

A Student’s Perception of Their Mindset and Motivation

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The Problem

There are several studies that focus on children’s mindsets and mindset interventions; however, few studies have focused on a student’s perception of their own mindset. Additionally, there are many studies that have analyzed what type of motivational factors play in a child’s educational development, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, but rarely address a student’s own perspective on their motivation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the significance of analyzing a student’s perception of their own mindset and what motivates them to learn, by answering the following research questions: How do students perceive their own mindset? Does a student’s mindset effect their academic motivation? Does a student’s mindset effect how they are motivated to learn?

Implications

The current study adds more insight to previous research because it examined fixed vs. growth mindset in elementary school students and investigated intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation. This study added additional insight on how students perceive their own mindset and motivation, which can be extremely useful information for an educator regarding understanding their students at a deeper, social-emotional level. For further investigation, educators could carry out this research in other grade levels, school sites, and demographics to help understand how to best meet the needs of their students.

Methods

This mixed-methods study was conducted in two parts at one school site, with 54 fifth grade students. Quantitative data was gathered through the distribution of an electronic survey. Next, qualitative data was gathered through student interviews.

Step 1: Over a two-week period, parents and students gave their consent and assent to be a part of the study.

Step 2: 54 fifth grade students participated in an electronic survey that asked them to reflect on their mindset and motivation. The survey took approximately 20 minutes.

Step 3: 6 students were randomly chosen to participate in interviews to help give a narrative to the research. Each interview took approximately 15 minutes.

Step 4: After the surveys were completed and the interviews were conducted and recorded, the data was collected for analysis.

Results

Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

According to the data, most students had a growth mindset towards intelligence and schoolwork. The trend of students perceiving themselves having a growth mindset was shown through the results of the statement “no matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.” 91% of students agreed with this statement, which further reveals how this population of students have a growth mindset. The following statement “the harder you work at something, the better you will be” had an overwhelming 98% of students who agreed with this statement. Regarding fixed mindset, less than half of the student population perceived to have a fixed mindset towards school.

Interviews

The qualitative data collected and analyzed revealed three themes: students believe that the harder you work, the more successful you’ll be, extrinsically motivated by parents and future goals, and intrinsically motivated to learn new things. This narrative revealed that 5 out of 6 students perceived to have a growth mindset; however, there was a shift in the perspective of how students are motivated. 4 out of 6 students revealed that they are more motivated to work hard so that they can either please their parents and/or so that they are academically successful. This grade-oriented mindset was made more apparent in the interview portion of the study.

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

During the survey section of this study, most students perceived themselves to be intrinsically motivated. 89% of participants who agree with the following statement “I ask questions in class because I want to learn new things” are intrinsically motivated to learn because their natural curiosity is heightened due to the challenges they are given. The remainder of the findings from the survey indicated that students at this academic level are intrinsically motivated to learn new things and have a natural curiosity; however, extrinsic motivations such as pleasing parents and receiving good grades seemed to be a major influence.