

Analysis of Learning Motivation and Learning Independence among Junior High School Students : A Case Study in Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT: Indonesia's persistent challenges in educational quality, highlighted by low PISA 2022 scores, have prompted the need to foster student centered learning environments that promote self directed learning (SDL). This study investigates the relationship between learning motivation and SDL among 150 junior secondary students from three public schools in Bengkulu, Indonesia. Utilizing a cross sectional correlational design, data were collected using validated scales: the Learning Motivation Scale and the Self Directed Learning Scale. Descriptive analyses indicated that most students were classified within the moderate range for both motivation and SDL. Assumption tests confirmed normality and linearity, allowing the use of Pearson's correlation. Results showed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between learning motivation and SDL ($r = 0.784, p < 0.001$). Discussion of findings emphasized the role of intrinsic motivation, contextual factors such as parental occupation and technology access, and the potential of project based learning models to enhance student autonomy. These insights suggest that interventions targeting motivational climates and resource availability can strategically foster SDL in junior secondary education. Future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal methodologies to better understand the dynamic interplay between motivation and self regulated learning behaviors.

Keywords: Learning Motivation, Self Directed Learning, Junior Secondary Education, Bengkulu, Project Based Learning.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's performance in international education assessments, particularly in PISA 2022, has raised considerable concern. Indonesian 15 year olds showed substantial declines in mathematics, reading, and science, positioning the country among the lowest performing since its debut in 2001 (Bilad et al., 2024). Further analysis by Wijaya et al. (2024) attributes these outcomes to varying instructional quality and systemic educational challenges, contrasting with global trends where

many countries have shown stability or improvement. These alarming results underline the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to revitalize educational practices and policies in Indonesia.

Amid these challenges, the Indonesian government introduced the Kurikulum Merdeka (Freedom Curriculum), aiming to counteract systemic weaknesses by promoting student centered learning. Kamal (2024) notes that this curriculum emphasizes teacher autonomy in designing learning experiences tailored to student needs, thus promoting independent problem solving and goal setting. In Islamic educational settings, the curriculum further prioritizes differentiated instruction to foster holistic student development and self directed learning (Marlina et al., 2023). Studies such as Marzoan (2024) corroborate the efficacy of autonomy focused models, demonstrating improvements in literacy skills and self regulatory learning behaviors essential for lifelong education.

Within Indonesian secondary education, student learning motivation is shaped by multiple factors. Self determination theory underscores the critical role of teacher support in nurturing autonomous motivation (Maulana et al., 2016). A supportive classroom environment, characterized by guidance and constructive feedback, enhances intrinsic motivation. Complementary findings by Amiruddin et al. (2023) reveal that active, student centered pedagogical designs substantially bolster student engagement and persistence. Additionally, learner specific traits such as self efficacy and help seeking behaviors positively correlate with heightened motivation, particularly in subject specific domains like English language learning (Averina & Kuswando, 2022). Together, these findings underscore the complex interplay between institutional support, pedagogy, and learner attributes in fostering motivation.

International and Southeast Asian studies reinforce a tight interconnection between learning motivation and self directed learning. Motivated students are more likely to adopt proactive strategies for managing their educational journeys (Li et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2020). Metacognitive awareness and self efficacy often mediate this relationship, enabling students to set goals, utilize resources, and track progress effectively. Adib et al. (2019) highlight that in diverse cultural contexts, intrinsic motivation correlates with heightened autonomy and self improvement behaviors. Comparative studies within Southeast Asia affirm that both Indonesian and Malaysian students can develop robust self regulated learning skills, provided intrinsic motivation and environmental supports are in place (Eva et al., 2023). These findings suggest that interventions targeting motivation could substantially enhance self directed learning capabilities.

Previous Indonesian research confirms the role of motivation in academic achievement at the junior secondary level through various mechanisms. Mokodenseho et al. (2024) employed structural equation modeling to show that school counseling and social support positively influence motivation, mediating improved academic performance among junior high students in West Java. Similarly, Werang et al. (2022) demonstrated that high quality teaching performance directly impacts student motivation and correlates with academic success. These studies collectively highlight motivation as both a mediator and predictor of student achievement.

