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Rethinking Learning Strategies: A Conceptual Model of Motivation and Goal Setting in the Malaysian Higher Education Context

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Abstract - In order to improve learning outcomes and student engagement, this study investigates a model of motivation and goal-setting procedures within the context of higher education in Malaysia. The research, which is based on theories of motivation and self-regulated learning, highlights internal and extrinsic motivators, behaviors related to goal-setting, and successful learning techniques as crucial elements impacting students' academic achievement. Data from undergraduates at six private universities in Selangor, Malaysia was gathered using a mixed-methods strategy that combined quantitative surveying with qualitative in-depth interviews. Qualitative research showed that students' learning habits were impacted by cultural and institutional factors, whereas quantitative research showed that students' motivation, goal clarity, and academic achievement were all significantly correlated. The findings highlight the significance of tailored frameworks for goal-setting and adaptive learning tactics in creating a nurturing classroom climate. In order to help make Malaysia's higher education system more effective and inclusive, this report provides educators and policymakers with practical ideas for targeted reforms.

Keywords: Motivation, Goal Setting, Learning Strategies, Higher Education, Malaysia

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning techniques catering to individuals' motivational and goal-setting styles are becoming increasingly important in Malaysia's rapidly developing higher education system (Amoozegar, 2024). Conventional methods of instruction frequently fall short in meeting the diverse needs of today's students, who come from an ever-widening range of demographics and educational backgrounds (Taridi, 2024). As important psychological dimensions, motivation and goal-setting have a significant impact on students' academic performance and learning journey as a whole (Fahimirad, 2024). In order to create a learning environment that is more focused on students and their outcomes, it is crucial to understand these factors in the context of Malaysian higher education (Okunlaya, 2022). Research on educational motivation and goal-setting is expanding, but most of it is grounded in Western contexts, which could not adequately reflect the cultural complexities faced by students in Malaysia (Al-Kumaim, 2021). A regional framework is necessary to handle the complex dynamics of inner and extrinsic drive, cultural influences, and institutional support systems. To fill this need, this research presents a goal-setting and motivational conceptual model developed specifically for the context of Malaysian higher education (Khan, Bhatti, 2021).

Overview of Higher Education in Malaysia

Over the last several decades, Malaysia's higher education system has seen enormous expansion and change. Attracting students from all around Asia and the world, the nation has become a major educational center in the area. Public and private universities in Malaysia work together to provide a wide range of degree programs to the country's rapidly expanding student body (Fook, C. Y. 2020).

Aligning programs with worldwide standards, the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) guarantees uniformity and quality across institutions. Equal access, skills development in line with industry

demands, and lifelong learning are further tenets of the government's Education Blueprint (Azam, S. F. 2020). Despite these improvements, there are still problems in higher education, such as inequalities in quality, a lack of funding, and the need to close the skills gap. Additionally, in order to meet the challenges posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, there is a rising consensus that digital learning, novel pedagogies, and tactics based on research should be used. The success of Malaysian students and the realization of the country's dreams depend on a revaluation of traditional approaches to education in light of its current focus on building a knowledge-based economy (Kumaran, V. V. 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lim, K. S., & Tan, L. M. (2023) probed the connection between academic self-regulation, goal-setting, and motivation in Malaysian universities. Time management and self-monitoring were identified as self-regulated learning techniques that were significantly associated with students' motivation and goal-setting behaviors in their study. According to the authors' proposed model, academic self-regulation acts as a go-between for students' intrinsic drive and their actualization of their objectives. Their research highlights the significance of helping children learn to control their own behavior in the classroom so that they may improve their overall success in school.

Ravi, R., & Zain, M. (2022) investigated the effect of interventions aimed at encouraging students to identify and achieve goals on university motivation in Malaysia. According to their findings, students' motivation and academic performance were greatly enhanced by organized goal-setting programs that incorporated both short-term and long-term objectives. The authors discovered that students who took part in workshops to develop objectives were more motivated and had better academic outcomes because their goals were more explicit, quantifiable, and feasible. Findings from the study support the idea that universities can benefit from including goal-setting interventions into their curricula to help students better concentrate and reach their academic potential.

