

# A Survey on Achievement Motivation among University Students

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## Abstract

Being motivated is a major factor contributing to student excellence in their studies and success in life. Students face various academic pressures from the education system itself or from environmental factors that can impact their level of motivation to achieve excellence. This study explores achievement motivational levels among university students in Malaysia from the four aspects of gender, race, place of residence and academic performance (CGPA). This survey-type study uses a simple random sampling method involving research subjects comprising 200 students ( $n=200$ ). The research instrument used is the Achievement Motivation Test (AMT) introduced by Abu Bakar Nordin (1995). Data was analyzed using SPSS Version 26 software. An independent sample t-test analysis was used to identify the differences in achievement motivation levels based on the four aspects mentioned. Overall, the study found no difference in the level of student motivation based on gender ( $t= 0.254$ ,  $p> 0.05$ ), race ( $t= 0.922$ ,  $p> 0.05$ ), place of residence ( $t= 1.836$ ,  $p> 0.05$ ), and academic performance ( $t=1.623$ ,  $p> 0.05$ ). However, some differences in motivation levels were found between students with low ( $M = 2.8$ ) and high ( $M = 3.0$ ) CGPAs. Thus, it can be concluded that motivational levels have a major role in ensuring student success and excellence. This study can form the basis for designing motivational modules or guidelines in public universities and the Ministry of Education for enhancing student achievement.

**Keywords:** Achievement Motivation, Academic Performance, Cgpa, University Students.

## Introduction

In general, motivation is the process of stimulating and guiding a person's behaviour as well as giving directions to abide by particular behaviours. The word motivation is often used to describe some form of human behaviour. Motivation is often an element used to influence individual performance (Walters et al., 1990). It is also understood as being the driver or internal energy for achieving a desired goal besides being the process of producing the energy for attaining one's goals or aspirations. Generally, motivated individuals possess the spirit to

achieve excellence in their studies and success in their lives (Don, 2006). As such, the issue of motivation has received much attention among researchers since the beginning of the 20th century. Numerous studies using various variables and aspects have been conducted on human motivation (Mary-Rose & Bruno, 2017).

In the area of student development, motivation is seen as the main determinant of success, especially in academic performance. Motivated students have the drive to exert themselves to meet the goals they seek. However, the motivational process is influenced by other concepts such as interests, values, attitudes and also students' desire for a particular undertaking (Sevil, 2017). Meanwhile, Mohammad Ikmal et al. (2020) explained that most students are influenced by two types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

### **Problem Statement**

The belief that students lack motivation to study or succeed is often echoed in the press or highlighted during talks and educational fora. Students who cannot grasp the idea of their goals and aspirations at university are often mired in social issues and fail in their exams. Studies reveal various issues that require serious attention in order to improve existing education systems. A major problem is that the education system allows students to proceed to higher levels (automatic promotion) without taking into account their mastery of the 3Rs (reading, counting and writing) thus undermining their ability to follow lessons, resulting in dropouts (Hassan, 2005). Such a system makes students lose interest and lack the motivation to learn (Hassan, 2005).

The issue of poor academic performance among students is a polemic that continues to be a never-ending debate. This situation worsens every year, especially before students move to higher education institutions. Studies have shown that intelligence is not the main factor in student academic achievement. Non-cognitive factors also need to be identified in understanding the factors contributing to academic achievement (Kumar & Tankha, 2020). The motivation for achieving has been identified as an important element in producing outstanding academic performance among students (Kumar & Tankha, 2020; Steinmayr et al., 2019).

The pressures of school, family and the environment can undermine student motivation. The ongoing global pandemic has posed major challenges to communities including students. The implementation of the movement control order (MCO) forced students to switch to online learning sessions. They had to overcome various online learning challenges which indirectly weakened their motivation (Smith et al., 2021). Such a situation generates much stress and affects motivation based on their individual capacities whether positive or negative.

