

5-9-2013

What Motivates the Minds of Level Three Spanish Students: The Effects of Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation for Classroom Success

Elizabeth Zaplatosch
Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.valpo.edu/sarp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zaplatosch, Elizabeth, "What Motivates the Minds of Level Three Spanish Students: The Effects of Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation for Classroom Success" (2013). *Education Senior Action Research Projects*. Paper 37.
<http://scholar.valpo.edu/sarp/37>

This Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Education at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Senior Action Research Projects by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.



What Motivates the Minds of Level Three Spanish Students?



Abstract

This study examines elements of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in third year Spanish students and how these different varieties of motivation affect their success and attendance in class. A brief survey was given to 6 sections of Spanish level three (including 2 regular classes and 4 Pre-IB/honors classes). In the survey, which the students took anonymously, the students were asked to comment on their grades, attendance in class, and their reasoning behind taking Spanish class as an elective in high school. This study aims to discover a correlation between intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation and grades/attendance. According to contemporary research in motivational education, students that are motivated by intrinsic factors, such as a true interest and love for learning, are more likely to receive high grades and attend class more often than students motivated by extrinsic factors, such as grades or parental influence.

Literature Review

The following are key elements of research based evidence that I have found pertaining to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in secondary education:

-Intrinsic motivation is motivation that is inspired from internal factors, such as genuine enjoyment for a topic. An example of intrinsic motivation in language learning is learning because languages are intriguing and present a worthy and rewarding challenge for a learner.

-Extrinsic motivation is motivation that is inspired from external factors such as parental influence or the desire to get good grades, for example. Students that are motivated by extrinsic factors typically are only able to make a superficial connection with the material they learn.

-Often, extrinsic factors can underlie seemingly genuine motivation. For example, students may have intrinsic goals, like achieving satisfaction with their learning, but may still be motivated by extrinsic factors like grades or praise from others.

Conclusion: Specifically for language learning, educators must encourage students to have purely intrinsic motivators in their learning. To promote intrinsic motivation, teachers should emphasize real-world application and relevance to the lives of the students in their instruction.

Completed By:

Elizabeth Zaplatosch,
Professor Del Gillispie
Valparaiso University

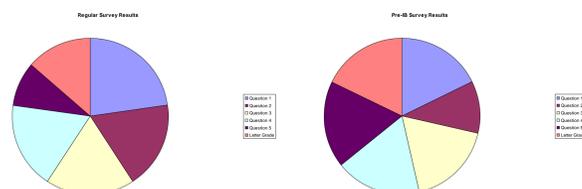
Methodology I

Setting/context: This study was conducted in a set of six different high school Spanish classes. The school in which the study was conducted is located in a moderate sized town in Indiana composed of mainly middle class families. The population has a Caucasian majority, though small amounts of diversity exist in the community.

Subjects/participants: The students that participated in this study come from level three, Spanish classrooms in a high school. A total of 154 students participated, and the population is composed of two regular and four Pre-IB classes. The students are mainly Caucasian, though there are 3 native speakers of the target language and several minority students included in the population.

Data Tables

The graphs below depict the survey results for both the Pre-IB classes and the Regular classes. See column to the right for data analysis.



Research Question

Do intrinsic motivation factors result in a higher grade and attendance rate for third-year Spanish students than extrinsic motivation factors?

Methodology II

Description of Research Methodology: In this study, a survey was distributed to 154 level three Spanish students (from both regular and Pre-IB classes) to be completed during class time. The students were given no previous indication of the content of the survey, and they were assured that all answers are anonymous and confidential. The survey was composed of questions designed to pinpoint the factors that motivate students to succeed in a language course, with options that discuss extrinsic motivators as well as options that present intrinsic motivators. The survey also asked students how many times they have been absent from class, as well as what their estimated grade for the course is. These variables are designed to demonstrate a correlation between motivation and success in the classroom. After the students took the survey they were debriefed on the purpose of the survey and how their answers provide valuable research statistics.

Data Analysis

According to the survey results, the majority of students that have a high grade (A or B) in level three Spanish classes at the high school level are motivated by internal factors, such as a love for language learning or a passion for exploring new cultures. Typically, the students that selected answers on the survey that indicated intrinsic motivation also indicated a higher letter grade and attendance rate. The opposite also is true; according to the results of the survey, the students that are motivated more by extrinsic factors such as parental influence typically range between letter grades B-D (with a lower attendance rate). Of course, there were a number of exceptions, where there was no visible correlation between motivation and success or attendance. However, the majority of the surveys aligned with the hypothesis of this experimentation: intrinsic motivation often indicates higher grades and attendance than extrinsic motivation.

Conclusions

Students that are motivated by intrinsic factors are much more likely to succeed in school by earning high grades and having a high attendance rate. On the other hand, students that are motivated by extrinsic factors often make only a superficial connection to the material they are learning, often hindering their success with language learning. There are some limitations for this study. First, the population was not very diverse. That is, because of the lack of minority students and differences in socioeconomic status among the Spanish level three students at this particular school, many of the students come from similar backgrounds. This may narrow the results of the study mainly to one particular population. Also, some students may not have known an accurate estimate of their grade if they do not regularly check, so their answer on the survey may not have been entirely accurate. The concept of intrinsic motivation and the research regarding the topic does suggest, however, that these findings are likely applicable to many types of students.

Implications

Impact on Student Participants: The results of this survey and experimentation serve as an indication to students that they should conjure motivation from intrinsic sources rather than extrinsic sources. That is, students should be encouraged to find a true interest and passion for learning rather than focusing entirely on outside influences like grades and parental influence. With an authentic enjoyment for learning, grades will likely, in turn, improve. One strength of this study for the students is that it gave them the opportunity for self-reflection on their own goals and desires for learning. A weakness of the study is that some students were not aware of the status of their grade, so they had to estimate. Students that do not take initiative or are not motivated may not have known an accurate estimate for their grade.

Impact on the field of education and other teachers at the school: For the field of education in general, my findings suggest that truly effective teaching should motivate students intrinsically in order for them to experience genuine success and happiness in the classroom. In order to truly motivate students, this study should encourage educators to create lesson plans that are interesting, interactive, and relevant to the students' lives so that they are more relatable to and enjoyable for the students. The whole purpose of teaching is to serve the students in the best way possible. By motivating them and making learning enjoyable for the students, we meet our expectations as educators.