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The Role of Instructor Presence in Enhancing Motivation in Online Learning in Japan

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The Role of Instructor Presence in Enhancing Motivation in Online Learning in Japan

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to analyze the role of instructor presence in enhancing motivation in online learning.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Instructor presence in online learning significantly increases learner motivation by making students feel supported, guided, and connected rather than isolated. Regular feedback, active discussion participation, and clear communication from instructors improve engagement, persistence, and course completion rates. Overall, visible and responsive instructors transform online courses from passive content consumption into interactive learning experiences that sustain motivation.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social presence theory, community of inquiry framework & self-determination theory may be used to anchor future studies on the role of instructor presence in enhancing motivation in online learning. Institutions should prioritize instructor training programs that emphasize the development of a visible and engaging online presence. Education policymakers should consider instructor presence as a key element of online learning quality standards.

Keywords*: Instructor Presence, Online Learning*

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INTRODUCTION

Student motivation in online learning environments is often assessed using self-reported motivation scales or participation rates in online activities. Self-reported scales typically ask students to rate their level of motivation on a Likert scale, where higher ratings indicate greater motivation to engage with the course material. Participation rates reflect how actively students interact with online resources such as discussion boards, quizzes, or video lectures. Research has shown that student motivation is a crucial predictor of success in online courses, as highly motivated students are more likely to engage with course materials and complete assignments. In the USA, studies indicate that students who are actively engaged in course activities are 30% more likely to complete their courses successfully compared to those with lower participation rates (Johnson & Kuehler, 2019).

In developed economies like Japan and the UK, student motivation trends show a growing emphasis on the integration of technology in learning. In Japan, online learning platforms report that 70% of students who regularly attend live virtual sessions have higher motivation and academic performance compared to those who only access recorded materials. Similarly, in the UK, participation in synchronous online discussions correlates with a 40% increase in student engagement and completion rates. These findings emphasize the importance of not only course design but also instructor-student interaction. A study by Johnson & Kuehler (2019) supports this by showing that increased interaction in online courses can lead to higher motivation and completion rates.

In developing economies, student motivation in online learning is influenced by various factors, including access to technology and internet connectivity. Self-reported motivation scales are often used to assess how students perceive their own drive to participate in online courses. Participation rates in online activities, such as forums and live classes, also serve as key indicators of motivation. For instance, in India, a study found that 45% of students with limited access to high-speed internet reported lower motivation levels, as they struggled to engage fully in online learning activities. However, those with stable internet access and regular instructor interaction exhibited a 25% increase in motivation and course completion rates (Singh & Gupta, 2020). This highlights how external factors, such as technology infrastructure, can significantly impact student engagement and motivation in developing countries.

In countries like Brazil, where online education has expanded rapidly, research shows that 50% of students report higher motivation levels when courses include practical assignments and real-time interaction with instructors. Additionally, studies in South Africa demonstrate that student motivation tends to increase by 30% when there are clear, structured guidelines and constant feedback from instructors. These trends underscore the importance of creating supportive learning environments that account for local challenges such as internet connectivity and technological limitations. Singh & Gupta (2020) found that incorporating community-driven learning initiatives in developing economies significantly improved student motivation and participation in online education.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, student motivation for online learning is heavily shaped by access to technology and cultural factors that influence learning behaviors. According to a study in Kenya, students from rural areas with unreliable internet access reported a 40% decrease in motivation to participate in online courses compared to their urban counterparts. However, when students in both

urban and rural areas were provided with offline content, such as downloadable study materials, motivation and engagement levels increased by 20%. This demonstrates how the availability of alternative learning resources can mitigate challenges posed by poor internet infrastructure. In countries like Nigeria, self-reported motivation scales reveal that 35% of students feel less motivated in online learning environments compared to traditional classroom settings (Ogunleye, 2021). However, initiatives such as mobile learning platforms, which cater to the region's high mobile phone penetration, have proven to enhance motivation by offering more flexible learning options.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the integration of mobile phones in online learning has provided a significant boost to student motivation. In Ghana, where mobile learning is prevalent, participation in mobile-based online courses has increased motivation by 50% compared to desktop-based systems. This shift highlights the potential of mobile technologies to engage students in regions where traditional internet access is inconsistent. Ogunleye (2021) supports this, noting that mobile platforms offer an effective alternative to bridge the technological divide in Sub-Saharan Africa, significantly enhancing student motivation and engagement.