In addition, globalization has changed the landscape and ecosystems of educational institutions. This has generated a new-millennial education revolution with human capital forming the main support in the development of a country. This new wave in education has forced nations to priorities education over all other factors as a means of migrating from production- to knowledge-based economies. Thus, this revolution has had a major impact on competition in the world of education in producing first-class human capital for promoting and sustaining national development efforts.

Therefore, this study aims to identify differences in achievement motivation based on several variables, namely gender, race, place of residence and student academic performance.

**Literature Review**

Shackleton and Fletcher (1984) state that the concept of achievement motivation was founded by Murray in 1938. The concept was later developed by McClelland (1951) into the "Need for Achievement" or "nAch." An individual's level of achievement motivation can be determined by measuring their behaviors in attempting to successfully complete a challenging task. This can measure the achievement motivation of the individual. Individuals who give reasons that a given task is difficult and cannot be done will be considered as having low achievement motivation (Shackleton & Fletcher, 1984).

***Achievement Motivation Theory***

The achievement motivation theory developed by McClelland explains the need to formulate an achievement task in the form of two factors or motives, namely the motive to achieve success and the motive to avoid failure. The motivation to achieve success is defined as the reaction of elation in achieving something. While the motive to avoid failure is represented by the ability to react with shame at a failure. The probability of success is seen as a subjective estimate of the likelihood of success at a given task. McClelland (1985) also explains that the composition of motivation is based on the motives to achieve success and to avoid failure. The motive to achieve success is characterized by pride if there is success in producing something, while the motive to avoid failure is considered offensive if the failure is accepted. Individuals motivated to achieve success crave competition, success and a variety of enjoyment including changes in specific situations that affect the strength of the achievement motive.

The self-determination theory (SDT) bases the development of personality and human behavior as an experiment on organismic theory that places the human psychological level as its priority (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT states that self-determination and independence represent the origins of a person's behavior (Orosz et al., 2017). SDT is used not only to understand the nature and effects of individual autonomy but also how it develops, and how specific, biological and social effects can be balanced. SDT divides motivation into three categories, namely intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and no motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Intrinsic motivation is a source of energy which is central to the active nature of humans (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It is defined as the driving force for an activity in ensuring that the individual achieves internal satisfaction. Intrinsic motivation involves the process of considering whether an individual's goals or activities are interesting and useful and is realized through their internal drive (Orosz et al., 2017). Intrinsic motivation is related to academic performance whereas extrinsic motivation is the driver that makes an individual derive benefits from an activity rather than in its inherent value itself. Individuals with extrinsic motivation act to receive the rewards without which the behavior will not occur. An example of extrinsically motivated behavior is doing something to obtain concrete rewards and to avoid punishment. The lack of motivation explains a situation where a person is not motivated to act (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

***Factors Influencing Achievement Motivation***

Desa (2006) noted that the need for achievement varies according to the achievement situation. This is because student achievement behaviour depends on many factors such as the value of incentives or rewards expected from the success achieved. The inclination to achieve this success in relation to a task or activity is dependent on three variables, namely

the motive to achieve success, the probability of the act of doing the task, and the incentive value of the success.

Ikmal et al. (2020) explained that students are influenced by two types of motivation. The first is intrinsic motivation which refers to their drive and interest to act for self-satisfaction without expecting any reward. The second is extrinsic motivation which is an external drive urging the student to carry out a task. Faizal (2019), however, states that these two forms of motivation are interrelated and a student can possess both types.

### ***Achievement Motivation in Malaysia***

Esa (2003) concluded that there are several reasons for the lack of student motivation. Among them are unclear goals, doubts over one's potential, lack of self-trust, poor planning and self-management, low coping skills, undefined priorities, and dubious environmental and peer group selection. These eight elements of ambiguity contribute to students lacking direction though they may still have the ability to attain success in school. This, according to Esa (2003), is because what individuals feel about events befalling them is based on factors that can influence their feelings, behaviour and certain behavioural traits.

The study by Ilias, Rahman, Noor, & Saidon (2010) explained that learning styles have a significant impact on student motivation. This can also be seen in the research by Sadiq & Hassan (2021) and Abd Aziz et al. (2006) which showed a strong correlation between deep learning styles and internal motivation. Academic performance tends to suffer when students fail to adapt to the way of teaching and learning at the university, in addition to not having the right learning styles (Kaviza, 2019; Baharin et al., 2007).

