

Motivational Factors and Learning Enthusiasm: A Multi-Level Analysis in Buddhist Sunday Schools in Wonogiri Regency

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ABSTRACT

Buddhist Sunday Schools (Sekolah Minggu Buddha, SMB) face ongoing challenges in sustaining students' learning enthusiasm across different educational levels. Understanding how motivation influences engagement is critical to improving instructional practices in these multi-level settings. This study employed a mixed-methods design to explore the relationship between motivational factors and learning enthusiasm among 38 students (18 elementary, 10 junior high, and 10 senior high) from three SMBs in Wonogiri, Indonesia. Data were gathered through questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The analysis revealed a clear developmental trend in motivational orientation. Elementary students were predominantly driven by extrinsic motivation ($r = 0.85$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.72$), junior high students demonstrated a balanced mix of extrinsic and intrinsic factors, while high school students were primarily intrinsically motivated ($r = 0.82$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.67$). These findings indicate that students' motivational profiles evolve with age and educational stage. The results highlight the importance of tailoring motivational strategies to students' developmental levels. Effective interventions may include age-appropriate curriculum design, interactive and experiential learning activities, and structured spiritual mentorship to foster both engagement and long-term spiritual growth. This study underscores the value of differentiated motivational approaches in SMB settings. Adapting instructional methods to align with students' motivational development can enhance learning enthusiasm and support meaningful participation in religious education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Buddhist Sunday School (SMB) plays a crucial role in spiritual development and character formation for Buddhist students, yet faces significant challenges in maintaining student motivation and learning enthusiasm. Initial observations at three SMBs in Wonogiri Regency revealed concerning patterns of declining student attendance and participation, particularly pronounced in higher grade levels. This motivational challenge is compounded by the multi-level nature of SMB classrooms, where students from various educational levels (elementary through high school) often learn together, creating substantial instructional complexity.

Non-formal religious education in Indonesia serves a strategic role in character formation and spiritual identity development for young generations, especially for adherents of minority religions such as Buddhism. According to data from Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2022), Buddhists represent approximately 0.8% of Indonesia's population, while formal education institutions offering Buddhist religious education remain limited in proportion to the overall education system. Research by Sadtyadi (2020) indicates that many Buddhist students across Indonesia have minimal access to formal Buddhist religious education in their schools, creating a significant gap in religious education access.

Motivational challenges in SMB learning are further complicated by the demographic characteristics of the students. Unlike Islamic or Christian religious education that can typically group students by age, most SMBs in areas with minority Buddhist populations like Wonogiri must accommodate the entire age range in a single class. This situation creates pedagogical dilemmas considering the different cognitive, spiritual, and emotional needs and capacities at each developmental stage. Standard motivational models are difficult to apply in this context, requiring a more nuanced and adaptive approach based on the multi-level learning characteristics in SMB (Arweck & Jackson, 2014).

Within the Indonesian education framework, SMB serves as an essential non-formal religious education avenue. According to PMA Number 39 of 2014, SMB operates as community-organized religious education through study groups held at various Buddhist worship and training centers. For many Buddhist students receiving limited religious education in their formal schools, SMB provides critical spiritual development opportunities through its four main functions: providing new knowledge and skills, eliminating doubts about religious experiences, developing sound understanding, and creating peace and happiness (Mujiyanto et al., 2022).

The challenge of learning motivation in SMB stems from the unique characteristics of religious education, which aims not merely to transfer knowledge but to instill values and shape character (Sadtyadi, 2018). This complexity is heightened in multi-level classrooms where developmental needs vary significantly. For instance, elementary students require different motivational approaches than adolescents, yet many SMBs must accommodate all ages simultaneously due to resource constraints.

Herzberg's motivation theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the motivational dynamics in SMB. Ibrahim et al. (2023) applied Herzberg's two-factor theory in educational settings, distinguishing between motivators (intrinsic factors like achievement and recognition) and hygiene factors (extrinsic elements like learning environment and evaluation methods). Similarly, Azid et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of understanding the interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in learning contexts.

