

Exploring Learning Motivation and Anxiety among Secondary School Students

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Abstract

There is no doubt that having excellent academic performance is necessary to guarantee one's life in the future. Various efforts are made by parents to ensure their children have a high learning motivation and achieve excellent results in academics. However, academic demands can cause anxiety among children. Therefore, it affects their motivation to go to school and it contributes to negative effects on the children's mental health. So, this study was conducted to identify the learning motivation among high school students and explore the concerns they face at school. This qualitative study is based on five psycho-educational group counseling sessions with seven respondents who are between the ages of 14 and 16. The findings of the study show that these students have good motivation, but they have concerns such as harassment from their peers, fear of teachers, schoolwork load and unpleasant behavior of canteen staff. The conclusion that can be made as a result of this study is that the concerns faced by students need to be addressed immediately by parents and the school to ensure that students are happy to go to school and strive to achieve excellent results in the academic field.

Keywords: Learning, Motivation, Anxiety, Peer Harassment, Fear of Teachers, School Workload

Introduction

Motivation is one of the non-cognitive factors that is often studied as a predictor of student academic achievement (Lee & Stankov, 2018). Analysis of data from international assessment results TIMSS and PISA shows that motivation is one of the main factors that contribute to the level of academic achievement of students (Pitsia et al., 2017). The level of student motivation affects the extent to which students are willing to allocate energy and effort to perform certain tasks. As stated by Self-Determination Theory, students' intrinsic motivation is more dominant and effective in influencing students' academic achievement. Students with high extrinsic motivation are more likely to focus solely on the result such as exam scores rather than the learning process. This can result in students' creativity not being able to develop further after they have achieved what they have targeted. While the direction of

Malaysian education is now active to produce more students who are not only able to achieve an excellent academic level but also creative and able to think at a higher level. Motivation increases if the level of student efficacy increases, then student involvement in learning will also increase (Fielding-wells et al., 2017). The teacher's teaching strategy plays an important role in influencing the balance of students' intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Schukajlow & Pekrun, 2017; Azman & Mistima, 2018).

Antony (1998) defines anxiety as a process that consists of stress, threat and state of anxiety. The process follows a sequence that starts from cognitive, affective, physiological and behavioral. The process is driven by a high-pressure stimulus either from the inside or outside. If a person perceives the stimulus as dangerous or threatening to him, he will become emotional. Next, it will experience high internal anxiety. According to Hashim (2016) a high level of anxiety has a relationship with academic achievement. Therefore, students who have a high level of anxiety will be less motivated and thus disrupt the student's academic achievement.

Objective

This study was conducted based on three objectives that have been identified as below:

1. Exploring learning motivation among high school students in achieving excellent results in academics.
2. Identify the concerns faced by students at school.
3. Identify student coping strategies in overcoming the concerns faced.

Literature Review

Zubir et al (2018) carried out a study on 30 school students with the aim of identifying the level of motivation and attitude towards learning Malay language. The results of the study show that all respondents have a high level of positive attitude compared to motivation. This study shows that student motivation is less encouraging due to a lack of enthusiasm to learn. This is due to other factors that affect these students which in turn cause the motivation to learn the language to decrease.

Iberahim et al (2017) conducted a study to identify the influence of 21st century learning on students' attitudes, motivation, and achievement in learning Malay language. A total of 277 4th grade science and literature students in 3 schools in Kelantan were selected as the sample for this study. The influence of 21st century learning has many positive effects on the motivation, attitude and achievement of students in the Malay language subject. This study shows that students' attitude towards 21st century learning is at a high level, students' motivation towards learning Malay language that has been applied 21st century skills and the level of achievement is also at a high level. Overall, this study found that high motivation can indirectly encourage students to improve their learning achievements.

Jusoh et al (2016) conducted a study on learning motivation and student engagement in learning Malay language composition skills among low-achieving students. This study involved a total of 166 students in three schools using a cross-sectional study method with the distribution of questionnaires to the study respondents. The results of the study found that students with low achievement had high learning motivation and involvement in learning

composing skills. This study only looks at student motivation and involvement in composing skills in Malay.