Instructor presence plays a significant role in shaping student motivation in online learning environments. Four key components of instructor presence include the frequency of instructor feedback, live sessions, discussion posts, and active participation in course forums. Regular and timely feedback from instructors has been linked to higher student motivation, as it provides students with a sense of progress and encourages them to engage more deeply with the course content (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Live sessions further enhance engagement by allowing real-time interaction, which fosters a sense of connection between students and instructors, thereby increasing participation and motivation (Shernoff, 2017). Discussion posts also serve as a critical tool for instructor presence, as they encourage students to reflect on and engage with course materials in a collaborative, social context, which can enhance motivation through peer interaction.

When instructors actively participate in course forums and provide consistent, constructive feedback, it leads to greater student engagement and motivation, as these actions help students feel supported and valued in the learning process (Anderson, 2001). Studies have shown that the frequency of instructor feedback is positively correlated with increased student motivation, as students perceive the course as more interactive and responsive to their needs (Garrison, 2000). Live sessions, by facilitating immediate clarification of doubts, contribute to a heightened sense of involvement and commitment to the course (Shernoff, 2017). Additionally, instructor participation in discussions encourages students to share insights and develop critical thinking, which is essential for motivation in online learning. Ultimately, these forms of instructor presence influence student participation rates and their self-reported motivation, promoting a more active and engaging learning environment.

Problem Statement

Despite the rapid expansion of online learning across global educational systems, many students continue to struggle with low motivation and engagement in virtual courses compared to traditional classroom settings (Najjar, 2025). Research suggests that a key challenge in online learning environments is the limited interaction between instructors and students, which can weaken students' sense of connection and reduce their motivation to participate in course activities (Puja,

2024; Limbu & McKinley, 2025). Although the teaching presence comprising instructional design, communication, feedback, and facilitation has been linked to improved student experience, there remains inconsistency and limited empirical evidence on how specific aspects of instructor presence directly impact student motivation (Li, 2024; Limbu & McKinley, 2025). Moreover, some studies indicate that variations in instructor presence do not always yield clear improvements in student outcomes, highlighting mixed findings and unresolved gaps in the literature (Li, 2024). Therefore, there is a pressing need for further research to clarify how and to what extent instructor presence influences student motivation in online learning contexts, especially given the persistent motivation challenges many learners report.

Theoretical Review

Social Presence Theory

Social Presence Theory, developed by Short, Williams, and Christie in 1976, emphasizes the importance of creating a sense of "presence" in online learning environments. It argues that students are more likely to engage and feel motivated in online courses when they experience emotional connections through visible and interactive communication with instructors and peers. Instructor presence, through methods such as regular feedback, live interactions, and personalized support, fosters this social presence. In online learning, where physical cues are limited, the sense of social connection becomes crucial in maintaining motivation. This theory supports the idea that when instructors actively engage with students, it enhances their emotional and cognitive involvement, leading to greater motivation to participate and succeed (Richardson, 2021).

Community of Inquiry Framework

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework, introduced by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer in 2000, posits that meaningful online learning environments are built upon three essential elements: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Teaching presence, specifically, refers to the instructor's role in guiding the learning process through structured feedback, fostering discussions, and offering instructional support. This presence is vital for enhancing student motivation, as it creates a supportive learning environment that encourages active engagement. The CoI framework demonstrates how instructor presence directly influences both cognitive engagement and motivation, as students are more likely to participate in learning activities when they feel supported and challenged by their instructors (Garrison & Akyol, 2020).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan in the 1980s, emphasizes the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive human motivation. The theory identifies three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for fostering motivation. Instructor presence plays a key role in meeting these needs, especially relatedness, by establishing connections with students and fostering a sense of belonging in the online classroom. When instructors offer timely feedback, create engaging learning activities, and support student growth, they fulfill the needs for competence and relatedness, leading to increased student motivation. This theory underscores the importance of instructor interaction in motivating students, as their engagement and success are often linked to the instructor's ability to provide a supportive and motivating learning environment (Martínez-Álvarez , 2022).

