

The Application Of Self-Determination Theory In Enhancing Learning Motivation Among Vietnamese Students: A Review

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Abstract: This paper provides a comprehensive review of the utilization of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and its six constituent theories to augment learning motivation among Vietnamese students. SDT posits that individuals are driven to pursue experiences that fulfil their fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The application of SDT in the educational landscape of Vietnam has emerged as a promising approach to bolstering learning motivation. The core principles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness have been effectively implemented within classrooms and schools, resulting in heightened intrinsic motivation, engagement, and academic achievement among students. These findings underscore the significance of establishing a supportive and engaging learning environment grounded in SDT principles, as it addresses the limitations of traditional teaching practices and contributes to the overall well-being of students. Nonetheless, further research is imperative to explore the enduring effects of implementing these theories in Vietnamese educational settings and to identify strategies for their successful and efficient implementation.

Key Word: Learning motivation; Self-Determination Theory; Vietnamese education.

Date of Submission: 09-06-2023

Date of Acceptance: 19-06-2023

I. Introduction

In recent decades, researchers worldwide have focused on human motivation. In Vietnam, studies have explored learning motivation, using a range of theories and models to explain it. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory, and Self-determination theory have been widely used to explain human motivation, each offering unique perspectives on how motivation works. Although past studies have made valuable contributions to our understanding of motivation, there is still much left to explore. This article aims to explore the application of Self-determination theory in Vietnamese education and propose future research directions.

II. Material And Methods

Learning motivation

Theoretically, motivation refers to the instinctual factors that influence the drive to fulfil or achieve a specific goal [1]. Brophy defines motivation as a theoretical construct used to describe the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of goal-directed behaviour [2]. According to Ryan and Deci, a person who lacks motivation has no inspiration or desire to complete a task or action. On the other hand, a motivated person is energised and actively working towards a goal [3]. In summary, motivation is the factor that urges a person to take action, provides direction, and keeps them engaged in that action until the goal is achieved.

In terms of education, motivation is what drives students to learn new things. A student can be motivated to learn a new skill because they know its potential utility or value will help them get a better grade, or because of curiosity and interest [3]. Furthermore, learning motivation refers primarily to the quality of students' cognitive engagement in a learning activity, not the intensity of the physical effort they devote to it or the time they spend on it [2]. According to [4], there are seven factors that promote motivation: challenge, curiosity, control, fantasy, competition, cooperation and recognition. Therefore, students vary not only in the level of motivation (or how much motivation), but also in the type of that motivation.

Learning motivation theories

Brophy, when researching the development of the concept of motivation, divided it into 4 groups: Behaviour Reinforcement Theories, Need Theories, Goal Theories and Intrinsic Motivation Theories [2]. Behavior Reinforcement Theories propose that reinforcement is the primary mechanism for establishing and maintaining behavior instead of drives or needs. A reinforcer is any stimulus that enhances or maintains a

behavior. For instance, grades or rewards can be used to recognize students' efforts and motivate them to continue performing well. Needs theories are the first theories that appear as alternatives to Behaviour Reinforcement Theories. These theories hold that behaviour is the result of need. Among them, Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs is the most widely known and influential. This theory proposes that human needs are arranged in a hierarchical order, with physiological needs being the most fundamental, followed by safety, love and belonging, esteem, and finally, self-actualization. According to Maslow [5], individuals strive to meet their needs in this order, with higher-level needs becoming more salient as lower-level needs are satisfied.