Vibulphol (2016) conducted a study on student motivation which is to study English language motivation and learning and teacher motivation strategies in the classroom among school students. A study of 329 students and 12 teachers in Thailand showed that student motivation in the classroom was relatively high and students had an interest in learning English. However, the level of learning was found to be not high and several students in almost every class had a low level of motivation. The findings of this study also show that high motivation and interest in learning English is high among students in advanced classes. The results of this study provide information that the importance of motivation theory applied by teachers is very important in increasing student motivation.

In addition, Daniela (2015) conducted a study on 270 high school students aged 12 to 14 years in Romania. This study aims to identify student motivation factors such as self-efficacy, self-control, interest in the subject that affect student performance. The results of the study show that students with low confidence in success have a low level of learning performance. Students do not realize their intrinsic value and think they are forced to study by teachers and parents for fear of failing exams. Overall, the findings of this study show that a high level of self-regulation has a relationship with a high level of motivation. This study found that learning performance will increase if an individual has curiosity, high self-efficacy, has self-control, regulation and has planning in achieving goals.

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Psychological problems among students are increasingly worrying. Students may face potential stressors due to such things as financial hardship, academic superiority, competition with peers, constant pressure to succeed, and worries about the future. This stress can have a major impact on a student's academic performance, ability to progress and decision to remain at university. Additionally, students may have an increased risk of depression, anxiety, drug use, and personality disorders, and other negative consequences later in life.

A study conducted by Serin et al (2010) showed that there is a direct and negative relationship between life satisfaction, depression and anxiety. According to a study conducted on students at Ankara University, anxiety and depression affect life satisfaction and are related to each other. The results of this study show that self-reported life satisfaction is highly related to symptoms of depression, hope and anxiety. In other words, the state of life satisfaction is associated with feeling depressed, depressed, hopeless (Guney, 2010). This has proven that there is a relationship between anxiety and a person's life satisfaction.

Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and the data is obtained from a psycho-educational program. This method was chosen to help researchers understand this issue in detail by only using a small sample size. This psycho-educational program has used methods in the form of group counseling sessions conducted at a tuition center in Ampang. This study was conducted through five sessions conducted during two face-to-face meetings.

The planning of psycho-educational group counseling sessions is carried out in a targeted manner with goal setting based on idea sharing and discussion sessions. The focus of the first session is on getting to know the group members and their backgrounds. The second session focused on exploring the motivation level of group members in academic achievement. The third session focused on identifying the concerns faced by these students at school. The fourth session aims to explore the coping strategies of group members in overcoming the concerns they face, and the last session focuses on the students' reflection on the discussions carried out throughout this psycho-educational program.

Respondent Demographics

This study consists of seven students studying at a day secondary school in Keramat, Kuala Lumpur. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents involved in this study.

Table 1

Respondent demography

Respondent	Gender	Age
P1	Male	13
P2	Male	13
P3	Male	14
P4	Female	14
P5	Female	15
P6	Male	15
P7	Male	16

Finding and Discussion

The results of this study have answered three research questions. The findings of the study have been analyzed thematically to find themes that are appropriate and related to the objectives of the study.

Objective 1: Student's motivation to go to school and achieve academic excellence

Interest in School

The findings of the study found that four respondents were interested in going to school. For them the routine of going to school gives them joy. Their statement is as below:

" I like going to school. Our school is the best! We can go play during recess. I joined the rugby club, later in the afternoon after school, I will go to practice with the school team. The rugby coach is also the best. We always shop after the game."
(P3)

" I have a hard time getting up in the morning. Because I always sleep late at night. But I also want to go to school tomorrow morning. I have a good friend; her name is Amira. He sat next to me in class. My mother always gives me food. We joined the Girl Guide Club together..." (P1)