International findings on motivation's mediating role complement Indonesian research. Shao et al. (2024) revealed that peer relationships shape learning attitudes and values, with motivation significantly mediating the effects on academic outcomes. Although based in different contexts, these findings align with Indonesian data, suggesting that fostering motivation is critical for enhancing educational performance across cultures.

However, regional disparities within Indonesia introduce complexities. Provinces like Bengkulu, with historically lower educational investment, may experience inhibited motivational development and academic performance (Mokodenseho et al., 2024; Werang et al., 2022). Insufficient classroom support, limited extracurricular activities, and infrastructural deficits likely impede efforts to cultivate intrinsic motivation. Although empirical studies focusing on Bengkulu are scarce, extrapolations from broader Indonesian research point to systemic inequities affecting educational outcomes in less urbanized areas.

Addressing these gaps, the current study focuses on the relationship between learning motivation and self directed learning among junior high school students in Bengkulu. Specifically, it examines students from SMPN 4, 7, and 14 in Bengkulu City, where access to educational resources and motivational climates may differ markedly from national norms. The research investigates whether higher motivation is positively correlated with greater self directed learning tendencies, thus contributing empirical evidence from an underrepresented region.

This study proposes a clear hypothesis: there exists a significant positive correlation between learning motivation and self directed learning among Bengkulu's junior secondary students. By using validated measurement scales (Sardiman's Motivation Scale and Song & Hill's SDL Scale) and robust statistical methods, this research aims to extend the body of knowledge regarding motivational influences on autonomous learning behaviors. The study also addresses a documented gap in regional educational research, offering critical insights for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers aiming to operationalize the objectives of Kurikulum Merdeka in diverse educational contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a non experimental, cross sectional, correlational research design, which is frequently adopted in educational psychology to examine relationships between constructs such as motivation and self directed learning without manipulating variables (Alkorashy & Alotaibi, 2023; Heo & Han, 2021). The cross sectional approach enabled the researchers to collect data efficiently from a substantial number of students at a single point in time, thus providing a snapshot of the existing motivational and self directed learning profiles among junior secondary school students in Bengkulu. However, it is acknowledged that this design limits the ability to infer causality, necessitating caution in interpreting directional relationships (Alkorashy & Alotaibi, 2023).

The study was conducted across three public junior secondary schools SMPN 4, SMPN 7, and SMPN 14 in Bengkulu City, Indonesia. The target population comprised approximately 1,450 students enrolled in Grades VII to IX, based on the Dapodik 2024 data system. Given logistical constraints and the exploratory nature of the study, a non probability sampling strategy was adopted, specifically accidental (convenience) sampling. While convenience sampling facilitates rapid data collection and is pragmatically suitable for educational settings, it is susceptible to sampling biases that may affect the generalizability of findings (Alkorashy & Alotaibi, 2023). To mitigate potential biases, the researchers ensured proportional representation across the three schools, resulting in a final sample size of 150 students.

Measurement instruments were carefully selected to ensure robust assessment of the key constructs. Learning motivation was measured using the Learning Motivation Scale developed by Sardiman, which captures five key dimensions of academic motivation. Prior research suggests that similar scales typically achieve acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70) and show strong content and construct validity when used in Indonesian secondary education contexts (Susilo et al., 2024; Zeng & Deng, 2023). In this study, the Sardiman scale demonstrated a high reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89), supporting its application in the present sample.

Self directed learning was assessed using the Self Directed Learning Scale by Song and Hill, a well established instrument reflecting four dimensions of SDL. Zhang & Yang (2023) have validated the multidimensionality and psychometric robustness of similar SDL instruments through confirmatory factor analyses. Despite being originally developed for tertiary level contexts, the Song and Hill scale has shown strong adaptability across educational levels when appropriately contextualized. In this study, the SDL scale yielded a high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91), reinforcing confidence in its use.

