Student Motivation during COVID19: Motivation Theory Perspective

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Abstract: *This study is a qualitative paper about the amount and intensity of student motivation during COVID 19. This study views motivation as a process and tries to find out reasons of reduction in motivation using different motivation theory-based perspectives. The study focuses on need element of motivational process and discusses how dissatisfaction of needsof children lowers motivation. The motivational models of Maslow's Hierarchical Need Theory, Weiner's Attribution Theory and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) have been used to explain the need-based approach of motivation. The paper concludes with major issues or problems of online learning and probable solutions.*

Key Words: *COVID, Maslow, Motivation, Need, Self-determination theory, Weiner.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

According to WHO, globally the number of Corona cases have risen to 99,404,510 withnumber of deaths at 2,132,012. WHO reports show in India upto 24th January 2021 there have been 10,655,641 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with153,378 deaths. Globally COVID-19 situation has affected all the sectors of the economy including education sector with1.6 billion children in 192 countries and 63 million teachers being affected by closures of educational institutions. UNESCO report states globally COVID had affected more than120 crores of students and more than 32 crores in India including 14 crores of primary and 13 crores of secondary children (Jena, 2020).

From March to June 2020, primary education level (which is compulsory and necessary for every child) was affected with 86% of children being eliminated from schools in less developed nations. This dropout may be a serious concern as UN reports 24 million children may not return to school in post COVID scenario. UNESCO reports 23.8 million additional children will dropout post COVID due to economic issues faced by their families as unemployment, business problems. COVID has resulted in student debt, shift to digital learning, poverty, homelessness as well as negatively influenced children's education (Jain &Agarwal, 2020).

Henrietta Fore, executive director of United Nations Children's Fund, states that 460 million children across the globe are without online access and computers. UNICEF reports girl children are worst affected as 20% of them in East Asia and Pacific did not have access to online education and 69% of them reported studying for lesser hours (Babb & Buchanan, 2020). 67% parents agreed their girls were facing increase in household responsibilities reducing study time. Psychological effect of pandemic was higher in female students, younger students aged 18 to 24 years, Asian students, low socioeconomic students, students exposed to more than eight hours of screen exposure in a day, students having poor health, students whose family or loved ones are suffering from COVID-19 (North Carolina State University, 2021).Article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights states "Everyone has the Right to Education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages." Article 21A of Indian Constitution states "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine." Education is a right of every child but COVID has increased the inequality in educational sector with most of the children lacking infrastructural facilities.

2. PROBLEM WITH ONLINE LEARNING :

Teachers are stressed about students virtually showing attendance in online classrooms but remaining passive in class, not participating, and not collecting learning materials. Classroom behavior is difficult to be monitored during online class as teacher is busy presenting in class and cannot always focus on children. Children are submitting poor assignments or not turning in assignments at all (Kassner, Jonas, & Klein, 2020). Children on the other hand are also under continuous stress of learning online. Use of mobiles and laptops are not comfortable in all cases for students of all ages (Jain & Agarwal, 2020). An observational study conducted on 2,100 undergraduate and graduate students found students are feeling negative emotions like fear, guilt, irritability, stress, worry during COVID-19 and they felt demotivated, anxious, stressed and isolated. Statistics show about 21 percent students felt amotivation, difficulty in studying or focussing, developing procrastination and 17 percent were high on anxiety. Psychological health was affected for 45 percent of students with high risk and low motivation, 40% with moderate risk and 14% only in low-risk category (North Carolina State University, 2021).

