IIUM JOURNAL OF HUMAN SCIENCES

IIUM JOURNAL OF HUMAN SCIENCES

IJOHS

IIUM Journal of Human Sciences

The Evaluation of an Online Peer Support Group on the level of Situational Motivation among University Students Amidst a Pandemic: A Self-Determination Theory Approach

Nur Najlaa Fayyadhah Norhasmi[1], Nur Syafiqah Amir Rasid[1], Nan Syarifah Munirah Megat Alias[1], Muhammad Syahmi Fadzril Mohd Sohaini[1], Siti Mariam Sh Abdull Rahman[1], Nurfatin Afiqah Baharin[1], Nor Quratun Aina Abdul Talib[1], Mohammad Azizi Mohd Sha'ari[1], Nur Alia Mohamed Afendi[1] and Pamilia Lourdunathan[2]

[1]Undergraduate Students, International Islamic University Malaysia
[2]International Islamic University Malaysia

ABSTRACT

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many students have reported a loss of motivation while pursuing remote learning. The loss of motivation can be attributed to various factors, among which are a loss of social support, such as from friends and lecturers, in completing their assessments. This study aimed to help IIUM undergraduate students to increase their level of motivation through online peer support group sessions using a Sport Psychology approach. The Self Determination theory was adopted as a framework in guiding the process of the research. This study also employed two other psychological techniques which are a cognitive behavioural approach and a relaxation exercise. A total of 13 undergraduate university students of IIUM from different faculties were selected using a convenience sampling method based on their voluntary participation in the peer support group. The participants were required to answer two online surveys and commit to joining two online peer support group sessions. The first online measure used was conducted as a need analysis to assess their level of motivation. This measure comprised demographic information form, an informed consent form, and a few qualitative open-ended questions related to their level of motivation. This yielded useful indicators for the content of the peer support group sessions while the second online measure was used as a pre-test and post-test measure using the Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS). The data collected using the online questionnaire was measured using a paired sample T-test to evaluate the effectiveness of the online peer support group sessions on the level of situational motivation among IIUM undergraduate students. The findings of the study showed that although there was no statistically significant difference in the pre-test and posttest results of the SIMS scale, interestingly qualitative findings from the participants yielded positive results which were evident through several meaningful emergent themes that were obtained from the feedback of the participants post intervention. It is hoped that the planned initiative of peer support groups will be expanded to include more students in order to help prevent any further progression of loss of motivation and secondary crisis of compromised mental health in those who have suffered from self-isolation, physical distancing, and quarantining.

Keywords: Situational Motivation, Peer Support Group, Self-Determination Theory, SIMS scale

INTRODUCTION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all university students were required to attend online learning classes, which replaced face-to-face classes. This was proposed by the Minister of Higher Education to reduce the spread of COVID-19 among students, and it was expected to end in December 2020 (Lim, 2020). However, until the middle of 2021, all university students are found to be still undergoing online learning, which has led them to lose their motivation to do their assignments and complete their studies.

The loss of motivation can also be attributed to them losing some amount of social support, such as from their friends and lecturers, in finishing up their assessments. There were also several technical inconveniences that happened at home, such as poor internet connection and a lack of devices. Therefore, this campaign was conducted to help undergraduate students, mainly IIUM undergraduate students, increase their motivation levels through online peer support groups using a sports psychology approach.

Motivation is derived from the word "motive," which means a reason for doing something (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Meanwhile, according to Gredler et al. (2004) as cited in Lai (2011), motivation is the factor that influences our decision to do or not to do anything. This shows that in order to do something, an individual needs to have motivation in order to complete their work and this can range from anything, such as utilising music and environmental factors such as nature. Individuals who are currently engaged in an activity are said to be motivated by situational motivation. Furthermore, a large body of evidence suggests that one's current motivation is linked to psychological outcomes such as pleasant affect and vitality (Sheldon, Ryan, & Reis, 1996). For some students, their motivation level can increase when they are in different places. However, because of the pandemic outbreak, students were not able to have freedom to go outdoors frequently. They seemed to experience a loss in their motivation levels to do their work as they needed to stay home all day. Due to that, the online peer support group was created to help IIUM undergraduate students deal with the challenges they face and to help increase their motivation level in managing and coping with their daily problems.

The majority of students in higher education who engaged in online learning during the pandemic expressed reservations about online or digital learning. Lack of internet access, insufficient technology, and insufficient engagement and contact with students and teachers were among the major issues faced by higher education students (Adnan & Anwar, 2020).Face-to-face interaction has been deemed an important aspect of their social development throughout their early years, and it may be harmed during the epidemic, leading to mental health difficulties (Mikolajczyk et al., 2008).

Evidence is mounting that the lockdown has had a significant impact on many students' lives with regards to their education, well-being, and mental health, and it was also presumed that this impact would be long-term. As well-known developmental psychologist and neuroscientist Professor Uta Frith recently wrote for reachwell.org (2020, Frith), education "changes the way we perceive the world and behave in relation to others, and this directly affects our brain."As a result, there was a pressing need for an intervention that could help these students enhance their well-being and get through their current situation.

A study conducted by Akioka and Gilmore (2013) aimed to improve students' levels of motivation for homework. In this study, the Self-Determined Theory (SDT) was adopted to provide the conceptual framework for the study to investigate the levels of motivation among students in schools, and this study suggested that the motivation continuum ranges from intrinsic to extrinsic through the identification and introjection process. The results revealed that there was a protective effect on the quality of motivation (Akioka & Gilmore, 2013).

