

## Motivating Students to Learn in Time of COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

Amid the rapid spread of COVID-19 pandemic, universities and schools resorted to e-learning or learning from distance via internet platforms using smart phones and computers. In other words, students sit at their homes waiting for their teachers and lecturers to send them their lessons and lectures via internet and through online learning platforms such as Google Classroom, Schoology, Edmodo, FCC, Zoom, etc. In such a learning method, students become passive (teachers control the flow of the lectures and students only receive the information). Therefore, Students need to be motivated. This article sheds light on the recent trends of motivating students to learn.

**Keywords:** students, motivation, e-learning

### 1. Introduction

Due to COVID-19 pandemic and its huge and rapid spread in the entire planet, governments imposed lockdown on their people to control and limit the spread. Universities and schools, however, closed and resorted to e-learning (distant-online learning through smart phones, computers, and internet platforms). In such learning and due to COVID-19 pandemic without previous planning, especially in low income countries, students become passive (only listening to the lecture). Teachers almost do everything in the lecture, from arranging and speaking to sending. Therefore, students need to be motivated.

Motivation is one of the basic principles for good educational system. In other words, motivating students to learn through electronic tools and online platforms means that students should be eager to learn, take part, and engage in the learning process (Garavan et al, 2010; Kim & Frick, 2011).

Teachers need to change the traditional learning environment in class to that of electronic one. Such task is not easy in general and in times of COVID-19 in particular.

El-Seoud et al (2016) conclude that teachers should put into consideration attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction when they want to motivate their students within an e-learning environment. Attention can be achieved through animation, relevance and confidence can be achieved through course materials organization over time supported with quizzes and explanation of course importance. Satisfaction could be achieved through electronic *recognition within the course collaborative students and teachers over e-learning process.*

According to Palmer (2007), teachers can figure out that their students are motivated through noticing that they are happy and eager to learn, they engage themselves in the lecture, ask more questions, pay attention, and become active. Ryan & Deci (2000) demonstrate that motivation means a strong move that makes someone want to do or create something. Therefore, anyone who feels empty from inspiration and the will to act is considered to be unmotivated.

The main purpose of this paper is to provide teachers with the recent trends of Students' motivation to learn. The article lists and summarizes the main motivational strategies that can teachers use to motivate students to learn, especially in the current difficult time of COVID-19.

## 2. Students' Motivational Strategies in Time of COVID-19

Many studies have been conducted on students' motivation to learn (See Gottfried, 1990; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Ames, 1992; Deci et al 1999; Dörnyei, 2001; Gottfried et al 2001; Brophy, 2004; Henning, 2007; Dailey, 2009; Girmus, 2011; Pedditz & Spigno, 2012; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012 ; Wilkesman et al 2012; El-Seoud et al 2014; El-Seoud et al 2015; Amirkhanova et al 2016; Takahashi, 2018; Davis (n.d.).

The following 35 motivational strategies for students are extracted from different previous research done on motivation, especially (El-Seoud et al 2015). Each strategy is simplified to help teachers, especially those who are teaching in low income and poor countries, to motivate students to learn in the hard time of the pandemic:

1. Students should not feel of isolation and neglect. Isolating students leads to lack of attention. Therefore, teachers should always encourage them to get to know each other and benefit from each other through group and team work.
2. Teachers should always be there when needed. In other words, teachers should log in the selected e-learning platform repeatedly, leave notes and encourage students to leave comments and questions.