Although both of these theories suggest that behavior is motivated by external requirements or internal needs, they do not explain the direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of behavior. Goal theories were developed to address these questions. Goals are something that individuals are committed to achieving and can be monitored and evaluated. Goals refer to something that an individual is committed to achieving and can be monitored and evaluated. Goal theories suggest that motivation arises from people's active desires, which help to direct, maintain, and enhance behavioral outcomes. In other words, people are motivated to achieve their goals, and this motivation is what helps to shape their behavior. After the theory of goals, there is a shift in research direction from emphasizing motivations coming from external pressures to motivations stemming from internal desires, self-determination of goals and self-regulation. behavior. Intrinsic motivation theories describe people pursuing their own needs and wants, doing something because they want it, not because they need to do it. Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory states that social settings promote intrinsic motivation when they satisfy three innate psychological needs: autonomy (self-determination in deciding what to do and how to do it), competence (developing and exercising skills for manipulating and controlling the environment), and relatedness (affiliation with others through prosocial relationships) [3]

This article aims to provide an in-depth explanation of Self-Determination Theory and its application in Vietnamese education.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a widely accepted theory of human motivation and well-being is a theory of motivation developed by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan [3]. It explains how different forms of motivation (from autonomous to controlled motivation) can predict outcomes such as performance, engagement, vitality, and psychological health. The theory distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivations. To be autonomous involves acting with a full sense of volition, endorsement, and choice, whereas, to be controlled involves feeling externally pressured or compelled to behave whether by the promise of a contingent reward, fear of punishment, ego involvement, or other external factors There are hundreds of studies have shown that autonomous motivation leads to better performance, creativity, persistence, and overall well-being. SDT also emphasizes the importance of satisfying the basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, which promote self-regulation, social relationships, and well-being. Social environments that support the satisfaction of these needs lead to positive outcomes, while those that thwart the satisfaction of these needs lead to negative outcomes. Several studies have highlighted the potential benefits of applying SDT in educational settings. For example, Vansteenkiste et al. [6] found that providing autonomy-supportive classroom environments led to increased motivation, engagement, and academic achievement among high school students in Belgium. Similarly, Reeve et al. [7] demonstrated the positive effects of an autonomy-supportive teaching style on middle school students' intrinsic motivation and achievement in the United States.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro-theory that comprises six mini-theories developed at different times to explain a circumscribed set of motivational phenomena emerging from research programs in the laboratory and applied settings [8]. Although the six mini-theories do not constitute the whole of SDT, most phenomena explained within this theoretical tradition can be located within one of these mini-theories.

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) explains a set of phenomena related to intrinsic motivation and the social contextual conditions that can either undermine, maintain, or enhance it [8]. Intrinsic motivation refers to the inherent motivation that energizes people to do things they find interesting and enjoyable. Intrinsic motivation is the prototype of self-determination, which is why SDT research began with the study of intrinsic motivation. Research has found, for example, that extrinsic rewards - the so-called "carrot and stick" approach to motivation - as well as deadlines, evaluations, and close supervision tend to diminish people's intrinsic motivation for the activity [9], whereas providing choice and acknowledging people's feelings tend to enhance their intrinsic motivation. SDT explains that external events such as rewards, punishments, and evaluations can undermine people's feelings of autonomy, whereas choice and acknowledgments tend to support their autonomy satisfaction, thus affecting their intrinsic motivation accordingly.

Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) explains how individuals integrate various behavioral regulations into their sense of self and how this integration affects their motivation to engage in specific behaviors. According to OIT, individuals have varying degrees of autonomy or self-determination in their motivation for engaging in a particular behavior.

According to Ryan and Deci [3], the originators of OIT proposed that individuals can be motivated through five different levels of regulation:

1. Amotivation - lack of motivation or interest in a behavior
2. External Regulation - motivation that comes from external sources such as rewards or punishments.
3. Introjected Regulation - motivation is driven by internal pressures such as feelings of guilt or shame.
4. Identified Regulation - motivation that is integrated into one's values and beliefs.
5. Integrated Regulation - integration of behavior into one's sense of self, where the individual sees the behavior as important to their identity.

Studies have shown that higher levels of autonomy and self-determination in motivation lead to greater academic achievement and satisfaction with university life [10]. Therefore, understanding the regulatory processes that underpin student motivation can assist educators and counselors in designing interventions to increase intrinsic motivation and engagement in academic activities.

