

The Teacher as a Source of Student Inspiration: A Qualitative Study in a Business School

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Abstract

Teachers are an important source of inspiration for their students. Although educational research considers inspiration to be an important motivational construct that generates positive results for students, the different conceptual interpretations of the construct have made its study difficult. This situation is accentuated in the context of Latin America, due to the scarcity of empirical studies that contribute to its understanding. Considering the teacher as a source of inspiration and based on the inspiration model of Thrash & Elliot (2003, 2004), this study seeks to understand how students experience inspiration. Twenty university students were interviewed about their experiences of inspiration about their professors. The interviews were evaluated through thematic analysis. The results revealed 5 themes that highlight the characteristics of the inspiring teacher. Additionally, the thematic analyzes verified the existence of the three characteristics of the inspiration model (evocation: 1 theme, transcendence: 3 themes, and motivation: 4 themes). The study contributes by laying the foundations for formulating a guide that characterizes the inspiring teacher. As well as formulate positive insights focused on the characteristics of inspiration that allow students to transcend professionally through their university studies.

KEYWORDS: Student, Inspiration, Teacher, Business School.

El profesor como fuente de inspiración de los alumnos: Un estudio cualitativo en una escuela de Negocios

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Resumen

Los profesores son una importante fuente de inspiración para sus alumnos. Si bien la investigación en educación considera que la inspiración es un constructo motivacional importante que genera resultados positivos para los estudiantes, las diferentes interpretaciones conceptuales del constructo han dificultado su estudio. Esta situación se acentúa en el contexto de América Latina, debido a la escasez de estudios empíricos que contribuyan a su comprensión. Considerando al docente como fuente de inspiración y con base en el modelo de inspiración de Thrash & Elliot (2003, 2004), este estudio busca comprender cómo los estudiantes experimentan la inspiración. Veinte estudiantes universitarios fueron entrevistados sobre sus experiencias de inspiración sobre sus profesores. Las entrevistas fueron evaluadas a través del análisis temático. Los resultados revelaron 5 temas que destacan las características del profesor inspirador. Además, los análisis temáticos verificaron la existencia de las tres características del modelo de inspiración (evocación: 1 tema, trascendencia: 3 temas y motivación: 4 temas). El estudio contribuye sentando las bases para formular una guía que caracterice al docente inspirador. Así como para formular reflexiones positivas enfocadas en las características de inspiración que permitan a los estudiantes trascender profesionalmente a través de sus estudios universitarios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Estudiante, Inspiración, Profesor, Escuela de Negocios

Introduction

Student inspiration by teachers is an understudied topic in higher education research. Inspiration has been understood as: "...an epistemic-motivational episode in which an individual is awoken to what is valuable and imbued with the spirit to articulate, embody, or otherwise express this new understanding" (Trash, 2020, p. 3). Investigating the factors that may contribute to higher-education students' well-being and motivation is essential to promote optimal academic performance and learning. One such factor may be the inspiration students get from their teachers. Inspiration has been defined as a motivational concept consisting of three core characteristics that distinguish it from other states: epistemic transcendence, evocation, and approach motivation (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004). This suggests that an inspiration experience is a motivational state that provides the receptor with an awareness of new or better possibilities and that one feels compelled to bring the new idea into fruition (Thrash et al. 2014; Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004).

Despite the great advances made by Thrash & Elliot (2003, 2004) in the study of inspiration, literature on student inspiration in higher education contexts is still limited (Nabi et al. 2018). Moreover, available studies have used specific theoretical perspectives in the educational field or defined inspiration in terms of its specific manifestations. For example, Sjaastad (2012) studied inspiration by teachers in STEM-oriented (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) higher education programs, using Woelfel & Haller's (1971) theory of significant persons. Lamb & Wedell (2015) studied inspiration by teachers in second language education in Asian Schools, and de Jong & Van der Zee (2009) and Van Der Zee (2012) studied student inspiration in the specific context of catholic schools. The only authors that build upon the theoretical framework proposed by Thrash & Elliot (2003, 2004) are Nabi et al. (2018), Souitaris, et al. (2007), and Ahmed et al. (2020), who study student inspiration in entrepreneurship education programs.