### ***Motivation Achievement Abroad***

McClelland and Atkinson in Sdorow (1995) studied achievement motivation in regard to the need for control, priority and perfection. Individuals seeking to satisfy their achievement needs will strive for a high level of performance. This was clearly shown in their studies where the student respondents with a strong desire to excel in their exams also exhibited high levels of motivation in achieving that objective (Duncan & McKeachie, 2005; Lynch, 2006; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002).

In their study, Muna and Atinkut (2018) explained the close relationship between motivation and stress. Everyone needs a certain amount of pressure to remain motivated. But when the pressure exceeds the ability of a person to cope with it the result is stress. Good stress is defined as being suitable to individual needs in improving mental and physical performance and further contributing to productive and creative results. However, positive stress is not the only type of stress found in our environment and it can be influenced by internal and external factors. Therefore, changes in stress levels can impact individuals negatively as it has a direct effect on their behaviour and health. While motivation is a cognitive and emotional form for encouraging a person to make decisions even under stressful situations. The prevalence of motivation drives a person to act and maintain efforts to achieve goals. This clearly shows the relationship between motivation and stress and that both elements influence each other.

### **Methodology**

This is a quantitative study using a survey design based on a questionnaire for gathering information from respondents. The population for this study comprised students of the

Skudai campus of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The sample involved 200 respondents selected through a simple random sampling method. The study was located within the area or purview of UTM and conducted through the distribution of questionnaires in classes and lecture halls at the Faculty of Education. The research instrument comprised a set of questionnaires consisting of two parts, part A and part B. Part A contained demographic information on the background of respondents such as gender, race, residential status, grade points average achievement, age, semester, and field of study. Part B involved the Achievement Motivation Test (AMT) questionnaire consisting of statements measuring student achievement motivation. The AMT questionnaire was introduced by Nordin (1995).

### Findings and Discussion

The findings mainly focus on four aspects in students' life and how they influence achievement motivation of the respondents. The four aspects are academic performance (CGPA), place of residence, race, and gender.

#### *Differences in achievement motivation by gender*

Table 1

*Independent sample t-test in achievement motivation by gender*

CATEGORY	M	SD	t	df	Sig.
Male	2.96	.25			
			0.254	28	.801
Female	3.00	.40			

P>.05

Based on Table 1, the analysis conducted show a significance value of 0.801, exceeding the 0.05 level set. This indicates that there is no significant difference in achievement motivation between male and female students. The findings also show that the mean achievement motivation value for female students (M = 3.00) is not significantly different from that of male students (M = 2.96).

The study shows no significant difference in achievement motivation among the respondents based on gender. A t-test performed to determine whether there was a significant difference in achievement motivation between male and female students found a significance value of 0.801, above the 0.05 level set, meaning no significant difference between the genders. This coincides with the findings in a meta-analysis study conducted by Nihan (2020) on a group of students. In addition, Horner's study in John (1997) also found no significant difference in the dispositions of women and men in rejecting achievement. This shows that the motivation towards achievement is similar for both men and women. Nevertheless, these findings somewhat differ from many other studies that indicate a difference in male and female motivation. The study by Sadiq & Hassan (2021) found that the motivation level of female students (mean = 2.7390) was higher than that of male students (mean = 2.6080).

Similarly, a study by Dai (2001) on 208 students (112 female and 96 male) from two secondary schools on the relationship between motivational achievement and self-esteem found the two elements to be higher among female than male students. This study's findings clearly show that in the era of advanced technology, all students regardless of gender receive similar exposure and opportunities, especially in the educational field that indirectly instills a sense of self-motivation within individuals. In another study, Cetin (2019) noted that the

different motivation levels between male and female students had an effect on student scores in social science subjects but not on the scores in math subjects.

