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PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN THE FORMATION OF STUDENT MOTIVATION

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Abstract: Student motivation is a complex construct shaped by intertwined psychological, social, and pedagogical factors. Contemporary educational psychology emphasizes that motivation is not a stable trait but a dynamic state emerging from the interaction between students' inner world and their learning environment. This article synthesizes theoretical and empirical findings on the psychological factors underlying the formation of student motivation, with particular attention to self-determination theory, value–semantic orientations, self-related beliefs, emotional states, and social context. Research shows that satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness is a central pathway to autonomous (self determined) motivation, which predicts higher academic persistence, well being, and achievement. Personal values, meaningful life goals, and the need for self realization form the value foundation of internal academic motivation. Self efficacy, locus of control, self esteem, and self acceptance shape how students interpret success and failure and determine their willingness to expend effort and persist in the face of difficulties. Emotional factors such as anxiety and affective climate can either undermine or support motivation, while teacher behaviors, classroom climate, and peer relations mediate the impact of these internal factors. By integrating evidence from meta-analyses, empirical studies, and critical reviews, the article highlights that effective interventions to foster student motivation must simultaneously address psychological needs, cognitive–emotional processes, and the broader learning environment. The conclusion argues for a holistic, culturally sensitive approach in which educators deliberately design autonomy supportive, competence enhancing, and relationally rich learning experiences that align with students' values and long term purposes.

Keywords: student motivation; psychological factors; self determination theory; basic psychological needs; internal motivation; self efficacy; values; anxiety; educational environment.

Motivation is often described as the driving force behind learning, yet it is not a simple energy that students either possess or lack. In educational psychology, motivation is understood as a multidimensional construct that encompasses the reasons, goals, and inner states that prompt students to initiate, direct, and sustain academic behavior. For learners at any level, motivation determines whether they approach learning tasks with curiosity and persistence or with reluctance and avoidance. Importantly, motivation is formed at the intersection of psychological factors within the student and the conditions created by family, school, and society. The question of which psychological factors shape student motivation is central, because motivation is consistently linked to academic performance,



Date: 3rdDecember-2025

persistence, and well being. When motivation is predominantly self determined—arising from genuine interest, curiosity, and internalized values—students tend to achieve higher levels of learning and experience greater satisfaction and resilience. Conversely, when motivation is driven mainly by external pressure or fear of failure, learning often becomes formal and instrumental, with limited depth of engagement.

A foundational theoretical lens for understanding the psychological formation of motivation is self determination theory, and specifically its component, basic psychological needs theory. This framework posits that human beings possess three universal psychological needs: competence (the experience of effectiveness in one's activities), autonomy (the experience of volition and psychological freedom), and relatedness (the experience of connection and belonging). When these needs are satisfied within the educational context, students are more likely to develop autonomous forms of motivation, in which learning is pursued out of personal interest or deeply held values rather than external control. A large meta-analysis of 144 studies involving over 79,000 students shows that competence is the strongest positive predictor of self determined motivation, followed by autonomy and then relatedness. This means that students' belief that they can master academic tasks—supported by appropriate challenges and constructive feedback—is a central psychological factor in fostering robust motivation. At the same time, autonomy is not equivalent to doing whatever one wants; rather, it involves experiencing a sense of choice and ownership over learning goals and strategies. When teachers adopt autonomy supportive practices—such as offering meaningful rationales, acknowledging students' perspectives, and allowing some choice—students report higher satisfaction of their needs and stronger autonomous motivation than when similar support comes from parents, indicating the special role of classroom interactions in the daily formation of motivation.

However, motivation is not determined solely by situational needs satisfaction. Internal motivation develops on the basis of deeper value—semantic and personal characteristics. Research on students' internal academic motivation highlights that meaningful life goals, internal locus of control, and personal autonomy are key psychological foundations of learning self determination. Students who see their studies as aligned with long term purposes—such as self realization, professional growth, and contribution to society—are more likely to experience learning as personally meaningful and to maintain effort even in the absence of immediate rewards. Values of personal development, spiritual pleasure, and creativity, alongside a supportive space of interpersonal interactions, help create conditions in which academic motivation can form and grow . A recent critical review across diverse countries identifies psychological values as one of six pivotal factors influencing learning motivation, noting that in many Eastern contexts, such values (for instance, diligence, perseverance, and respect for learning) are particularly salient determinants of motivation, while Western literature often emphasizes social and environmental influences. This cultural nuance suggests that the psychological formation of motivation is intertwined with broader value systems and must be understood within sociocultural frameworks.



