

Motivation in Learning: A Case Study of Young Adult Learners in Kuala Selangor, Malaysia

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Abstract: This study aims to explore motivation factors that contribute to learning among young adult learners in selected schools in Kuala Selangor, Malaysia. Four focus group discussions had been conducted to collect the data via a semi-structured interview. The selection of participants in the interview was based on learners who experienced the motivational session conducted by the researchers. Using thematic analysis to analyse data, six themes were found in this study. The themes that emerged from the analysis are 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. The findings show that although teachers and friends can be motivating factors that encouraged the learners to go to school, these factors were also hindrances influenced success or failure. Being young adult learners, their cognitive level is still developing and they are influenced by physiological changes. Hence, educators and policy makers need to ensure that young adult learners, especially those who are at risk of dropping out of school, are motivated to complete their secondary education.

Keywords: Malaysian Young Adult Learner, Motivation in Learning, Self-motivation

1. Introduction

Motivation is great enthusiasm in a person that drives the person to accomplish something to succeed. Bandura (1997) claimed that motivation is a concept that is developed from individual learning activities and experiences that are influenced by various situation. In the context of learning, Ormrod (2000), Boström and Bostedt (2020) argued that motivation does effect learners by focusing behaviour on a certain goal. For instance, good grades in high school have been linked to positive outcomes in future higher education such as increased confidence, better academic preparedness, a better appreciation of higher education success and better coping skills. Understanding motivation is essential in constructing a learning process that can bring learners toward learning. Learner motivation is influenced by many factors that can determine various behaviour (Reeve, 1996; Singh et al., 2002; Chan & Norlizah, 2017; Boström & Bostedt,2020). Learner motivation is described as the self-generated spirit that offers behaviour directed toward a specific objective (Zimmerman, 2008). Apart from that,

Bandura's triadic theory explains that social cognition is the basis of self-regulated learning, which influences learning through personal, environmental, and behavioural factors (Bandura, 1986). These three factors are reflected in learner motivation. In addition, Chan and Norlizah (2017) also claimed that learners who are highly motivated in learning will attempt to achieve high performance in academic achievement and overcome challenges they faced during class.

Numerous school-based research has focused aspects of academic performance results. Findings inform that learner motivation affect 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 instance, Al Khatib (2010) in his study discovered that when learners have strong motivational beliefs, they had more academic merits. Amraia et al., (2011) mentioned that different backgrounds may result in different kinds of motivation that contributed to academic achievement in the Malaysian context. Additionally, Mazuin et al., (2021) whose study was also based on Malaysian context revealed that learner motivation had a positive impact on learning related to achievement, recognition, relationship with peers and relationship with educators. Furthermore, Boström and Bostedt (2020) in their quantitative study found that learner motivation was also affected by teaching strategies and parental support in teaching and learning. In addition, Sharifah Muzlia (2015) investigated the forces of motivation. She studied six motivational constructs, in line with humanistic and cognitive perspectives on motivation: the future time reference, achievement need, learning goals, self-efficacy, self-determination, and expectancy values. The six constructs of motivation were predicted to work simultaneously to influence learners towards achieving success. The six constructs were selected because they represented a more 'intrinsic drive-in' in term of thoughts and emotions that moved individuals to engage in productive learning behaviour, thus better grades. She hypothesized that when learners had elevated level of motivation in all six, they were more achievement oriented. In contrast, if any of the components were inadequate, learners experienced low motivation and were less driven to succeed. Chan and Norlizah (2017) in their quantitative study emphasized learners' motivation towards science learning. They found that learners who were moderately motivated towards science learning achieved mid-low grades in their science subjects.

However, the problem of learners having poor motivation towards learning is something that cannot be easily resolved. Other studies in the Malaysian context have revealed that this is a common phenomenon among Malaysian adult learners. (Ainol Madziah & Isarji, 2009; Samsiah et al., 2009; Thang, 2009; Thang & Azarina 2007; Umadevi; 2001). Their studies indicate the possibility of a relationship between motivation and achievement. Being a learner could have various kinds of emotional changes, especially for young adult learners. For instance, young learner feel stress, anxious, excited, sad during their learning their time in the educational institution. Therefore, learners must consciously increase their motivation towards learning because academic excellence may lead them to achieve their ambition in the future. Although numerous researchers had contributed towards the scope of motivation and academic achievement, the previous researchers are more focused on young adult learners' motivation towards specific subjects such as English, Science and Mathematics. There is a dearth of literature focusing on Malaysian young adult learners' motivation on schooling. Therefore, this study aims to explore what are the aspects that influenced young adult learners to be motivated towards their learning.

2. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design. Participants were young adult learners ranging from 13 to 17 years of age in secondary schools. The schools were located in one of the districts in Selangor which is Kuala Selangor, Malaysia. The method of data collection was semi-structured interviews via google meet. A semi-structured interview is one of the methods of data collection that can be modified during the interview session which allowed the researchers to understand more about the case of the study (Robson, 2002). This study used the semi-structured interview to gain the data from the participants following an interview protocol developed by the researchers based on the context of this study.

Four focus groups participated in the data collection. Each group consisted of five to seven learners. Purposive sampling was used in this study by selecting the participants based on the criteria that the participants attended the motivational session conducted by the researchers. Hence a total of 23 participants were selected for the study. Patton (2002) stated that “the purpose of purposive sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the question under study” and “information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p.169).

From data collected from the interviews, the researchers used thematic analysis to analyse interview data. They first listened and transcribed the interactions verbatim. Then they analysed the participants’ responses and coded them accordingly before producing appropriate themes.

As for ethical considerations, the researchers took note of several things. Firstly, the researchers explained the purpose of the interviews. Secondly, the researcher assured the participants that their names would not be revealed to anyone during the interviews. For example, the names were changed to codes in the interview reports as stated in Table 1.

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

3. Findings

The themes that emerged from the analysis are ‘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’. This finding section will further elaborate on each of the themes.

3.1 Reasons for coming to school

In the present post pandemic context, going to a brick-and mortar school can be a daunting task for learners. Due to many activities outside of school that are more alluring for learners, such as playing online games, and watching television programmes, schooling seems to be a tiresome phenomenon for some learners, putting them at risk of being left behind in lessons and school activities. Nevertheless, through this interview, the researchers were able to gauge the reasons that the learners were absent from school. The categories that emerged from the analysis were 'seeking knowledge', 'giving back inspiration to others', 'to socialize', 'responsibilities', 'to improve oneself', and 'pursuing ambition'. Many learners, for instance, RPNM, RPAS, and TJA, responded by saying that a school is a place where they can 'increase their knowledge' as the school provided various subjects to cater for students' mental faculty.

Besides that, RMA added that she liked to travel, and some of the knowledge that she gained in school were of her interest, for example, information about certain places, people, and new activities. Interestingly, RPAS also added that going to school can be an inspiration to others especially his family members. This means that they themselves could become role models to others to come to school. PRMS said that "I can be an inspiration for others around me to come to school". Other participants also agreed that they attended school because of the socialization process where they can meet their friends and teachers. Indeed, school is a place of learning socializing platform, a factor in hidden curriculum. DHAM said, "going to school is one's responsibility that needs to be fulfilled" while TJSR claimed that skipping school might cause teacher to scold them, "...if I do not attend school, the teacher will scold me," (TJSR). All in all, the whole discussion of attending school can be categorized as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. According to Santrock (2018), intrinsic motivation can be a long-lasting behaviour whereby students perform certain tasks because they like them, hence can internalize them. Compared to extrinsically motivated factors, the behaviour tends to halt if the external factors are less prevalent.

3.2 Interest in schooling

The second finding that emerged from the analysis are the factors that stirred the learners' interest in attending school. The categories or the sub-themes that emerged are 'nice teachers,' friends,' 'conducive place to learn,' and 'facilities.' Commonly teacher can be a strong motivating factor for students to attend school. Sometimes it is the way the teacher teaches, his or her behaviour or the appearance of the teacher that could catch the learners' interest. Other common reasons for attending school are because of friends as mentioned by RPSZ, "I can meet more friends in school as compared to friends around my house." RMAT said, "In school, there are teachers and friends that can help us to learn."