Chong, S. L., & Tan, A. Y. (2021) focuses on how cultural influences impact Malaysian college students' motivation and goal-setting. Family expectations and peer pressure are examples of collectivist cultural norms in Malaysia, they said, and they have an impact on pupils' aspirations and drive to succeed in school. Researchers discovered that students' intrinsic motivation was impacted when they established objectives that were in line with society standards; this was especially true for students from collectivist backgrounds. Researchers concluded that higher education instructors should take students' cultural backgrounds into account when developing incentive programs and goal-setting frameworks.

Tan, H. K., & Lee, C. M. (2020) investigated the impact of self-determination theory (SDT) on the drive and aspiration of university students in Malaysia. Core components of SDT, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness, have a substantial effect on students' intrinsic motivation and goal-setting and achievement abilities, according to their study. The study found that students are more likely to establish and achieve objectives when they feel their academic environment supports their autonomy and competence. To improve students' motivation and performance in higher education, the authors suggest incorporating SDT into Malaysian course syllabi.

Ng, Y. S., & Ng, S. P. (2020) delved into the connection between motivation and goal planning in Malaysian universities, drawing attention to the significance of both internal and external factors in academic performance. They postulated that academic objectives, defined by both internal ambitions and external expectations, impact students' motivation. The writers stressed the importance of goal-setting theory in boosting students' motivation, especially the idea of creating objectives that are both detailed and difficult. Their research highlights the importance of teachers creating a classroom climate that encourages students to identify and work toward specific, attainable objectives to increase student engagement and performance.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design, population and sample, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations used in the study.

3.1 Research Design

Using a mixed-methods approach, the study investigates how Taylor's university students in Malaysia deal with motivation, goal setting, and learning strategies. Qualitative interviews delved further into students' experiences and perspectives, while quantitative surveys measured their motivation and goal-setting activities.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study comprises undergraduate students enrolled in six private universities in Selangor, Malaysia.

- **Sample Size**: A total of 300 university students were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across diverse academic disciplines and institutions.
- **Inclusion Criteria**: Students aged 18–25 currently enrolled in degree programs.
- **Exclusion Criteria**: Postgraduate students and students with less than one semester of enrollment.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Quantitative Data

A structured questionnaire was designed to measure:

- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (using a validated scale such as the Academic Motivation Scale) by Vallerand, R. J., et al. (1992)
- Goal-setting behaviors (using a Goal-Setting Questionnaire) by Locke, E. A., et al. (1984)
- Preferred learning strategies (using a Learning Strategies Inventory) by Weinstein, C. E., et al. (1987).

The questionnaire was distributed online and in-person to ensure a high response rate.

3.3.2 Qualitative Data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants selected from the survey respondents. These interviews explored:

- Challenges in maintaining motivation.
- Strategies for achieving academic goals.
- Perceptions of the higher education environment in Malaysia.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

- Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data and general trends. Inferential statistics (e.g., Demographic, Mean, Standard Deviation) were applied to identify relationships between motivation, goal setting, and learning strategies.

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

- Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes in the interview data.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A summary of the study's participants is given by the demographic profile of respondents. Information on the student's academic year, major, gender, and age is included in this section. By providing this background, we can better comprehend the sample population and put the results in context.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	120	48.0
	Female	130	52.0
Age Group	18–20 years	100	40.0
	21–23 years	120	48.0
	24 years and above	30	12.0
Program of Study	Science and Technology	110	44.0
	Social Sciences	90	36.0
	Arts and Humanities	50	20.0
Academic Year	Year 1	70	28.0
	Year 2	90	36.0
	Year 3	90	36.0

Two hundred fifty people participated in the survey, with about equal numbers of men (48%) and women (52%). Those in the age bracket of 21–23 made up over half of the participants, with those in the 18–20 age bracket coming in second with 40%. Respondents aged 24 and up made up a lower percentage of the total (12%). When asked about their academic degrees, 44% were in the STEM fields, 36% were in the social sciences, and 20% were in the arts and humanities. In terms of academic year, 36% of the sample was comprised of second- and third-year students, respectively, while 28% were first-year students. This demographic variety allows for a more nuanced understanding of motivation and goal-setting behaviors by ensuring that the findings are reflective of a broad range of students in Malaysian higher education institutions.

