

From the Back of the Classroom to the Top Student

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It was the first day of Mehr, marking the beginning of the new academic year. The atmosphere in the school was filled with excitement. My former students eagerly took their seats, making the class lively on their own. However, in the third period, the situation was different. I entered a classroom where all the faces were unfamiliar. This was the very class that two of my experienced colleagues had warned me about: “Maintain control,” “Be strict from the start,” “Some of them were admitted under special conditions,” and “Enter with a serious demeanor to establish authority.”

With these preconceived notions, I decided to assert my authority from the outset. When discussing classroom rules and examinations, I spoke firmly, even warning that if I caught any student cheating, I would tear up their exam paper. Suddenly, a student from the back of the class, seemingly the class representative, stood up and said in a serious tone: “Why do all teachers start the first lesson with threats? You could simply take the paper and deduct marks without making a scene.”

Laughter erupted among some students, but I paused. He had a valid point. I looked around the class and realized that I had unknowingly judged them based on my colleagues' opinions. Perhaps these students did not need rigid discipline but rather a teacher who understood them.

As days passed, I gradually discovered the root of their behavior. Their previous teachers had largely ignored their needs, resorting to threats of low grades to enforce discipline. In response, these students sought refuge in mischief, trying to make the classroom more bearable for themselves.

I decided to take a different approach. Instead of confrontation, I sought connection. I focused on the same student who had challenged me on the first day—someone who showed little

interest in academics and openly admitted to being a "last-minute crammer." But instead of reprimanding him, I established a rapport. I designed a study plan tailored to his needs, shared my own learning experiences, celebrated his small achievements, and encouraged his active participation in class discussions.

Initially, he did not take my efforts seriously. But gradually, he changed. Today, he is no longer the same student he was at the beginning of the year. He is now the top student in the class. In his midterm exams, he scored above 18 in all subjects, including History, Sociology, Philosophy, and Psychology.

This experience taught me a valuable lesson: sometimes, rather than imposing strict rules, all students need is a teacher who listens to them and helps them find their motivation.

Scientific Analysis

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Introduction

Teacher-student relationships are fundamental to the learning process. Numerous studies in educational psychology have demonstrated that classroom management strategies and teachers' interactions with students directly impact motivation, academic achievement, and students' attitudes toward learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Theories of intrinsic motivation and cooperative learning emphasize that fostering a supportive learning environment, rather than relying on punitive approaches, leads to more positive outcomes (Vygotsky, 1978). The narrative analyzed in this paper presents a practical example of how shifting from a rigid, authoritarian teaching approach to a more empathetic, student-centered method can yield significant educational benefits.

Discussion

In the presented narrative, the teacher initially entered the new classroom with preconceived negative assumptions based on warnings from colleagues. At first, they attempted to assert authority using traditional classroom control methods, including rigid rule enforcement and verbal threats. This approach aligns with psychological theories of extrinsic control, which suggest that strict control may lead to short-term compliance but often reduces students' intrinsic motivation over time (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

A pivotal moment in this interaction was when one student openly challenged the teacher's authoritarian approach, questioning the necessity of threats. This response can be analyzed

through the lens of the "autonomy in learning" theory, which posits that students resist excessive control and restrictions when they feel their independence is being undermined (Reeve, 2009). The gradual shift in the teacher's approach—from strict enforcement to supportive encouragement—aligns with social learning theories and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). By fostering positive interaction, reinforcing intrinsic motivation, and providing structured yet flexible guidance, the teacher successfully altered the student's perception of learning.

The results of this shift were evident. A student who initially showed little interest in academics eventually transformed into one of the top achievers in the class. This transformation supports psychological perspectives that emphasize the effectiveness of encouragement and student engagement over punitive measures (Bandura, 1997).

Conclusion

The experience presented in this paper illustrates how transitioning from rigid control to a supportive, student-centered approach can profoundly impact students' academic progress. Findings in educational psychology confirm that collaborative methods, particularly in classroom settings, enhance intrinsic motivation, active participation, and overall academic success. Therefore, teachers should prioritize motivational strategies and positive interactions over external control and punishment to foster meaningful and sustainable learning for their students.