2. DEFINITION OF MOTIVATION :

Oxford English & Spanish Dictionary states Motivation is "A reason for acting or behaving in a particular manner; desire or willingness to do any activity". Cambridge English Dictionary defines Motivation as a "willingness or enthusiasm to do any activity, or feeling the drive for doing something". Psychology Dictionary states "Motivation is the driving force behind the energy required to complete a task, which gives purpose or direction to human behaviours operating at a conscious and subconscious level, without motivation such behaviours would not be caused. It is an individual's willingness to exert physical or mental effort in order to achieve a goal." Dictionary.com defines motivation as a force "providing with areas on to act in a certain way."According to Mangal (2010) "motivation is something which prompts, compels and energises an individual to act or behave in a particular manner at a particular time for attaining some specific goal or purpose." Some researchers define motivation as quality that promotes or hinders initiation of behaviour (Gredler, Broussard &Garrison, 2004). Motivation not only initiates any behaviour but directs and maintains it until the intended goals are reached (Nevid, 2013). Motivation is necessary to attain desired goals and individuals have the power to enhance or control their motivation (Psychology Today, 2021). Motivated students voluntarily use learning strategies as attention, engagement to gain understanding of the content (Turner, 1995).

3. BENEFITS OF MOTIVATION:

Motivation is an essential element in learning process as:

- Motivation results in taking initiative, understanding benefits of education and engaging in a task
- Motivation develops self-regulated academic behaviours as thinking, attention, effort, concentration
- Motivation develops learning readiness and improves quality of performance
- Motivation causes goal focussed behaviour
- Motivation helps learners derive pleasure from learning
- Motivation promotes cognitive processing, use of deep and conceptual learning strategies
- Motivation ensures persistence and resilience in education
- Motivation is relevant for all children irrespective of gender, age or nationality

4. PROCESS OF MOTIVATION:

Process of motivation begins with unsatisfied needs which may be biological or psychological in nature. Need can be defined as wants or desires which every individual wishes to satisfy. Unfulfilled needs give rise to tension within an individual which creates drives which are state of aroused awareness compelling an individual to act. Act or behavior is intended towards fulfilment of need, reduction of tension and brings about homeostasis state in an individual where all his needs are completely satisfied (Mangal, 2010).

4.1 NEED BASED THEORIES OF MOTIVATION:

Need based theories of Motivation propose that biological, psychological needs or growth needs are to be satisfied in order to motivate children. In this paper researcher focuses on need dissatisfaction which occurred during COVID lowering motivation in children.
Researcher tries to explain this need dissatisfaction in terms of three theories of motivation: Maslow's Hierarchical Need Theory, Weiner's Attribution Theory and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Maslow's Need theory focuses on biological needs (physiological needs), social needs (safety needs and belongingness needs) and growth needs (self-actualisation) and considers needs as desires which can be temporarily satisfied but occurs again with time (Huitt, 2007). Biological needs are considered to be lower order needs while growth needs are higher order. Only when lower needs are satisfied one can move to higher order needs (Kaur, 2013).

Though not a need-based theory in its true sense, Weiner's Attribution Theory proposes that children feel the need to attribute the cause of their success and failure on internal and external elements. The element to which they attribute their success and failure decides the quality of their future motivation (Weiner, 2010). Attributor has the need ofgaining knowledge, using this knowledge to control own activities and environment (Weiner, 1985). A future direction is obtained as past outcomes resulting in success are repeated (Weiner, 1972). Causal attributions are required to adapt in COVID environment and overcome all challenges of life.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) concentrates only upon psychological needs of an individual and states environments which satisfies three basic psychological needs of children enhance their motivation and orients them from external motivation towards internal motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory there are five levels of human needs and unless the lower level needs are satisfied higher order needs are not desired. These five needs starting with the lowest are Physiological Needs, Safety and Security Needs, Love and belongingness needs, Esteem needs and Self-actualisation needs (Kaur, 2013). COVID 19 situation and restrictions imposed by it has left many of these needs unfulfilled lowering student motivation.

Physiological Needs. These needs are related to hunger, thirst and other basic necessities of survival. Children coming from lower socioeconomic background are often provided with these basic goods from their school. Schools provide them with basic health details and sometimes with free dresses and books. Midday meals were one of the attractions which bring children to schools and lockdown closures denied fulfillment of these basic needs lowering student motivation during COVID19. Empty stomach lowers learning readiness and students cannot concentrate on their studies (Kaur,2013).

Safety and Security Needs. This need focusses on physical security and emotional sense of feeling secure. Domestic violence has been on a rise during pandemic and children coming from lower socioeconomic status are at greater risk of becoming a victim. Violence in home has increased due to deteriorating psychological condition of parents. Unemployment, anxiety regarding future, difficulty to pay for school fees (Jena, 2020), fear of disease has led to psychological stress causing violence to accelerate.