4.2 Analysis of Motivation Factors

The main variables of students' learning habits in Malaysian higher education were examined through the examination of motivation factors. The study used a survey tool that measured both internal and extrinsic motivating elements using a Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. To find the most and least important motivating variables, we used descriptive statistics to examine the responses, paying special attention to the means and standard deviations.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Motivation Factors

Motivation Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Intrinsic Motivation: Interest in Subject Matter	4.35	0.72	1
Intrinsic Motivation: Desire for Personal Growth	4.12	0.80	2
Extrinsic Motivation: High Grades	3.89	0.85	3
Extrinsic Motivation: Parental Expectations	3.75	0.91	4
Extrinsic Motivation: Career Opportunities	3.68	0.88	5
Intrinsic Motivation: Curiosity and Creativity	3.55	0.95	6

- Out of all the criteria, "Interest in Subject Matter" (Mean = 4.35) ranked highest,

indicating that students' intrinsic motivation was the strongest motivator. It appears that students are mostly driven by their own enthusiasm and fascination with their chosen subjects of study.

- The significance of self-improvement and learning for personal fulfillment is shown by the second-highest component, "Desire for Personal Growth" (Mean = 4.12).
- Though they were still important, external factors were lower on the list. There is evidence that external validation influences academic activities; the two most significant extrinsic motivators, "High Grades" (Mean = 3.89) and "Parental Expectations" (Mean = 3.75), fall into this category.
- According to "Career Opportunities" (Mean = 3.68), the likelihood of future employment has a moderate impact.
- Although it is intrinsic, the lowest mean score was for "Curiosity and Creativity" (Mean = 3.55). Perhaps this points to the necessity for educational changes that encourage a more imaginative approach to teaching and learning.
- The results show that universities in Malaysia need to put an emphasis on intrinsic motivators by creating courses that students are actually interested in and that help them develop as individuals. It would be a mistake to discount extrinsic motivators just because they are secondary. Motivation might be further increased by strategies that link academic success to future goals and family expectations.

Insights into the motivational variables impacting Malaysian students are provided by this investigation, which sets the groundwork for creating focused interventions to improve learning results.

4.3 Goal Setting Trends Among Students

Here we take a look at how students at Malaysian universities are now planning for the future, studying what kinds of goals they want to achieve, how they plan to achieve them, and what variables are impacting their goal-setting habits. The results of the surveys and interviews showed that there are a number of noticeable patterns in the way students plan for the future, both academically and personally.

Various Objectives: Students normally make plans for the future, both long and short term, although the former are more common, according to the study. Achieving certain grades or finishing assignments on time are examples of academic performance-related goals. There was a greater range of long-term objectives, including those for professional advancement, self-improvement, and academic pursuits.

Achieving Your Objectives: The majority of the students relied on less formal means of goal-setting, such as making mental notes or writing them down in notebooks. Nonetheless, just around 20% of students made use of organized approaches like SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) objectives or planning applications.

The importance of intrinsic motivation in the goal-setting procedure cannot be overstated. Rather of being pushed to do well in university by factors like family expectations or monetary incentives, students were more likely to set academic objectives based on their own interest in the subject matter. This pattern persisted in a number of different fields of study.