Causality Orientation Theory (COT) proposes that individuals differ in their orientation toward causality, which in turn influences their motivation for a task or activity. According to COT, individuals can be classified into three categories based on their causality orientation: autonomy-oriented, control-oriented, and impersonal-oriented.

Autonomy-oriented individuals have an internal locus of control and prefer activities that allow them to exercise their personal autonomy. Control-oriented individuals, on the other hand, have an external locus of control and prefer activities that provide clear guidelines and rules. Impersonal-oriented individuals believe that outcomes are determined by factors beyond their control and may lack the motivation to engage in tasks or activities. Studies have shown that students with an autonomy orientation are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and achieve higher academic success compared to those with a control or impersonal orientation [11]. Moreover, students who are taught to adopt an autonomy orientation towards learning have been found to exhibit greater intrinsic motivation and engagement in academic tasks [12]. Therefore, understanding the causality orientation of university students can inform educators and counselors in designing interventions to enhance student motivation and engagement in academic activities.

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) elaborates on the nature of evolved psychological needs and their relation to psychological health and well-being. BPNT proposes that there are three basic psychological needs - competence, autonomy, and relatedness - which are universal and essential for the well-being and optimal functioning of all people. The theory further argues that social contexts that promote the satisfaction of these needs will promote well-being and effectiveness, whereas those that interfere with the needs will promote ill-being and less effective functioning. BPNT also completed the functional specification of what needs satisfaction ultimately supports when combined with CET, OIT, and COT. Need satisfaction predicts greater intrinsic motivation and perceived competence (CET), internalization and integration of regulatory processes, including emotion regulation (OIT), and the development of autonomous motivational orientations (COT). Furthermore, BPNT shows how these motivations, regulations, and orientations result in greater wellness, vitality, and healthier functioning.

Goal Content Theory (GCT) is a framework that seeks to explain the motivational processes underlying goal pursuit. It suggests that people are motivated to pursue certain goals because of the content or nature of those goals. This theory proposes that different types of goals evoke different types of motivation and that the specific focus of an individual's goals can influence their behavior, cognition, and affect.

In the context of university students, GCT could help explain why some students are more motivated to pursue academic goals than others. For example, if a student values learning for its own sake and has the desire to understand complex concepts, they may be more likely to be motivated by mastery goals (goals focused on improving one's skills or knowledge) rather than performance goals (goals focused on demonstrating competence or outperforming others).

One study that applied GCT to the motivation of university students was conducted by Elliot and Church [13]. They found that students who had a stronger orientation towards mastery goals tended to have higher levels of intrinsic motivation and better academic achievement than those who were more focused on performance goals. The authors suggested that universities should foster an environment that encourages mastery-oriented goal-setting in order to promote student motivation and success.

Overall, GCT provides a useful framework for understanding how the nature of goals influences motivation in university students and may have practical implications for promoting academic success.

Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT) is a motivational framework that suggests that individuals are motivated to build and maintain relationships with others. According to Ryan & Deci [14], social connections play a vital role in shaping an individual's motivation and behavior. This theory posits that the quality of social relationships one has can influence their level of motivation and engagement in various activities, including academic pursuits.

In the context of university students, RMT proposes that positive relationships with peers, teachers, and mentors can foster greater academic motivation. Supportive relationships can provide students with emotional and instrumental resources that help them overcome challenges and persist in their academic goals. Conversely, negative or unsupportive relationships can hinder academic motivation and lead to disengagement from academic pursuits.

To sum up, establishing and maintaining close relationships are among the most important and autonomously pursued aspects of people's lives. Need support to predict better dyadic functioning, more trust, volitional reliance, greater wellness, and mutuality of need support yields the most positive relationship outcomes.