Inspiration is one of the many forms can take lecturer-student relationship, and it is important to study using scientifically sound theories, such as Thrash & Elliot's (2003, 2004) model. Moreover, several authors believe that the knowledge concerning the development of various factors that instil motivation to learn amongst business students has been limited (Kashif et al., 2013) and that studies in the western world are on the way to proving this phenomenon (Adcroft, 2010). Additionally, several studies have found some cultural differences in learning, motivation to learn, goals and purposes of learning, and learning strategies adopted (Marsella et al., 1985; Weisz, 1984). Therefore, it is important to expand the study of motivational concepts, such as inspiration, to higher education in emerging markets contexts where it has not been previously investigated, and this study contributes directly to this. Considering that this is an underdeveloped field of study and context, the qualitative approach that will be used in this investigation is ideal at this stage (Kashif et al., 2014).

This research aims to understand students inspiration process. The research questions are: How do students from business schools become inspired by their teachers? How are the characteristics of Trash & Elliot's model of inspiration reflected in the student experience? Consequently, this article will present this study's literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion sections.

Literature review

The concept of Inspiration

Inspiration is an understudied concept in academic literature. There are various definitions, which are mostly circumscribed to specific fields of study. For example, some conceptualizations are specific to the study of student's inspiration from religious teachers (Van der Zee, 2012, p. 21), others to psychology (Hart, 1998; Hymer et al., 2008), and others to management and leadership studies (Searle & Hanrahan, 2011).

The study of inspiration in the behavioral sciences had several perspectives and conceptual definitions until Thrash & Elliot (2003) built a comprehensive conceptualization of inspiration. They developed the tripartite conceptualization that posits that inspiration has three principal characteristics: evocation, transcendence, and motivation (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). The first one, evocation, refers to the fact that inspiration is evoked and unwilled (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). Hence, the cause of inspiration is defined as an evocative stimulus, such as an idea, a person, an object, or an act (Thrash & Elliot, 2003; Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010). Trigger stimuli can be a divine revelation (supernatural), a creative illumination (internal), or a person or object (environmental) (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Because inspiration is unwilled, one does not feel directly responsible for becoming inspired. The second characteristic, transcendence, refers to the fact that inspiration allows the individual to become aware of new ideas or possibilities, which are better or more important than one's usual concerns. (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004; Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010; Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010). These new ideas or possibilities were not considered by individuals before inspiration. The third characteristic is motivation. Inspiration involves motivation to express or manifest that which is newly apprehended (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004; Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010; Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010).

Student inspiration by teachers

Studies concerning how teachers may inspire their students and the characteristics of this process are scarce (Lamb & Wedell, 2015; Nabi et al., 2018), and there is some evidence to believe that they may be essential in higher education, contributing not only to academic performance but also to other aspects such as future entrepreneurial intentions (Nabi et al., 2018), career choice (Sjaastad, 2012), self-concept development and self-efficacy (Lamb & Wedell, 2015).

Student inspiration by teachers has been studied in various contexts, such as in STEM-oriented higher education programs (Sjaastad, 2012), in second language education in Asian schools (Lamb & Wedell, 2015), in catholic schools (de Jong & van der Zee, 2009; Van Der Zee, 2012), and entrepreneurship education programs (Nabi et al., 2018; Souitaris, et al., 2007; Wartiovaara et al., 2019; Ahmed et al., 2020). However, this concept has continued to be studied from several theoretical perspectives in the educational field. For instance, authors such as Sjaastad (2012) propose an equivalence between the terms "inspire", "motivate" and "influence", and draw their definition of inspiration from Woelfel & Haller's (1971) theory of significant persons. According to this theory, significant persons provide information related to conceptions of the self or a significant object and may influence a person's choices.

Other authors such as Lamb & Wedell (2014, p.2), who investigated inspiring English teaching in Asian schools, defined inspiration as "something that is the result of a soulful

relationship that changes a person's emotions and behaviors from within over the long-term". The authors found that students considered that inspiring teachers had to be "good technicians of language teaching", had to "offer a good model, both personally and professionally", and had to be "good psychologists".

de Jong & Van der Zee (2009) and Van der Zee (2012) have studied student inspiration from teachers in Catholic schools. They proposed that inspiration may be "regarded as mental causation of perlocutionary effects that, through the outstanding qualities of the source of inspiration, may motivate people, based on suitable aptitudes, to have certain thoughts and desires and to perform certain actions" (de Jong & Van der Zee, 2009, p.13).