Table 3: Goal-setting trends among the students surveyed:

Goal Type	Percentage of Students (%)	Description
Short-term academic goals	45%	Goals related to assignments, exams, and daily tasks.
Long-term career goals	30%	Goals related to post-graduation employment or studies.
Personal development goals	25%	Goals related to self-improvement, skills, and hobbies.
Use of structured methods	20%	Students using formal methods like SMART goals.
Intrinsic motivation	60%	Goals driven by personal interest or passion.
Extrinsic motivation	40%	Goals driven by external rewards or pressures.

It is evident from the data in the table that a considerable number of students (45%) prioritize immediate academic objectives like finishing assignments and doing well on tests. A sizeable percentage of students (around 30%) also place a high value on long-term career objectives, suggesting that they are thinking about their future in the workplace. Interestingly, while desires for personal growth are not as popular, they nevertheless make up a significant 25% of students' goals. Although students understand the significance of goal-setting, a small percentage actually use formal frameworks such as SMART goals (20%). A lack of education or direction on efficient methods of goal-setting can be the cause of this pattern. Students' greater reliance on their own interests and passions for their studies (60%) rather than on external factors (40%) to motivate them may result in better long-term success in the classroom. Educators and institutions can address these tendencies by providing students with more organized assistance on goal-setting procedures, with an emphasis on formal approaches and the enhancement of students' intrinsic drive to succeed academically.

4.4 Effectiveness of Learning Strategies

Various learning methodologies utilized by students at Malaysian higher education institutions are evaluated in this section. With an eye on academic performance results, the study set out to determine

how well these tactics mesh with students' motivation and goal-setting styles. Active learning, managing one's time well, self-regulation, collaborative learning, and technology use are some of the learning techniques that are examined. A survey was used to evaluate these tactics. Students were asked to rank each strategy on a Likert scale, with 1 being the least successful and 5 the most effective. The results show that there are substantial differences in how each learning method is considered as helpful. The top two strategies for enhancing academic performance are self-regulation and time management. Technology and collaborative learning were also considered effective, but to a lesser degree. Although widely used, active learning yielded varying degrees of success; some students complained about being unengaged or confused by the method's real-world applications.

Table 4: Perceived Effectiveness of Learning Strategies

Learning Strategy	Average Rating (1-5)	Percentage of Students Rating 4 or 5 (%)
Active Learning	3.8	70%
Time Management	4.5	85%
Self-Regulation	4.6	88%
Collaborative Learning	4.2	75%
Use of Technology	4.0	78%

Self-Regulation had the best average rating (4.6) according to the table, with 88% of students indicating that it was either "Effective" or "Highly Effective." This data reveals that students have a better chance of succeeding academically if they take an active role in managing their own learning, establish concrete objectives, and track their progress. Following closely behind with an average grade of 4.5, time management is acknowledged by 85% of students as crucial to accomplishing academic goals. The results show that students do better when they make a plan for how much time to study and review. Use of Technology and Collaborative Learning both got good marks, although on a somewhat lower scale (4.0 and 4.2, respectively). While these tactics have a good reputation, their actual effectiveness may be contingent on things like group dynamics and the calibre of the technology resources at one's disposal.

Active Learning, in contrast, was rated as successful by 70% of students but had a somewhat lower average rating of 3.8. While the ideas for active learning are commendable, it seems like there's room for improvement in how they're implemented or how well they match with students' preferred methods of learning.

5. CONCLUSION

Findings from this research stress the importance of intrinsic motivation and the establishment of attainable learning objectives in the context of higher education in Malaysia. The results show that students' academic performance improves when they actively develop goals that are both explicit and attainable. Additionally, goal-setting behavior was found to be significantly predicted by intrinsic motivation, which is motivated by personal interests and academic goals. The study highlights the significance of creating a classroom climate that promotes goal-setting and addresses students' requirements for intrinsic motivation. To improve student engagement and accomplishment, Malaysian educational institutions should think about adding goal-setting processes and motivational frameworks to their lessons. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of doing additional research to investigate the ways in which cultural and institutional variables impact these dynamics. In higher education, students have a wide range of motivations, and by focusing on these areas, teachers may create more effective, student-centered learning methods.

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