THE EFFECTS OF MOTIVATIONAL APPROACHES ON LEARNING INTEREST AMONG SIXTH FORM STUDENTS IN KUCHING AND SAMARAHAN DIVISIONS, SARAWAK

By

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to determine to what extent certain motivational approaches were practised in the classroom and whether these approaches were related to student interest in learning. It has been argued that the lack of learner-centred motivational strategies have obstructed students from having a keen interest in the learning process. This study attempted to: (1) determine students' degree of interest in learning based on selected socio-economic background, gender, perceived academic ability levels and subject streams, (2) determine students' perception of the use of motivational approaches in the classroom based on socio-demographic characteristics, and (3) determine whether a correlation exist between learning interest and the motivational approaches used by teachers.

The study made use of the causal-comparative approach to study the main independent variable, motivational approaches, in retrospect for their possible effects to the dependent variable, interest in learning. The research instrument utilised a questionnaire to collect data from 220 Form Six students through stratified random sampling from twelve schools in Kuching and Samarahan Divisions of Sarawak. The three-part questionnaire consisted of items on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, their responses to interest in learning and their perception of the use of motivational approaches used by their teachers. Statistical tests carried out were the t-Test and One-Way ANOVA for determining significance of different mean values between groups. Correlation tests between variables was conducted through Pearson's Bivariate Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis.

The study found that students' interest in learning was moderate and their perception of motivational approaches used were generally average. The study also found a correlation between learning interest and goal motivation, achievement motivation and intrinsic motivation, with the strongest correlate being goal motivation. However, out of these three motivational approaches, goal motivation had significant influence on interest in learning among students. The study also found that students with higher academic ability had a higher degree of learning interest. Similarly, these students also perceived their teachers' use of motivation at a greater regularity compared to students of lower academic ability. The results suggested that motivational and affective variables are vital components of the learning process without which students will not be able to benefit completely from the learning process in the class environment.
ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan sejauh manakah pendekatan-pendekatan motivasi yang tertentu diarnalkan di dalam bilik darjah dan sejauh manakah pendekatan-pendekatan itu berhubung dengan minat pelajar dalam pembelajaran mereka. Adalah menjadi satu isu bahawa kekurangan praktiknya strategi-strategi motivasi telah menghalangi minat pelajar-pelajar untuk mendalam proses pembelajaran. Kajian ini cuba: (1) menentukan paras minat pelajar dalam pembelajaran berasaskan latarbelakang latarbelakang socio-ekonomi, jantina, paras kebolehan akademik yang difikirkan, dan aliran matapelajaran mereka; (2) menentukan persepsi pelajar mengenai amalan pendekatan motivasi dalam bilik darjah berasaskan ciri-ciri demographik yang tertentu; dan (3) menentukan samada korelasi wujud antara minat pembelajaran dalam golongan pelajar dan pendekatan motivasi yang diamalkan oleh guru.


ADMISSION

No part of this thesis has been used to support any application to obtain a degree qualification in this university or in any other institution of higher learning.
DEDICATION

This thesis is specially dedicated to my beloved wife, Rosy Ho Chu King, and my three sons, Paul Dylan Lim Yung Le’, Joshua Joel Lim Yung Chern and Daniel Duane Lim Yung Xeng for their support, encouragement and patience with me throughout this study.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstrak</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Diagrams</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Symbols</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>xviii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction                  | 1    |
1.2 Background of the Study       | 5    |
1.3 Statement of the Problem      | 7    |
1.4 Objectives of the Study       | 9    |
1.5 Conceptual Framework          | 11   |
1.6 Research Hypotheses           | 13   |
1.7 Significance of the Study     | 15   |
1.8 Definition of Terms           | 18   |
1.9 Limitations of the Study      | 19   |
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Concepts of Interest in Learning

2.3 Relevance of Motivation on Interest in Learning

2.4 Teacher’s Role in Motivation

2.5 Characteristics of Interest in Learning
   2.5.1 Attention
   2.5.2 Persistence
   2.5.3 Activity Level
   2.5.4 Performance