Charlotte Dignath and Gerhard Büttner conducted a meta-analysis study on intervention studies at primary and secondary school levels to identify the components of fostering self-regulated learning among students. Dignath and Büttner (2008) stated that the study was conducted to explore the impact of interventions on students' academic performance, the strategies used, and the motivation of the students involved. The study was conducted using meta-analytic multiple regression analysis to analyse the data collected (Dignath & Büttner, 2008). Dignath and Büttner (2008) revealed that the outcome measures were grouped into three, which were academic performance, use of knowledge about cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and motivation, which were also defined operationally. The results revealed that the training programmes that were based on the use of cognitive have higher effects than the motivational aspects of metacognition on academic performance at the primary school level,

while at the secondary level, metacognitive aspects have the highest effect on academic performance (Dignath & Büttner, 2008).

Also, Fátima Morais et al. (2020) conducted a study on the efficacy of intervention programmes on adolescents' creativity representations and academic motivation. An approach called Future Problem Solving Program International (FPSI) was used throughout this program, which focused on training creativity representation and creative problem-solving skills among youth. The study was conducted in schools where it divided participants into control (N = 42) and experimental groups (N = 77). The control group did not attend the FPSI program, while the experimental group was exposed to the programme for four months by having 45-minute weekly sessions. The result showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups, which showed that academic motivation and creativity representation were found to be evident in the experimental group. Thus, it showed that the FPSI programme was effective in increasing student motivation towards academic learning as well as creative problem-solving on the cognitive and emotional level (Runco et al., 2012, as cited in Fátima Morais et al., 2020).

In another study, Martin (2008) examined the effects of a multidimensional educational intervention on students' motivation and engagement among 53 high school students who were divided into a control group (n = 27) and a treatment group (n = 26). The Motivation and Engagement Scale-High School (MES-HS) was used in this study to measure the students' motivation and engagement. Overall, the results of this study showed positive motivation changes for the treatment group on important dimensions such as task management, persistence, anxiety, failure avoidance, and unclear control. Positive changes were identified in the areas of valuation, management, planning, task management, persistence, avoidance of failure, unclear control, and self-impairment.

Also, the role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students was another study conducted by Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) to identify the role of personal motivation and environmental social support such as parents and peers towards academic performance. Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) stated that those who lack peer support are predicted to have lower outcomes in their academic performance. The study was conducted using the Motivations for Attending University scale (SMAU) and Baker and Siryk's (1984) student adaptation to college questionnaire. The results confirmed through the correlational analysis that environmental support, such as peer support and family support, was highly correlated to motivation (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005).

A study conducted by Elike Stracke and Vijay Kumar on the role of peer support groups (PSG) in realising graduate attributes in the research degree.Stracke and Kumar (2014) suggested that peer support groups have played a major role in the attribution of the outcome in the research degree, one of which is self-motivation. The study was conducted by first conducting a survey on the attribution of doctoral education and later on providing the PSG to help develop the requirements of their universities, which are their graduates' attributes (Stracke & Kumar, 2014). Stracke and Kumar (2014) mentioned that the data that was analysed on the attribution of PSG has contributed to critical thinking, self-motivation, research organization, and teamwork. The study also revealed that PSG was believed to have contributed to helping the graduates keep on track and maintain their momentum (Stracke & Kumar, 2014).

A research study conducted by Razak and See (2010) on matriculation students was conducted to see whether online peer learning would help students improve their academic achievement and motivation towards learning a statistics course. A quasi-nonequivalent design was conducted where 193 students were divided into a control group (n = 109) and an experimental group (n = 84). Researchers asked students from the experimental group to group themselves into five people per group. The result showed the academic achievement of the students who were exposed to the online peer learning received higher grades compared to the control group who only received classroom learning. As for the motivation level, the result showed that students who received online peer learning and additional

learning have higher motivation compared to matriculation students who only have face-to-face learning.

Kiefer et al. (2015) conducted a mixed-method study to investigate teacher and peer support among young adolescents' motivation, engagement, and school belonging. A quantitative survey was distributed with n = 209 and a qualitative method was conducted in the form of interview sessions with 18 students, 5 teachers, and 1 administrator. Participants were instructed to complete a survey that took around 40–45 minutes, which was to investigate the behaviour of motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging. Six scales were given to students to identify the relationships between teacher support, teacher involvement in the classroom, peer support, academic motivation, classroom engagement, and school belongings. Meanwhile, the interview session was in the form of a semi-structured interview, which lasted between 30 and 60 minutes per session. The results showed that there was a strong relationship between teacher and peer support towards youth's motivation, engagement, and school belonging.

The present study adapted a model used in a study by Prasad, Vaidya, and Kumar (2016), which investigated the effects of psychological stressors and coping strategies on one's life in terms of health through emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and psychological factors. This was in line with a study by Vatankhah and Tanbakooei (2014) that mentioned that a lack of social support has become one of the stressors that affect an individual's life, especially students, where parental and teacher support is a main contributing factor to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Motivation and social support from family and friends have been found to be associated with psychological well-being among university students, whereby enhancing social support can lead to better motivation in their studies (Rehman, Bhuttah & You, 2020). Figure 1 below shows the theoretical framework of past research on stress-causing factors that can affect the performance of teachers and a lack of social support that can lead to a loss in motivation.

Several studies have demonstrated the importance of motivation-based interventions in increasing academic performance. A study conducted by Elisabeth Akioka and Linda Gilmore on an intervention to improve motivation for homework was conducted to evaluate its effectiveness on motivation. Akioka and Gilmore (2013) stated that the Self-Determined Theory (SDT) was adopted to provide the conceptual framework in the study to investigate the levels of motivation among students in schools, and this study suggested that the motivation continuum ranges from intrinsic to extrinsic through the identification and introjection process. The results revealed that there was a protective effect on the quality of motivation (Akioka & Gilmore, 2013).