Date: 3rdDecember-2025

Closely connected to values are self related beliefs and attitudes: self efficacy, self esteem, self acceptance, and perceived control. Self efficacy—the belief in one’s capability to organize and execute actions required to achieve specific goals—plays a critical role in whether students engage with challenging tasks or avoid them. Empirical work on internal academic motivation shows that self esteem, self acceptance, self understanding, and self confidence all contribute to the formation of learning motivation and encourage the development of professionally important qualities. When students feel capable, worthy, and accepted, they are more likely to interpret setbacks as temporary and controllable rather than as evidence of personal inadequacy. Locus of control—whether individuals attribute outcomes to internal efforts or external forces—also shapes motivational patterns. Students with a more internal locus of control perceive academic success as dependent on their actions, which reinforces their willingness to invest effort and persist. Research on internal psychological factors and achievement motivation indicates that students with higher motivation to succeed tend to choose moderate, realistic levels of risk and show a stronger, more sustained desire to attain goals, whereas those dominated by fear of failure either opt for very low or excessively high risks, undermining effective engagement. This interplay between success motivation, risk preference, and hope for success highlights the mechanisms by which internal psychological factors channel motivation into concrete learning behavior.

Emotional and affective factors further shape the development and expression of student motivation. Emotions are not mere by products of motivation; they are integral components that can amplify or disrupt motivational processes. Anxiety, in particular, has a complex relationship with learning motivation. A correlational study among elementary school students found a significant association between anxiety, broader psychological conditions, and motivation to learn science. While moderate levels of concern can sometimes activate effort, heightened or chronic anxiety often narrows attention, reduces working memory efficiency, and undermines students’ confidence in their abilities, thereby weakening intrinsic motivation and leading to avoidance of challenging tasks. In higher education, research demonstrates that basic psychological need satisfaction is associated with more positive affect and higher self reported motivation, which in turn are linked to better academic performance. Courses perceived as more motivating are characterized by higher satisfaction of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, higher positive affect, lower negative affect, and better grades, suggesting that affective climate is a powerful mediator between psychological needs and motivational outcomes. These findings point to the importance of creating emotionally safe and supportive learning environments in which mistakes are treated as opportunities for growth rather than as threats to self worth.

Beyond internal dispositions and emotional states, the formation of student motivation is deeply embedded in social and pedagogical contexts. Classroom climate, the nature of teacher–student relationships, and the structure of learning activities are decisive in shaping students’ motivational experiences. Empirical investigations into psychological factors influencing motivation show that participation in discussions, conferences, and competitions; collaborative group work; and the use of innovative technological methods



Date: 3rdDecember-2025

can significantly enhance students' motivation to study. These practices not only make learning more interactive and engaging but also satisfy needs for relatedness and competence, as students experience themselves as active contributors to a community of learners. In primary education, research on sustainable learning motivation emphasizes the role of emotional engagement, teacher–student interaction, and innovative teaching methods, concluding that a supportive educational environment and differentiated instruction are crucial for maintaining long term motivation. When teaching strategies are adapted to individual differences, offer optimal challenges, and include constructive feedback, students are more likely to experience success and to internalize positive academic identities.

School structures and broader institutional practices also matter. A literature review on variables influencing learning motivation identifies six interrelated clusters: psychological values, cognitive factors, social and environmental influences, demographic characteristics, academic background and study habits, and interventions and programs. Social and environmental factors include classroom norms, assessment systems, availability of resources, and the overall school ethos. For example, grading practices that focus exclusively on summative evaluation and social comparison may foster performance goals and extrinsic motives (such as striving for high marks or avoiding failure) at the expense of intrinsic interest. By contrast, formative feedback that emphasizes progress, mastery, and strategies supports students' sense of competence and autonomy, thereby strengthening internal motivation. Moreover, institutional efforts to integrate psychologically informed instructional activities—such as teaching students about growth mindsets, attributional styles, or the malleability of intelligence—have been shown to change students' beliefs about themselves and their learning environment, improving both motivation and performance. This line of work underscores that psychological factors are not fixed attributes of students; they can be shaped through deliberate pedagogical interventions.