Empirical Review

Park and Kim's (2020) explored how perceived instructor presence influences student engagement and satisfaction in online learning environments. The research used surveys and Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis to analyze responses from over 300 university students enrolled in online courses. Their findings revealed that strong perceived instructor presence, particularly through interactive communication tools like Microsoft Teams and video feedback, significantly increased student engagement and satisfaction. Students reported that when instructors were visible and engaged, they felt more motivated to actively participate in the course. The study also highlighted that students who perceived their instructors as being present were more likely to complete assignments on time and attend virtual classes regularly. The authors recommended that institutions encourage instructors to adopt more interactive tools to create a sense of presence and connection with students. They suggested that instructors who regularly use discussion forums, real-time messaging, and timely feedback create a motivating learning environment. Park and Kim concluded that instructor presence could effectively enhance the overall learning experience in online courses by increasing student motivation and fostering a community atmosphere. By improving the frequency and quality of instructor interactions, the study argued, instructors can bridge the gap of physical absence and increase student participation. Their research supports the notion that online courses can be just as engaging as traditional classes if instructors maintain an active presence. The study also proposed that instructor involvement could reduce feelings of isolation in online learners, a common challenge in virtual education. This finding underscores the need for instructors to be visible and communicative to maintain high levels of student engagement. Park and Kim's study provides a valuable framework for institutions seeking to enhance motivation in their online learning platforms. The authors suggested that instructor training programs should emphasize the importance of presence in online courses to maximize student engagement and motivation.

Gering (2018) investigated the impact of instructor feedback and presence on student success and engagement in online courses. The researchers adopted a strengths-based approach to analyze student success in asynchronous online courses. They surveyed over 400 students from various institutions and examined their perceptions of instructor presence, feedback, and communication. Their findings suggested that students who received regular and personalized feedback from instructors were significantly more likely to remain engaged in the course. The study revealed that instructor presence, including personalized responses to assignments, regular participation in discussion forums, and direct communication with students, led to improved student persistence and engagement. The researchers also found that students felt more motivated when instructors provided feedback that acknowledged their efforts and progress. Additionally, the study highlighted that consistent instructor feedback helped students develop a better understanding of course content, which directly influenced their motivation to engage in subsequent tasks. Based on these findings, Gering recommended that institutions provide instructors with training on how to maintain a visible presence through frequent, meaningful interactions. They emphasized the importance of instructors not only providing academic feedback but also offering emotional support and guidance to students. The researchers suggested that fostering a supportive online community could lead to better student retention and overall course satisfaction. The study concluded that instructor presence plays a pivotal role in student motivation, especially in online learning environments where students may otherwise feel isolated. Institutions were encouraged

to use various communication channels, such as email, discussion boards, and virtual office hours, to maintain regular contact with students. Gering further recommended that online courses include clear guidelines on how instructors should communicate with students to ensure that they feel connected and motivated.

Shehzad and Charles (2023) explored the relationship between instructor social presence and student engagement in online higher education. Their study used a mixed-methods design, combining surveys and interviews to assess student perceptions of instructor presence and the impact on motivation. The study involved over 200 students from several universities who were enrolled in online programs. The results indicated that students who perceived a higher level of social presence from their instructors were more motivated to participate in course activities. Instructors who interacted frequently with students, provided personalized feedback, and participated in discussions created a more engaging and motivating learning environment. The research revealed that instructor social presence led to increased feelings of connectedness, which in turn enhanced student engagement and motivation. Shehzad and Charles (2023) found that when instructors used video, audio, and live sessions to engage students, it reduced the sense of isolation often felt in online learning settings. Based on these findings, the study recommended that instructors increase their interaction with students by incorporating multimedia and real-time communication tools into online courses. The authors emphasized the importance of instructor involvement in discussions and feedback, which fosters a sense of community and motivates students to be more active in their learning. The study concluded that instructor social presence is a crucial factor in motivating students and improving engagement in online learning environments. Shehzad and Charles (2023) suggested that instructor training programs should focus on enhancing social presence and providing tools for better communication. The research also called for more studies on the role of social presence in various online learning contexts to understand its broader impact.