Previous research on SMB motivation has left significant gaps. Ayu et al. (2022) examined teachers' efforts to improve student motivation in SMB Dhamma Sena but focused solely on teacher roles without addressing multi-level complexity. Joli et al. (2022) investigated relationships between spiritual intelligence, motivation, and achievement but limited their study to high school students. Darani et al. (2023) studied teacher creativity in increasing learning enthusiasm but overlooked cross-level motivational dynamics. Sumadyo et al. (2023) analyzed Buddhist adolescents' interest and motivation in religious activities, finding that lack of faith (Saddha) was a primary factor in low participation. Meanwhile, Metri et al. (2022) identified positive correlations between interest, motivation, and learning achievement among Buddhist students in formal schools. These studies demonstrate the complexity of

factors affecting motivation in Buddhist education but lack comprehensive analysis of multi-level motivational patterns in SMB.

The significance of this research has increased with modern challenges to religious education. Isman et al. (2023) identified that personal factors like self-efficacy and goal orientation significantly shape learning motivation. In SMB contexts, these challenges intensify when accommodating diverse educational levels within shared learning environments. Various theoretical perspectives, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Cahyono et al., 2022), Locke's Goal-Setting Theory (Purba et al., 2021), and McClelland's Theory of Needs (Pratama et al., 2022), provide complementary frameworks for understanding how motivation varies across developmental stages in religious education settings.

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors influence learning enthusiasm among multi-level SMB students?
2. What are the distinct patterns of motivation-enthusiasm relationships at each educational level (elementary, junior high, and senior high school)?

The research hypotheses are:

1. Different educational levels will demonstrate distinct motivational patterns affecting learning enthusiasm in SMB contexts.
2. Extrinsic motivational factors will have stronger correlations with learning enthusiasm at lower educational levels, while intrinsic factors will predominate at higher levels.
3. A developmental progression in motivational patterns will be evident across educational levels, showing a transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation.

2. METHODS

This study employed a mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory strategy, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses to understand motivational relationship patterns in multi-level SMB students. This approach was selected to capture both statistical relationships and participants' subjective experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex motivational dynamics in religious education (Ghanad, 2023).

The study population comprised all students from three SMBs in Wonogiri Regency: SMB Dhamma Sena (12 students), SMB Dhamma Sasana (22 students), and SMB Maitriratna (4 students), distributed across elementary school (18 students), junior high school (10 students), and senior high school (10 students) levels. A saturated sampling technique was applied due to the limited population size (N=38), allowing comprehensive analysis of all SMB students in the region. While the sample size is relatively small, it represents the complete population of Buddhist Sunday School students in the study area, ensuring ecological validity within this specific context.

Data collection used structured questionnaires developed based on Herzberg's two-factor theory and adapted to the SMB learning context. The instrument measured three main constructs:

1. Extrinsic motivation (15 items): learning environment (5 items), learning resources (5 items), social support (5 items)
2. Intrinsic motivation (15 items): self-confidence (5 items), interest (5 items), achievement satisfaction (5 items)
3. Learning enthusiasm (15 items): discipline (5 items), participation (5 items), perseverance (5 items)

All items used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument underwent content validation by three experts in Buddhist education and educational psychology, with a content validity index (CVI) of 0.87. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded coefficients of 0.84 for the extrinsic motivation scale, 0.86 for the intrinsic motivation scale, and 0.82 for the learning enthusiasm scale, indicating good internal consistency. Additionally, a pilot test with 12 SMB students outside the study area was conducted to ensure comprehensibility and cultural appropriateness, following methodological recommendations by Jackson (2011).

Quantitative data analysis employed non-parametric statistics due to the small sample size and the ordinal nature of the Likert scale data. While parametric tests typically require normally distributed data and larger sample sizes ($n > 30$ per group), our sample consisted of only 10-18 participants per educational level. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed non-normal distribution ($p < 0.05$) in several variables, further justifying the non-parametric approach. The Kruskal-Wallis test compared motivational patterns across education levels, while Spearman correlation analyzed relationships between variables. Bootstrap techniques (1000 resamples) enhanced statistical reliability with the small sample. Effect sizes (R^2) were calculated for all significant relationships to determine practical significance.

The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 15 purposively selected participants (9 students representing all education levels, 3 SMB teachers, and 3 parents) and participatory observation during 6 learning sessions. The interview protocol focused on motivation experiences, learning challenges, and perceived factors affecting enthusiasm. Sessions were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Participatory observations used a structured observation sheet to document engagement patterns, teaching strategies, and student-teacher interactions.