3. Engaging and motivating students to learn can be achieved through inquiry. Teachers should try to push students to question everything and inquire about their lectures and homework. Teachers should also provide their students intellectual questions in order to increase students' attention as well as motivation. They should always ask their students to post their questions and inquiries without hesitation and shyness.
4. Diversity in giving the lecture can also raise students' motivation and interest in the e-class. This can be done, for example, by making an educational YouTube channel posting in it your good montaged and beautiful videos. Also use colours, PowerPoint, pdf files, learning apps such as Khan Academy, UDEMY, LYNDIA, TED, QUORA, and EDX.
5. Give your students enough time to ask and share their thoughts and opinions. This gives the students a sense of control and responsibility for their learning.
6. Students should be encouraged to communicate and cooperate with the teacher and with themselves. This can have a great positive impact on their desire to learn.
7. Encourage students to post their scientific inquiries. Teachers should also provide immediate response to maintain a good communication.
8. Teachers should also interact with students, monitor their presence on the selected learning platform, and provide them continuous feedback.
9. Curriculum should be carefully designed by teachers. Teachers should not accumulate the lectures on the students; instead they should raise the difficulty levels gradually starting with simple topics and short introductory videos and PowerPoint files.
10. Using various activities and thinking methods can magnet and motivate students to learn more.
11. Teachers should be aware of the fear and anxiety of students since such factors can have negative impacts on their ability to learn.
12. Push students to think deeply. This can lead to creativity and critical thinking.
13. Teachers should carefully consider students' abilities in technology. Some students are good while some others are weak. Therefore, teachers should be flexible and solve their technological problems and answer their questions and inquiries.
14. Use well-arranged syllabus and flexible lecture schedule. Let the students know what they will study in the next lecture.

15. Always ask about students' needs and inquiries before, within, and after the lecture. Teachers should also ask their students about their attitudes towards the lectures, the teaching method, the learning platform, and everything related to the teaching process.

16. When I asked my students to write their inquiries and questions about the teaching process At the Department of English Language and Literature, College of Education for Humanities, Wasit University, Iraq, the students complained about the long and large number of pdf lectures which were sent by their teachers. The lectures are not accompanied by videos. Teachers also do not follow the timetable of the lectures in each day, as some of the lectures reach students in late hours, such as at four in the evening or after mid-night. Students also complained that some professors send videos and pdf lectures from YouTube and Google which do not belong to them. This is also a weakness in the teaching process.

17. The content of your lectures and lessons should be relevant to students' goals and intentions in order to avoid Students' loss of interests in the discussed contents.

18. Help your students to trust in themselves and gain confidence. This can be achieved when students gain success in what they do.

19. E-learning does not need to be limited to pdf lectures, assignments, and online tests and quizzes. In the learning process, teachers need to use pictures, videos, and audio elements to help students feel as though they are more connected. Teachers also need to introduce themselves in a video and encourage students to learn. They should also encourage them to study and love education and science.

20. Give the students your own material contents, especially the interesting and noteworthy ones. Use easy technological and electronic tools that are easier and favoured by students.

21. Reply to students' emails or messages, their questions and inquiries quickly and optimally within 24 hours. This makes students feel that their teachers are serious in the e-learning process.

22. Provide the students continuous feedback, notes, and comments on tasks quickly.

23. Post a weekly video message in your e-learning platform to give your students a sense of real-time conversation.

24. Reward students' success. Students are not machines or robots. They are human beings. Teachers; therefore, should reward students' success. They should also praise their students since praising helps build self-esteem and

self-confidence, which in turn helps motivate students to study and accept the idea of e-learning, especially in a country like Iraq which is witnessing difficult times in terms of economy, unemployment, and poverty.

25. The behavioural goals of Bloom's six levels (starting from the lowest levels of thinking (remembering and understanding), to the highest levels of thinking, i.e. creativity must be taken into account in e-learning.

26 Design your tests in a way that takes into account the inclusion of all the content of your subject and also takes into account the specifications of a good test and the six levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

27. Create social interaction and social bonds with the students. Talk to them and try to know their educational, economic, social, health, and financial problems and their difficulties in the learning process.

28. Political, social, and economic factors can demotivate students to indulge in the learning process. Such factors include the country's low economy, corruption, unemployment, poverty, lack of technology, and internet weakness. Teachers should put all these factors into consideration since such factors can have negative impacts on the e-learning process.

29. In the hard time of COVID-19, do not use fear language. In other words, you should not threat your students and use angry language just because they have not attended your e-lecture or did not do the assignment that you asked them to do.

30. Teachers' skill and expertise in handling the learning process, their sense of humour, intellectual knowledge, high educational qualifications, and high teaching qualities can have positive impacts on the students' motivation.