### ***Differences in achievement motivation based on residence status***

Table 2

*Independent sample t-test on achievement motivation based on residence status*

CATEGORY	M	SD	t	df	Sig.
Urban	2.8	.35	1.836	28	0.077
Rural	3.0	.31			

P>.05

As Table 2 shows, the significance value of 0.077 is above the level set at 0.05, meaning that there is no significant difference in the achievement motivation of urban and rural students. This means the achievement motivation of students living in urban areas is the same as that of students in rural areas. The mean value recorded by rural students (M = 3.0) is seen to be not significantly different compared to urban students (M = 2.8) in the area of achievement motivation.

The findings of the study show a significance value of 0.077, above the significance level of 0.05 set, thus indicating no significant difference in achievement motivation between urban and rural students. However, the mean values show that the achievement motivation of rural students is higher than that of urban students. The mean value for respondents from rural areas is 3.0 and is 2.8 for those in urban areas, giving a mean difference of 0.2. These results are in line with a survey study by Desa (2006) on 50 Yayasan Pelajaran Johor (YPJ) college students which established no relationship between environmental aspects such as residence and family with student achievement motivation. Likewise, the study by Ashira and Azwan (2018) on university students found that, on average, the achievement motivations among urban and rural areas were similar, that is, at a moderate level.

An empirical study by Hidayat et al. (2021) noted that factors in the learning environment influence motivation and have a positive bearing on the CGPA scores of students. In addition, working in a team also has a significant impact on CGPA. Among the main predictive factors for higher CGPA scores is a conducive study environment, whether at school, university or college (Scales et al., 2020).

### ***Differences in achievement motivation based on academic performance***

Table 3

*Independent sample t-test between achievement motivation based on academic performance status (CGPA)*

CATEGORY	M	SD	t	df	Sig.
High CGPA	3.0	.36	1.623	28	0.116
Low CGPA	2.8	.18			

P>.05

The significance value of 0.116 as shown in Table 3 is above the set value of 0.05. This means that there is no significant difference in achievement motivation between low and high CGPA-scoring students. The mean values recorded by students with low CGPAs (M = 2.8) and those with high CGPAs (M = 3.0) are not significantly different, meaning that their levels of

achievement motivation are almost similar. However, there is still a mean difference between students with low CGPA ( $M = 2.8$ ) and high CGPA ( $M = 3.0$ ).

According to Ahmad et al (2005), achievement motivation is a prerequisite for achieving excellence. It reflects a person's inclination to do a job better, more efficiently and effectively, whether at work, in business or in the field of education. This is supported by Faizal (2019) who states that motivational elements consisting of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are the main drivers for students to succeed academically and in life. Thus, this argument reinforces the view that in the aspect of education, motivational levels contribute significantly to student success and excellence.

According to an experimental study conducted in Hungary, low grade achievement is influenced by low levels of motivation. In general, less-motivated students tend to receive lower grades. This is because, motivation plays an important role in the desire to achieve higher grades (Orosz et al., 2017). The same study also found that teachers play an important role in student performance and that a sound relationship between the two positively impacts CGPA scores. Despite the influence of teacher-student relationships on student motivation and achievement, close relationships between the two have been found to be lacking in secondary schools. For example, a study of more than 89,000 students found that only a minority possessed and experienced the most basic elements of relationships such as feelings of being loved. Only 35 percent of them reported a "caring" school environment (Benson, Scales & Syv-ertsen, 2011) while only 22 percent experienced both a caring school environment and high expectations from teachers (Scales, 2013). Furthermore, the quality of relationships between teachers and students tends to regress in the transition from primary to secondary schools (Roorda et al., 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Appropriate and effective achievement motivation if practiced can aid students in achieving much positive results in various aspects. This study found no significant difference in achievement motivation between genders, race, residence status, and academic performance. In addition, students can also appreciate their own tendencies, strengths and weaknesses through the level of self-motivation inherent within themselves.

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that the factors of gender, race, place of residence and student performance do not affect student motivation in learning. Students with high motivation tend to display high levels of confidence in their lives. Motivation is the driver for developing confidence among students in facing various educational challenges in the future.

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