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# Learners' Personal and Social Development: Focusing on Motivation and Emotional Stability

## (Perkembangan Peribadi dan Sosial Pelajar: Memfokuskan Motivasi dan Kestabilan Emosi)

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| ARTICLE INFO | Abstract |
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| | Human development involves a continuous process of learning and adaptation. Every day presents opportunities for individuals to acquire new knowledge and skills. While much attention has been given to physical and cognitive development, the domains of personal and social development are often overlooked. This discussion paper delves into the personal and social development of university students, with a specific focus on motivation and emotional stability. It highlights the significance of these elements in shaping individuals' ongoing learning journeys. Finally, the paper underscores the importance of recognising and fostering personal and social development throughout life, emphasising the critical role of motivation and emotional stability in facilitating continuous growth and learning.<br><br>Keywords: Personal Development, Social Development, Motivation, Emotional Stability |

# INTRODUCTION

All human beings are born to learn and adopt. As part of human development, we learn something new every day. Four major developmental domains can be studied and observed: physical, cognitive, personal, and social (Ormrod et al., 2016; Ormrod et al., 2019). Although it is commonly believed that all human beings are born with similar abilities and developmental expectations, it is important to recognise that each individual has their own unique learning differences (Ormrod et al., 2017c).

Parents often prioritise their children's cognitive abilities and invest money in their education and talents from a young age. However, this competitive environment can lead to unnecessary stress that could potentially hinder their development. There are two crucial aspects of human development: personal ability and social development, which are often overlooked (Ormrod et al., 2017a, 2017c; Rani, 2018). Neglecting these throughout their children's development can result in a lack of self-awareness and poor social skills when they grow up as an adult.

As human beings, our moods significantly impact our thoughts, behaviors, and overall well-being. Incentive and reward have been shown to have a positive effect on human motivation (Ninggal et al., 2020; Tessier et al., 2022). This suggests that our mood can be influenced by external factors. In order to develop, motivation and emotional stability are essential (Rani, 2018). This applies universally and without exception. The study of interrelated human psychology can provide insight into these areas. Therefore, this discussion paper will explore learners' personal and social development, focusing on motivation and emotional stability.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## HUMAN LEARNING

Human learning or any form of development can be highly associated with the ability of emotional intelligence (Fadilah & Wijaya, 2022). This is no exception for personal and social development. According to Goleman (2011), emotional intelligence is not the same as Intelligence Quotient (IQ). It is often misunderstood and treated as the same. The characteristics of a highly emotionally intelligent human consist of motivation, drive, rapport and even empathy. Therefore, it is believed that emotional intelligence can be fostered through learning and teaching methods (Fadilah & Wijaya, 2022).

The two main theoretical perspectives within educational psychology are the cognitive perspective and behavioural perspective (Ormrod et al., 2017a). It is said that human learning can be from own cognitive ability as well as can be taught and instilled through behaviours. This was evident through the works of Gardner (1991) on multiple intelligences. In the Multiple Intelligence Theory, learners are categorised accordingly, allowing educators to develop and design instructional and assessment strategies to cater to different types of learners. This was further supported by Ling (2021) whereby it is said that every learner must have something to take away from each lesson. Each take away can be different from their peers as long as it is attaining the learning outcomes intended for those lessons (Ormrod et al., 2017d).

On the topic of nature versus nurture, many studies have found that cognition can be trained and developed through habits and turned into behaviours (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Watson & Kimble, 2017). This is especially true, speaking from personal experience in school, a bad experience or trauma can cause prolonged lack of motivation toward a particular subject or learning as a process. When a teacher or educator is always negative and not motivating, it can affect the mood and learning behaviours of learners (Ninggal et

al., 2020). Therefore, the importance of personal and social development, motivation, and emotional stability for learners is a big question that needs to be addressed.