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using a six-step process: familiarization with data, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and report production. Two researchers independently coded the data to ensure intercoder reliability (Cohen's kappa = 0.82). Member checking with participants verified the accuracy of interpretations. Data matrices enabled cross-case analysis to identify patterns specific to each educational level. Triangulation of data sources (students, teachers, parents) and methods (questionnaires, interviews, observations) strengthened validity.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings followed a connecting approach, where qualitative data explained statistical patterns. Ethical considerations included informed consent from all participants (and parents for minors), confidentiality assurances, and freedom to withdraw. The study received approval from the institutional ethics committee.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Analysis of Research Data

The following section presents an analysis of the research data to examine the relationship between various influencing factors and students' learning enthusiasm across different levels of education. A Spearman correlation test was used to measure the strength and direction of these relationships, as this method is suitable for identifying associations between non-parametric data. The analysis aims to determine whether there are consistent patterns or significant differences in how specific variables—such as teaching strategies, learning environment, or student motivation—correlate with enthusiasm for learning in primary, secondary, and higher education settings.

Table 1. Spearman Correlation between Various Factors and Learning Enthusiasm at Each Level of Education

Educational Level	Motivational Factor	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Effect Size (R ²)
Elementary School (Lower grades)	Direct verbal praise	0.85	<0.05	0.72
Elementary School (Lower grades)	Presence of parents/caregivers	0.88	<0.05	0.77
Elementary School (Higher grades)	Learning independence	0.65	<0.05	0.42
Junior High School	Peer support	0.68	<0.05	0.46
Junior High School	Personal value understanding	0.70	<0.05	0.49
Junior High School	Connection to spiritual identity	0.72	<0.05	0.52
Senior High School	Mindfulness application	0.82	<0.05	0.67
Senior High School	Personal meaning	0.78	<0.05	0.61

At the elementary level (18 students), clear developmental transitions were evident between lower grades (grades 1-3) and higher grades (grades 4-6). Lower grade students demonstrated strong reliance on extrinsic motivational factors, with direct verbal praise ($r=0.85$, $p<0.05$, $R^2=0.72$) and parent/caregiver presence ($r=0.88$, $p<0.05$, $R^2=0.77$) showing the strongest correlations with learning enthusiasm. As one teacher explained during interviews:

"Younger elementary students need immediate recognition for their efforts. A simple 'well done' can transform their participation level. They're still developing their understanding of Buddhist concepts, so connecting through positive reinforcement works best." (Teacher A, SMB Dhamma Sena)

Observations revealed that lower grade students exhibited highest engagement levels (87% active participation) when learning incorporated movement and visual elements. The attachment to parental figures also significantly influenced participation, with most younger students requiring a 30-minute adaptation period when parents were absent, a finding consistent with patterns observed by Yuningsih and Masyithoh (2023) in their study of elementary students' learning enthusiasm.

Higher grade elementary students (grades 4-6) showed an emerging transition toward intrinsic motivation, with learning independence moderately correlating with enthusiasm ($r=0.65$, $p<0.05$, $R^2=0.42$). Their self-reflection scores improved from 6.5 to 8.2 (on a 10-point scale) during the study period, indicating developing metacognitive abilities. A fifth-grade student reflected:

"I like learning Buddha's stories because they help me understand how to be a better person at school. Before, I just came because my parents brought me, but now I want to learn more about the teachings." (Elementary Student, 11 years old)

Junior high school students (10 participants) demonstrated a complex balance between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Peer support emerged as a significant factor ($r=0.68$, $p<0.05$, $R^2=0.46$), alongside deeper connections to spiritual identity ($r=0.72$, $p<0.05$, $R^2=0.52$). These students showed increased capacity to connect Buddhist teachings with contemporary issues and personal experiences. Their preference for learning methods shifted noticeably, with experiential approaches generating 85% engagement compared to 60% for traditional lectures.

One junior high student articulated this developmental transition:

"When I was younger, I mostly enjoyed the games and stories. Now I'm interested in understanding why we practice certain rituals and how Buddhist teachings can help me handle problems with friends or school stress." (Junior High Student, 13 years old)

Table 2. Percentage Data on Achievement and Participation

Educational Level	Regular Attendance	Self-Initiated Participation	Dependence on Extrinsic Rewards	Application of Buddhist Values
Elementary- (Grades 1-3)	78%	35%	82%	40%
Elementary (Grades 4-6)	82%	65%	58%	65%
Junior-High School	75%	80%	45%	75%
Senior-High School	85%	95%	20%	85%