" My class teacher is good. Always order for us to come to school. So, every day I want to go to school. That day the teacher gave us free nasi lemak, one class got it. The best..." (P4)

However, there are two respondents who have anxiety about going to school because they are worried about unfinished schoolwork and fierce teachers. The respondent's statement is as below:

"I don't like going to school because my schoolwork is not ready. I don't like the teacher who gives me a lot of schoolwork..." (P2)

"Our History subject teacher is fierce, he is a man. He brings a cane to class. That day I was here because I didn't finish my schoolwork. After that I feel sleepy and want to wake up in the morning..." (P6)

Achieve Goals

All respondents have the determination to learn because they want to pursue their ambitions. There are some respondents who come from poor families and have the desire to study hard to achieve their goals. The respondent's statement is as follows:

" I want to study smartly; I want to repay my mother's sacrifice. My mother alone raised us five siblings. I want to be a doctor when I grow up, work in a hospital and get a big salary. Can take care of mom and younger siblings..." (P7)

" I want to be a firefighter; I can help people put out fires. That day my parents took us to the fire office to see the firemen at work. The fireman brother is really great, he can climb the fire truck and put out the fire. The fountain is strong. When I grow up, I want to be like that..." (P1)

"I want to be an astronaut who goes to the moon. That's why I want to be smart and score A in the exam. You know, in my class, there are many who want to be astronauts. We entered the Science Club..." (P2)

Objective 2: Student anxiety at school

This study also found that there are various concerns faced by these students. Here are the concerns faced by the respondents.

Interference from friends

During the daily school hours, the disturbances that mostly occur are the students' mental and emotional disturbances. The harassed student did not use any physical harassment during school hours. Most of the harassment that is often done is like mocking, teasing with bad name calling and harassing students who seem quiet and don't talk much. According to

respondents, they are often teased about their physical appearance and for not socializing with friends at school. The respondent's statement is as follows:

"I don't think it's fun when I'm friends with my friends. Suddenly they messed me up and I felt sad and angry with them. They always call me fat, not pretty, black..." (P4)

"This thing happened to a friend I don't even know very well. He accused me of stealing his money, when I never did. But they are always messing with other people. I don't know why, and I am the one who is angry with the teacher..." (P1)

"My friend always bullies me at school because he doesn't like me. I don't even know why he doesn't like me even though we've never even known each other closely..." (P3)

"My friend always makes fun of the popular girl gang at my school..." (P5)

"My friend is always messing with me, I'm afraid that he will steal my money and hit me..." (P2)

"My friends are angry with me because my friends don't let me play with them..." (P2)

Fear of Teachers

The motivation of students to attend school is slightly disturbed when subject and discipline teachers are too fierce towards students. According to these respondents, they feel worried and afraid to go to school when they still have unfinished schoolwork and teachers who are fierce when teaching. Respondents expressed it as follows:

" I am afraid of my cane teacher when there is schoolwork or training that is not ready. The math teacher brings a cane to class and if we don't prepare the exercises, she will have a cane in our hands..." (P3)

" Teacher BM because he gives a lot of essays and schoolwork. Essays are hard to do. That's why I sleep late at night..." (P7)

" Our discipline teacher is fierce, I'm afraid of the cane when I come late to school. That day, my sister woke up late because she slept late that night, so we went to school late. The teacher called us and our cane..." (P2)

School Workload

It has become a habit for teachers to give schoolwork to students every day. This is to increase students' understanding of a topic that has been taught in school. In addition, the goal of schoolwork is to guide them to find their own answers and prevent these students from forgetting the lessons that have been taught by the teacher.