In a world that prioritises cognitive achievement, we may have overlooked the real drivers to attain it. O'Flaherty and Gleeson (2017) in their study have found that the education setting must pay more and comprehensive attention to the personal and social development of learners. It is believed that motivation and emotional stability play a big role in boosting the ability of personal and social development of learners and when ignored at a young age, it can be a prolonged issue when the learner enters the different stage of Erikson's psychosocial development (Rosenthal et al., 1981).

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned earlier, personal development is part of human development and it is strongly believed that education should pay more attention to the personal development of learners (O'Flaherty & Gleeson, 2017). Personal development outcomes empower learners to think about themselves in the context of broader connections and dependencies between different life stages, including the ability to consider the relationships between people of different backgrounds, nationalities and cultures, and collective and individual relationships with the natural setting (Christie & Higgins, 2020).

Learners should be encouraged to be able to engage on community issues to understand the interdependencies between them and the world, and their role within those relationships (Christie & Higgins, 2020; O'Flaherty & Gleeson, 2017). However, there is no guarantee that it will increase the personal development of learners, it is believed that the process will help learners become competent and confident (Christie & Higgins, 2020).

Therefore, it is evident in today's curriculum whereby community engagement project that is impactful and beneficial to the community is highly encouraged at the university. In Malaysia, as part of the Ministry of Higher Education's (MoHE) requirements, learners must take Matapelajaran Pengajian Umum (compulsory subjects) courses in the U4 cluster, which focuses on community engagement project-based learning. This is in line with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) learning domain to focus on personal development (Amin & Kaprawi, 2019).

Prins (2020) further supported this claim by stating that cooperative learning or learning in an environment can positively affect learners' perceptions of learning. The act of understanding student learning through this method recognises the potential for personal development through the process (Christie & Higgins, 2020).

The personal and social development of learners and the interaction between learners are interrelated (Prins, 2020) and therefore, should be studied together to further understand learners. This is especially true with personal development, learners are more likely to have the potential emotional hazards toward global problems (Christie & Higgins, 2020).

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Like personal development, social development is also part of human development and it is strongly believed that education should pay more attention to the personal development of learners (O'Flaherty & Gleeson, 2017). Based on Vygotsky's social development theory, social development is considered as social interaction, and to be a central part of all human learning (Taber, 2020). Brian (2017) opined that middle school students are highly social as compared to other stages of life. It is believed that human beings view social interactions and social contexts differently at different stages of life. In middle school, students are at the age when they are more curious and likely to explore more (Brian, 2017; Fadilah & Wijaya, 2022).

However, at university as learners, they may be more selective with social interactions (Goodwin, 2017). Through their experience and prerequisite knowledge (Taber, 2020), learners can choose how they want to learn and who they want to learn with. It is very much evident to be successful whereby assessment strategies at the university level are focusing on learning in groups, learning from peers and helping or collaborating with peers (Sobral, 2021).

This was further supported by past studies on Erikson's eight stages of social development is found to be in line with Vygotsky's scaffolding learning theory, whereby learners learn bit by bit and cumulatively throughout different stages in life. (Rosenthal et al., 1981; Taber, 2020). Hence, usually learners tend to be more mature and wholesome when at the university level through the many years of cumulative prerequisite knowledge.

When mentioned about social development, it is often thought as a development attained outside the home environment as social skills involve interacting with strangers (Vozzola & Senland, 2022; Zsolnai, 2002). However, it is interesting to note that Bandura's social learning theory found that as much as social skills are about the external environment or outside of the home, underdeveloped social abilities and skills are associated with unsatisfactory or poor family ties (Zsolnai, 2002). After all, like the old English saying, "charity starts at home", empathy is indeed nurtured at home.

MOTIVATION

Motivation can be said to be a state or feeling that is being driven by thought and behaviour through personal satisfaction and even curiosity without the incentive of external rewards or reinforcements (Goodwin, 2017). Everyone responds differently to different kind of stimuli and possesses different levels of motivation. Therefore, motivation is a very intrinsic subject matter and many students struggle with it; be it with studies or personal development (Brian, 2017).