Children need a safe environment to feel secure and concentrate on studies and domestic violence or simple arguments can lower motivation (Jerome, 2013). Anxiety regarding the realistic financial and health problems which are happening and pathological anxiety of what might happen is lowering concentration and resulting in low motivation (Cullinan, 2020). Another reason for which children are feeling insecure is because Cyberbullying incidents have been on rise with children spending more time online. Screen time restriction and restrictions on using specified websites imposed by parents are also lowered. Cyberbullying has created fear in minds of children making them avoid various educational platform.

Love and Belongingness Needs. Every individual has the need of receiving love and to feel belongingness to any social group he desires to be associated with. School provides a loving environment for children where they can play, interact and enjoy with friends.
Teachers also provide warmth to children and enhance feelings of belongingness to the classroom. Online mode has

isolated children from peers and teachers leaving needs of belongingness unfulfilled. Students are craving the bond they shared with teachers and peers. Education was fun if peers were around. Contagion effect in a school motivates children to study (Cullinan,2020).

Esteem Needs. Children are seeking constant reinforcement for their educational activities and being able to perform any activity successfully enhances esteem. Erickson in Psychosocial Theory states (stage 3 Initiative vs. Guilt) the child upon being successful have increased sense of esteem and if unsuccessful suffers from guilt of being incapable. Maslow states teacher can increase self-esteem by providing positive feedback, praising in front of peers, allowing opportunities to prove one-self and enhance prestige among peers (Jerome, 2013; Kaur, 2013). Online mode of education does not support esteem needs as short duration of classes make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized feedback. Sense of achievement in front of whole class is also impossible with switched off videos and lack of human contact. In school achievements are rewarded with recognition, awards, promotion, status among peers, and love of teachers which is not present in the home environment and can be demotivating (Cullinan, 2020; Jerome, 2013).

Self-Actualisation or achieving full potential is possible if student puts in their best effort to achieve what they are capable of. In the classroom teacher can motivate and push the learner to strive towards excellence which is not possible in online mode (Jerome, 2013; Kaur, 2013).The online contact makes it difficult to judge whether the student has understood the lesson completely. Monitoring the learner is difficult while watching the screen continuously during transacting the lesson using screenshare. Moreover, motivating students in face-to-face mode is more efficient than on virtual platform. Self-actualisation may also be difficult with students' attention getting bifurcated between the content and coping with online classroom challenges.

Weiner's Theory of Attribution

Weiner (1971) stated that learner's future success and motivation depends on their attribution of previous success or failure upon four causal factors which are ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. Reasons of success and failure are attributed along three dimensions

i) Internal or external

ii) Stable or unstable

iii) Controllable or uncontrollable (Weiner,1986)

Children having internal locus of control believe their success is due to their ability and effort while children having external locus of control believe their success depends on task difficulty and luck. Ability and task difficulty are stable causes but effort and luck are unstable causes (Weiner, 1985). Of all causes only effort is a controllable cause. Generally, researchers found success is attributed to ability more than failure to lack of ability, again failure is connected to lack of effort more than success to effort, and failure is connected bad luck but success is not connected to good luck.

Ability. Online mode of education brought to the focus disadvantage of certain academically intelligent children who either could not afford to use or was incapable of using technology efficiently. Many children in rural or socioeconomically disadvantaged regions are unable to access the gadgets in first place, followed by problems in power connections, network issues and lack of technological knowhow. First generation learners suffered as parents could not help with gadgets which urban children easily received. While some educated parents may be tech savvy most of them lacked technical knowhow to help their children (Jena, 2020). Ability was not being associated to success as failure occurred even after being capable (Weiner, 1985, 2000). Reports of children committing suicide on nothaving smart mobile or not being able to participate in online class are found limited or no internet access and inability to afford computer, laptop and may create education inequality (Jena, 2020). Ability being put to test can shake confidence of children and lower motivation (Cullinan, 2020;Weiner,1985,2000).