Nevertheless, the respondent of the study has concerns about the burden of schoolwork because they feel that there is too much schoolwork and not enough time to complete it. The respondent's statement is as follows:

"Sometimes I'm kind of lazy to go to school because there's a lot of schoolwork and I'm not ready. If you go to school, confirm that you are angry with the teacher..." (P2)

"There is a lot of schoolwork, every teacher gives schoolwork. After that, I want to make notes for each subject. Sometimes, I come home from school tired, I fall asleep until the evening. At night there is not enough time to do schoolwork. I do whatever I can..." (P7)

Canteen Staff Behavior

The canteen is a place that will be visited by almost all students because every student is given time to take a break from the learning process. There are some parents who will provide food supplies for the children and there are also some who give shopping money to buy food in the school canteen.

According to the findings of this study, respondents have concerns about canteen staff who according to them are fierce, behave inappropriately such as not returning excess money and not accepting payment in the form of coins. Things like this have disturbed the emotions of these students and disturbed the emotional stability of the students to continue the learning session on the day of the incident. Most of the respondents have experienced this inappropriate event and their statements are as follows:

"There is an aunt in the canteen when I pay, she won't give me the rest of my money. I was surprised, but because there were many people at break time, I just left from there..." (P)

"I don't like the canteen aunt because she sells a chicken nasi lemak for three ringgit. I've only brought five ringgit in school money, then it's fun to shout at the school boys..." (P)

"That day I gave a coin, and the canteen aunt didn't accept it. He said we don't accept coins here. I find it strange because there is a boy in front who can pay with coins. I have only this money left in my pocket..." (P)

"That's right, that day also happened to me. Talk loudly, then I get angry. I don't like the canteen, the food is not good, and then it's expensive..." (P)

Objective 3: Coping Strategies to Overcome Anxiety Report to the Teacher

The objective in the fourth session is to train these students to come up with a coping plan to deal with the anxiety they face. They are required to build a mind map and come up with ideas on how they can deal with anxiety and help them in their studies so that they are more motivated to achieve excellent results in the academic field.

These students are aware that the behavior of disturbing other friends in an inappropriate way is wrong and should be reported immediately to the teacher. They also believe that teachers can help them in solving the problems they face. All the respondents stated that they need to report immediately to the teacher when they are harassed by friends or canteen staff doing something wrong. Here is the sharing from the study respondents:

"After this I should report to the teacher when my friends bother me. I know I shouldn't keep it to myself..." (P4)

"About the canteen aunt, we should report it to the teacher so that the teacher can take action..." (P3)

"I'm here to tell the teacher and if I can advise the boy not to disturb me again, but if I dare..." (P2)

"I want to tell the teacher, but I'm afraid. I'm afraid that the bullying friend will know that I told the teacher..." (P5)

Build a Timetable

Good time management can help students complete all schoolwork within the prescribed period. They are aware of the use of personal timetables to plan time in order to achieve a balance between studying and resting. The respondent's statement is as follows:

"I know I like to play after school. But I know I have a schedule for myself and follow that schedule. I know this schedule is important, but that's what I'm too lazy to do..." (P)

"My good friend has a schedule like this, my mother told me to do it. My schoolwork is not finished because I like to play on the phone until I go to bed late. But it's true that if there's a schedule, we're here to follow..." (P)

"I used to have this timetable, but I didn't follow it for a long time. I sometimes come home from school tired, in the evening I want to go out to play. But I'm also afraid of being angry with the teacher if the schoolwork is not ready. It's true what these friends say, I have a schedule for myself..." (P)

Conclusion

The findings show that learning motivation can be generated through the student himself, his family and the role of the local community including the school. High motivation helps students to continue to strive in their studies so that they excel in academics and at the same time form a person who is balanced in terms of physical, spiritual and spiritual.

The concerns faced by these students should not be taken lightly because as we see today, harassment that was initially just a joke can turn into bullying which has a negative effect on the students being bullied. The school should try to approach students in a prudent way so that they do not have a feeling of fear but have a feeling of respect for the teacher.

With this, we hope that students can easily and voluntarily report their concerns to teachers or school counselors.

These teenagers are the hope of the family, country and nation. They are potential leaders for the future. So, this educational process needs to be carried by all parties with a sense of responsibility so that these students can grow up in a safe and harmonious atmosphere.

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