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# Editorial: Opportunities on improving student motivation at all levels of education

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## Editorial on the Research Topic

### Opportunities on improving student motivation at all levels of education

There is no single recipe for improving student motivation. Current research trends on motivation are well represented in our Research Topic. Although the scope of the research published is relatively large, both from substantive and methodological standpoints, it helps forecast future trends in motivation research.

## Common takeaways

When it comes to improving student motivation, the teacher will always come as a point of agreement for its important role. While four papers (Radil et al.; Tharaldsen; Wang and Hu; Zhou et al.) specifically focused on teachers' role in fostering student motivation, two of those papers qualitatively detail how teachers spontaneously engage in supporting strategies as well as what elements of the classroom they identify as crucial for supporting student motivation (Radil et al.; Tharaldsen). While many aspects brought forward by the teachers themselves clearly align with motivation research, others, such as the importance of “key students” (i.e., popular class figure) acting as motivation champions in the class, break the mold of motivation-enhancing strategies typically put forward in the literature. This research thus present teachers not only as motivational supporters, but also as references for understanding motivational patterns and developing insightful motivating strategies.

Half of the manuscripts in the topic (Pulkka and Budlong; Chen and Zhang; Nagy et al.; Paumier and Chanal; Wang and Hu; Yang et al.) include quantitative analyses that combine more than one motivation variable (e.g., self-efficacy, goals, self-determination, engagement). In this context, one must keep in mind that students' motivational landscape is complex and dynamic. The labels for various motivational concepts bring this complexity to more interpretable grounds for researchers, but they must not be used to infer simplicity about the motivational experiences that students undergo. In other words, while coining and juggling with precise motivational terms is helpful for researchers, this does not imply that motivational experiences of engagement, goal striving, and self-efficacy, for example, happen in silos and are devoid of complexity. When inferring from results using multiple motivational variables, one must keep in mind that the concepts presented are overlapping, imprecise, and dynamic.

This highlights the crucial importance of measurement in the context of motivational research. As much as a good measurement will help to reduce ambiguity in presentation and interpretation of results, a weak measurement gives the overall impression that the field of motivational research is approximative and negligent. Thus, strong measurement will help better to outline the motivational experience of students as well as contribute to identifying the processes and causation sequence that lead to improved motivation. It is important to keep in mind that not all motivational concepts wield similar power in determining the quality of the student experience, such that the more we manage to delineate to boundaries of various motivational concepts, the more targeted the motivational interventions that derive from the research will be.

## Informed suggestions for future research

Two manuscripts in the topic (Pulkka and Budlong; Yang and Cai) have presented research using profile analysis to identify patterns in student motivation. Person-centered analyses in general are helping researchers to uncover how their participants can be grouped in clusters of motivation types. Although this line of analysis remains very promising, we reckon it could be pushed even farther in large datasets by including more than motivational variables in the creation of profiles. In doing so, it could be possible to distinguish, within profiles of participants that share the same motivational pattern, other factors that could be associated with the onset or perpetuation of this pattern. Looking in the various ways students end up with similar motivational patterns is a path seldom taken but that holds important potential for improving our understanding, and the quality, of student motivation.

Finally, only one manuscript (Anyichie and Butler) pertained to culturally informed pedagogies and their purported motivational effect. One-size-fits-all solutions to improving motivation belong in the past, and although profile analyses are one way researchers look beyond global effects to focus on the experiences of individuals, there are many other ways to take into accounts the diverse

backgrounds students come to our schools with. With culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy, one goes beyond the idea of “what’s good for the goose is good for the gander” to rather embrace the motivational influence of cultural experiences. Many more research on this topic is needed to better understand how our schools will support all students through culturally informed practices.

## Conclusion

In sum, this topic has garnered a host of relevant and cutting-edge research on student motivation that, when taken together, give a promising outlook on the next decades of motivational research. Thank you to authors and reviewers who contributed in making this topic possible.

## Author contributions

JB drafted the editorial. FG, WL, and KD provided relevant feedback. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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