Although these studies have substantial differences in their conceptualization of inspiration, they all conclude that teachers inspire students. However, some of these define inspiration in terms of its specific manifestations (e.g., in the religious educational domain). This constitutes an important limitation according to Thrash & Elliot (2003), as the concept of inspiration can be applied to phenomena across domains. Moreover, others associate inspiration with a particular theoretical framework, and this has also been critiqued by Thrash & Elliott (2003), as it is at odds with the aim of parsimony.

Studies in the field of higher entrepreneurial education have built upon the important advances made in the psychological study of inspiration. For instance, Souitaris et al. (2007) proposed an operational definition of an "entrepreneurial education (EE) program derived on entrepreneurial inspiration" based on Thrash & Elliot's (2003, 2004) work. They defined it as a "change of hearts (emotion) and minds (motivation) evoked by events or inputs from the program and directed towards considering becoming an entrepreneur" (Souitaris et al., 2007, p. 573). Although in their study, entrepreneurial inspiration (in comparison to other components of EE) was the only factor that positively related to start-up intentions, they investigated inspiration in a general sense and did not explore the various triggers that could be offered by such programs (Nabi et al., 2018).

Ahmed et al. (2020) used Souitaris et al. (2007) inspiration definition. Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, they studied entrepreneurship education programs (EEP) and found that inspirational activities increased students' desire to be entrepreneurs (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Although the investigations are similar, very few have studied inspiration using Thrash & Elliot's (2003) tripartite conceptualization, which has a considerable amount of scientific evidence. Also, only a few studies have focused on understanding how students become inspired by teachers from an explorative and qualitative perspective, more so in an emerging market context (Lamb & Wedell, 2014).

Methodology

In this investigation, a qualitative approach is particularly useful when working with understudied populations, such as Business School Students from Lima, Peru, as it facilitates the identification of the interpretive knowledge about a community, such as its social norms or ethnicity (Kashif et al., 2014). Qualitative, exploratory designs also enable researchers to gain detailed, open, and non-controlled responses from subjects (Patton, 2002). This is particularly useful when studying novel topics such as student inspiration (Nabi et al., 2018).

Participants

50 students from a Business School in Lima, Peru, were contacted via e-mail. This is a convenience sample and participants included in the study had to meet the following criteria: be between the 6th and 12th career semester and be in a business-oriented program (e.g., International Business, Marketing, Business Administration, Business Engineering). These criteria were used to guarantee homogeneity in the student sample. This kind of sampling technique is also known as a purposive sampling technique, which is beneficial when researchers are interested in selecting respondents who will provide detailed information on the study topic (Speziale et al., 2011). The students were briefed on the general purpose of the study and were provided with a URL to sign a virtually informed consent in case they decided to participate. 20 students, 10 male and 10 female, answered the e-mail and signed the informed consent.

In this study, the sample size was determined by the concept of Information Power (Malterud et al., 2016), as study characteristics such as specific aims, a dense sample specificity, and a strong dialogue provided the study with high information power.

Data collection

An interview guide was developed based on stimulus questions used to elicit inspiration narratives by Thrash & Elliott. (2004), and questionnaires employed by Thrash & Elliott (2003, 2004) and Thrash, Elliot et al., (2010) to measure the three inspiration characteristics, evocation, motivation, and transcendence. This interview guide sought to explore how students are inspired by their teachers and how the three inspiration characteristics (Trash & Elliot, 2003, 2004), manifest in these experiences. This interview guide consisted of open-ended, semi-structured questions about their inspiring experiences. The guide was used flexibly, to ensure that participants could describe issues that may have been incongruent with areas of question (Mays & Pope, 2000). Two pilot interviews were conducted to ensure that questions were correctly understood by respondents, and no further adjustments were needed. Piloting interviews is a recognized and recommended process in qualitative research (Krueger, 2014). One-on-one interviews were conducted, and participants were asked to narrate their experiences of inspiration independently, which means, to talk separately about each teacher that inspired them.

The interviews were conducted via Google Meet video conferences and lasted 30 minutes, on average. Interviews were conducted by a female psychologist, trained in qualitative methods. The interviews' audio recording was transcribed.