The school environment is another pull factor for students to be present at school. TJAM shared "... can meet teachers face to face and when we come to school, each subject we need to go from place to another, so it becomes exciting". Besides, the facilities in the school such as the biology, physics, and chemistry laboratories can attract them to school (RPMS). Thus, the analysis revealed that there are several reasons that interest students to attend schools such as teachers, friends, and the school environment.

3.3 Disinterest in coming to school

As opposed to the earlier discussion, there are findings as well as to why learners avoided going to school. The sub-themes that emerged from this study are 'teachers', 'friends', 'much homework', and 'food'. Teachers and friends can be demotivating factors for some learners to attend school. Learners being scolded by teachers is a grim experience for some, more so if they were scolded in front of their friends in class. Having friends who were not supportive made the scenario worse. Some friends took advantage of one another as stated by RPMS, "...having friends who are "toxic" and they like to copy answers {tests/assignments}, and also friends who like to belittle others which can bring traumatic experience to that person,". RMAT added that there were friends who liked to "accuse and backstab" others.

Having homework means learners need to complete the given tasks earlier prior to a subsequent class. In a way, this also bolsters the lessons learned in the previous class. However, some learner find too much homework as troublesome as they have insufficient time. "... I do not like much homework. when I reach home, I'm already tired. Then at night, sometimes I could not complete all the homework" (TSJD & TJAM). Another interesting factor is related to food as a contributing factor in this sub-theme; the same food being sold in the canteen could cause boredom. Overall, the analysis of the sub-categories showed that 'friends' was a major factor that negatively deflated their interest in coming to school.

3.4 Subjects of interest

This sub-theme presents subjects in schools that were of learners' interest. This is an interesting finding because the curriculum and policies require learners to learn many subjects depending on their subject stream. Among the subjects that the young adult learners had to take are History, Al Quran and Sunnah, Technology, English, Syariah, Art, Biology, Agriculture, Mathematics, Tasawur, Additional Mathematics, Chemistry, Physic, Science, Islamic Studies, and Bahasa Melayu. For instance, DHY said, she likes History because "we can learn from the past episodes so we do not repeat the same mistakes, and we can work on improving ourselves". DHF mentioned that from the subject of Al Quran and Sunnah, she learned in detail about AL Quran and Hadith. DHA also added that "...English is an international language, and can communicate with people from other countries." She liked Technology because "I like the subject Technology Graphic and Communication. I am a person who likes to imagine and likes to draw in which the subject fits me. For example, developing house structure." On the whole, there are various subjects suggested by the students, and English and Mathematics were the most preferred choice.

3.5 Effort to increase academic performance

In this theme, the researchers wanted to find out about the efforts that students invest to improve their academic achievement. Undeniably, there are many aspects of learning in the school environment such as formal, informal, academic, and socialization. However, the priority in school and society is academic achievement. Hence, the sub-themes for "efforts that students put in to increase their academic performance" were unravelled as 'doing homework', 'revisions', 'mind mapping', 'asking teachers', 'focusing in class', 'learning in a group', 'time division', and 'extra class'.

One of the important activities that can assist learners in their studies is "doing homework that teachers have assigned as mentioned", as stated by DHY. Teachers also become an important referral point for the students if they have questions, in addition to discussing with friends. Besides, another significant factor to improve their studies is by revising. DHF said, "I like to do exercises and revisions by myself and find out videos related to my subjects" which is also parallel to DHAZ's claim that "it was easier to understand the lesson when she watched the video" and TJH's "the video (online) can be repeatedly watched". The participants also mentioned note-taking as the most important method used to take down information, while using mind mapping with various colours to make them attractive was the second most important in the process of learning. Other responses to increase academic performances are to "focus on a class during lessons", "study in a group", "manage time well" and even "give allocation time to relax one's mind", and "attend tuition classes".

3.6 Factors contributing to academic achievement

This sub-theme discusses on the factors that contributed to or assisted in the learners' academic achievement. The findings included 'friends', 'teachers', 'family', 'oneself', 'co-curriculum'. The majority of the participants answered teachers, family and friends as their major contributing factors. According to RPMS, "...teachers help me with love. Besides that, they also show concern about my subjects. While parents, support me in my academic work and guide me in things that I do not know." This is supported by DHF, however, she added that teachers do play a significant role in her learning process but sometimes the teachers' words can also dampen her motivation. Some also commented that their friends were a motivating factor as they felt more comfortable learning from them. RMAF, "...if

we are weak in certain subjects or questions, we ask friends who are more knowledgeable.” Participant like RMAF said that she motivated herself as she liked to “study on her own because she does not like to ask questions to others”. Finally, involvement in co-curriculum activities was a motivating factor because it allowed them to become active.