III. Application of Self-Determination Theory in Vietnam

In Vietnam, traditional teaching practices have often relied on a teacher-centered approach at all levels of education, due to the long-standing influence of Confucius and Feudalism [15]. Teaching in Vietnam has been mainly viewed as teachers lecturing and students taking notes, where rote and passive learning with little questioning and few thinking skills dominate. To address this issue, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has emerged as a promising alternative to foster a more supportive and engaging learning environment. SDT recognizes that students have inherent psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and that these needs must be fulfilled for them to be motivated and engaged in their learning. Several studies have explored the application of SDT principles in Vietnamese classrooms and schools, demonstrating the potential for more student-centered and interactive learning experiences. By promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness, SDT offers a path toward a more effective and fulfilling education system in Vietnam.

For instance, Bui Thi Thuy Hang et al. [16] conducted a study of 277 first-year vocational college students in Hanoi. They examined the impact of teacher autonomy and management board support on students' motivation and perceived evaluation. The results indicated that teachers and administrators not only play a crucial role in creating an environment that fosters internal student motivation, but also influence academic performance and the likelihood of dropping out. Students are encouraged to take self-initiated actions in the environment created by teachers and administrators.

Another study by Phan Thi Thanh Hang [17] investigates the motivation of Vietnamese technical English majors in their English studies, as well as the factors that influence their motivation. The data for this thesis were collected over the course of ten months from seven Vietnamese technical English majors and eight of their English teachers. Research has found that the English educational environment, including teachers and classmates, has the biggest impact on motivation. However, personal values of English knowledge and social networks also play a role. These networks motivate and guide participants and shape their learning strategies and goals. When participants lose motivation, their values and sense of responsibility can help them regain it.

A study on the motivation of both English and non-English majors revealed surprising results [18]. Not only English-major students but also non-English-major students have intrinsic motivation in learning English. This is opposite to what teachers argue, that only English majors have intrinsic motivation. The study found that external motivation was the only factor that could generate high effort in English majors, leading to success in their learning. The research also emphasizes the role of the instructor in motivating students and giving them autonomy in learning. For non-English majors, studying is often a requirement for other purposes such as work or promotion. At this point, students are motivated by external pressure, which can undermine internal motivation [3]. The teacher's job at this stage is to listen to the student's opinions and help them achieve their goals while finding appropriate ways to learn.

IV. Conclusion

In summary, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) shows great potential in boosting learning motivation among Vietnamese students. Despite only being used in educational research for around a decade, SDT's results have challenged some conventional ideas about teaching and learning, and have sparked many new areas of research aimed at improving the quality of education in Vietnam.

These studies have demonstrated the role of intrinsic motivation in students' learning outcomes, as well as their interest and attachment to the subject. Students who are supported in their autonomy, inspired, and motivated achieve better results than those who study due to external pressures such as grades, punishment, etc. Additionally, all of the above studies confirm the important role of teachers in fostering students' internal motivation. Teachers serve as guides and create autonomous environments to promote student learning. This approach is in contrast to the traditional teaching method in Vietnam, where the teacher is the center of the class and learners are not free to express opinions, debate, and critique. To support students, teachers need to develop strategies that continue to innovate teaching methods based on technology acquisition. This will change education in a direction where students can participate more in activities that involve connection and interaction between lecturers with students, students with students, and students with technology. Teachers should also

develop a plan for learner interaction and exchange through forums and discussion groups. The application of Self-Determination Theory to future research will promote the creation of an educational environment where learners are motivated to develop more holistically.

Future studies can focus on examining the specific factors that contribute to creating a supportive classroom environment and motivating students to set challenging goals. This can include exploring the role of teachers, parents, and peers in promoting learning motivation, as well as investigating the impact of cultural and social factors on students' motivation to learn.

Moreover, given the rapid changes in technology and globalization, future research can explore how these factors impact students' motivation to learn in the digital age. For example, while technology has already played a significant role in education, there is still much that we do not know about how it can be utilized to enhance students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are the key constructs of Self-Determination Theory. Additionally, research can also examine the impact of globalization on students' motivation to learn in a digital age, particularly with the growing importance of cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Finally, future research can also explore how technology can be used to promote students' sense of belonging and community, which are critical for fostering motivation to learn in any educational context.

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