Data Analysis

Interview transcriptions were imported into NVivo 12 for analysis. Thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Finfgeld-Connett, 2014) was used to analyse the data, and results were reported following the JARS-Qual guidelines for reporting qualitative research (Levitt et al., 2017, 2018; Levitt, 2020). The transcripts were distributed to all the authors of this investigation, who carefully read the data several times. An initial coding process of 10 interviews was carried out by a psychologist trained in qualitative analysis. The coding identified by the psychologist was verified by the other authors. Codes were then organized into themes and subthemes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane,

2006). Consequently, the first coder met with the authors to discuss the themes and derive candidate themes. This promoted credibility and coherence to the data interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998). The authors then met to code the remaining 10 interviews. Additionally, inspiration stories (E.g., Students being inspired by a particular teacher) were analyzed to see if the three components of Thrash & Elliot (2003, 2004) characterized them.

Findings

There are two sets of findings in this study. The first one concerns the diverse characteristics or actions that students consider inspiring in teachers. For this set of findings, the thematic analysis revealed 5 themes. The second one concerns the characteristics of the student's inspiration experiences. In this set, data were divided into three clusters that represented the three main characteristics of inspiration. For the evocation cluster, only 1 theme emerged. For the transcendence cluster, 3 themes emerged. For the motivation cluster, 4 themes emerged.

Actions and characteristics of inspiring teachers

Theme 1: A teacher that provides practical and useful knowledge for future work experiences.

Many participants reported being inspired by teachers whose class contents transcended theoretical knowledge and included practical content. For example:

I had this teacher who would use examples of companies he had worked in, and he would tell you about them and relate them to class content. These were things you could never find in books; it was practical knowledge we needed and were not necessarily getting from other teachers.

The things he shared and taught us were interesting, and we could apply them in work environments. The same always happens with inspiring teachers, they need to have a lot of experience and what he does in class, and what he teaches, must be useful for their internships or work.

Theme 2: A teacher that is funny and friendly with the students.

Teachers that were humorous, joyful, and friendly were also considered inspiring by students. The students that reported this mentioned that these teachers were funny and/or friendly while teaching, as well as in their individual interactions with students.

She had excellent humor. It was obvious that she was passionate about the course topic and knew how to transmit that. She genuinely enjoyed teaching, and that was inspiring.

I imagine that as any person, she might have had bad and good days, but when she came into the room, she was always joyful, smiling, happy to help... She made all of us participate and the way she carried out the lesson was just really fun”.

Theme 3: A teacher that keeps students engaged in their lesson and explains the contents clearly.

Several students considered that teachers that kept students' attention in class, as well as engaged with the class topics, were inspiring.

I think how the teacher managed the students' attention was inspiring. In some moments, they would be more engaging than in others, but it was always consistent.

I think it was inspiring how friendly and easygoing his class felt. He was hilarious, but also quite smart. He knew so much, and he made you feel that the subject was hard at all.

Theme 4: A teacher that is successful, intelligent, and passionate about their career. Many participants reported being inspired by successful teachers, who had achieved important professional milestones and who currently held or had previously held important or senior positions in diverse renowned organizations. This was related to teachers being passionate about their area of expertise and having a deep and extensive knowledge of it.

This professor was inspiring because he had so much experience working in international businesses, and you could sense he was an expert when he spoke. He is also a fantastic researcher and has taken part in so many investigations.

Theme 5: A teacher that enjoys teaching and is concerned about his or her student's learning and professional growth.

Teachers that were passionate about teaching and transmitting knowledge to students were considered inspiring by them. Many students reported that a teacher's passion for teaching derived from them believing that their course was important and transcendent for students' personal or professional growth.

What I found inspiring about this teacher was how he always pushes you to do more and gives you amazing feedback. I think teaching is genuinely his passion; he likes to do it. So, he doesn't hesitate to give you advice.

Identification of the tripartite model in student's inspiration experiences

Evocation, theme 1: Inspiration occurs involuntarily its occurrence depends on the presence of the stimuli.

Regarding Evocation, only one predominant theme emerged, which was that students experience inspiration as an evoked, involuntary experience.

