

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation for Elementary Teachers: Saudi Arabian Context

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Abstract: This paper describes factors that intrinsically and extrinsically motivate elementary teachers in an all-boys elementary school in Saudi Arabia. Using a qualitative case study research methodology, data were collected via 14 semi-structured individual interviews, two focus group interviews, and a month of classroom observations of Grades 4, 5, and 6 teachers. Using an inductive approach, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis was conducted in five phases: transcription of interviews in Arabic, transcript translation from Arabic to English, data analysis for emerging themes, and triangulation of the data from the interviews, focus groups and classroom observations. The findings revealed Saudi Arabian teachers were motivated intrinsically through (a) their religious beliefs associated with teachers, (b) social connection with colleagues and students, and (c) their pride when witnessing the students' academic achievement. Extrinsic motivations were (a) awards and rewards, (b) salary and tenure, and (c) proximity to family. Analyzing the findings using self-determination theory (SDT), the intrinsic motivation was based on their psychological needs, and extrinsic motivation was linked to commitment to their profession. The study concludes with a call for the Saudi education system to use educational research to inform policies, such as creating professional development opportunities, which further lends to teacher motivations.

Keywords: Teacher Motivation; Qualitative Case Study; Self-Determination Theory; Saudi Arabian Context

Introduction

Currently, the Saudi government is working on a project entitled Vision 2030. Vision 2030 is Saudi Arabia's plan to improve and become a source of excellence in all capacities (Khan, 2016). One of the main focuses of this document includes a description of how to reform newly envisioned policies to enhance the equity and effectiveness of the education system. Teacher motivation is one of the challenges facing Saudi teachers in enhancing the effectiveness of their teaching. Teachers are required to engage in professional development in order to enhance their knowledge and competence. However, the new government strategy encourages teachers to see beyond the extrinsic motivations of promotion and encouragement, to foster collaborative and positive relationships with students in their classrooms (Algarni & Male, 2014, p. 3).

Despite the significance of motivational factors in teaching effectiveness, few studies have addressed intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for teachers in the Gulf Countries, and no study has been identified in this study focused on the role of motivational factors in developing effective teaching practices in the Saudi Arabian context. Therefore, this study aims to address the motivational factors and potential methods for engaging Saudi teachers in developing effective teaching in the classroom. To that end, this study is guided by the following research question: What intrinsic and extrinsic factors do motivate Saudi teachers to teach effectively?

Literature Review

Promoting teacher motivation and retaining teachers in schools require maintaining a balance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Lam et. al, 2010). Previous studies emphasize schools should support teacher competence and autonomy, which are largely intrinsic factors, such as teachers' well-being and teachers' desire for self-development (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Neves & Lens, 2005; Taylor & Albasri, 2014; Vansteenkiste et. al, 2006; Wang, 2012). Wang (2012) asserted the stability of psychological and emotional wellbeing for teachers leads to happy teachers who are engaged in their profession. Wang (2012) indicated educators improve their skills and performance in the classroom when their voice is heard, when their voice is respected, and when they are well-paid. Taylor and Albasri (2014) emphasized a dynamic work environment, where teachers are encouraged to try new things, stimulating the individual's desire to continually improve their skills. Further, Amabile (1996) deemed a positive social environment and friendly workplace result in comfortable and safe work conditions, both of which stimulate intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Faculty members in schools in rural areas tend to have strong rapport with their colleagues (Berry & Gravelle, 2013). Thus, a supportive social environment increases a desire to engage in professional activities, which, in turn, feeds one's intrinsic and extrinsic motivational goals (Vansteenkiste, et. al, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

This study used self-determination theory (SDT) to explain intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors driving the effective teaching for the teachers of Hijrah¹ School. SDT is a versatile theoretical framework that explains motivational processes and outcomes throughout various careers (Vallerand et al., 2008). Ryan and Deci (2000) developed an approach to SDT using tenets from Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET). Intrinsic motivation provides the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs for humans: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Vansteenkiste, Lens, and Deci (2006) explained that the intrinsic motivation goals “are theorized to be more directly linked to satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy” (p. 28). Ryan and Deci (2000) argued interpersonal events and structures (e.g., rewards, communications, feedback) conduce *feelings of competence* during action, which can enhance intrinsic motivation for action because they allow satisfaction of the basic psychological need for competence (p. 58). Feelings of competence will only enhance intrinsic motivation if accompanied by *a sense of autonomy*. Having choice and the opportunity for self-direction seem to enhance intrinsic motivation as these are factors that enhance a person’s autonomy. The tenet of relatedness is attributed to extrinsic motivation, suggesting the likelihood of a person’s willingness to act comes from the perceived connectedness and value ascribed by one’s own family, peer group, or the society in which they live (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 59).