Yong (2022) examined how instructor-student interactions influenced motivation during emergency remote teaching amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused on students enrolled in emergency online courses at a Malaysian university, with data collected through surveys and focus group interviews. Yong found that students who had regular interactions with their instructors via live sessions, personalized feedback, and frequent communication reported higher motivation levels compared to those with limited instructor contact. The study highlighted the role of instructor presence in reducing the feelings of isolation and disconnection that often arise in remote learning. It also found that students were more motivated to complete assignments and attend live sessions when instructors provided timely and supportive feedback. Based on the findings, Yong recommended that instructors prioritize regular, personalized communication with students in online courses, especially in emergency remote teaching contexts. The study suggested that using live sessions and feedback loops could foster a sense of community and enhance motivation. Yong (2022) also emphasized the importance of creating a motivating environment that allows students to feel heard and supported by their instructors. The research proposed that instructor training programs should equip educators with strategies to engage students effectively in online learning environments. The study concluded that strong instructor presence, particularly through frequent interaction and feedback, is essential for maintaining student motivation during emergency remote teaching.

Roque-Hernández (2024) investigated how perceived instructor presence and the use of interactive tools affected student satisfaction and engagement in online courses. The study surveyed 250 students enrolled in a range of online courses at a Spanish university. The results showed that students who perceived higher levels of instructor presence—measured by instructor participation in discussion forums, regular feedback, and real-time sessions—had higher engagement and satisfaction rates. Students also reported that the use of interactive tools, such as quizzes and group activities, helped them feel more connected to the instructor and peers, which increased their motivation to participate. The study concluded that instructor presence plays a critical role in enhancing both student engagement and overall course satisfaction. Roque-Hernández (2024) recommended that instructors incorporate more interactive tools and maintain a consistent presence throughout the course to foster greater student involvement. They emphasized that such practices create a motivating environment that encourages students to engage actively with course content. The researchers also suggested that universities invest in technology that supports instructor-student interactions and the creation of interactive learning activities. The study further recommended that instructor training programs emphasize the importance of maintaining a visible presence in online courses to enhance motivation and engagement.

Agbong and Agbong-Coates (2024) explored the role of instructor presence in asynchronous online courses and its impact on student engagement. Their study focused on over 200 students enrolled in an online program in Nigeria, using surveys and content analysis to gather data. They found that students who received regular and personalized feedback from their instructors were significantly more engaged in course activities. The study revealed that instructors who actively participated in discussion boards, provided timely feedback, and used various communication tools (such as email and course announcements) increased students' sense of connection and motivation. Agbong and Agbong-Coates (2024) recommended that instructors in asynchronous courses ensure regular interaction with students to maintain a high level of engagement. They suggested that personalized communication from instructors could help mitigate the feelings of isolation that often arise in online learning environments. The study also proposed that instructors utilize a combination of communication strategies, including peer interactions and group activities, to maintain motivation. The researchers concluded that fostering an environment where students feel supported and connected to their instructor is key to sustaining motivation and engagement in online courses.

Su (2023) compared teaching presence and student engagement in blended and emergency remote teaching. Their study focused on 300 students across several universities, using both surveys and interviews to collect data on their perceptions of instructor presence. The study found that students who perceived a strong teaching presence, characterized by frequent feedback, live sessions, and instructor engagement in course forums, were more motivated and engaged in both blended and emergency remote learning contexts. Su (2023) highlighted that teaching presence positively impacted student motivation, especially in emergency remote settings, where students often face challenges such as lack of face-to-face interaction. They recommended that instructors maintain a strong teaching presence, even in remote settings, to enhance motivation and engagement. The study also suggested that blended learning environments provide a more effective platform for fostering instructor presence, as they combine face-to-face and online interactions. The researchers concluded that strong teaching presence is essential for maintaining student engagement and motivation, particularly in challenging remote teaching situations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: While the studies on instructor presence (Park & Kim, 2020; Gering et al., 2018) emphasize the importance of feedback, interaction, and visibility, there is a gap in exploring the specific mechanisms through which instructor presence enhances motivation. For instance, the impact of instructor presence might vary depending on student personality traits (introversion vs. extroversion) or learning styles, which have not been sufficiently explored. Most existing research (Shehzad & Charles, 2023; Yong, 2022) focuses on broad perceptions of presence, but further research could focus on specific interactive tools (such as live video, real-time feedback, or asynchronous forums) to discern which is most effective in motivating students.