I knew some things about doing academic research, but I had no idea how to get involved. But this teacher gave me the curiosity to start doing it. He just spoke so much about it that it became inevitable not to think about it. And class after class, hearing him talk about all his papers and investigations made me want to give it a go. And now I am delighted with what I am doing.

I didn't really understand what doing real research was like. The fact that the teacher was so insistent on the importance of research... it became impossible to not think about it. He inserted this inspiration to do research within me.

Regarding transcendence, three themes emerged.

Transcendence, theme 1: The students' career certainty increases.

Most students reported that inspiration by their teachers helped them increase their career decidedness, because when teachers would share their professional experiences with them, they would give them greater insight into what practicing the profession would be like.

I am glad he was my teacher. He was so passionate about his job, and he transmitted that to us. He made me feel sure about my career choice.

I started thinking... 'I might actually be in a good path'. (...) When the teacher told us his experiences... it felt as if you were re-living them with him, and that helped acquire this security with my career choice.

Transcendence, theme 2: The class contents are considered more interesting and useful than before inspiration occurred.

Students reported acquiring new preferences and perceived an added utility to the class contents that were not considered as useful previously to the inspiration experience.

I had forgotten how much I liked this subject until she became my teacher. I don't know how she just made me realize how cool this topic was and how important it was going to me in my professional life.

Transcendence, theme 3: One must be strained and perseverant to achieve professional success.

Students also report that teachers inspired them to believe that they could overcome several life difficulties and challenges by being effortful and enthusiastic in overcoming them.

I remember that this teacher made me think seriously about never giving up. He left me with the idea of never giving up, always persevering in our dreams, and never settling for less than what we expect.

He transmitted this idea that... you must never conform and you should always persevere in achieving what you want.

A total of 4 themes concerning motivation as part of inspiration experiences were found. Motivation, theme 1: Carry out an academic investigation.

Some students mentioned that teachers, in this context, inspired them to get involved in academic investigations. Many of the students reported never having been interested in academic research before the inspiration experience.

I think it was thanks to him that I decided to learn more about the possibility of becoming a researcher. He inspired me to do that. Also, he made me think about working in the public sector.

When this teacher talked about academic papers or research... he inspired me. I am working on a paper myself now, and it's due to him.

Motivation, theme 2: Pay more attention in class and strive for better results in the course being taught by the inspiring teacher.

After being inspired by a certain teacher, most students reported becoming more eager to listen and understand the contents the teacher was dictating in a certain course.

I would say he inspired us to study harder. He made everything in the course seem so useful and relevant for us that you felt the urge to learn and study. It felt easier also, and you started enjoying it.

Motivation, theme 3: Find the teacher outside of class for academic questions. Participants also recalled being inspired to look for teachers and continue discussing class topics or to ask them academic questions.

This teacher was so inspiring that I still try to reach out to ask him academic questions. I want him to be my thesis supervisor.

Motivation, theme 4: Become interested in teaching. Some participants recognized that teachers inspired them to consider becoming teachers.

I think that one of the things that inspired me was how he believed education could change society. His work was his contribution to humanity, and that made me consider becoming a teacher. I started giving debate classes sometime after that.

Discussion

Prior to this investigation, there had been no attempts to understand student inspiration in Peruvian, higher educational contexts. Students of a Peruvian business school reported that teachers could be an important source of inspiration for them. As Lamb & Weddell (2014) mentioned, the finding that students do get inspired in a previously unstudied context is an important contribution to inspiration literature, as there is currently not enough evidence to generalize any inspiration theory throughout cultural contexts, specifically, Thrash & Elliott's (2003, 2004) conceptualization of inspiration. Moreover, this study identified the aspects or characteristics which are considered inspiring in teachers using a qualitative approach. Also, a degree of similarity was found with the results of previous qualitative investigations made in non-occidental contexts, such as Asia (Lamb & Weddell, 2014). This suggests the possibility of teacher-related inspiration drivers being similar in diverse cultural contexts. Using the culture study of Hofstede (2011) a degree of similarity with other countries was also found in spite of Peru and Latin American cultures tend to rank higher on Power Distance and Uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2011).