Maulana and Opendakker (2014) contributed to SDT by identifying subtypes of extrinsic motivation: *external* regulation, *introjected* regulation, and *identified* regulation. External regulation involves less autonomous behaviours and are performed to meet external demands (p. 593). Introjected regulation is defined as behaviours that are exhibited to please internal contingencies as a result of external influence to maintain self-worth. Identified regulation is when one consciously values certain behaviours so their behaviour is driven as personally important (Maulana & Opendakker, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). According to Deci and Ryan (2011) SDT enables researchers to examine the effects of extrinsic support on intrinsic motivation. Accordingly, SDT was used in this study to identify internal and external resources that drove teachers’ effective teaching in this study.

Method

Saudi Arabian Educational System

In Saudi Arabian public schools, children are enrolled in Kindergarten at the age of 5, and boys and girls study together. From 6–12 years of age, students attend elementary school. Between 12–15 years of age, students are separated into male and female schools and attend intermediate school, and from age 15–18, students study in high school (Aljughaiman & Grigorenko, 2013). Across all levels, the school year consists of two semesters, each lasting for four months. Regardless of their country of origin, public education is free for all students, and the government offers free textbooks and health services to all students (Aljughaiman & Grigorenko, 2013).

From Grades 1 to 12, Saudi teachers instruct specific subjects and do not have their own classroom of students. Teachers work from 16 to 24 hours weekly. There are no term contracts for Saudi teachers; once hired, they have total job security and good salaries. In preparing a well-educated, democratically focused generation of teachers, high quality Saudi teachers would predestine students to become resilient and develop the ability to think critically and creatively (a highly valuable skill needed amid conflicts in the neighboring countries in the Middle East).

Research Design

The research design employed for this qualitative study was a case study (Stake, 2005; 2010), which is used when particular consideration is given to the life experience of participants restricted within a certain set of circumstances. Case study aims to derive a rich descriptive account of a single defined study unit (Stake, 2005; 2010). As a form of field research, such information is gathered through direct surveillance by the researcher. The study was bounded by its purpose (e.g., to describe professional and personal features motivating elementary teachers) and its context (e.g., within the setting of an all-boys elementary school located in Saudi Arabia).

¹ All people and places directly associated with details of the research are pseudonyms. To maintain the school’s anonymity, I also provide approximate demographic numbers when describing the research context.

Data Collection

To conduct this research, I traveled from Canada to Saudi Arabia on March 18, 2016, staying for the remainder of the school year. In order to maintain site and participant anonymity and confidentiality, I now describe a general overview of the research site and participant descriptions. 13 participants in this study were recruited from teachers at an elementary school located in a village near the city called Nadra. The participants who took part in the individual interviews are identified through Arabic names (i.e., Ahmed, Bandar, Fahad, Omar, Rashid, Salman, and Turki), and the participants in the focus group interviews are identified by Western names (i.e., Charlie, David, George, Henry, Joseph, and Peter).

Using an inductive approach to qualitative research (Merriam, 2009), three methods were used to collect and triangulate the data: observations, semi-structured individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Beginning March 18, 2016 until April 18, 2016, 13 teachers were observed in elementary classrooms. Observations were to examine teaching in relation to teacher and student interactions, types of learner activities experienced by students, student demeanor both during and outside the classroom, and the school infrastructure (e.g., size of classrooms, location of meeting rooms and staff rooms). The purpose of this observation period was to assist me in understanding the teaching climate of the school, and the case study realities of my participants.

At the beginning of April, 2016, 14 individual interviews with seven participants, and two focus group interviews with three participants in each group were facilitated in Arabic. All individual interviews and one focus group interview were conducted in the school, and the second focus group interview was conducted in a participant’s home. With regard to the latter point, I was scheduled to leave Saudi Arabia to travel back to Canada, and having the interview in the participant’s home was a cultural and hospitable way for him to bid me farewell. Also, the participants of the second focus group knew each other well and were comfortable gathering at this house.