Dignath and Büttner (2008) conducted a meta-analysis to explore the impact of an intervention on students' academic performance. This study was conducted at primary and secondary school levels to identify the components of fostering self-regulated learning among students. Also, this study was conducted to explore the impact of interventions on students' academic performance, the strategies used, and the motivation of the students involved. Dignath and Büttner (2008) revealed that the outcome measures were grouped into 3, which were academic performance, use of knowledge about cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and motivation, which were also defined operationally. The results revealed that the training programmes that were based on the use of cognitive have higher effects than the motivational aspects of metacognition on academic performance at the primary school level, while at the secondary level, metacognitive aspects have the highest effect on academic performance (Dignath & Büttner, 2008).

Also, Fátima Morais et al. (2020) conducted a study on the efficacy of intervention programmes on adolescents' creativity representations and academic motivation. An approach called Future Problem Solving Program International (FPSI) was used throughout this program, which focused on training creativity representation and creative problem-solving skills among youth. The study was conducted in schools where it divided participants into control (N = 42) and experimental groups (N = 77). The control group did not attend the FPSI program, while the experimental group was exposed to the

programme for four months by having 45-minute weekly sessions. The result showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups, which showed that academic motivation and creativity representation were found to be evident in the experimental group. Thus, it showed that the FPSI programme was effective in increasing student motivation towards academic learning as well as creative problem-solving on the cognitive and emotional level (Runco et al., 2012, as cited in Fátima Morais et al., 2020).

In another study, Martin (2008) examined the effects of a multidimensional educational intervention on students' motivation and engagement among 53 high school students who were divided into a control group (n = 27) and a treatment group (n = 26). The Motivation and Engagement Scale-High School (MES-HS) was used in this study to measure the students' motivation and engagement. Overall, the results of this study showed positive motivation changes for the treatment group on important dimensions such as task management, persistence, anxiety, failure avoidance, and unclear control. Positive changes were identified in the areas of valuation, management, planning, task management, persistence, avoidance of failure, unclear control, and self-impairment.

Additionally, the role of personal motivation and environmental social support, such as parents and peers, towards academic performance was explored among ethnic minority first-generation college students by Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005). It was found that those who lacked peer support were predicted to have lower outcomes in their academic performance. The study was conducted using the Motivations for Attending University scale (SMAU) and Baker and Siryk's (1984) student adaptation to college questionnaire. The results confirmed through the correlational analysis that environmental support, such as peer support and family support, was highly correlated to motivation (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005).

Another study by Stracke & Kumar (2014) that explored the role of peer support groups (PSG) discovered that PSG plays a major role in the attribution of the outcome in the research degree, one of which is self-motivation. The study was conducted by first conducting a survey on the attribution of doctoral education and later on providing the PSG to help develop the requirements of their universities, which are their graduates' attributes (Stracke & Kumar, 2014). Stracke and Kumar (2014) mentioned that the data that was analysed on the attribution of PSG has contributed to critical thinking, self-motivation, research organization, and teamwork. The study also revealed that PSG was believed to have contributed to helping the graduates keep on track and maintain their momentum (Stracke & Kumar, 2014).

Further, a research study conducted by Razak and See (2010) found that students who received online peer learning received higher grades compared to students in the control group who only received classroom learning. As for their level of motivation, the results showed that students who received online peer learning and additional learning have a higher level of motivation compared to matriculation students who only received face-to-face learning. This study was carried out on matriculation students to see if online peer learning can help students improve their academic achievement and motivation to learn a statistics course. A quasi-nonequivalent design was conducted where 193 students were divided into a control group (n = 109) and an experimental group (n = 84). Researchers asked students from the experimental group to group themselves into five people per group.

Similarly, Kiefer et al. (2015), who conducted a mixed-method study to investigate teacher and peer support among young adolescents' motivation, engagement, and school belonging, also found that there was a strong relationship between teacher and peer support towards youth's motivation, engagement, and school belonging. In this study, a quantitative survey was distributed with n = 209 and a qualitative method was conducted in the form of interview sessions with 18 students, five teachers, and one administrator. Participants were instructed to complete a survey that took around 40–45 minutes, which was to investigate the behaviour of motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging. Six scales were given to students to identify the relationships between teacher support, teacher involvement in the classroom, peer support, academic motivation, classroom engagement, and school

belongings. Meanwhile, the interview session was in the form of a semi-structured interview, which lasted between 30 and 60 minutes per session.

The present study adapted a model used in a study by Prasad, Vaidya, and Kumar (2016), which investigated the effects of psychological stressors and coping strategies on one's life in terms of health through emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and psychological factors. This was in line with a study by Vatankhah and Tanbakooei (2014) that mentioned that a lack of social support has become one of the stressors that affect an individual's life, especially students, where parental and teacher support is a main contributing factor to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Motivation and social support from family and friends have been found to be associated with psychological well-being among university students, whereby enhancing social support can lead to better motivation in their studies (Rehman, Bhuttah & You, 2020). Figure 1 below shows the theoretical framework of past research on stress-causing factors that can affect the performance of teachers and a lack of social support that can lead to a loss in motivation.

