

Abstract

Attempting to answer what motivates students to learn, this research proposes and test a two-factor model, where self-reflections increase learning goals and self-compassion reduces performance goals. Learning-oriented individuals concern mastering skills and performance-oriented individuals concern demonstrating competence. In study 1 (n=88), positive correlations are found between learning goals, self-reflection and self-compassion. In study 2 (n=98), after completing a difficult test, participants were randomized into 3 conditions, doing self-reflection, both reflection and compassion, and a control group. Results indicated that self-reflection increases learning behavior, including information and challenge seeking. Self-compassion entails mindfulness, self-kindness and common humanity. When supplementing self-reflection, it lowers one's performance goal and fear of others' negative evaluations. Altogether, self-reflection and self-compassion take two different routes to strengthen students' learning motivations. Implications are three-fold. First, as these concepts can be easily comprehended, disseminated and practiced, educators are advised to nurture these skills. Second, the two-factor model enables customized teaching. While self-reflection suits demotivated students better, self-compassion is more helpful for diligent students troubled with a desire to prove their abilities. The latter is especially prominent in Asia. Third, future researchers are invited to develop and explore the feasibility, scalability and sustainability of a well-structured intervention program that fosters both qualities, thereby motivating more students to unleash their potentials.

Keywords: Self-reflection, Self-compassion, Learning goals, Performance goals, Learning motivations, Learning orientation