Both individual and group interview questions were aligned with SDT. Participants were asked questions such as (a) what school-related or personal factors motivate you to do your job well (e.g., professional development, salary, and personal drive), and (b) what aspects of the education profession do you think would motivate teachers to do well? The average length of the first set of individual interviews was 63 minutes, and the average length of the second set of individual interviews was 62 minutes. The focus group interviews also lasted for 60 minutes on average (See Tables 1 and 2). The interviews were recorded and were transcribed verbatim in Arabic.

Table 1. Overview of Individual Interview Participants and Length of Interviews

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Length of Interview 1*</i>	<i>Length of Interview 2*</i>
Ahmed	59 minutes	58 minutes
Bandar	61 minutes	76 minutes
Fahad	61 minutes	30 minutes
Omar	61 minutes	60 minutes
Rashid	71 minutes	72 minutes
Salman	58 minutes	66 minutes
Turki	71 minutes	72 minutes
	63 minutes	62 minutes
	(Average length)	(Average length)

* Note: All interviews are rounded off to the nearest minute.

Table 2. Overview of Focus Group Interview Participants and Length of Interviews

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Length of Interview*</i>
Charlie, David, George	54 minutes
Henry, Joseph, Peter	66 minutes
	60 minutes

(Average length)

* *Note: All interviews are rounded off to the nearest minute.*

Data Analysis

Using an inductive and thematic approach to data analysis, interview transcripts and observational notes were coded to examine what intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivate Saudi teachers to teach effectively. First, each Arabic transcript was translated verbatim into English. Once the English transcripts were completed, I paginated them into one booklet, which contained the 14 individual interviews, the two focus group interviews, and my observational notes. The data were coded using a different colored font for each group of data. Using this procedure, six themes were identified and classified into two larger categories in line with the SDT: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The themes associated with intrinsic motivation included (a) religious beliefs, (b) relationships, and (c) personal, professional, and academic fulfillment. The themes associated with extrinsic motivation subsumed (a) praise and recognition, (b) salary and tenure, and (c) proximity to family. Overall, these categories and associated subthemes represent the motivational factors driving teaching effectiveness of teachers in this study.

Research Findings

Intrinsic Motivation

For participants, their personal belief in Islam and the teaching profession, relationships and social connections, and pride in the academic achievements of students were linked to intrinsic motivation factors.

Islam and the Teaching Profession. All participants had a core, intrinsic belief God would reward them if they were diligent teachers. Salman explained:

Because you seek your reward from God, teaching is an honorable career with a high status ... Teaching was the message of the Prophets. Teachers should work hard, because they are responsible for other Muslim children. They take them from the state of being ignorant to the state of being knowledgeable, from darkness to light (Albishi, 2017, p. 68).

The participants believed teaching is an integral part of Islam. When I asked Turki about the characteristics of an effective teacher, he said, "First of all, a good teacher should follow the religious teachings and apply them in his work. They should treat the students nicely and be close to them" (Albishi, 2017, p. 68). Teachers were intrinsically motivated by their religious beliefs associated with the teaching profession.

Relationships and Social Connections. The sense of collegial connection intrinsically motivated Saudi Arabian teachers. The participants revealed positive relationships at the school were an inspiration to them. For instance, Ahmed clarified one of the personal intrinsic factors that motivated him to come to school was "The collaboration between the colleagues" (Albishi, 2017, p. 73). During observation, behaviours observed reflected positive collegial relationships. For example, the teachers did not start their breakfast until all the school personnel were present and sat around the table. If one was late, the rest would wait until he arrived. Sharing these meals appeared to establish a level of trust within the group and support the morale of the teachers.

Positive teacher-student relationships also intrinsically motivated Saudi Arabian teachers. For example, Bandar recorded he had a positive relationship with the students, which made him proud to be a teacher. Bandar built a rapport with his students by using nicknames. He said, "I always like to give my students nicknames, such as hero or sweetheart." Omar said, "I deal with the students as if they are my children" (Albishi, 2017, p. 72). The idea that good student relationships were meaningful came from both Islamic beliefs, and the fulfillment the participants felt when they interacted positively with students.