In classroom, studies have shown that when given more freedom, learners become more creative and more willing to learn (Tessier et al., 2022; Zsolnai, 2002). According to Piaget's assumption, increasing the level of readiness for learning among learners is important. This was further supported by Goodwin (2017) that motivation is highly needed for personal development and future growth. It is a worldwide challenge to keep inspiring and maintaining the motivation in classroom and even in the workforce (Rani, 2018). This is particularly crucial for adult learners who are having to juggle with both work and study. In addition, research showed that motivation can influence student engagement and academic performance (Tessier et al., 2022).

EMOTIONAL STABILITY

Emotional stability is the ability to manage feelings and behaviours. According to Tattum and Tattum (2017), having personal development and social awareness is very crucial in determining emotional stability. Therefore, it is believed that having emotional stability determines the ability to maintain a certain level of calmness irrespective of the situation one encounters (Tattum & Tattum, 2017).

Human beings are hit with different emotions each day and having the emotional stability to be able to embrace and overcome adversity is key in going through each day in a meaningful way (Aleem, 2005; Ninggal et al., 2020). In a world filled with comparisons and expectations to perform well, human beings need to be able to remain productive and stay focus when confronted with different emotional triggers. Especially in learners who are more likely to be anxious, it is believed that emotional strength and the way we response to triggers depends on how we interpret the world around us (Aleem, 2005).

Therefore, learners must be able to have the ability to manage feelings and behaviours in a professional setting (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Watson & Kimble, 2017).

DISABILITIES

It is important to acknowledge that learners may have disabilities before discussing the theories. Disabilities can be categorised into four forms: Cognitive, Personal, Social and Physical (McNaught & Pope, 2022). This means that learners with these disabilities are less likely to perform at the same level as their counterparts (Cubbage & Thomas, 1989; McNaught & Pope, 2022). Most educators fail to acknowledge or ignore this reality and treat all learners equally the same. This is disadvantaging both learners who are abled and differently abled as the level playing field is not equitable.

There are many studies arguing on whether this should be focus on equality or equity (Hjort & Agergaard, 2022) as it can affect the motivation and emotional stability of learners. Differently abled learners often time do not want to be treated differently and would appreciate to be competitive at the same level as their counterparts (McNaught & Pope, 2022).

**Table 1**
*Comparison of Variables in Local and International Scenarios*

| Variable | Local Scenario | International Scenario |
|---|---|---|
| Emotional Intelligence (EI) | EI influences personal and social development. | EI impacts cross-cultural communication and global collaboration. |
| Cognitive Perspective | Focus on cognitive skills and knowledge acquisition. | Cognitive theories applied globally in diverse educational contexts. |
| Behavioural Perspective | Local behaviour modification techniques in education. | Behavioural approaches adapted to different cultural norms globally. |
| Personal Development | Emphasis on personal growth within local education systems. | Personal development frameworks adapted to global education standards. |
| Social Development | Local social interactions and peer relationships. | Global social development through international student exchanges. |
| Motivation | Local factors such as family, culture, and education system. | International factors like global job markets, multicultural environments. |
| Emotional Stability | Local factors affecting emotional resilience. | Global challenges affecting emotional stability, such as migration. |
| Disabilities | Local support and inclusion policies. | International conventions and global disability rights. |

*Basic Assumptions*

- Personal Development

Every human being is born to have the want for personal development and wanting to be better than others. According to Ninggal et al. (2020), students with high personality scores tend to view themselves as motivated, except for emotional stability. The result was consistent with Freud's theories (Vozzola & Senland, 2022) on id, ego and superego. In summary, the id is the pursuit of pleasure, while the ego is governed by the reality

principle, the superego bids is the pursuit of idealistic goals and perfection (Lapsley & Stey, 2011). It is assumed that human development is governed by these three agencies, which strive for perfection through idealistic goals and moralistic standards (Lapsley & Stey, 2011; Vozzola & Senland, 2022).