Figure 1: Teacher's Performance as a Function of Occupational Stress and Coping (Prasad, Vaidya & Kumar, 2016)
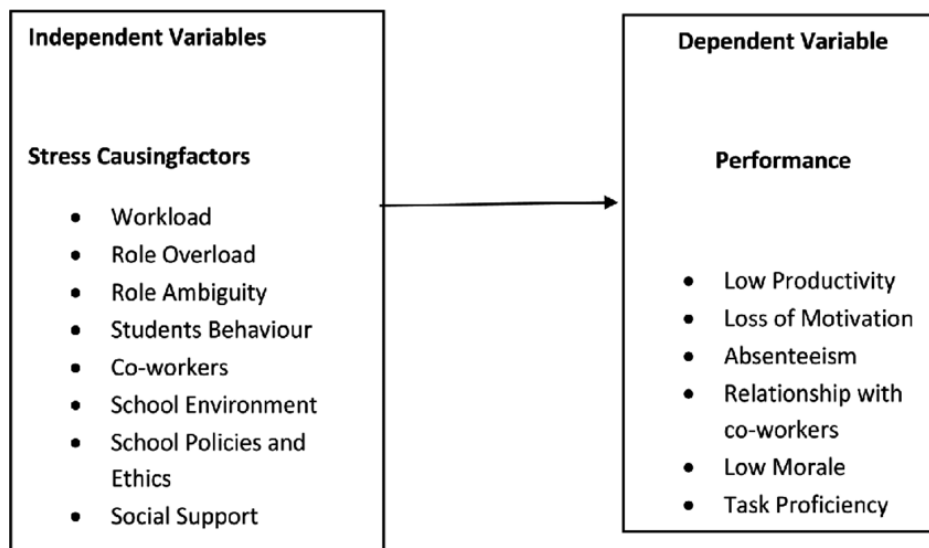
Sokol and Fisher (2016) stated in their study that they found great significance in the effectiveness of peer support groups. Below are the conceptual frameworks for the present study that were developed from Figure 1 and are shown in Figure 2. As can be seen below, there are two variables, which are the Online Peer Support Group (intervention) and the stressor, which is the independent variable for the present study, while the outcome variable is the level of motivation. Hence, to improve motivation, an online peer support group was used as a moderator in this study, which was aimed at helping to decrease the possible risk factors and enhance the protective factors by providing social support among IIUM undergraduate students.

Figure 2: Self-Determination Theory
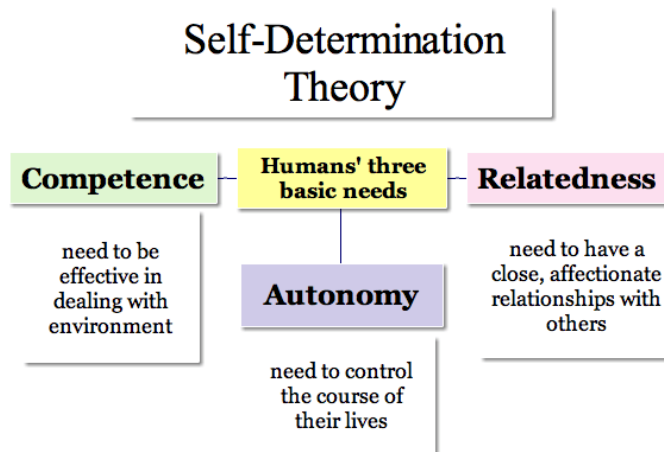
Figure 3: The Conceptual framework of the present study showing the intervening effect of the Online Peer Support Group on Motivation
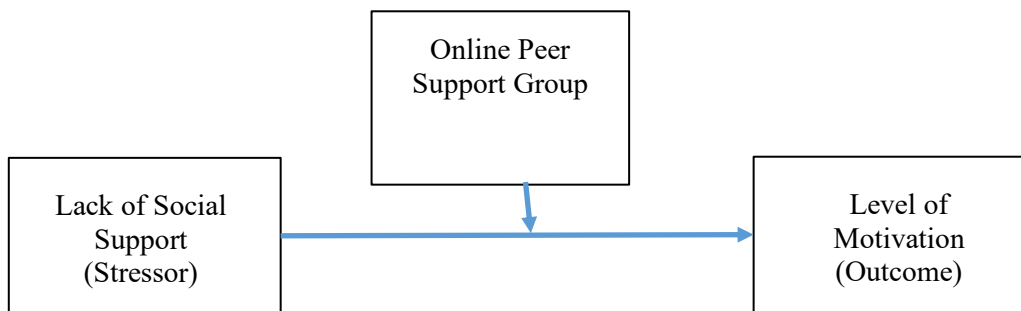
Research Question:

1. What is the current motivation level of IIUM undergraduate students?
2. What is the effectiveness of the psychosocial-spiritual educational online support group using the sport psychology approach?

Research Objective:

1. To identify the motivation level of IIUM undergraduate students after the online peer support group.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of a psychosocial-spiritual educational campaign using a sport psychology approach.

HYPOTHESIS

The hypotheses of this study are as below:

H0: There will be no significant difference between pre-test and post-test measures.
H1: Participants will have a higher level of motivation after undergoing the online peer support group intervention

METHOD

Study Design

A mixed method design that utilised both a quantitative and qualitative approach was employed. The first part of the study utilised a need analysis, which had several open-ended questions to explore the current level of motivation of students.

The second part of the study involved a quantitative design whereby a quasi-experimental one-group-pre-test-post-test design was utilised to evaluate and identify the efficacy of the online peer support group on situational motivation among IIUM undergraduate students using the approach of the self-determination theory.