Pride in the Academic Achievements of Students. Most of the participants found a sense of academic fulfillment came through helping students achieve success. The participants' explanation of professional fulfillment was exemplified through students' achievements. For Fahad, the academic achievements of his students were an underlying reason why he strived to maintain the high quality of his teaching:

I swear ... I hope to serve the community in a way that Allah rewards me for it... The Social Development Department threw a party to honor the top students. I attended the party and, among the things that brought joy to my heart, was seeing that all of the top students that were honored were my students that I taught in Grade 1. Some of my students now are university students. This is what motivates me to stay in this profession, and I consider it one of my greatest accomplishments (Albishi, 2017, p. 78).

Directly witnessing the trajectory of his teaching on his students motivated Fahad to continue on his teaching path.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivators noted from the participants were associated with physical awards and rewards, salary, and ability to reside near their families.

Awards and Rewards. Most participants admitted there were many encouraging aspects about their job (e.g., physical awards and rewards), which were predominantly given by senior administration. Rashid explained an example of such gifts: “Two years ago they [the Government] introduced a new idea, which is a BMW car gift for the special teacher. There are 10 cars for 10 special teachers every year” (Albishi, 2017, p. 82). As participants are looking for further expansion of this type of financial reward, they have categorized the physical awards as important external motivation factors.

The participants also spoke about other kinds of awards and rewards they received. Salman said, “The school board is throwing an awards ceremony this week.” When I asked Salman who received an award, he answered, “I was rewarded for being a good teacher, and also the principal was awarded for being a good leader” (Albishi, 2017, p. 83). In many ways, the physical rewards were a metaphorical *pat on the back*, which made the participants feel good.

Salary and Tenure. Teachers are some of the highest paid professionals in Saudi Arabia. This financial factor played an important role in the participants’ choice to be teachers. Ahmed said the salary motivated him to work hard. He said, “Of course, the financial side is considered a motivational factor, and it helps you work better” (Albishi, 2017, p. 83). In Saudi Arabia, teachers’ the salaries are tax-free. Both the salary and benefits encourage teachers to continue to teach or motivate other individuals to choose teaching as a profession.

Proximity to Family. Participants wanted to live close to their families. Fahad said, “Teaching is better, because it allows you to live close to your family in the village. That was my main reason for choosing teaching” (Albishi, 2017, p. 85). Henry shared the same thought and stated, “There are some positive sides [to teaching] such as being close to my family. If I had been in any other job, I would be far away from my family” (Albishi, 2017, p. 85). Also, Bandar had family responsibilities at a young age, which propelled him to go into teaching. These comments show in Saudi Arabia, personal life plays a significant role in the individual’s career choices. It also reflects the importance of family relationships in Saudi culture.

Discussion

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation comes from the emotions, desires, interests, and hopes felt and embodied by a person. It is the reason an individual does something pleasurable or intriguing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While competence, autonomy, and relatedness were articulated as the three types of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the results from this study were able to add another dimension: belief in Islam (religion). Islamic religion was reported to motivate the teacher participants in their efforts to enhance teaching effectiveness. The Saudi teachers interviewed sought to earn the deeds and rewards from God if they were effective, good teachers. They also feared falling into the reputation of sin if they were not effective, hard-working teachers. Baki (2004) argued Islam impacts how the Saudi education system is organized and delivered and how the Islamic faith and its rules are embodied in how educators teach. While investigating the influence of religion on Saudi employees in the health context, Alotaibi and colleagues (2016) found the Islamic religion motivated Saudi nurses to take care of their patients, because in return for quality care, these caregivers would get rewards from God. These findings show the prevalence of Islamic beliefs in motivating teachers in effective teaching in Saudi Arabia.

Another factor in my study pertaining to motivation was positive relationships among school personnel. These Saudi teachers had good collegial and/or personal relationships with each other, and these connections motivated them to stay in the teaching profession. Compared to collegial relationships, relationships between teachers and students appeared a less motivational factor. This main finding aligns with the literature. The literature pertaining to positive relationships among teachers revealed it has a great influence on a teacher's intrinsic motivation (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Leithwood et. al, 2008). The majority of participants agreed positive relationships among teachers and leaders decrease the pressure of the disadvantages of the education system in their school. Thus, the teachers felt a greater connection with others, and they internalized the feeling as a sense of self-worth.