Effort. Effort is an unstable cause related to success and children are ingrained with a belief that true hard work will bring success (Weiner, 1985, 2000). Online mode shook this belief as children were often denied the opportunity to expend effort. Even those who were lucky enough to have all required gadgets they were faced with the difficulty of putting in technical effort along with academic effort. Extended screen time causing eye problems,

coping with new technology and learning about new online platforms created stress. Self –Determination theory a prominent theory of motivation states often motivation is reduced due to effort beliefs where children do not take up tasks believing they will not be able to sustain the effort required.

Task difficulty. Children are encountered with various tasks in their academic career some of which are easy and pleasurable while others are boring and difficult. Interesting or easy tasks tend to increase motivation while difficult tasks by nature result in demotivation. Motivation is getting reduced with increased difficulty of academic tasks being transacted in online mode (Weiner,1985, 2000).

Luck. Weiner identifies one important factor Luck upon which children tend to attribute their failure. A poor grade may be attributed to teacher bias, health issues, peer disturbance during exam, unavailability of reading material. Though attribution on luck is mostly used as a sort of defence mechanism but in online mode it seems to influence academic achievement as children having good technological infrastructure and technological knowhow are often gaining over those who are deprived of it (Weiner,1985, 2000).

Self-Determination Theory

This theory talks about three psychological needs which when fulfilled promotes motivation.These psychological needs are need for autonomy, need for structure and need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Legault, 2017;Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Autonomy. This requires providing freedom to the child, allowing participation in decision making, allowing choice, providing rationale for classroom rules in place (Deci et al., 1994), accepting and respecting student perspectives (Legault, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Online mode takes away most of this sense of autonomy as children are under parental control which does not exist while attending offline classes. Parents may interfere with academic decision making and academic choices in online learning mode. Choice is also reduced as teachers themselves are trying to cope with new technological setup and are unable to provide academic choices. Perspectives of students are also difficult to acknowledge in limited time online classes.

Structure. This requires clear expectations from teachers before starting the class, monitoring by teachers during the class and provision of feedback after the class (Legault, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Children in a structured classroom can attain educational objectives with optimum effort. Children are often confused regarding the road to follow and need constant feedback and reinforcement (Vallerand, 1997). Online mode does not allow for structure to be provided at each step of learning. Guidance during the class and individualized attention is not provided. Scope of feedback is also lowered as teacher often gave feedbackon facial expressions of students realising how much they have not understood. Feedback is given on class work and oral evaluation in offline class, the scope of which is also lowered in Online mode.

Relatedness. Similar to Maslow's Theory this theory states that teacher and peer relatedness or warmth enhances motivation. Teacher not only creates a warm classroom climate, but also dedicates resources in form of emotional support to children (Ryan et al., 1994). Dependability on teachers, being able to share problems helps to satisfy security needs. Affection from teachers often motivates students to strive beyond capacity and achieve merely to make teachers proud (Legault, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Online teaching can help in continuing content transaction but teacher immediacy and teacher presence is lacking. Peer relatedness is also essential for enhancing student motivation as peers fulfill the need of belongingness and help students in difficulty. Peers were a major attraction behind children adjusting to a strictly disciplined school environment (Ryan et al., 1994). Online learning has separated children from peer contact and often left them to solve their academic difficulties alone. Scope of collaborative learning and peer tutoring has been lowered substantially.

5. PROBLEMS IN COVID SITUATION AND ONLINE MODE OF LEARNING:

i)   Under COVID related closures education system suffered from postponed classes, postponed board exams, shortening of semester (Jain & Agarwal, 2020; Jena, 2020)

ii)   Both teacher and Student motivation are low due to isolation or being disconnected from co-workers and peers (lack of relatedness) due to COVID related closures and stay at home restrictions. Teachers and students also miss seeing each other. Young children who are more attached with their teachers,

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schools are their second home, even older children who enjoy playgrounds, canteen chats, school celebrations are feeling isolated (Gadella Kamstra, 2020;Kurtz, 2020).

iii) Teachers are anxious about the challenges and inequities children are facing due to inaccessibility of gadgets, lack of infrastructure which the school ensured equitably for all children, coupled with technical issues (Kurtz, 2020).