- Social Development

Learning is a social endeavour, and educators are using this to their students' benefit (Brian, 2017). In other words, learning is a fun process through social gathering which happened in the classroom. However, is it safe to assume that learners are diverse in terms of their learning abilities and cultural backgrounds? This supported the previous claims of Zsolnai (2002) whereby it was found that there is lack of studies on how different developmental levels of social skills and abilities affect academic achievement. According to Prins (2020), learners are more diversified than heterogeneous and works better in cooperative settings. Nevertheless, with the sudden shift to online learning during the recent pandemic, learners are faced with risks on their digital safety, including cyberbullying and privacy concerns (Gottschalk & Burns, 2020). This shift has caused many learners to be lack of confidence and prefer to remain silent during online class, with no engagement (Agopian, 2021; Ninggal et al., 2020).

- Motivation and Emotional Stability

According to Bandura's social learning theory, people learn from others and gradually adopting the behaviours, through observation, imitation, modelling (Bandura & Hall, 2018). There must be a certain level of motivation and emotional stability for a person to be able and willing to develop personally and socially (Kryshko et al., 2022). With higher level of motivation and emotional stability, self-efficacy is more attainable and is believed to be a part of academic success in higher education (Goodwin, 2017; Kryshko et al., 2022). In addition, motivation is also considered as an important source of well-being in higher education (Kryshko et al., 2022). This was further evident that satisfied learners tend to have better grades and are less likely to drop out (Kryshko et al., 2022). However, Ninggal et al. (2020) found that the motivation construct did not affect the relationship between study skills and emotional stability. Therefore, it could be concluded that the relationship between study skills and emotional stability is not mediated by motivation.

## DISCUSSION

In this 21st century and digital era, one of the biggest mistakes that is still on-going, especially in higher education setting is not treating university students as adult learners (Agopian, 2021). For this discussion, the context of learners is being scope to focus on university students. When choosing the programmes and where to study, most university students (referred as learners) did not make the decision themselves. It is usually decided by their parents. Sometimes, it is fulfilling their parents' dreams or goals. Not only that, for most learners when first entered universities, it is usually quite the culture shock as they were shifting from rote learning in schools to a more open learning culture (Aleem, 2005). Therefore, instilling the ability of motivation and emotional stability is very crucial in ensuring that learners can develop and fully deploy their skills and competences through personal and social development at any stages of their lifecycle as well as psychosocial development (Smieszek, 2020). That way, learners can be very agile and able to adopt to any situations without affecting their ability to learn and develop.

The MQF second edition provides the overarching structure of the higher education framework in Malaysia. One of its learning domains that must be achieved by learners are lifelong learning (Amin & Kaprawi, 2019). All programmes must inculcate lifelong learning skill amongst graduates. With the focus of attaining this learning domain, it is believed that Malaysian graduates will have the motivation and emotional stability to constantly

seek knowledge through formal and informal learning and development, at any age and at anywhere (work or formal education) (Amin & Kaprawi, 2019).

Having said that, it is also believed that the first step of learning is awareness (Muehrcke, 2012). First and foremost, learners need to be aware of the surroundings to be able to feel and adapt according to situations. Regardless of age, human beings learn by reacting to stimulus and by repeating steps (Bosmans et al., 2022). Habits then turn into behaviour. For many years, learning through behaviourism is still very much emphasized and heavily practised in our education system (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Watson & Kimble, 2017). At the school levels, classical conditioning is implemented through stimuli or reward (Maltzman, 2021). Students are programmed on how to react to a certain situation or else they may be punished. The fear instilled can hinder the creative ability of students, forcing them to only learn what the teachers want them to learn. Many teachers are also still practicing operant conditioning through positive and negative reinforcement as well as positive and negative punishment (Bosmans et al., 2022). This is somewhat practised to ensure that the teachers still have control over the students on discipline matters (Maltzman, 2021; O'Flaherty & Gleeson, 2017; Zsolnai, 2002). However, should this still be the way forward? Should we move away from behaviourism and focusing on achieving constructivism? Or is it too late already? Many researchers have stated that in this 21st century, we should be focusing on the digital era where connectivism is the way forward (Downes, 2022).