4. Discussion

Motivation is very important in everyone’s life as it would propel one toward a goal, from the simplest behaviour such as going for lunch to a more complex one for instance pursuing study, choosing a job, and marriage. These all require motivation which is defined as, “the processes that energize, direct, and sustain behaviour” (Santrock, 2018, p. 424). Motivation can be discussed in various theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Taormina & Gau, 2013; Trivedi & Mehta, 2019; Marczak & Yawson, 2021), the Behavioural theory of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and attribution theory which analyse from three-domain – locus, stability, and controllability (Wiener, 1986). In the context of this research, the authors wanted to investigate learner motivation. Hence to get the students’ responses, interviews were conducted. The analysis of the interview adopts the thematic analysis. The themes that emerged from the analysis are reasons for coming to school, interest in schooling, disinterest in schooling, subjects of interest, effort to increase academic performance, factors contributing to academic achievement.

In the present day, schooling could become an intimidating place for some young adult learners due to bullying cases, boring ambience, monotonous classroom instructions and alluring entertainment outside of schools. Nevertheless, there are still many learners, regardless of the said issues, who still come to school. The finding suggests that the learners are aware that the main place for them to seek knowledge is in school. In school, they also learn aspects of socialization, learn to interact with friends, and teachers, and learn to be responsible individuals. They are aware that they need be in school to become a learned person and hence later be able to pursue their ambitions; the school become the bridge to their success. With this in mind, they are motivated to go to school.

According to the Behavioural Theory of Motivation by Bandura (1986), the elements of intrinsic factors are more significant and long-lasting as compared to extrinsic motivation in pursuing one goal, and it can be said the participants in this research have both elements of extrinsic and intrinsic factors, and possibly the extrinsic factors outweigh the intrinsic factors, but it still important. The participants liked to go to school because there are friendly teachers and friends, besides the conducive environment that they can learn and facilities that are provided. However, when asked about things that they find not of their interest, their answers were also teachers, and friends, and included homework, and food. These suggest that, as much as teachers and friends can be the motivating factors that induced the students to school, these factors also can be the hindrance. Student success or failure can be influenced by these factors. Being young adult learners, their maturity in thinking is still developing and this is influenced by the surge of changes in physiology due to puberty, thus the school management needs to find ways of getting the students to like to come to school. Moreover, past research has indicated that young adult learners who choose to pursue their studies to tertiary education level are influenced by the motivation that they receive during learning time (Steinmayr, Weidinger, Schwinger & Spinath, 2019; Inocian, Jane, Hoybia, Ann, Mirasol, Mae, Moneva & Jerald, 2019; Tus, 2020). This demonstrates the significance of having high motivation during school years as it becomes a pushing factor for the students to pursue their education to a higher level. It also has pointed out how young adult learners’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and engagement can influence their learning outcomes. Motivation to pursue studies in higher education is increased by a greater connection between the learning process and the perceived application to the needs of young adult learners in their future (Hasan, Imran, Muhammad Aslam, & Kasyif, 2010; Harackiewicz, Smith & Priniski, 2018). Their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can benefit them in pursuing excellence in their learning which may lead them on their journey to achieve their future career. Continuing education to the higher education level would help them attain the right qualification and skills for their dream career in the future. As advocated by Shin, Lee & Ha, (2017), having extrinsic motivation will push learners towards achieving job security and financially stable life. The findings from this study demonstrates factors that affect students’ motivation in learning. A huge emphasis and attention should be given to these factors as

research has shown that students who are highly motivated perform better in their studies and they strive towards achieving their learning goals.

5. Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. This research is part of fulfilment of the requirements for the research grant while Nurul Fitriah served as the research principal. Author 1 carried out the introduction, literature review and conclusion for this paper. Author 2 conducted the interpretation and discussion of the results. Author 3 wrote the abstract, proofread, and checked whole content whereas Author 4 and Author 5 did the data analysis from the interview.

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