Students reported a series of characteristics or actions of teachers that had inspired them. We could find five characteristics that represented the subject's experiences. Inspiring teachers were those who provided practical and useful knowledge for future work experiences. This finding is not surprising, considering that several studies have recognized the importance of Future Time Perspective (FTP) in student engagement (Hilpert et al., 2012). This means that, if students believe that their education will be useful for them, they are more likely to be positively motivated (Husman & Lens, 1999; Kauffman & Husman, 2004). Students also considered that inspiring teachers were funny and friendly with their students. This result is in line with what Lamb et al. (2014) found in their qualitative study with Chinese and Indonesian English language students. They found that students also considered that "nice/kind" and "humorous" teachers were considered inspiring by students. Also, the research carried out by Kashif et al., (2013) with Pakistani students suggested that faculty members who were friendly and approachable enhanced student's motivation to learn in business classrooms. This finding may suggest that teachers that display this characteristic may be considered inspiring regardless of the cultural context being studied.

Students considered that inspiring teachers were also those who kept students engaged in their lessons and explained class contents with clarity. Again, the study carried out by Lamb et al., (2014) yielded very similar results, as both Chinese and Indonesian students considered that teachers that "used novel methods", that "made an effective use of traditional methods" or that gave "comprehensible lessons with clear explanations" were considered inspiring by their students. Teacher inspiration, hence, is dependent on his/her ability to capture students' attention and keep them engaged during the course. This is in line with findings from other studies, where students who were positively engaged in their course work and with instructors tend to be highly motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2009).

Students reported that teachers who are successful, intelligent, and passionate about their careers are inspiring. These kinds of themes were also found in Lamb & Weddell's (2014) study in Chinese and Indonesian provinces. Solpuk Turhan et al. (2019) found in their study in Turkey about characteristic of inspiring teachers that one characteristic of the inspiring teacher is his / her professional development. This may suggest that these kinds of attributes are being considered inspiring across cultures. Several authors have argued that inspiration may be elicited by moral beauty, admiration by skill, and awe by vastness (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Thrash & Elliot, 2014). Finally, students considered that inspiring teachers enjoyed teaching and were concerned about their students' learning processes and professional growth. This finding is similar to the results of Lamb & Wedell's (2014) study, where students were inspired by teachers with whom students had a personal and close relationship, and who offered reassurance, praise, and encouragement. This may be particularly important in Peru, which is a fundamentally collectivist country, where warm, close interpersonal relationships and cooperation are among the principal drivers of happiness and wellbeing (Yamamoto, 2016).

This study also sought to understand if students' inspiration experiences were characterized by the components of Thrash & Elliot's (2003, 2004) tripartite model of inspiration. When exploring the evocation component in students' experiences, there was one common theme that was transversal to students' experiences: Inspiration occurs involuntarily, and its occurrence depends on the presence of the stimuli. This is consistent with Thrash & Elliot's (2003, 2004) definition of evocation, in which an epistemic awakening is elicited by an object in the stimulus milieu without any responsibility from

the inspired person. Students used expressions such as “the teacher awoke an interest in me”, “the teacher gave me a new perspective”, “the teacher made it impossible to think in anything else but the course themes”, which show a sense of self that is relegated to a passive object position, entailing that these inspiration experiences are characterized by being evoked by the inspiring teacher.

Transcendence refers to the fact that an individual may become vividly aware of new or better possibilities (Thrash & Elliott, 2003, 2004). In this study, it is clear how students are awoken to new and novel ideas and possibilities, and how these may be beneficial for their academic life. For example, students consistently reported an increase in their career certainty after being inspired by a teacher. Another theme that emerged when analysing transcendence was that class contents are considered more interesting and useful than before inspiration occurred. This is consistent with the transmission function of inspiration proposed by Thrash & Elliott (2004). This function states that inspiration involves a motivation to extend intrinsic value from an elicitor object to a motivational object. However, for this extension to occur, the person must recognize the “intrinsic value” from the elicitor object, and the theme that is being discussed shows how this may happen. Hence, we can see that the characteristics of inspiration that were found in Thrash & Elliot’s (2004) studies are also found in students from Peru, suggesting the possibility of a process that occurs similarly in diverse cultural backgrounds, and that may yield positive motivational benefits for students. Finally, we also find that a person must be strained and perseverant to achieve professional success. In this study, teachers who were successful had important achievements and high intellectual capacity were considered inspiring.

