

# Exploring the Motivational Challenges of Special Needs Students in Learning Specific Vocational Skills Subjects through Self-Determination Theory Approach

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## Abstract

Teaching of specific vocational skills subject (KVS) for special need students (MBK) in secondary schools enhances the students' skills and knowledge pertaining to specific jobs. In the following section, this research employs Self-Determination Theory to analyse MBK's motivating barriers in studying KVS subjects. The theory of SDT applied here in gives a preview of MBK's motivational setup in relation to the KVS learning and understanding the key aspects that determine MBK motivation. SDT involves satisfaction of basic psychological needs, that is autonomy, competence and connectivity as important to intrinsic motivation and learning. This paper also outlines possible improvement and interventions that may help increase their motivation as well as performance in these subjects. The finding of this concept paper should inform the advancement of the reviewed education framework and offer helpful insights to educators and policy makers in the enhancement of special needs student needs to motivate and achieve in vocational skills subjects.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Special Needs Student (MBK), Specific Vocational Skills (KVS), Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

## Introduction

Over the past several years, the education system in Malaysia has seen a significant transformation. The Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025 (PPPM) is a testament to the Government's dedication to accepting the significance of inclusive academic and vocational education for students with disabilities. This aligns with the UNESCO target of enhancing education for individuals with disabilities as a component of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Improving the accessibility of quality and inclusive education for individuals with disabilities is a critical component of the 2016-2022 Action Plan for Disabled Persons. This involves the provision and implementation of vocational courses and skills that are specifically tailored to the needs of individuals with MBK in the field of special education

(Rahimah et al., 2021). This entails the supply and execution of vocational courses and skills that are especially suited to the requirements of persons with MBK in the field of special education. These courses and skills come in the form of vocational training. Furthermore, in 2016, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia put into effect the Standard Curriculum of Special Education Secondary Schools, which is abbreviated as KSSMPK. In accordance with the goals of the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2020 (Siti Nabila, 2019), this curriculum places a strong focus on disciplines that are relevant to vocational training.

As part of KSSM, the specific vocational skills (KVS) subject was introduced in collaboration with the Department of Curriculum Development (JPK) to prepare MBK for the Malaysian Modular Skills Certificate (SKM) (Nazmin et al., 2021). The curriculum framework complies with the operating standards set by JPK, to ensure the quality of education and recognition of SKM Modular across industries. The purpose of KVS is to provide to MBK not only to qualify them for the Malaysian Skills Certificate, but also to form human capital that is ready in terms of knowledge and motivational challenges. In line with the MOE's desire for MBK secondary school leavers to have the skills and confidence in the field of employment on par with existing employees (Rahman et al., 2020).

### **The Importance of Motivation to Special Needs Students (MBK)**

The learning process of MBKs is significantly influenced by their motivation. This motivation is related to the intrinsic motivation of students to acquire knowledge and accomplish their learning goals. Due to their more complex learning requirements, which necessitate ongoing assistance from various sources, MBK students require a higher level of motivation than mainstream students (Sa'don Zubir, 2019). Moreover, the motivational needs of MBK are more important because they need additional support to arouse their interest in learning (Mongudal et al., 2019). High motivation can help MBKs increase their involvement in learning and overcoming challenges as well as improve their ability to learn. Moreover, the motivational needs of MBK are particularly important since they demand additional support to enhance their interest in learning (Mongudal et. al., 2019).

MBKs can improve their ability to learn and boost their involvement in learning and conquering challenges by displaying a strong degree of motivation. Studies suggest that the learning motivation of MBK might be impacted by the aspiration for social recognition and feelings of praise (Mongudal et. al., 2019). According to him, intrinsic motivation is also important to MBK because it gives them an internal impetus to learn and gives them learning satisfaction. A study conducted by Alhawiti (2017), stated that MBKs with deep interests are able to strive to learn and repeat learning activities until they can. A study conducted by Nurul Hidayah (2022), on two categories of students with special needs, autism and intellectual impairment, found that both of these categories prefer to gain economic token while studying. They expressed their enthusiasm for learning in the classroom.

This shows the need for external stimulus that extrinsic motivation is important in boosting MBK motivation. This is in line with a study conducted by Jelani (2020), that states that extrinsic motivation can help students with special needs to feel more happy, appreciated and present by their peers.

**MBK Motivation Challenges in KVS subjects**

Motivation is a strong will, desire or spirit to do something with the aim of achieving success. However, there are some challenges that MBK itself faces in motivating themselves while following KVS skills learning. A study conducted by Ramalingam and Jiar (2022), found that MBKs in the vocational field faced the challenge of external motivation in continuing their education and learning. These motivation problems can be attributed to a variety of motivational and personal factors. The first issue therefore is the low self-esteem that leads to the motivational issue amongst the MBK. This is in line with a study conducted by Jelani (2020) which stated that extrinsic motivation can help students with special needs feel happier, valued and more existent by their peers.

Besides, another motivational challenge that MBK faces in KVS learning is cognitive difficulties. Cognitive difficulties are the limitations of the ability of the MBK in terms of thinking and the limitation of the mastery of knowledge. They have unique cognitive profiles that can make certain types of learning challenging or disappointing (Mongudal et al., 2019). Failure to make repeated tasks also weakens the motivation of these MBKs because it is likely that they have tried their best in carrying out tasks but failed (Filippatou & Kaldi, 2010). These cognitive difficulties can create a cycle of negative experiences that can lead to a decrease in motivation and isolation from the learning process. It also leads to lack of skill while during a practise of this skills subject.