iv) Teachers report though they are expending more effort in teaching and maintaining communication but inequity is persistent specially in low socioeconomic group children. Teacher communication also varies upon the subject taught (core subjects) and grade level (elementary) while sport and arts are losing ground (Kurtz,2020)

v) Teacher student communication has occurred through email, WhatsApp, video conferencing and social media which again posed problem. Zoom platform was found to have security problems. Apart from educators of special children there is little social contact of teachers with students (Kurtz, 2020).

vi) Teachers are motivated normally to learn new things but in Covid situation a lot was going on with adjusting to online teaching. Learning technology in a limited time, preparing PPT, holding student motivation in online mode, and class management as sharing screen, monitoring students, replying in chat box, controlling video and microphone has made teaching difficult (Gadella Kamstra, 2020).

vii) COVID brought about a situation of distant future in the form of online learning to present moment where unprepared teachers and students are forced to online mode (Jain & Agarwal,2020; Jena, 2020)

viii) Truancy has increased due to intentional (not logging in, not making contact, etc.) or non-intentional (lack of accessibility) causes. Kurtz (2020) reports about 12% learners in high income families and 33% in low income families are showing truancy. Low income families are incapable of providing infrastructure widening inequity. Students staying in one room family apartment and pressurized in Performing household duties are not getting similar opportunities as they would have received at school.

ix) Students are having issues of understanding difficult subjects which requires individualised attention which can be only provided in classroom(Kurtz,2020)

x) It is normal to feel stressed in a situation with disruption of normal life, scarcity of commodities, financial insecurity and increasing unemployment caused by theclosures. Students are stressed about paying hostel fees, food and college fees (Gadella Kamstra, 2020).

xi) COVID-19 increased problems for teachers in the form of lack of support from school administration, increase in workload, salary deductions, lack of student interaction, technological issues reducing teacher motivation and teachers in result were unable to motivate students (Gadella Kamstra,2020).

xii) For college students there are anxiety issues as coronavirus news, decreasing GDP, high unemployment rates, and uncertain future life after they pass college (Kurtz, 2020).College graduates are anxious regarding future employment as
Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's reports unemployment risen from 8.4%in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9% (Jain & Agarwal, 2020; Jena, 2020)

xiii) Increase in *Public Private Partnership with technological* companies providing online digital platforms (Google, Microsoft) and Open platforms like Udemy, edX, Coursera causing market size of e-learning market worth to increase in India from USD247 million in 2016 to 8 times more in 2021(Jain & Agarwal, 2020).

6. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

• Teachers should emphasize on goal setting (SMART Goals Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) and help students find structure in work (Boring-Bray, 2020). Setting deadlines and breaking down project into small parts (Cullinan, 2020).

• Planning the daily tasks, prioritising and time management helps to be on a focussed path and achieve goals in a structured manner. Having control over certain aspects during time of uncertainty can enhance motivation (Boring-Bray, 2020; Cullinan, 2020).

• Take care and stop burn out as taking excessive load thinking others are getting ahead while one is isolated at home is natural. But it is wise to take up as much one can swallow. Mental health is as much essential as physical health (Boring-Bray, 2020;Cullinan,2020)

- Staying connected is essential as peers, friends, or relatives are our strength and can be support for mental health. Talking out can help to reduce anxiety and gain information (Boring-Bray, 2020;Cullinan,2020).

- Counselling sessions could be organised online by schools to reduce anxiety and depression which lowers student motivation. Reading motivating books or hearing motivational talks are advised(Boring-Bray,2020)

- Too much focus on news circulating around should be avoided (Cullinan,2020)

- Technology has helped children to maintain social connections and continue their classes and also provided some flexibility from school schedule (Gadella Kamstra,2020)

- Students should go for self-study and find out what drives them whether it is knowing new things, solving problem, achievement, creating new things(Cullinan,2020)

- Infrastructure and facilities to be improved to make education accessible and inclusive, training sessions for teachers and students specially of poor sections to develop skills for online teaching learning (Jain & Agarwal, 2020).

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