31. Before motivating students in the e-learning process in time of the pandemic, teachers need to motivate themselves.

32. Use a better and easy e-learning platform. I recommend Schoology (for more information, see Abbas, 2020).

33. Be positive and build relationships with the students. Encourage them to study and avoid criticism and reprimand. Treat all of your students with respect and love.

34. Teachers should take the time of their lectures into consideration. Some students do not continuously pay attention to their teachers inside the class at school or university for 50 minutes and in normal circumstances. They definitely cannot pay attention for 50 minutes in the e-class. Therefore, teachers need to reduce the time of their lectures to less than 50 minutes, divide their lecture, and send short videos. Teachers should also put into

consideration the internet weakness. Short video lectures can be downloaded and saved quickly in the students' smartphones and computers.

35. Teachers should also make their lectures motivational and engaging by using various motivational techniques such as using short lectures, introduction, and discussion supported with various examples, visual aids, colors, clear writing, and short answer questions.

### 3. Conclusions

This article presented a brief account of the 35 motivational strategies that can teachers use to motivate students to learn. The world is witnessing hard times due to the quick spread of a dangerous pandemic. Therefore, in such difficult times, our students need to be motivated in their learning process. If students are motivated to learn electronically, they will accept and engage in e-learning successfully. Then, the goals of a good e-learning process in time of COVID-19 will be achieved.

### 4. Recommendations

1. During the COVID-19 lockdown, I completely agree with Williams & Williams (2011) factor of "hierarchy of needs". They state that:

Regarding lower level needs, if a student is hungry or thirsty, it is more difficult to focus on learning. Also, if the environment is physically, mentally, or emotionally unsafe, then it will be hard for the student to put all of his or her attention on learning. If the teacher always is critical of the student, then the student probably will not feel accepted or that he or she belongs. Low self-esteem and ego will make the student feel unappreciated and unrecognized. As such, the educator must do what is must necessary to support the student to a higher level of need satisfaction so that the student can focus his or her attention on learning. Even at the level of self-actualisation, the educator may need to provide encouragement or opportunities (3-4).

2. Depression and anxiety disorders can have greater negative impact on students' learning process. To ensure a successful learning environment, teachers should put depression and anxiety of the students into consideration. They should test their students' depression and anxiety symptoms and discover whether such symptoms stem from interior factors (love, neglect, isolation, problems) or exterior factors (financial, economic, poverty, disease) and whether such symptoms are simple, moderate, mild, or severe. Teachers should work hard to reduce the depression and anxiety levels of their students.

3. In e-learning, teachers talk most of the times of the lecture. Therefore, they need to adhere to Grice's (1975) four maxims of conversation. They are: quality (teachers' conversations should be truthful. Teachers should also not say for which they lack adequate evidence). Quantity (teachers' lectures should be as informative as is required. Their lectures should not be less informative). Relation (their lecture should be relevant. What they say should be relevant. They should avoid irrelevant talk, especially unmotivated ones like politics, disease, and unemployment). Manner (teachers should be clear, unambiguous, brief, and orderly) in their e-lectures and talks.

4. Achieving Maslow's hierarchy of needs is crucial for the learning process as a whole. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory consists of five stages of human needs in the form of hierarchical levels within a pyramid. From the bottom of the pyramid to its upwards, the levels of needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Physiological and safety needs are related to the basic needs of humans. Belongingness-love and esteem needs are related to the psychological needs. Self-actualization needs are related to the self-fulfillment human needs (McLeod, 2018). Physiological needs such as air, food, drink, clothing, and shelter are crucial for human survival. If such needs are not satisfied, then people including students cannot work and behave properly. Safety needs comes after satisfying the physiological needs. Safety needs include the needs for security, law and order, stability, employment, health, and freedom from fear. Love and belongingness needs include the needs for friendship, connection, intimacy, love, attention, trust, and acceptance. Esteem needs include the need for respect of others, trust and strength. Self-actualization needs include people who attempt to use their current potential abilities and skills to show their huge potentials and achievements. Students cannot reach their potentials and achievements without satisfying the physiological and psychological needs.