Family background and social identity further interact with psychological processes to influence motivation. A review of academic motivation among ethnic minority students synthesizes findings from forty five studies and shows that individual, family related, school related, and broader social factors all play potential roles. Family expectations, parental involvement, and experiences of discrimination or stereotype threat can either support or undermine students' motivational orientations. However, the evidence base is fragmentary, with many factors examined in only a single study and limited capacity to build an integrative model, highlighting a significant research gap. Similarly, socio psychological analyses of professional motivation in specialized educational settings note that students' attitudes toward their future careers, their motivational needs, and the impact of social environmental factors (such as institutional culture or peer norms) are critical to understanding how professional learning motivation forms and evolves. These findings suggest that motivation should be seen as co constructed between individuals and their social worlds, with psychological factors operating within a matrix of expectations, opportunities, and constraints.



Date: 3rdDecember-2025

The content and perceived purpose of learning tasks are also pivotal psychological determinants of motivation. When students view academic activities as relevant to their personal interests, future profession, or broader life plans, they are more likely to engage in deep learning. Studies on motivation as a factor in forming future specialists argue that the main motive in students' learning activities should be educational and cognitive interest; when external, utilitarian motives dominate, learning tends to become formal and lacks creativity and independent goal setting. Cognitive motives, such as curiosity, desire for mastery, and enjoyment of problem solving, channel the natural human need for development into productive academic behavior. At the same time, students rarely act from a single motive; rather, their activity is driven by a constellation of motives, some of which are primary and others secondary. For instance, a student might be simultaneously motivated by enjoyment of a subject, desire for a prestigious career, and fear of disappointing family. The relative strength and organization of these motives determine whether motivation is experienced as autonomous or controlled, resilient or fragile.

Another important dimension concerns the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and how background factors influence their development. Research with university students learning English as a foreign language shows that demographics such as age, field of study, and occupation do not necessarily determine whether learners are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. In that context, many students reported predominantly intrinsic motives and considered motivation itself a factor of great significance for success. This finding challenges simplistic assumptions that certain groups are naturally more extrinsically driven and suggests that instructional design and classroom culture may carry more weight than static background characteristics. Moreover, a study of business students' academic performance confirms that motivation significantly predicts both perceived and objective indicators of academic success, alongside mental and physical health, work–life balance, and anxiety. This reinforces the notion that motivation is part of a broader psychological ecosystem that includes well being and stress regulation.

The psychological mechanisms underlying the development of the motivational sphere are multifaceted. Personality development, communication patterns, and even the use of humor can influence motivation, while external factors such as study conditions, financial support, and relationships with teachers and peers also play a role. Contemporary psychologists emphasize that motivational properties are shaped by both professional aspirations and contextual circumstances, requiring integrated psychological and pedagogical approaches to support their positive development. From this perspective, motivation is not merely “enhanced” by adding rewards or punishments; it is cultivated by aligning educational practices with students' basic needs, values, self beliefs, and emotional realities.

Conditions

In conclusion, the formation of student motivation is best understood as a dynamic process in which multiple psychological factors converge. At the core lie the basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness; when satisfied, they give rise to autonomous motivation, positive affect, and better academic performance.



Date: 3rdDecember-2025

Surrounding this core is a network of value–semantic orientations, self related beliefs, and emotional states. Meaningful life goals, personal development values, and the need for self realization provide a sense of purpose that sustains internal motivation. Self efficacy, self esteem, and internal locus of control enable students to interpret challenges as surmountable and to persist in the face of difficulties. Emotional conditions, particularly the management of anxiety and cultivation of positive affect, either reinforce or erode these motivational foundations. Social and pedagogical environments—including teacher autonomy support, classroom climate, collaborative learning, family influence, and institutional culture—mediate and shape how these internal factors are expressed. Because motivation is formed at the intersection of these psychological and contextual processes, effective educational practice must be holistic and intentional. Educators and policymakers who aim to foster strong, enduring student motivation should design learning environments that support autonomy, build competence through optimally challenging and meaningful tasks, nurture warm relationships, and address students' emotional and value based needs. Such an integrated approach not only enhances academic performance but also contributes to the development of resilient, self determined individuals capable of lifelong learning.

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Date: 3rdDecember-2025

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