Motivation is considered the final stage of the inspiration process, in which the individual seeks the realization or concretization of the acquired idea or vision (Thrash, 2020). Four main themes were found, representing the principal motivational drives that resulted from inspiration experiences in our group of students. Students felt compelled to carry out academic investigations, and they reported that their teacher’s involvement in academia was what inspired them to do this. To our knowledge, this is a novel finding, as well as the fact that students felt motivated to find a teacher outside of class for academic questions. Both motivations may be beneficial for students’ learning processes. Moreover, some students became interested in teaching because of inspiration experiences. This may be in line with the fact that inspiration may reflect an “identity opportunity” for students (Wartiovaara et al., 2018). Finally, students in this study reported feeling motivated to pay more attention in class and strive for better results in the course being taught by the inspiring teacher. This theme reveals the importance of inspiration in an educational context, as it can contribute to student engagement during lessons.

As previously mentioned, there are series of benefits that derive from inspiration experiences that may be particularly beneficial for higher education students: improvement of task performance, learning, efficiency, progress towards personal goals, productivity, work-mastery motivation, the pursuit of multiple majors, and creativity (Milyavskaya et al. 2012; Oleynick et al., 2014; Thrash, Elliot et al. 2010). Although further investigation is necessary to understand how all these variables relate in this context, this study is an initial approach to comprehend how inspiration benefits undergraduate students.

Conclusions

In this study, several factors have arisen as actions or characteristics that students consider inspiring in their teachers. Students consider that inspiring teachers are those who give them tools and knowledge that go beyond theoretical concepts, and that will become of special use when they are working as business professionals. Also, students recall the value of teachers being friendly, easy-going, and fun, as well as that of teachers that manage to engage students in class topics and deliver class content efficiently, in a way that made it memorable. Students are also inspired by passionate, intelligent, and successful teachers. Finally, students are inspired by teachers who enjoyed teaching and who cared for students' professional development and learning process.

Moreover, this study allowed us to see how Thrash & Elliot's (2003) tripartite model of inspiration reflects what students in this context consider and describe as inspiration experiences. In most cases, students reported that their experiences occurred out of their volitional control and described the motivation and transcendent ideas that the experience entailed as things that came to them from a source other than themselves. Transcendent ideas were also an important part of inspiration experiences, and these consisted of having clarity and security with their career choice, with finding class contents more interesting and useful than before the inspiration experience, and of having to be strained and perseverant to be successful. Motivations that resulted from inspiration experiences were always present, and it was possible to group all of them into four main categories, consisting in being motivated to decide or find out more about specialization areas within the students' careers, paying more attention and being more dedicated in the subject taught by the inspiring teacher, looking for the teacher outside of class to continue discussing class topics and becoming interested in being a teacher.

One of the main academic contributions of the current study is that it uses one of the most scientifically solid frameworks to study inspiration, and addresses Thrash & Elliot's (2003, 2004) critiques to a theoretically driven and domain-specific study of inspiration. Additionally, the qualitative methodology allows for the comprehension and identification of specific manifestations and characteristics of the construct in a previously unstudied context. Also, it shows that Thrash & Elliot's (2003, 2004) model of inspiration is valid across cultures. Practically, this study allows us to understand the diverse actions and characteristics of inspiring teachers. This could serve as a guide for lecturers who are interested in inspiring their students and who want to leave them with a positive, lasting impact that will be beneficial for their education. Also, we can now have more precise insight into the positive impacts of inspiration, in terms of academic motivations and transcendent ideas.

Among the limitations of the study are the limited use of supplemental checks to ensure methodological integrity according to the JARS-Qual criteria (Levitt et al., 2017; Levitt, 2020). For instance, the return of the theme structure to participants could have been employed to triangulate results and ensure that any possible author bias towards results has been avoided. Moreover, more auditing processes or member checks could have been included, as well as structured methods for research reflexivity.

Despite the present study's strengths, future investigations could include inductive approaches to understanding inspiration, which could allow the emergence of new characteristics in Thrash & Elliot's (2003, 2004) tripartite model. Future studies could

seek to validate Thrash & Elliot's scale in the present context to initiate quantitative studies. These could allow us to study the impact of inspiration in other variables relevant to management higher education (entrepreneurship inspiration, inspiration to strive towards high-rank positions in companies, inspiration to continue studies in business schools).

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