With regard to intrinsic motivation in Hijrah School, self-fulfillment was an area which surfaced as vital among the Saudi teachers. Some participants spoke of how they believed, through their teaching, they had an influence to improve their society, expanding their own knowledge, and enhancing student achievement. Likewise, previous studies found the feelings of personal fulfillment are often the strongest type of motivation. An example of teacher fulfillment was the Turkish study by Saban (2003). Saban mentioned Turkish teachers were motivated to teach even though they had relatively low income, because they were fueled with ambitions to improve their society. With regard to my findings there was a relationship between self-fulfillment and addressing a psychological need for competency. The sense of competency was reached when the teachers felt they were making a difference in both the student's lives and the surrounding communities. Thus, self-fulfillment was a strong intrinsic motivational factor to continue with their teaching careers.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation is concerned with external factors such as money or rewards that help obtain personal or professional goals (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Maulana and Opdenakker (2014) identified three subtypes of extrinsic motivation in SDT: identified, introjected, and external motivation. With regard to teacher participants' answers, there were three main extrinsic motivation factors: physical awards and rewards (i.e., introjected), salary (i.e., external), and proximity to family (i.e., identified).

Awards and rewards from the school principal or school board enticed elementary teachers to teach well. According to Deci and colleagues (1994), SDT posits introjection as an external motivation factor for people, but the individuals who experienced introjected motivation believe they deserve more than what they got as a prize. Applying this model of introjection to this study, participants admitted the awards and rewards motivated them while they criticized the scarcity of the type of these prizes in elementary schools. Thus, in order to maintain and support Saudi Arabian teachers' motivation in schools, senior administration should seek to increase the value of physical awards.

With regard to salary, several participants admitted they would look for another job if the government reduced the current teacher's salary. These participants openly expressed that the salary is an important external motivation factor that keeps them in school. In turn, the salary affected, to some level, some teachers' motivation to continue teaching. Based on SDT, external motivation factors provide a concept for researchers to understand human needs and social forces impacting individuals' decisions (Deci & Ryan, 2008), including money (Olafsen et al., 2015). All participants in this study were from a government school, which means they had the same payment amount each year, and they did not complain about this topic.

The last type of external motivation was the proximity to family, which is an example of identified motivation. The participants valued having a job that allowed them to be in a location physically close to their family members. Most of the participants indicated working near to their families encouraged them to go into and stay in the teaching profession.

Implications of the Study

Findings from this study suggest the Nadra School Board should consider creating professional development courses, which values and highlights Saudi teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Professional development creates opportunities to strengthen teacher autonomy and competence, as well as the continued recognition of teacher competence through awards and rewards, supportive collegial relationships, and proximity to one's family suggests promising possibilities. For Saudi students, teachers, and researchers who reside in Canada, this study's findings might help Canadian universities understand the Saudi Arabian educational environment's background and the classroom

teaching context for Saudi Arabian people who select Canada to complete their learning. This study's findings might also help Canadian teachers who accept positions in Saudi Arabia or other Arabian Gulf countries to further understand the teaching context, which is important for teachers heading overseas. Finally, this study's findings can serve as the foundation for similar studies in neighboring Gulf countries.

Limitations of the Study

The study presented a number of limitations. First, the study was conducted during the last month of the school year in Saudi Arabia. Many teachers were extremely busy with their students, which could have affected the results by varying teacher attitudes, thus impacting their capacity to truly reflect on their own intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. With regard to the research, I had imposed a few delimitations: (a) only participants who were teachers and/or administrators from an all-boy's elementary school were recruited for the study, (b) the experiences of female teachers were not included in this study, and (c) the study took place in the south of Saudi Arabia. All of these delimitations contributed to the meaning and manageability of my project.

Conclusion

Saudi teachers have minimal rates of autonomy due to a centralized educational system (Alzaidi, 2008). A centralized education system may be such a factor, which impacts Saudi teachers' autonomy and intrinsic motivation for betterment of the professional self. The study found the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate Saudi teachers to teach effectively. The intrinsic factors included (a) religious beliefs, (b) relationships, and (c) personal, professional, and academic fulfillment. The themes associated with extrinsic motivation were (a) praise and recognition, (b) salary and tenure, and (c) proximity to family. Using SDT, the intrinsic motivation was based on their psychological needs, and extrinsic motivation was linked to commitment to their profession. As the Saudi government invests billions to improve the education system (Khan, 2016), they may need to consider promoting more opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development and educational research. Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia would benefit from educational research in order to continually improve their educational system to foster more effective student learning. As such, my study provided a space for Saudi Arabian educators to voice how the Saudi government could assist teachers in developing their own skills and performance in the classroom, thus using educational research to inform policies, such as creating professional development opportunities, that may further enhance teacher motivation.

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