**Figure 1**
*Relationships between Personal and Social Development*
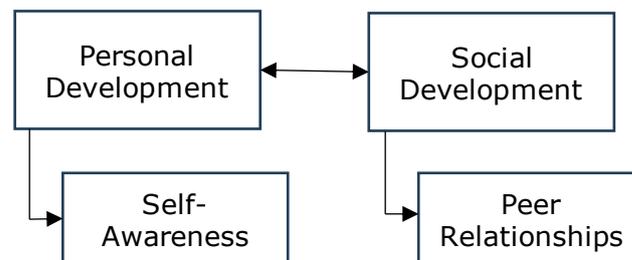


At the higher education setting, it is very crucial for educators enhance learners' personal and social development with a focus on motivation and emotional stability to positively linked to academic performance, satisfaction and intended persistence (Aleem, 2005; Kryshko et al., 2022; Ninggal et al., 2020). In line with that, a study by Ninggal et al. (2020) reported that there is a significant relationship between motivation and emotional stability, and online study skill with emotional stability. This means that high level of motivation and emotional stability are negatively linked to procrastination. Therefore, educators can boost the productivity and engagement level of learners (Ninggal et al., 2020).

As an educator, one must also be alert with identifying the potential blockages that can hinder learners from receiving the intended knowledge. One of the most common blockages or distractions experienced by learners is the affective filter, whereby it acts as a barrier to knowledge acquisition (Du, 2009). Learners with high affective filter will lower their intake whereas learners with low affective filter allow more input into their acquisition device (Du, 2009). Nowadays, learners have shorter attention span and focus on multitasking during lessons. Hence, it is highly recommended for educators to present their content in bite sized form using social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and even TikTok (Jacobs et al., 2022b). It was found that bite sized learning

through social media platforms can increase the motivation level of learners' engagement as well as academic performance (Jacobs et al., 2022a).

In today's digital era, where there is a constant lack of physical interaction, a sense of self-affecting motivation and emotional stability are very important in ensuring that learners and educators stay engaged. The study of Zsolnai (2002) revealed the correlation of social factors of the personality with learning motivation. When learners are motivated and have emotional stability, they are being able to avoid mental block and not affecting their learning process. It is said that to achieve this, educators need to be facilitator instead of the traditional classroom teacher (Agopian, 2021; Ormrod et al., 2017b). With that, learners are more willing to communicate and learn with their peers (Agopian, 2021; Aleem, 2005).

The mental health aspect has become one of the most important issues in today's world, especially in learners going through online learning. The loneliness felt are more serious than ever. Goleman (2011) iterated that emotional intelligence is more established in face-to-face environment. Hence, it has a more personal touch. Ninggal et al. (2020) stated that motivation and emotional stability are highly related with personal development of learners. Therefore, educators need to prevent motivational decline and subsequent academic dissatisfaction among learners through various learning and teaching methods (Kryshko et al., 2022).

The most basic of humanistic theory of personality such as Maslow's needs hierarchy theory, personality is moulded by the desire to realise one's full potential (Rani, 2018). Therefore, when learners faced failure more than once, the tendency of losing motivation and emotional stability is very high. Learners might face a state of mind as explained by the learned hopelessness theory, when an internalisation of stable causes following failure (Raufelder & Kulakow, 2022). On the other hand, the motivating principle is the pursuit to reduce tension, which is experienced as pleasure (Lapsley & Stey, 2011). Goodwin (2017) opined that learner from family with criminal records or broken family are more likely to experience emotional and physical instability. Therefore, educators should be open minded when dealing with a diverse classroom.