2.6 Interest in Learning and Socio-Demographic Variables
   2.6.1 Age
   2.6.2 Gender
   2.6.3 Socio-Economic Backgrounds
   2.6.4 Academic Ability
   2.6.5 Subject Disciplines

2.7 Motivation and Socio-Demographic Variables
   2.7.1 Age
   2.7.2 Gender
   2.7.3 Socio-Economic Background
   2.7.4 Academic Ability
   2.7.5 Subject Streams
2.8 Historical Development of Motivational Approaches and Interest in Learning

2.9 The Four Motivational Approaches
2.9.1 Achievement Motivational Approach
2.9.2 Extrinsic Motivational Approach
2.9.3 Intrinsic Motivational Approach
2.9.4 Goal Motivational Approach

2.10 Relationship between Motivational Approaches and Interest in Learning
2.10.1 Achievement Motivation and Learning Interest
2.10.2 Extrinsic Motivation and Learning Interest
2.10.3 Intrinsic Motivation and Learning Interest
2.10.4 Goal Motivation and Learning Interest

2.11 Conclusion

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Research Design
3.3 Population and Sample
3.4 The Research Instrument
3.5 Data Collection
3.6 Data Analysis
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Socio-Demographic Characteristics
   4.2.1 Form Class
   4.2.2 Socio-Economic Background
   4.2.3 Gender
   4.2.4 Race
   4.2.5 Boarding/Non-Boarding
   4.2.6 Academic Level
   4.2.7 Subject Disciplines

4.3 Interest in Learning

4.4 Interest in Learning based on Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics

4.5 General Perception of Sixth Form Students towards Motivational Approaches used by Teachers

4.6 General Perception of Motivational Approaches based on Selected Socio-Economic Characteristics

4.7 Relationship between Interest in Learning and Motivational Approaches

4.8 Motivational Factors in the Classroom that has an Influence on Learning Interest among Sixth Form Students
   4.8.1 Multiple Regression Analysis of Motivational Approaches on Interest in Learning
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction 117

5.2 Summary of Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology 117

5.3 Summary from the Study 120

5.3.1 General Degree of Interest among Students based on Socio-Demographic Characteristics 121

5.3.2 General Student Perception on the use of Motivational Approaches based on Socio-Demographic Characteristics 122

5.3.3 Relationship between the Use of Motivational Approaches and Interest in Learning 124

5.3.4 Motivational Approaches that Influence Interest in Learning among Sixth Form Students 125

5.4 Conclusions 126

5.5 Recommendations 131

5.5.1 For Policy Makers 131

5.5.2 For Heads of Schools 132

5.5.3 For Teachers 133

5.5.4 For Researchers 133
Bibliography

Appendix

Questionnaire
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Student Population in Form Six classes in Kuching and Samarahan schools</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Statistics of Questionnaires Returned by Respondents</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Sample size of Form Six students from Kuching and Samarahan Schools</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>The Three Sections and Variable Items in the Questionnaire</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Outcome of Reliability Analysis Test Based on the Alpha Scale</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>A Summary of Statistical Tests Employed in Analysis of Data</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Distribution of Respondents by Demographic Characteristics</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 220)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Distribution of Respondents by Their Interest in Learning</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 220)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Mean Values and Values from Levene’s Test and t-Test for Student Interest in Learning based on Residential Backgrounds</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Mean Values and Values from Levene’s Test and t-Test for Student Interest in Learning Based on Gender</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>One-Way ANOVA and Mean Values for Student Interest in Learning Based on Academic Ability Levels</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Post-Hoc Analysis Results Using Duncan Multiple Range Test for Interest in Learning Based on Academic Ability Levels</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.7 Mean values and Values from Levene’s Test and t-Test for Student Interest in Learning Based on Subject Stream 89

4.8 Range of Values For The Use of Motivational Approaches and Interest in Learning 90

4.9 Mean Values of Student Perception of Motivational Approaches Used in the Classroom 91

4.10 Mean Values and Probability Values from Levene’s Test and t-Test on Perception of Rural and Urban Respondents towards Motivational Approaches 93

4.11 Mean Values and Values from Levene’s Test and t-Test on Gender Perception of Motivational Approaches 95

4.12 One-Way ANOVA Test and Mean Values for Student Perception of Motivational Approaches Based on their Academic Ability Levels 97