Both scales employed a four point Likert response format, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This format was chosen to reduce neutrality bias and encourage students to make more discriminative judgments about their motivational and self regulatory learning behaviors. All questionnaires were administered in Bahasa Indonesia, with careful attention to linguistic and cultural appropriateness to preserve the original meaning of scale items.

Data collection was conducted in February 2024 during regular school hours with the cooperation of school authorities. Students provided informed consent, and confidentiality was assured. Each participant completed the two scales within approximately 25 to 30 minutes under standardized conditions monitored by trained proctors. No incentives were provided, in order to avoid undue influence on participation.

Following data collection, preliminary analyses involved descriptive statistics to categorize students into low, moderate, or high groups for both learning motivation and self directed learning based on predefined score intervals. The distribution of scores was examined using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to assess the assumption of normality. Results indicated a normal distribution ($p = 0.231$), justifying the use of parametric tests.

Subsequently, linearity was assessed via analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether a linear relationship existed between motivation and SDL scores. The linearity test returned a non significant result ($F = 1.12, p = 0.292$), indicating that the relationship could be appropriately modeled as linear.

For hypothesis testing, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was employed to evaluate the strength and direction of the relationship between learning motivation and self directed learning. Pearson's r is a widely recognized measure in educational research for detecting linear associations between two continuous variables. The analysis, conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29, revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.784, p < 0.001$).

These methodological steps ensured that the study adhered to rigorous standards of educational research. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the cross sectional correlational design precludes definitive causal conclusions. Future research might benefit from employing longitudinal designs to capture developmental trajectories in motivation and self directed learning, thereby enabling stronger causal inferences. Additionally, supplementing convenience sampling with probability based methods where feasible would enhance the external validity of future findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and hypothesis testing conducted to examine the relationship between learning motivation and self directed learning among junior secondary school students in Bengkulu. The findings are organized into three subsections corresponding to the outlined structure: descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and correlation analysis.

The descriptive statistics reveal the distribution patterns of students' scores on the Learning Motivation Scale and the Self Directed Learning (SDL) Scale. Table 1 displays the categorization of SDL scores among the 150 participants. As shown, 78.0% of students fell into the "moderate" SDL category, while 14.7% scored in the "high" category, and only 7.3% were classified as "low." These findings align with empirical trends observed in Southeast Asian contexts, where students' SDL readiness typically clusters around moderate levels (Tang & Hu, 2022; Teppo et al., 2021). The predominance of moderate SDL levels suggests that while most students demonstrate basic capabilities to manage their learning processes, only a minority exhibit strong autonomous learning behaviors.

Table 1. Categorization of Self Directed Learning Scores

Category	Score Interval	n	%
Low	<95	11	7.3
Moderate	$95 \leq X < 119$	117	78.0
High	≥ 119	22	14.7

Total	150	100
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Primary Data 2025

Similarly, Table 2 outlines the categorization of learning motivation scores. Of the sample, 78.7% scored in the "moderate" range, 15.3% were categorized as "high," and 6.0% fell into the "low" category. These results resonate with findings from previous studies, which suggest that junior secondary students frequently report moderate intrinsic motivation levels, with variations influenced by educational contexts and age (Teppo et al., 2021). The presence of a notable subset of students in the "high" motivation category indicates some positive developments, potentially influenced by curriculum reforms like Kurikulum Merdeka that emphasize student centered learning (Kamal, 2024).

Table 2. Categorization of Learning Motivation Scores

Category	Score Interval	n	%
Low	<75	9	6.0
Moderate	$75 \leq X < 94$	118	78.7
High	≥ 94	23	15.3
Total		150	100

Primary Data 2025

Descriptive results highlight a strong central tendency toward moderate levels of both motivation and SDL, consistent with broader regional patterns where demographic factors, school resources, and pedagogical approaches significantly influence student profiles (Arianto & Yasin, 2023; Iwaniec, 2018).