The lack of external motivation is the issue that other MBKs encounter when it comes to self-motivation. If MBKs lack external motivation, they may struggle to find purpose and connection in their educational journey. Consequently, individuals may feel excluded and have less motivation to work hard in order to achieve their objectives (Mongudal et al., 2019). Motivational problems that threaten the achievement of MBK at sometimes involve several internal and external factors that affect motivation. The aforesaid issues can lead to disengagement, feelings of isolation and a waning enthusiasm for the learning process, which with a negative impact on the students' academic achievements and future employment.

**Self-Determination Theory Approach to MBK Motivation**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a comprehensive framework that integrates the fundamental concepts of human motivation and personality (Rachel et al., 2023). Its objective is to elucidate the reasons for individual variations. According to Marylène et al. (2022), the objective of this theory is to examine the internal and external factors that influence the identities and behaviours of individuals. Finally, in 1980, Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan completed a basic research study concerning the three crucial psychological needs of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness and their eagerly positive effects on the educational process, Intrinsic motivation (Luria, 2022). The term extrinsic motivation is the introduced in the discourse based on the SDT framework and encompasses a wide range of autonomic and controlled motivations. It has been demonstrated that autonomous forms, which are distinguished by clearly defined restrictions, are more successful than incentives that are managed from the outside (Olafsen, 2020). Deci and Ryan (2008), said that the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that humans exhibit greater levels of self-regulation when they are motivated by intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic drive. It also means that people are more bound to regulate their behaviour more when acted by internal motivation.

Thus, the SDT framework recognises that there may be another class of extrinsic motivations that can be relevant if they are consistent with people's autonomy and self-determination (Luria, 2022). Regarding to Edward et al. (2008), the purpose of the present theoretical framework is more understandable especially for people from the minority who often experience such feelings as insufficiency and ineffectiveness. Possible results include self-esteem and perceived behavioural self-efficacy of children enrolled in the segregated special education classroom will be low and limited to the perceived classroom autonomy and importance of the child (Marylène et al., 2022). Wei et al. (2021) has underscored the importance of such motivating factors by proposing opportunities that essential for learning engagement especially of the disadvantaged learners who may feel disengaged in the traditional lessons.

Autonomy plays a crucial role in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) since it significantly influences the motivation of persons belonging to minority groups. Vansteenkiste et al. (2020) argues that promoting self-directed learning, including marginalized persons in decision-making, and facilitating choice-making all have a good effect on their motivation levels. As a result, this helps to provide a learning environment that is fair and equal, precisely designed to meet their individual requirements. Furthermore, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) focuses significant significance on cultivating a feeling of proficiency and independence among students (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

The motivation level of persons encountering deficits is greatly impacted by the capabilities of those who perceive themselves as frequently encountering hurdles when attempting to acquire new skills. Furthermore, the notion of relationship emphasizes the fundamental human requirement for social connections and a feeling of inclusion. Establishing a robust connection with coworkers, teachers, and support networks is crucial for persons who belong to underrepresented groups. According to Deci and Ryan (2020), their research demonstrates the significance of establishing an inclusive classroom setting, fostering collaboration among students, and providing social support as means to enhance student motivation and engagement in the educational process.

### **Intervention Reserves**

Based on the review of literature, several possible strategies and approaches that can be suggested to increase the motivation and results of MBK in the vocational skills subjects are as follows. This entails giving one on one attention to the MBK. Special attention should be given to how students will be taught by the teachers because each one comes with their unique needs. In this case it can boost their motivation and participation. This involves a learning plan in relationship to MBK whereby alteration of a plan is done depending on the capabilities of the MBK, alteration of the curriculum, provision of assistance technology among others.

Further, when the creativity of a teacher is restricted the MBKs get a chance to take control and learn at their own free will which in turn increases their motivation levels. This can be done by providing options and opportunities for self-directed learning, setting goals collaboratively, and involving students in the decision-making process. But at the same time, the domination of the teacher is necessary to assist the MBK in making their decisions. In

addition, they will also be able to increase the motivation of the MBK because of the supportive and friendly learning environment that fosters the enhancement of the competence of the MBK. This may entail offering precise directions on what should be done, breaking up the chore into parts, offering directions on how one should proceed, and frequently offering positive reinforcement such as compliments on progress made. Teachers must also be involved in strengthening relations and unity in the class for the motivation of the MBK. This effort can succeed by creating common peer group, promote teamwork and cooperation and social support.

Also, movement and motor activities, creativity and originality along with relevance and links to the learning content and 'real-life' situations be it the school day or other aspects of life help make learning a positive experience. The purpose of such treatments and strategies is to create the appropriate atmosphere for learning, participating, and developing non-discriminative attitudes among students of MBK, as well as to focus on the motivation issue that is associated with students' enrolment in KVS courses. This strategy, employed by educators/members and policymakers, may lead to the enhancement of the MBK's motivation and performance in these fields.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the purpose of this concept paper is to make a contribution to the current body of research by investigating the motivating hurdles that MBK faces when studying KVS courses using the Self-Determination Theory methodology. The purpose of this study is to give insights that may be used to inspire the creation of successful methods and interventions to meet the educational requirements of MBK students. These insights will be provided by identifying the elements that impact their motivation.

### **Contribution**

This study makes an important contribution to the development of motivation theory, especially through the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) approach. The study's summary found that aspects of autonomy, competence, and social relationships play an important role in increasing MBK's motivation to learn specific vocational skills subjects. This discussion reinforces and strengthens the SDT theory by emphasizing the three elements that influence MBK's intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Furthermore, this study offers a fresh perspective by demonstrating the more effective adaptation of SDT within the special education context.

This research can significantly enhance the understanding of vocational education in the context of special education in Malaysia. The results of this study may help special education teachers develop more efficient educational techniques and strengthen MBK's motivation through modified instructional methodologies. This study may assist policymakers and the Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia in developing more relevant and effective educational programs, particularly in improving MBK's motivation to learn essential skills in the future.



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