4.13 Post-Hoc Analysis Using Duncan Multiple Range Test for Perception of Motivational Approaches Based on Academic Ability Levels 98

4.14 One-Way ANOVA Test and Mean Values on Student Perception of Motivational Approaches Based on Subject Streams 100

4.15 Pearson’s Correlation between Learning Interest and Motivational Approaches among Student Respondents 101
4.16 Multiple Regression Analysis of the Effect of Motivational Approaches on Interest in Learning among Sixth Form Students Using the “ENTER” Method

4.17 Multiple Regression Analysis of the Effect of Motivational Approaches on Learning Interest Using the “STEPWISE” Method

4.18 Pearson’s Correlation Test on the Existence of Multi-Colinearity Among the Four Motivational Factors

4.19 Summary of Hypothesis Testing on Interest in Learning among Six Form Students Based on Socio-Demographic Characteristics

4.20 Summary of Research Analysis of Hypothesis Testing on Correlation between Learning Interest and the Use of Motivational Approaches among Six Form students

4.21 Summary of Research Analysis of Null Hypothesis on Contributory Factors of Motivation on Interest in Learning Among Sixth Form Students
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Part of the Conceptual Framework involving Interest in Learning Variable with the Independent Variable from Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Motivational Approaches</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Part of the Conceptual Framework involving Perceived Motivational Approaches with the Independent Variable from Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Range of Values for the Use of Motivational Approaches and Interest in Learning</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Probability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL</td>
<td>Lower Limit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UL</td>
<td>Upper Limit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>Pearson’s correlation Coefficient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Regression Coefficient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>Multiple determinant coefficient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>Change in multiple determinant coefficient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for Social Science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOTVFACT</td>
<td>Motivational Approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRNSIC</td>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTRNSIC</td>
<td>Extrinsic Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACHEVMNT</td>
<td>Achievement Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOALMTV</td>
<td>Goal Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTEREST</td>
<td>Interest in Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There has been a growing concern over the lack of interest in learning and poor student motivation in schools. These two elements have been thought by many as part of the root cause of student indiscipline. The Ministry of Education (1996) revealed that in the period 1990 to 1995, not less than 14 percent of all secondary school students were reported by their schools to be involved in some act of indiscipline. The cases included truancy, dropouts, coming late, causing class disturbances, extortion, smoking and stealing.

In examining the root causes of indiscipline, there would have been a discovery that many of these problem students were low in motivation, having lost almost all interest in their studies. If this being the case, what then are the strategies being formulated to counter these problems? In looking at the learning process in schools, what learning input that the vast majority of students have received did not seem to give priority to individual learners. Content in learning was given precedence over learner needs. Large classes and heavy teaching workloads also meant that teaching had become impersonal with teachers hardly able to give personal attention towards students’ individual learning needs. The
affective and motivational aspects of teaching seemed sidelined in favour of
cognitive factors.

The usual strategy to curb indiscipline in schools utilises the negative
reinforcement approach which involves issuing threats, canning, suspension and
expulsion. When such methods are employed in blanket fashion, these methods
only have a temporary effect in addressing the symptoms of indiscipline rather than
the root causes of the problem. Alternatively, could the application of relevant
motivational approaches be more effective in addressing the basic affective and
motivational needs of such students? These needs when unfulfilled might be a
major part of the root cause of their misbehaviour which was being used as a front
to gain attention.

In addition, rapid advances in the use of technology in Malaysia have seen
a prolific increase of modern technological tools such as satellite and cable-linked
television, CD-ROM and internet that has increasingly become intertwined with
the student's world. It is good when these electronic tools are utilised for
educational purposes but the danger of their misuse is certainly a high probability
especially among students. Coupled with the increasing number of students
involved in negative social activities such as *lepak*¹, the basic issue of unmotivated
students in Malaysian schools cannot be discounted. Such students have showed a
serious lack of learning interest, which again highlighted the issue of loss of
interest in learning. Are serious studies being conducted to find possible causes of

¹Malay word for loitering aimlessly around shopping complexes and entertainment outlets
the problem and possible solutions to the problem? To put the full blame on parents was not reasonable. The education system and teaching practices that are antithetical to students' basic learning needs have to shoulder part of the blame.

