* is that it has been found to be correlated with various positive work-place behaviors and outcomes, such as creativity, problem-solving, cognitive flexibility and persistence.

In terms of engagement of students, studies show that while teachers' extrinsic motivation have also a significantly influence on student engagement, their *intrinsic motivation* is the most important predictor of the engagement of students⁴ (wherein student engagement corresponds to behavioral, affective, and cognitive aspects namely interest regarding academic subjects, working effectively and very hard, active participation in classroom activities, coming to class prepared, and thinking critically and analytically in the study). Moreover, when the school heads or principals are motivated and create autonomy supportive culture in the school, it may potentially facilitate teachers' autonomous motivation, satisfaction, and well-being⁵

² Han, J., & Yin, H. (2016). Teacher Motivation: Definition, Research Development and Implications for Teachers. *Cogent Education*, 3, 1-18.

³ Can be accessed at <https://dse.education.gov.in/search?q=SArthaQ#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=SArthaQ&gsc.page=1>

⁴ Demir, K. (2011). Teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as predictor of student engagement. *e- Journal of New World Sciences Academy*, 6(2)
Can be accessed at <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/185566>

⁵ Eyal, O. & Roth, G. (2011). Principal's leadership and teacher motivation: Self determination theory analysis. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(3), 256-275.

When teachers are intrinsically motivated, they are more likely to create a positive learning environment, use innovative teaching strategies, provide personalized attention to students and set high expectations not only for themselves but for their colleagues and students.

Motivated teachers are likely to influence the motivation levels of their students and highly motivated students are likely to learn and perform better than the less motivated ones. A comprehensive review of teacher motivation studies⁶ reports that this interplay of constructs have been explored in different research studies with specific focus on teacher motivation and teaching effectiveness, teacher motivation and student motivation and factors influencing teacher motivation. However, more research is needed on the possible relationships between teacher motivation, student motivation and student cognitive outcomes as the review paper highlights as very few research studies⁷ have shown that the intrinsic motivation of teachers have a statistically significant positive relationship with students' academic achievement.

Uniting the evidence and approach for effective TPD in India

Despite the critical importance accorded to intrinsic motivation in policy perspectives and the extensive research endeavors in this area, it has been observed and experienced that largely educational processes/structures aim to shape and control motivation of teachers and educational officials from the outside which is more aligned with behavioristic approaches to motivation. Most of the times the current educational policies and practices around the globe remain anchored in traditional motivational models that fail to support students' and teachers' needs of autonomy, mastery and purpose⁸. In other words, less avenues and opportunities are provided to teachers and other education officials to develop a true sense of agency, competence/growth mindset and the larger purpose of teaching and learning. In the absence of such enabling conditions, teachers

⁶ Han, J., & Yin, H. (2016). Teacher Motivation: Definition, Research Development and Implications for Teachers. *Cogent Education*, 3, 1-18.

Kalyar, M.N., Ahmad, B. & Kalyar, H. (2018). Does teacher motivation lead to student motivation? The mediating role of teaching behaviour. *Voprosy obrazovaniya / Educational Studies Moscow*, National Research University Higher School of Economics, 3, 91-119

can be accessed at <https://ideas.repec.org/a/nos/vopro/2018i3p91-119.html>

⁷ Akhtar, S.N. , Iqbal, M. & Tattah, I.A. (2017). Relationship between intrinsic motivation and student academic achievement: A secondary level evidence. *Bulletin of education and research*, 39 (2), 19-29

⁸ Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 1-11

tend to drift far from the true joy of teaching and learning and may no longer feel motivated intrinsically.

In the context of teacher development frequent observations have been made regarding passive participation of teachers in capacity building programmes. In most of the INSET programmes it has been observed that teachers attended such programmes passively, as a routine 'duty' just to be completed, without feeling inwardly motivated about it⁹. For such programmes to be impactful, it is important to understand how to rekindle the motivation of teachers towards teaching-learning and how to embed structures and processes in the system so that motivation can sustain and teachers can thrive.