An online peer support group was used as an intervening variable to assist students with their motivation level, and the effectiveness was measured using a pre-test and post-test measure. Participants were required to attend two sessions of the peer support group. They were pre-tested before attending the first session by completing a pretest form, and they were post-tested after completing the second session by fulfilling a post-test form. On the other hand, motivation was defined through the Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS) scale (Guay et al., 2000).

A qualitative approach was then employed to further triangulate and support the post-intervention results by identifying participants' feedback after the 2 online peer support sessions. An open-ended question was asked post-intervention to explore participants' feedback regarding the peer support group sessions. The questions were designed to determine the effectiveness of the programme and how it might affect their lives after participating in both online peer support group sessions.

Participants

A total of 13 participants were recruited in this study, consisting of 7 males (N = 7) and 6 females (N = 6) using the convenience sampling method involving undergraduate students at IIUM. Participants had to be IIUM undergraduate students to be considered.Participation was voluntary and based on their availability of internet connection and time and involved no penalty or loss of benefits from this study. Participants had the right to withdraw from this study at any time without any forfeits while all the information gained by them was unrevealed and would be used only for research and academic purposes.

Measures

The Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS) was used to measure situational motivation, or an individual's motivation orientation toward a particular activity such as a project assignment or sports (Guay et al., 2000). The SIMS has demonstrated good reliability and factorial validity among adolescents in both a physical context (Lonsdale et al., 2011; Standage, Treasure, Duda, & Prusak, 2003) and a broader context (Guay et al., 2000).

The questionnaire comprises components of intrinsic motivation (IM), identified regulation (IR), external regulation (ER), and amotivation (AM). This 16-item measure, rated on a 7-point Likert scale, which is *1–corresponds not at all* to *7–corresponds exactly,* with higher scores indicating higher motivation levels.

An open-ended question was asked to explore participants' feedback regarding the peer support group sessions. The question is generally designed to find out how the programme may affect their lives after attending both sessions.

Procedure

The study began with the selected participants filling in the form as a confirmation to take part in the study. This form contains a demographic information form, an informed consent form, and a few qualitative open-ended questions related to their level of motivation. In this study, there are two sessions for the peer support group, and the dates already determined by the researcher are April 4, 2021, and

April 17, 2021. Next, all participants were asked about their accessibility to time to participate in the sessions. They are given two time options to choose from between 9 AM and 2 PM two days before the session. Once obtaining a majority decision, the researcher will announce the confirmation of the session. After that, all the participants are given a special ID number as their identification in the pre-test form. They are required to fill in the form before the first session. This form consists of a demographic information form, an informed consent form, and the Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS).

Next, the researcher will provide a Google Meet Link for both sessions for participants to join the peer support group session. Moreover, for the first session, there are 4 slots, which are ice-breaking, stress reduction techniques (breathing techniques), sharing sessions, and journaling and thoughts records (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques). While for the second session, there would be I like, I do not like sessions, cognitive restructuring (psychological socio-spiritual education), religion and spirituality (Islamic Model of Motivation), sharing sessions, and stress reduction techniques (breathing techniques). Participants have also been given a chance to share or ask any questions during the session, as that is the main goal for the peer support group. Both sessions lasted no more than one hour. Lastly, after the second session ends, all participants are required to fill in the post-test form, which is the same SIMS scale that was used as a pre-test measure.

An open-ended question was then asked post-intervention to explore participants' feedback regarding the peer support group sessions. The questions were designed to determine the effectiveness of the programme and how it might affect their lives after participating in both online peer support group sessions.

Data Analysis
There were 13 participants (N = 13), consisting of 7 males (N = 7) and 6 females (N = 6) who were selected based on convenient sampling among IIUM undergraduate students. Referring to the hypotheses of the study, a paired-sample T-test was used to study the effectiveness of the online psychosocial peer support group in enhancing the level of motivation among students. This paired sample T-test was used to evaluate the difference between pre-test and post-test measures. The data for the study was collected after the end of our 2nd session of the online peer support group. All the data was computed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (IBM SPSS). A paired sample T-test was used in the study to analyse the difference in SIMS scores between the pretest and post-test.

Peer Support Group Model Development
The theme of this peer support group is motivation. The campaign was developed using self-determination theory. According to Cox (2012), self-determination theory focuses on three innate human needs, which are competence, autonomy, and relatedness, as shown below in Figure 3. Competence, also known as self-confidence, and autonomy are thought to be valued in the self-determination theory and are critical to the development of intrinsic motivation (Cox, 2012).On the other hand, Cox (2012) mentioned that the third innate human need is relatedness, which is important for a person to be self-actualized as well as realise their potential. Two techniques that have been chosen that are related to the self-determination theory are relaxation and the cognitive behavioural approach. This is where it can be related to the three innate human needs, which are competence to practise relaxation to cope well with environmental stress, while autonomy helps to practise one's thoughts and relatedness is where the concept of discussing as a group and wanting to cope better with people and the environment

Firstly, the stress-reduction technique, as well as the relaxation technique, have been part of the module to lower the participants' stress and learn how to stay calm. According to Pietrangelo (2019), there are a few relaxation techniques to calm the body and brain, which are deep breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, and imagery. This is where the moderator will use the deep breathing technique at the end of the programme to help participants feel calm and be in the present moment after having had

the sharing and psychoeducational sessions. Besides, the moderator also used visual stimulation, such as motivational videos and videos on learning how to do deep breathing correctly to reduce stress.

