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UNVEILING MOTIVATIONAL DYNAMICS: A CASE STUDY OF YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to delve into the motivational factors influencing learning among young adult learners in selected schools in Kuala Selangor, Malaysia. Utilizing a qualitative approach, four focus group discussions were conducted through semi-structured interviews with participants selected based on their exposure to motivational sessions organized by the researchers. Thematic analysis was employed to distil key insights from the gathered data, revealing six overarching themes. The identified themes encompass the reasons for attending school, the cultivation of interest in schooling, manifestations of disinterest in schooling, preferences for specific subjects, deliberate efforts to enhance academic performance, and the multifaceted factors contributing to academic achievement. Notably, the findings underscore that while teachers and peer influences can serve as motivating factors driving learners to attend school, these same factors may also pose challenges that impact overall success or failure. Given the transitional phase of young adult learners, characterized by ongoing cognitive development and physiological changes, educators and policymakers are urged to take a proactive stance. Specifically, interventions should be designed to foster motivation among young adult learners, especially those at risk of discontinuing their secondary education. This study emphasizes the nuanced interplay of motivational factors in the educational journey of young adults, urging a comprehensive and tailored approach to support their academic endeavours.

Keyword: Motivation, Young adult learners, Learning motivation, educational psychology, Student engagement

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is marked by a profound enthusiasm within an individual that propels them toward achieving success. According to Bandura (1997), this concept evolves from individual learning activities and experiences influenced by various situations. In the context of learning, scholars such as Ormrod (2000) and Boström and Bostedt (2020) argue that motivation significantly influences learners by directing behaviour toward specific goals. For instance, the pursuit of good grades in high school has been linked to positive outcomes in higher education, fostering increased confidence, better academic preparedness, a deeper appreciation of success, and enhanced coping skills. Understanding motivation is pivotal in constructing an effective learning process. Learner motivation is a complex interplay of factors determining various behaviours (Reeve, 1996; Singh et al., 2002; Chan & Norlizah, 2017; Boström & Bostedt, 2020). It is described as self-generated spirit directing behaviour toward specific objectives (Zimmerman, 2008). Bandura's triadic theory further elucidates that social cognition forms the basis of self-regulated learning, influencing learning through personal, environmental, and behavioural factors (Bandura, 1986), all of which are reflected in learner motivation.

Highly motivated learners, as asserted by Chan and Norlizah (2017), strive for high academic performance and adeptly overcome challenges. School-based research consistently indicates that learner motivation significantly affects academic performance (Al-Khatib, 2010; Amraia et al., 2011; Brophy, 2010; Shamshuddin, 2008; Chan & Norlizah, 2017; Boström & Bostedt, 2020; Wong & Wong, 2019; Mazuin et al., 2021). For example, Al Khatib (2010) found that strong motivational beliefs correlate with increased academic merits.

Furthermore, studies in the Malaysian context, such as those by Mazuin et al. (2021) and Amraia et al. (2011), underscore the positive impact of learner motivation on various aspects, including achievement, recognition, peer relationships, and relationships with educators. Boström and Bostedt's (2020) quantitative study also revealed the influence of teaching strategies and parental support on

learner motivation. Sharifah Muzlia's (2015) investigation into motivational forces identified six constructs, including future time reference, achievement need, learning goals, self-efficacy, self-determination, and expectancy values. These constructs, rooted in humanistic and cognitive perspectives, were predicted to work synergistically to drive learners toward success. Chan and Norlizah (2017) emphasized learners' motivation in science learning, revealing a correlation between motivation levels and science subject grades.

However, despite extensive research on motivation and academic achievement, previous studies primarily focus on specific subjects like English, Science, and Mathematics among young adult learners. There is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding Malaysian young adult learners' motivation towards schooling. Thus, this study aims to explore the factors influencing young adult learners' motivation in the Malaysian context.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research design, focusing on young adult learners aged 13 to 17 in secondary schools located in Kuala Selangor, Selangor, Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Google Meet, offering flexibility during the sessions to delve deeper into the study's context (Robson, 2002). The interview protocol, developed by the researchers, guided data collection. For participant selection, purposive sampling was utilized, targeting individuals who had attended the researchers' motivational sessions. This approach, as outlined by Patton (2002), aimed to select information-rich cases that could illuminate the research question. A total of 23 participants, distributed among four focus groups consisting of five to seven learners each, were selected based on these criteria. Thematic analysis was employed to scrutinize the interview data. The researchers transcribed interactions verbatim, then analysed and coded participants' responses to derive meaningful themes. Ethical considerations were paramount. The researchers ensured clarity on the interviews' purpose and guaranteed participant anonymity throughout the process. Names were replaced with codes in the interview reports, as illustrated in Table 1. These measures upheld ethical standards and safeguarded the confidentiality of the participants.