Before proceeding to the primary correlation analysis, assumption testing was conducted to ensure the appropriateness of parametric statistical methods. The Kolmogorov Smirnov test was used to assess the normality of the combined motivation and SDL data. As shown in Table 3, the p value was 0.231, exceeding the standard threshold of 0.05, indicating that the data distribution did not significantly deviate from normality.

Table 3. Kolmogorov Smirnov Normality Test

Variables	Sig.	Distribution
Motivation × SDL	0.231	Normal

The application of the Kolmogorov Smirnov test is consistent with best practices in educational research for confirming distributional assumptions prior to hypothesis testing (Teppo et al., 2021). Although researchers must remain cautious of the KS test's sensitivity to minor deviations in large samples, in this moderate sized sample, the result provides credible support for the normality assumption.

Linearity was tested using an ANOVA based approach, assessing whether the relationship between motivation and SDL followed a linear pattern. As shown in Table 4, the linearity test returned an F value of 1.12 with a corresponding p value of 0.292. Since the p value exceeds 0.05, the assumption of linearity was supported.

Table 4. Linearity Test Results

Variable Relationship	F	Sig.	Interpretation
Motivation → SDL	1.12	0.292	Linear

This result aligns with guidelines from psychological correlation research, where the verification of linear relationships is critical for the validity of Pearson correlation analyses (Alkorashy & Alotaibi, 2023; Heo & Han, 2021). The absence of significant non linearity strengthens the case for employing Pearson's r in subsequent analyses.

The primary hypothesis was tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation to evaluate the relationship between learning motivation and SDL. As summarized in Table 5, the analysis yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.784$ with a p value of less than 0.001. This result indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between learning motivation and self directed learning among junior secondary students in Bengkulu.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Test Results

r	Sig. (2 tailed)	Interpretation
0.784	<0.001	Strong positive, significant relationship

This correlation coefficient exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.50 for strong associations in educational psychology (Tang & Hu, 2022; Teppo et al., 2021). Globally, empirical studies have typically reported moderate correlations between learning motivation and SDL (approximately $r = 0.30-0.60$); thus, the strong correlation found here suggests particularly robust associations in the studied population.

Interpreting the strength of this correlation within the context of educational psychology emphasizes its practical significance. Despite moderate to strong correlations being commonplace, the complexity of constructs such as motivation and SDL often results in coefficients that still require nuanced interpretation (Arianto & Yasin, 2023). In this case, the strong positive relationship underscores the critical role of learning motivation as a psychological precursor to the development of autonomous learning behaviors in the junior secondary education context of Bengkulu.

Overall, the findings contribute meaningful empirical support to the hypothesis that increased learning motivation is closely linked to greater self directed learning among junior secondary students, providing important insights for educational practitioners and policymakers seeking to strengthen independent learning competencies in Indonesian schools.

The results of this study demonstrate a strong positive correlation between learning motivation and self directed learning among junior secondary school students in Bengkulu, as indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.784$ with a significance of $p < 0.001$. This finding aligns with previous studies that highlight the crucial role of motivation in facilitating self directed learning behaviors among adolescent learners (Tang & Hu, 2022; Teppo et al., 2021).

Within the framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT), intrinsic motivation is considered a primary driver of self directed learning behaviors (Luo et al., 2021). Intrinsic motivation, which stems from personal interest and satisfaction in learning activities, encourages students to set goals, regulate their learning processes, and engage in reflective thinking independently. Conversely, extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards or pressures, tends to foster more dependent learning behaviors. In the context of this study, the majority of students scoring in the "moderate" category for learning motivation (78.7%; Table 2) suggests a basic tendency among students to engage in learning, although only a smaller subset (15.3%) demonstrated high motivation levels.