Secondly, the moderator asked a few questions during both sessions in the form of semi-structured questions. Some of the questions were: "What does motivation mean to you? Usually, what makes you motivated in your daily life? Is there anything that can boost your motivation? These questions were posed in the open-sharing session where moderators and all of the participants were sharing their problems, opinions, and thoughts without making any judgments (Tang, n.d.). It was also vital for moderators to not make any judgments and be empathetic instead of asking unnecessary questions.

The next approach utilised the cognitive behavioural technique, journaling, and thought recording, which was introduced to the participants. Sutton (2020) described how having thought records helped clients recognise their dysfunctional thinking or negative thinking. Based on Figure 5 above, the moderator provided psychoeducation on how to manage their thoughts where they were taught to identify their thoughts as either facts or based on assumptions.

Next, psychosocial-spiritual education was introduced to the participants. The moderator explained the cognitive model that involves thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The core belief was explained, which usually involves personal experiences. "These are beliefs that we hold at the centre of who we are." They describe the basic nature of the world (CBT Psychoeducation, 2016). Lastly, moderators provided further psychoeducation regarding cognitive distortions, which were described as unhealthy thinking patterns. Since the participants were not fully aware of these techniques, the moderator further provided an added explanation and demonstration by giving insight into how they could self-help themselves when they have a problem. Some of the participants were not from the psychology department, so this new learning could possibly be of great assistance to them in the future.

Lastly, Islamic perspective elements were included, whereby the Islamic Model of Motivation was adopted as it was aligned with the themes of an online peer support group that was conducted in an effort to increase motivation among IIUM undergraduate students. The Islamic Model of Motivation emphasises the human soul, which plays an important role as a moderating variable in increasing or lowering motivation behaviour at different stages of theories (Alias & Samsudin, 2005). Thus, each human soul is responsible for increasing their motivation to improve their own lives, as mentioned in Surah Ar-Ra'd, ayah 11, "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." Alias and Samsudin (2005) also stated that applying the principles of motivation in the Islamic perspective is helpful to individuals in fulfilling their roles as the vicegerents of Allah SWT. Hence, the Islamic perspective that was featured in this online peer support group helped the participants reflect upon themselves in their roles as Muslims, whereby it was hoped that it would help them to boost their motivation as well as become better Muslims.

Figure 4: Poster advertising the peer support group of the present study

Figure 5: Table of Programme Development

Module	Activities	Duration (mins)	Sub-Objective
Physical Resilience	Relaxation technique	5-10 minutes	To lower down the stress and keep being calm
	Deep breathing technique		To educate participants on techniques that can be used
	Stress Reduction technique		to reduce anxiety or stress.
Cognitive Resilience	Journaling and Thought Records	15-20 minutes	To always be mindful and remain in the present.
	Cognitive restructuring		To increase awareness on the advantages of acknowledging their own feelings.
Emotional Resilience	Sharing session using semi-structured questions	15-30 minutes	To allow people to express their burden and receive encouragement from others.
	Islamic perspectives		To relate concept of motivation with Islamic perspective as a Muslim

Figure 6: Thought Record Template Used in the Peer Support Group Sessions

FINDINGS

A total of 13 participants were recruited in this study, consisting of 7 males (N = 7) and 6 females (N = 6) using the convenience sampling method involving undergraduate students at IIUM. Participants had to be IIUM undergraduate students to be considered.

The statistical analysis programme SPSS was used to perform a paired sample t-test.This is to evaluate the effectiveness of online psychosocial-spiritual peer support groups in enhancing the level of motivation. There is no statistically significant difference in the SIMS scale from pre-test (M = 11.69, SD = 32.81) to post-test (M = 18.69, SD = 23.04), t (12) =-1.105, p >.005 (two-tailed). The mean increase in SIMS score was -7, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 20.08 to 6.8. The eta squared 0.09 statistic that was gained from the formula provided by Pallant (2007) signified a moderate effect size according to Cohen's standard. Thus, the result showed that there was no significant difference in the participants' level of self-determination before and after intervention since the probability value was more than.05.

However, all of the participants have given their feedback through a form with open-ended questions about how they generally feel about the support group in terms of their motivations, emotions, and criticisms after attending both sessions. After the qualitative data was analyzed, a few consistent themes could be found throughout their responses. The first theme was *positive energy,* in which most of the participants agreed that the support group managed to affect them positively, such as by helping them to feel more open and energetic and making them more expressive in voicing out their thoughts and concerns, which helps in lifting their emotional and mental burden. For example, one of the participants described how the support group made him feel "*very lively and managed to lift my spirits,*" specifically in the first session, as quoted by one of the participants. A few other participants mentioned how they also learned many new and informative things about motivation through the sharing of other participants in the support group, such as positivity in life and also regarding helpful techniques of cognitive behavioural approaches, specifically the act of journaling. A participant also mentioned how he felt much better and less lonely when he found out that other participants were demotivated just as much as he was. This sense of togetherness and common humanity concept was evident as a result of the online peer support group sessions conducted.

The next theme identified was *motivation*. Although most of them agreed that they did feel motivated by the support group, the degree of that varied. A few participants mentioned how they felt only slightly motivated by the sessions, while another participant found that this support group's interactive nature did help to boost their level of motivation.

Some of the same participants also provided interesting criticisms as well as suggestions for improving the support group in the future, starting with how the researchers should provide longer sessions for it to be more impactful and beneficial in the long-term manner. One of them even stated that the group setting is not that comforting for her as she is too shy to share her thoughts and stories in front of others. Next, a couple of participants pointed out the importance of the facilitators' role in making the support group interesting enough to make people feel motivated by it and not too rushed by giving the participants more space to share their thoughts.