Table 1. Details of Participants of the Study (by code name)

Code Name	Gender	Age
RPMS	Male	15
RPSZ	Female	15
RPSS	Female	17
RPNM	Female	17
RPAS	Female	13
DHA	Female	16
DHF	Male	16
DHAM	Female	16
DHY	Male	16
DHAZ	Male	16
DHH	Male	16
TJH	Female	15
TJS	Male	15
TJA	Female	16
TJAN	Female	16
TJAM	Female	17
TJSHD	Female	16
RMA	Female	15
RMAT	Female	17
RMAI	Male	16
RMAF	Male	16
RMS	Female	16
RMATH	Female	15

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed distinct themes that encapsulate the essence of the study, including 'reasons for coming to school,' 'interest in schooling,' 'disinterest in schooling,' 'subjects of interest,' 'effort to increase academic performance,' and 'factors contributing to academic achievement.' In the subsequent section, we will delve into a detailed exploration of each theme to provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

Reasons for Attending School: In the post-pandemic era, physical attendance at traditional schools faces challenges as external activities like online gaming compete for students' attention. School absenteeism reasons were explored through interviews, revealing categories such as 'seeking knowledge,' 'inspiring others,' 'socialization,' 'responsibilities,' 'self-improvement,' and 'pursuing ambition.' Participants, including RPNM, RPAS, and TJA, see school as an opportunity to increase knowledge, while RMA values the insights gained about travel. RPAS notably views attending school as a chance to inspire others. Socialization, a hidden curriculum element, is emphasized by participants like DHAM. School attendance reasons can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, with intrinsic motivations enduring based on genuine liking for tasks, as defined by Santrock (2018).

Interest in Schooling: The subsequent finding delves into factors that kindle learners' interest in attending school. Sub-themes such as 'nice teachers,' 'friends,' 'conducive learning environment,' and 'facilities' emerged. Teachers often emerge as a potent motivating factor, influenced by their teaching methods, behaviour, or overall demeanour. Participants like RPSZ emphasized the opportunity to meet more friends at school than in their local neighbourhoods, underlining the social aspect of learning. The school environment, coupled with facilities like laboratories, further contributed to students' positive perception of school.

Disinterest in Coming to School: Conversely, there were findings outlining reasons why learners avoided school, revealing sub-themes such as 'teachers,' 'friends,' 'excessive homework,' and 'food.' Teacher and friend dynamics emerged as demotivating factors, with some learners experiencing scolding or unsupportive friendships. Excessive homework was identified as a source of concern, impacting learners' energy and time. Surprisingly, the monotony of food offerings in the school canteen also contributed to disinterest.

Subjects of Interest: This sub-theme delves into subjects that captivate learners' interest. Despite a mandated curriculum covering diverse subjects, young adult learners expressed preferences for certain subjects. Participants highlighted subjects such as History, Al Quran and Sunnah, Technology, English, and Mathematics. For instance, DHY valued History for its lessons in learning from past experiences, while DHA emphasized the international communication aspect of learning English.

Effort to Increase Academic Performance: Examining the efforts invested by students to enhance academic performance revealed sub-themes like 'doing homework,' 'revisions,' 'mind mapping,' 'asking teachers,' 'focusing in class,' 'learning in a group,' 'time division,' and 'extra classes.' Participants highlighted the significance of homework completion, revision through self-study and online resources, and collaborative learning methods. Strategies like note-taking, mind mapping, and seeking clarification from teachers were emphasized, underscoring the multifaceted approach to academic improvement.

Factors Contributing to Academic Achievement: This sub-theme explores factors contributing to learners' academic achievement, including 'friends,' 'teachers,' 'family,' 'self,' and 'co-curricular activities.' Participants acknowledged the pivotal role of teachers, supportive family environments, and peer relationships in their academic success. Interestingly, some participants recognized self-motivation and involvement in co-curricular activities as factors contributing to their academic achievements.

In summary, the findings provide a nuanced understanding of the motivations, interests, and challenges young adult learners face in the context of schooling, shedding light on the complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing their educational journey.

CONCLUSION

Motivation, a driving force in individuals' lives, shapes various aspects from routine activities to complex pursuits like education and career choices. Explored through theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy and behavioural motivation, this research focuses on learner motivation, utilizing interviews

and thematic analysis. Themes emerge, including reasons for attending school, interest/disinterest, academic effort, and factors affecting achievement. Despite challenges like bullying and uninspiring environments, young learners recognize school's importance as a knowledge source and a bridge to future success. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, influenced by factors like teachers and facilities, play a role but can also hinder success. As learners mature, school management must address these factors for a positive environment, as motivation significantly impacts decisions for tertiary education. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can shape learning outcomes, influencing learners to excel and pursue higher education aligned with future goals. Motivation is crucial in connecting the learning process with young learners' future needs, propelling them toward academic excellence and career aspirations. In summary, this study highlights factors influencing student motivation, underscoring the importance of addressing these for a positive learning environment.

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