Identifying 'teacher motivation' as a national issue, Ramachandran (2006)¹⁰ shares the results from a study focused on teacher motivation and job satisfaction in India. The key issues pertaining to teacher motivation as the study highlights revolve around the lack of skills to manage diversity in the classroom, poor teaching environment, burden of non-academic responsibilities on the teachers and middle tier professional (at the district and block level) that takes them away from the classroom, non-need based and forced training programmes and the increased social distance between teachers and students. A deeper analysis indicates that these issues strongly point towards the profound need of empowering and motivating the educational workforce by responding to their basic needs of- becoming increasingly competent to do their work (mastery), promoting their agency so that they take initiatives and own their work (autonomy) and have a sense of goal orientation towards the learning of students (purpose). When these needs are duly recognised and are nurtured, it may gradually help the teachers to start finding joy in their work.

Overall, the science of motivation provides a robust framework for the framing and enactment of educational policies and practices. We should aspire to align not only our policies but also our practices to the framework of intrinsic motivation for lasting improvement and impact.

⁹ NCERT (2022). Guidelines for 50 hours of continuous professional development of teachers, head teachers and teacher educators: Based on National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: NCERT

¹⁰ Vimala Ramachandran & Madhumita Pal & Sharada Jain & Sunil Shekar & Jitendra Sharma, 2006. "Teacher Motivation in India," [Working Papers](#) id:306, eSocialSciences.

How to adopt a system wide approach to prioritize intrinsic motivation in India?

NEP (2020) highlights the importance of overhauling the service environment and culture of schools by ensuring that teachers are 'a part of **vibrant, caring, and inclusive communities of teachers** and larger school complex communities', '**sharing best practices** with each other and **working collaboratively** towards the common goal of ensuring quality children learning. Teachers themselves believe that activities such as individual and collaborative research, participation in professional development networks and mentoring and peer observation make moderate to high levels of impact on the quality of their teaching. Yet avenues to participate in such activities remain limited resulting in low teachers' participation¹¹. Following the policy mandate, enabling conditions need to be created wherein teachers and officials feel a sense of autonomy, mastery/competence and purpose or a sense of relatedness (with teaching, teacher fraternity and the larger goal of teaching-learning).

The enabling conditions not only work towards the rekindling of intrinsic motivation at the individual level but are also critical from the standpoint of achieving high priority national level goals pertaining to education. For any national initiative to be successful, understanding and tapping into the mediating role of intrinsic motivation is very critical. For instance, the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) mission, launched in 2021 by the

Ministry of Education, is one of the most crucial programmes that both the central and the state governments are prioritizing to help the children achieve foundational learning standards. For the mission to achieve its goals, it is imperative that the education workforce is highly motivated and intrinsically driven towards foundational stage teaching and learning. While the focus on imparting *content and skill* based professional development opportunities to teachers is important to build their pedagogical capabilities, *creating a conducive environment aimed at reigniting intrinsic motivation* will help build and strengthen the momentum of the FLN mission.

Key approach for rekindling and sustaining motivation at the systemic level

- **Establishing Communities of Practice (CoPs)/Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**- Building communities of teachers and educational officials at the State, District, Block, Cluster, School level and supporting these communities to develop a culture of collaborative and peer learning will be beneficial to nurture the intrinsic motivation at every rung of the system.

¹¹ OECD (2009). Creating effective teaching and learning environments. Paris: OECD

- **Institutionalising processes for promoting agency, growth mindset and goal orientation-** The CoPs of teachers and officials need to be supported to help embed the habits of sharing evidence informed best practices, reflection, contextualizing practices, developing plans to put ideas into action, observation, providing constructive feedback and appreciation amongst the education workforce. These practices have to be role modelled at every level leading to rekindling and sustaining of intrinsic motivation at each level and an observable systemic behaviour change.
- **Cultivating System-wide Coaching and Mentoring approach-** Through systemic efforts of regular mentoring and coaching of the existing cadre of officials and teachers, an enabling environment is to be created for giving primacy to the cultivation of joy of teaching-learning. For the change to be visible at the school and classroom level, the psychological needs of students in terms of having agency, mastery and purpose are to be nurtured through autonomy supportive classroom environment providing meaningful and level appropriate learning activities.
- **Ownership for sustained and long term impact-** For intrinsic motivation to sustain and flourish, inputs need to be periodically gathered by the governments from the system and the necessary conditions have to be worked upon continuously to help nurture the autonomy, mastery and purpose orientation of all the stakeholders including the students.

Nurturing intrinsic motivation and its sustenance in the longer run require a holistic system wide approach where the basic needs of autonomy, mastery and purpose of the educational workforce at different levels are deeply understood and addressed on a continuum.