DISCUSSION

Results from the paired sample t-test showed that there was no significant difference between the participants' levels of motivation before and after the intervention session. The research hypothesis is rejected since it has been shown from the results that the participant's motivational level has not increased after the intervention session. However, it has been shown through the qualitative analysis that the participants were positively affected by the support group session and that they felt motivated after attending the session. The two distinct themes identified were positive energy and motivation. The results of this study did not meet the expectations of the Self-Determination theory. However, the results might be affected by the extraneous factors that the participants were facing or several other environmental factors.

The positive impact of the online peer support group that was visible through the qualitative findings is in line with past literature. For example, the nature and findings of the present study share many similarities with a study by Kiefer, Alley, and Ellerbrock (2015), in which the goal of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to examine teacher and peer support for young adolescents' academic motivation, classroom engagement, and sense of school belonging at a big, urban, ethnically diverse middle school. This study supported the notion of the influence of teacher and peer support on student adjustment. It is also purported that peer support can assist in meeting the needs of young adolescents and promoting their academic motivation, classroom engagement, and school belonging. However, it was noted that there is a scarcity in the amount of research that has been conducted on support groups and there is a dearth of research on peer support groups among university students. Interestingly, most of the research on support groups has been focused mainly on assertiveness skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, or psychological issues, while the focus on improving motivation levels is rare (Carr, Miki Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Freeman, Barker, & Pistrang, 2008; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Pan, Chang, & Yu, 2005).

One of the limitations of this experiment was the essence of the online experiment. Due to the current COVID-19 situation, a Conditional Movement Control Order was imposed and has prohibited the researchers from performing a face-to-face experiment with the participants. Therefore, the researchers could not control the extraneous variables such as poor internet connection and loud surroundings, which may have made it difficult for the researchers to communicate with the participants during the session. Another limitation of the study was that a few of the participants could not attend the second session that was held by the researchers, which might have affected the participants' scores.

Alternative explanations may be related to the type of interventions that were used during the sessions. It is possible that the interventions were not complex enough to increase the participants' levels of motivation. Although the interventions were not complex enough, they had a positive impact on some of the participants, and a few of them managed to feel motivated.

Taken together, there is a growing need for more online peer support groups to be developed and applied among undergraduate students. As purported by Kiefer, Alley, and Ellerbrock (2015), future research may benefit from implementing peer support groups with observational data alongside inteviews while also integrating other stakeholders such as educators and administrative staff to further enhance these support groups in the institution to further provide a holistic voice for all to promote better academic adjustment. This provides insight into the importance of peer support groups, while the present study sheds light on building a solid foundation for future researchers who wish to replicate this study on a larger pool of students over a longer duration of time to address the shortcomings of the study. The present study may serve as a vital pre-experimental pilot study for a bigger and more robust implementation of online peer support groups.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the current study, which aimed to provide a psychosocial online peer support group based on the self-determination theory, was successful. The present study emphasised the implementation of the self-determination theory aimed at improving the level of motivation among IIUM undergraduate students amidst the challenging pandemic era. They were given a safe space to voice their concerns among peers, whereby there was a sharing of their concerns or thoughts regarding their motivation in two sessions. The intervention techniques that were used throughout the sessions were stress-reduction techniques, mainly relaxation techniques, and cognitive-behavioral techniques such as journaling and thought records. Other than that, psychoeducation was used to educate the participants about their cognitive structures. As implied by the extensive review of literature, support groups play a major role in improving one's self-motivation regardless of one's demographic. Also, it was found that the self-determination theory was a useful and helpful approach for increasing aspects of motivation in an individual. Therefore, the present study hopes to contribute to these subjects by integrating the theory into the group support practise of IIUM undergraduate students with the utilisation of different techniques.

The result of statistical analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between the participants' level of self-determination before and after intervention, indicating that the present study did not successfully meet the hypothesis intended. This may be due to various external factors that might have caused some limitations in the efficacy, such as the time gap between the sessions, the environmental factors of delivering the support group through an online platform, and the change of group dynamics or internal factors such as the participant's emotional or mood state during the sessions. It is indeed undeniably challenging to achieve the same result as a physical support group, as the settings are completely different. However, the qualitative analysis still managed to explicate how the participants were positively impacted by the support group, and several participants managed to feel highly motivated by this intervention. The least that the current project could contribute to now is that the participants have more awareness of their cognitive functions and are able to practise the learned techniques and apply them in their day-to-day life setting to regulate their motivation. It is also hoped that participants' stress levels, emotional burdens, and worries were able to be eased to some extent, even just for a moment during the sessions.

Future studies on self-determination theory on improving motivation through support groups are highly encouraged to be replicated with different demographics to validate and overcome the limitations of the current study. Lastly, support groups on the virtual platform are still not normalised in this new norm, so the flaws are inevitable. Therefore, studies surrounding ways of adapting to online support groups are needed in the future to improve the effectiveness of this mechanism as a coping mechanism for mental health issues.

Peer support groups have been found to be as successful as professional treatment in some instances, since they help individuals interact with people who share similar interests, and the psychoeducation provided can be quite beneficial. Additionally, group facilitators serve as mentors, assisting in the facilitation of and providing some direction and guidance within a support group (Health Direct, 2020). In conclusion, it is hoped that the use of online peer support groups may be normalised to reach out to the masses based on the different emotional, mental, or physical needs that they may have with regard to motivation.

REFERENCES

Adnan, M., & Anwar, K. (2020). Online Learning amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Students' Perspectives. *Online Submission*, *2*(1), 45-51.