Contextual Gaps: The studies reviewed focus predominantly on university settings (Park & Kim, 2020; Gering, 2018), which leaves a gap in understanding the role of instructor presence in non-university online learning environments, such as vocational training or corporate learning. Additionally, the research mainly focuses on course engagement and satisfaction, leaving out other critical aspects such as long-term retention or transfer of skills after course completion. Further exploration could be directed toward how instructor presence in online courses impacts student outcomes beyond satisfaction, such as practical skills and career readiness.

Geographical Gaps: The studies conducted by Park & Kim (2020) and Gering (2018) were mainly based in developed economies, raising a geographical gap regarding the impact of instructor presence in developing and low-resource settings. For instance, studies in African countries or rural areas in Asia could explore how internet access and technology infrastructure influence the effectiveness of instructor presence. Moreover, Shehzad and Charles (2023) and Su (2023) explored social presence in specific cultural contexts, but cross-cultural studies between Western and Eastern learning environments could provide deeper insights into how culturally shaped expectations of instructor authority and feedback affect motivation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, the role of instructor presence in enhancing motivation in online learning is pivotal to fostering student engagement and success. Research consistently highlights that when instructors are actively involved in the learning process through timely feedback, participation in discussions, and using interactive tools students experience higher levels of motivation, satisfaction, and engagement. This presence helps bridge the gap created by the physical absence in online environments, reducing feelings of isolation and increasing students' sense of connection to the course and their peers. The studies reviewed also emphasize the importance of instructor

training to maintain an active presence and effectively utilize communication tools to create an engaging and supportive learning environment. However, there are still significant gaps in understanding how instructor presence interacts with individual learning styles, cultural contexts, and technological challenges, particularly in non-university settings and in developing economies. Future research should address these gaps to better understand how personalized and context-specific instructor presence can further optimize student motivation and learning outcomes. Ultimately, strong instructor presence is not only a catalyst for increased engagement but also a critical factor in improving overall educational experiences in online learning environments.

Recommendations

Theory

Future research should focus on refining theoretical models of instructor presence by integrating individual learner differences such as learning styles, personality traits, and technological proficiency. Existing theories, like the Community of Inquiry framework and Social Presence Theory, could be expanded to incorporate the dynamic role of cultural and contextual factors in shaping the impact of instructor presence on student motivation. By exploring these factors, theories can evolve to offer more comprehensive insights into the nuanced ways instructor presence influences student engagement and motivation. Additionally, developing context-specific models that account for differences between university, vocational, and corporate settings would enrich theoretical understandings of online learning environments.

Practice

Institutions should prioritize instructor training programs that emphasize the development of a visible and engaging online presence. This includes timely feedback, participation in live sessions, and fostering interactive communication through discussion boards and multimedia content. Instructors should be encouraged to personalize their interactions with students to help them feel supported and motivated. Additionally, adopting best practices for asynchronous and synchronous learning could create a more flexible learning environment that addresses diverse student needs. Institutions should also invest in technologies that enhance interaction and feedback capabilities, such as learning management systems that support video feedback and real-time collaboration tools. Practical strategies should focus on reducing feelings of isolation by promoting active student-instructor and student-peer interactions.

Policy

Education policymakers should consider instructor presence as a key element of online learning quality standards. National and regional accreditation bodies could integrate clear guidelines on the expectations of instructor presence in online courses, ensuring that institutions adopt consistent standards for interaction and feedback. Policymakers should advocate for the integration of digital literacy training for educators to ensure instructors are equipped to create engaging and motivating learning environments. Moreover, funding opportunities could be provided for institutions that innovate in ways to enhance instructor-student engagement in online learning, particularly in low-resource settings. Policies should also promote equitable access to technology to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that both instructors and students can participate in meaningful interactions.

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