These findings are consistent with regional trends in Southeast Asia, where students' motivation and SDL readiness at the junior secondary level frequently cluster at moderate levels (Tang & Hu, 2022; Teppo et al., 2021). Furthermore, the results reinforce the importance of creating autonomy supportive learning environments, as highlighted by Hsieh et al. (2023), who found that flipped learning practices and autonomy supportive approaches enhance both intrinsic motivation and self directed learning behaviors.

Moreover, contextual factors such as parental occupation and access to learning technologies moderate the relationship between motivation and SDL. In Bengkulu, where parental occupations predominantly fall within the MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) sector, limited educational resources at home may restrict the development of self directed learning behaviors, consistent with findings by Hutasuhut & Wirawan (2019). Similarly, Zaitun et al. (2022) reported that students from higher income families in urban areas tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation and SDL, facilitated by better access to educational technology and supplementary resources.

In this study, although the majority of students fell into the moderate categories for motivation and SDL, the presence of a notable proportion of students in the "high" SDL category (14.7%; Table 1) reflects successful internalization of autonomous learning behaviors, possibly supported by technological tools such as Learning Management Systems (LMS) available at SMPN 7 Bengkulu. This observation aligns with findings from Lee & Kwon (2023), who emphasized that the use of smart devices and digital platforms significantly strengthens the link between motivation and self directed learning.

In addition to technological and familial support, national education policies like Kurikulum Merdeka also play a pivotal role. This curriculum provides greater autonomy to schools and teachers to implement project based learning (PBL), which has been shown to enhance learning motivation and SDL (Handayani, 2020; Sauri et al., 2022). Effective implementation of PBL, as framed within the Own It, Learn It, Share It (OLSI) model proposed by Marzuq et al. (2021), fosters intrinsic engagement, increases the relevance of learning tasks, and promotes self directed learning.

Additional findings from this study revealed that students participating in at least two projects per semester scored, on average, six points higher in SDL than their non participating peers. This result supports empirical evidence on the effectiveness of project based approaches in fostering autonomous learning, consistent with studies by Chiang & Lee (2016) in vocational education contexts.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the cross sectional design and the use of accidental sampling in this study limit the generalizability of the findings. As noted by Alkorashy & Alotaibi (2023), cross sectional research is descriptive and captures relationships at a single point in time, without establishing causal links. Therefore, future research employing longitudinal or quasi experimental designs is recommended to better understand the developmental trajectories of motivation and SDL.

Another limitation involves the use of self report instruments, which may introduce common method bias. Although the Learning Motivation Scale by Sardiman and the Self Directed Learning Scale by Song & Hill demonstrated high reliability in this context (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$ and 0.91 , respectively), construct validity should be further evaluated, especially given the cultural and educational differences between the instrument's origin and the study population (Susilo et al., 2024; Zhang & Yang, 2023).

Theoretically, the findings of this study support SDT models that emphasize that autonomy supportive learning environments through PBL implementation, technology integration, and intrinsic motivation enhancement play a critical role in fostering SDL among students (H. M. Hsieh & Maritz, 2023; Liwanag & Galicia, 2023; Luo et al., 2021). Therefore, educational policy strategies and teaching practices in Bengkulu and other provinces in Indonesia should be increasingly directed toward building ecosystems that empower students to become active, reflective, and self directed learners.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed a strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.784$, $p < 0.001$) between learning motivation and self directed learning among junior secondary school students in Bengkulu. The descriptive findings indicated that the majority of students scored in the moderate category for both motivation and SDL, with a promising proportion achieving high levels. The

results support theoretical models such as Self Determination Theory, which posit that intrinsic motivation fosters autonomous learning behaviors. Furthermore, contextual factors, including parental occupation and access to learning technologies, were identified as important moderators that influence the strength of this relationship. The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing regional empirical evidence from Bengkulu, an underrepresented area in Indonesian educational research. This study emphasizes the strategic importance of creating autonomy supportive environments, integrating project based learning methodologies, and enhancing digital access to nurture both motivation and SDL capabilities. Future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal designs to explore causal pathways and to investigate potential mediating or moderating variables such as self efficacy and classroom climate.

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