In looking at teachers' view points, Pintrich and Schunk (1996) found that many teachers attending in-service courses regarded motivation of students as one of their chief concerns in the classroom. For these teachers, student apathy towards learning has been steadily increasing even in schools that traditionally were held with high regard in society. Clifford (1993) reiterated that many educational practices had obstructed the very essence of learning by prioritising the ends and not the means of schooling. In studies related to motivation among Malaysian fourth formers, results indicated that motivational variables among students could be used to predict academic achievements (Britten, 1992). These findings implied that if poor academic results became a variable to measure unmotivated students, the number of students with below average grades academically would be too significant to be ignored.

The response of educational planners towards unsatisfactory academic performances is to direct more intensive examination-orientated strategies to be carried at the school level which stressed on techniques of answering questions ignoring the fundamental aspects of learning. This stopgap measure has forgotten the inter-related motivational and affective variables like interest in learning which are considered to be inseparable from the world of learning. McDonald (1993)
added that because motivation and emotion accompanies every learning activity, learning cannot be divorced from other non-cognitive factors without which natural learning cannot take place.

There are no exact figures of unmotivated students in Malaysian schools. However, if lack of motivation is assumed to be closely related to a combination of three other factors such as indiscipline, low academic performance and the professional opinions of many experienced teachers, then the figures will be too high to be ignored. This researcher offers a conservative estimate of 25 percent of students as in the unmotivated category. This statistic implies that when a teacher walks into a classroom of forty students, there would be a minimum of at least ten unmotivated students in any one class who would have deprioritised learning, putting learning activities in the back seat.

Bringing the vast world of learning to students is a school’s primary mission. Consequently, challenging and motivating students towards learning is the basic purpose of a school’s existence. Ideally then, educating all types of children irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, academic levels and their personal problems is the school’s sacred mission, including educating students who are considered to be hopeless academically. Surely then, a concerned teacher with the aid of effective motivational approaches can reach out to these students and sparked a ray of hope in them to enter afresh into the twin dimensions of
knowledge and learning, discovering their own innate learning skills and developing these skills to traversed new levels of knowledge.

Natural learning benefits students by giving them a greater scope in identifying what is the knowledge that is required in their own learning, generating appropriate learning goals, allocating study time, putting in effort by themselves, sustaining self-motivation and controlling their own learning intentions despite competing interests. The practice of motivating students deserves special attention as it is almost always linked with natural learning and the learner-centred approach in the teaching process. In any school, enhancing students to access natural learning should be placed on top of the school’s agenda for learning activities with the purpose of providing sufficient avenue and opportunity for students to utilise their own learning capacities to the fullest way possible.

1.2 Background of the Study

In the school environment, motivation and interest in learning form two of a complex of inter-related components in the teaching and learning processes that help students acquire and achieve learning goals. In addition, these two learning components of motivation and interest in learning provide the impetus for students in meeting personal aspirations of academic advancement, which are linked closely to their choice of a future career. However, despite its intricate attachment to the
learning process, to teaching practice and to enhancing life-long goals among learners, the twin factors of interest in learning and motivation have not receive the due recognition they deserve. In many corridors of learning, they have assumed only intuitive importance in the twin academic pinnacles of teaching and learning.

The use of motivation fulfils natural needs in human beings in the activity of learning by addressing the natural needs for control, competence and learning. McCombs (1996) added that the influence of motivation in learning becomes significant when learners perceived learning tasks as meaningful and interesting. Learning tasks should be related to students’ interests as this would encourage and increase their own control and choice in fostering the development of learning skills.

In Malaysia, learner-centred strategies were incorporated into the revised new curriculum for primary and secondary school education in the 1980s to counter traditional teaching practice based on the stifling teacher-centred approach, the limited examination-centred approach and the impersonal content-centred approach. While they have their own distinct advantages, these approaches have been generally ineffective in producing a natural interest towards learning as teachers had to struggle with class environments that were not conducive towards giving attention towards fulfilling individual learner needs.