University students can be treated as adult learners, as they are more mature and expected to take their own responsible on learning. According to Purwati et al. (2022), the six characteristics of adult learning or andragogy are motivation, self-concept, experiences, readiness to learn, need to know and problem-centred learning. Therefore, in order to encourage the growth or development and potential amongst learners, this can be done through personal development actualisation and enjoyment (Goodwin, 2017). In order to boost the motivation level, learning and teaching activities to focus on connectivism such group project and solving problem (Downes, 2022). Through group work and collaborative assessments, educators can put more attention on forming social skills and abilities amongst learners and enhance empathy which can develop higher emotional stability (Zsolnai, 2002). Christie and Higgins (2020) further supported this claim whereby there is a significant impact on personal development through learners' engagement, responsibility taking, group work and active pedagogy.

In addition, it was found that learners perform better academically outside the traditional classroom setting when the online delivery is just as effective as face-to-face teaching (Ninggal et al., 2020). With the rapid advancement technology, so many technologically enhanced learning platforms are available online to provide the vitality of social support for both motivation and emotional stability, in replacement of the traditional classroom settings (Goodwin, 2017). It is widely evident during and post pandemic that universities have motivated and stay engaged with learners by integrating technology into learning and teaching practices while striving to also provide solutions to online learning (Ninggal et al., 2020). This can be achieved through active learning that is said to be able to

increase the motivation level of learners (Zengaro & Zengaro, 2022). With motivation and emotional stability, learners are able to build peer relationships through technology and there are positive acceptance, active participation and effective communication which are also important components of social competence and development (Agopian, 2021; Downes, 2022; Zsolnai, 2002). Therefore, it can be said that technology provides the platform for social development.

**Table 2**
*Summary of Emotional Stability and Motivation on Personal and Social Development*

| Items | Personal Development | Social Development |
|---|---|---|
| Interconnectedness | Refers to the growth of individual capabilities, self-awareness, and the pursuit of realizing one's full potential. It is crucial for academic success and lifelong learning. | Involves building relationships, communication skills, and emotional intelligence, essential for collaboration and engagement in educational settings. |
| Role of Educators in Facilitating Motivation | Educators should act as facilitators, creating a learning environment that supports personal and social development. This includes recognising and addressing barriers such as affective filters and providing bite-sized, technology-enhanced learning. | In today's digital era, technology plays a vital role in maintaining motivation and emotional stability, offering platforms for social interaction and collaborative learning even in the absence of physical classroom settings. |
| Emotional Stability in Classroom | Allows learners to handle stress, failure, and challenges effectively, fostering resilience and a positive learning attitude. | Emotionally stable learners are more likely to engage positively with peers, participate in group activities, and avoid mental blocks that hinder learning. |

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the journey of personal and social development is a dynamic interplay of learned behaviours and inherent traits that shape individuals' growth over time (Zsolnai, 2002). Central to this process are motivation and emotional stability, which serve as foundation pillars for continued growth and learning. As highlighted by Rani (2018), the intricacies of personality play a significant role in influencing these key factors, underscoring the importance of understanding individual differences in educational settings.

Educators bear a critical responsibility in cultivating motivation and fostering emotional stability among learners. By employing diverse methods and techniques, educators can inspire engagement and enthusiasm, nurturing a positive learning environment that encourages exploration and growth among learners (Zengaro & Zengaro, 2022). Establishing meaningful connections with learners is paramount, as it cultivates trust and openness, laying the groundwork for fruitful educational experiences.

Ultimately, the pursuit of personal and social development is an ongoing journey that transcends age and circumstance. With dedication and support from educators, learners

of all backgrounds can harness their innate potential, embarking on a path of continuous learning and self-discovery. By prioritising motivation, emotional stability, and the creation of nurturing learning environments, educators play a pivotal role in shaping the future of individuals and society as a whole.

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