Akioka, E., & Gilmore, L. (2013). An Intervention to Improve Motivation for Homework. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, *23*(1), 34–48. https://doi.org/10.1017/jgc.2013.2

Alias, A., & Samsudin, M. Z. (2005). Psychology of motivation from an Islamic perspective. In *3rd International Seminar on Learning and Motivation* (Vol. 10, p. 12).

Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *motive*. *Cambridge Words.* https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/motive

Carr, J. L., Miki Koyama, M., & Thiagarajan, M. (2003). A women's support group for Asian international students. *Journal of American college health*, *52*(3), 131-134.

CBT Psychoeducation. (2016, April 18). Therapist Aid. https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-guide/cbt-psychoeducation

Cox, R. (2012). *Sport Psychology: Concepts and Applications, Seventh Edition.* McGraw-Hill Education.

Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of college student development*, *46*(3), 223-236. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0023

Dignath, C., & Büttner, G. (2008). Components of fostering self-regulated learning among students. A meta-analysis on intervention studies at primary and secondary school level. *Metacognition and learning, 3*(3), 231-264. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11409-008-9029-x

Fátima Morais, M. D. Jesus, S. N., Azevedo, I., Araújo, A. M., & Viseu, J. (2015). Intervention Program on Adolescent's Creativity Representations and Academic Motivation. *Paidéia (Ribeirão Preto)*, *25*(62), 289-297. https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-43272562201502

Freeman, E., Barker, C., & Pistrang, N. (2008). Outcome of an online mutual support group for college students with psychological problems. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *11*(5), 591-593.

Hayes, R. L., & Lin, H. R. (1994). Coming to America: Developing social support systems for international students. *Journal of Multicultural counseling and Development*, *22*(1), 7-16.

Health Direct. (2020, March). *Motivation: How to get started and staying motivated* . Retrieved from Health Direct: https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/motivation-how-to-get-started-and-staying-motivated

Guay, F., Vallerand, R. J., & Blanchard, C. (2000). On the assessment of situational intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: The Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS). *Motivation and Emotion*, *24*(3), 175–213. doi:10.1023/A:1005614228250

Kiefer, S. M., Alley, K. M., & Ellerbrock, C. R. (2015). Teacher and Peer Support for Young Adolescents' Motivation, Engagement, and School Belonging. *RMLE Online, 38*(8), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2015.11641184

Lim, I. (2020, May 29). Reality for Malaysia's university students: Online learning challenges, stress, workload; possible solutions for fully digital future until Dec. Malaymail.com; Malay Mail. https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/05/30/reality-for-malaysias-university-students-online-learning-challenges-stress/1870717

Martin, A. J. (2008). Enhancing student motivation and engagement: The effects of a multidimensional intervention. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *33*, 239-269. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2006.11.003

Mikolajczyk, R. T., Maxwell, A. E., El Ansari, W., Naydenova, V., Stock, C., Ilieva, S., ... & Nagyova, I. (2008). Prevalence of depressive symptoms in university students from Germany, Denmark, Poland and Bulgaria. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, *43*(2), 105-112.

Pallant, J. (2007). *SPSS Survival Manual: Third Edition.* Open University Press.

Pan, P. J., Chang, S. H., & Yu, Y. Y. (2005). A support group for home-quarantined college students exposed to SARS: learning from practice. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, *30*(4), 363-374.

Pietrangelo, A. (2019, December 12). *9 CBT Techniques for Better Mental Health*. Healthline; Healthline Media. https://www.healthline.com/health/cbt-techniques#types-of-cbt-techniques

Prasad, K. D. V., Vaidya, R., & Kumar, V. A. (2016). Teacher's Performance as a Function of Occupational Stress and Coping with Reference to CBSE Affiliated School Teachers in and around Hyderabad: A Multinomial Regression Approach. *Psychology*, *7*(13), 1700-1718. https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2016.713160

Razak, R.A., & See, Y.C. (2010). Improving academic achievement and motivation through online peer learning. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *9*, 358-362. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.12.164

Rehman, A. U., Bhuttah, T. M., & You, X. (2020). Linking Burnout to Psychological Well-being: The Mediating Role of Social Support and Learning Motivation. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, *Volume 13*, 545–554. https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s250961

Runco, M. A., Lubart, T. I., & Getz, I. (2012). *Creativity and economics*. In M. A. Runco (Ed.), The creativity research handbook (Vol. 2, pp. 173-198). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Ryan, A. M. (2001). The Peer Group as a Context for the Development of Young Adolescent Motivation and Achievement. *Child Development*, *7*(4), 1135-1150. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00338

Sheldon, K. M., Ryan, R., & Reis, H. T. (1996). What makes for a good day? Competence and autonomy in the day and in the person. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, *22*(12), 1270-1279.

Sokol, R., & Fisher, E. (2016). Peer support for the hardly reached: a systematic review. *American Journal of Public Health, 106*(7), e1-e8. https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303180

Stracke, E., & Kumar, V. (2014). Realising graduate attributes in the research degree: the role of peer support groups. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *19*(6), 616-629. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13562517.2014.901955

Sutton, J. (2020, December 16). *Thought records in CBT: 7 examples and templates*. PositivePsychology.com. https://positivepsychology.com/thought-records/

Tang, P. (n.d.). *Fundamentals of good peer support: Strengthening communication skills*. Peers For Progress | Peer Support Around the World. https://peersforprogress.org/pfp_blog/fundamentals-of-good-peer-support-strengthening-communication-skills/

Vatankhah, M., & Tanbakooei, N. (2014). The Role of Social Support on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation among Iranian EFL Learners. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *98*, 1912–1918. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.622