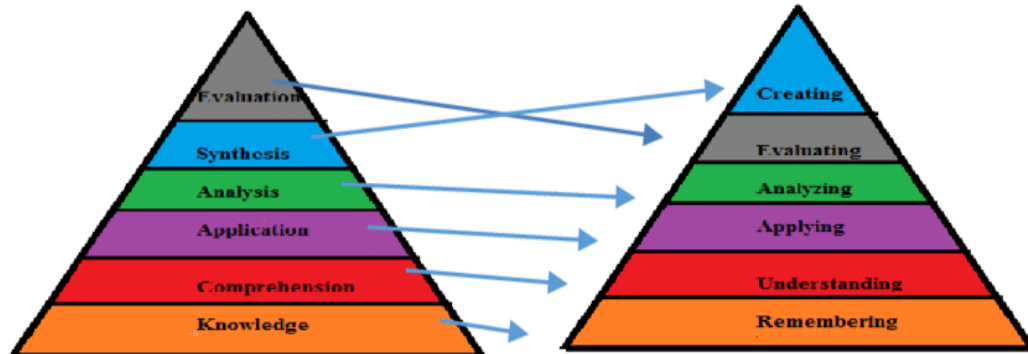


**Figure 1.** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Adopted from peacheypublications.com)

5. According to Anderson & Krathwohl (2001), Bloom (editor), Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl published a framework used for categorizing educational objectives in 1956. The framework was entitled as "The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain". Since the date of its publication, the framework has been translated into more than twenty languages and 'has provided a basis for test design and curriculum development not only in the United States but throughout the world' (XXI).

Bloom's taxonomy is crucial in the classification of thinking according to six cognitive levels. Throughout history, Bloom's taxonomy has been depicted as a stairway leading many teachers to encourage and motivate their students to climb to the higher level of thought. The pyramid of the taxonomy consists of three lowest levels and three highest levels. The three lowest levels are knowledge, comprehension, and application. The highest three levels are analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. A former student of Bloom led a new assembly for the purpose of updating the taxonomy during the 1990s (Forehand, 2010).





**Figure 2.** Bloom's (1956/2001) Original vs. Revised Taxonomy of Cognitive Domain (Adopted from Mizbani &Chalak, 2017: 14)

The six levels of Bloom's taxonomy are all used to enhance students' learning and develop their thinking. Therefore, teachers should put into consideration the six levels when they teach. The following six levels are presented clearly as follows (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, as cited in Forehand, 2010):

- **Remembering:** Retrieving, recognizing, and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory.
- **Understanding:** Constructing meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining.
- **Applying:** Carrying out or using a procedure through executing, or implementing.
- **Analyzing:** Breaking material into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organizing, and attributing.
- **Evaluating:** Making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.
- **Creating:** Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; recognizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing.

6. Good educational system will definitely create strong and healthy people. Such people will create good societies and thus create successful countries. Gaining good education is a complex process. Education does not only depend on the teacher, the student, and the designed syllabus; instead it is connected to economy and good government administration. In countries where corruption, poverty, and unemployment are high, education is low.

The more your country is corrupt and poor the more your educational system is weak and catastrophic.

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### □ تحفيز الطلاب على التعلم في وقت جائحة كورونا

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مستخلص البحث:

وسط الانتشار السريع لـ COVID-19، لجأت الجامعات والمدارس إلى التعلم الإلكتروني أو التعلم عن بعد عبر منصات الإنترنت باستخدام الهواتف الذكية وأجهزة الكمبيوتر. بمعنى آخر، يجلس الطلاب في منازلهم في انتظار أن يرسل معلمهم ومحاضريهم دروسهم ومحاضراتهم عبر الإنترنت ومن خلال منصات التعلم عبر الإنترنت مثل Google Classroom و Schoology و Edmodo و FCC و Zoom وما إلى ذلك. في مثل هذا التعلم، يصبح الطلاب سلبيين (يتحكم المعلمون في تدفق المحاضرات ويتلقى الطلاب المعلومات فقط). لذلك، يحتاج الطلاب إلى التحفيز. تلقي هذه المقالة الضوء على الاتجاهات الحديثة لتحفيز الطلاب على التعلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطلاب، التحفيز، التعلم الإلكتروني