Senior high school students (10 participants) demonstrated the strongest intrinsic motivation patterns. Personal meaning ($r=0.78$, $p<0.05$, $R^2=0.61$) and application of mindfulness practices ($r=0.82$, $p<0.05$, $R^2=0.67$) correlated most significantly with learning enthusiasm. These students viewed SMB participation as integral to their identity development rather than an external obligation. Their participation in SMB-initiated community service projects (70% voluntary involvement) reflected their internalization of Buddhist values. As one high school student expressed:

"The meditation and mindfulness practices I've learned help me manage my school stress. I'm not just learning about Buddhism anymore—I'm living it. Understanding impermanence and compassion has changed how I approach challenges." (Senior High Student, 17 years old)

Table 2 presents participation and achievement data across educational levels, showing increasing self-direction and decreasing dependence on extrinsic rewards.

3.2. Comprehensive Analysis

The developmental progression of motivation across educational levels reveals a complex spiral pattern rather than a simple linear transition. While extrinsic motivation dominated among elementary students, particularly in lower grades, intrinsic motivation steadily increased with age and spiritual development. This pattern aligns with developmental theories suggesting that younger children typically require more external reinforcement while adolescents increasingly value autonomy and personal meaning (Cahyono et al., 2022).

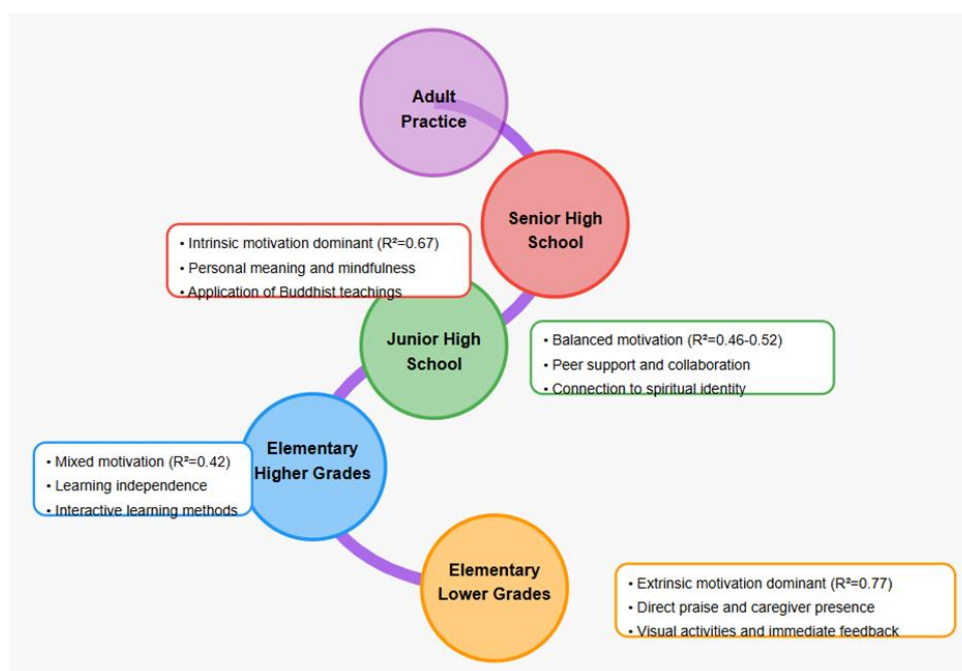


Figure 1. Motivational Development spiral model in Buddhist Sunday School

The increase in intrinsic motivation at higher educational levels can be attributed to several factors. First, cognitive development enables older students to grasp abstract Buddhist concepts more readily, facilitating deeper personal connections to teachings. Second, identity formation during adolescence naturally leads students to question and personalize their religious understanding, a process that Jackson (2021) describes as essential for authentic religious learning. Third, longer exposure to Buddhist teachings creates richer frameworks for integrating these principles into daily life.

Socio-cultural contexts significantly influenced motivational patterns. Students demonstrated stronger connections to Buddhist concepts when teachers linked them to local Javanese cultural values. This cultural bridging particularly benefited elementary and junior high students, creating accessible entry points to more abstract Buddhist principles. This finding aligns with Sahin's (2018) research on the importance of cultural contextualization in religious education.

Technology integration showed age-specific patterns of motivation impact. Elementary students responded enthusiastically to interactive, game-based applications of Buddhist stories. Junior high students valued technology for collaborative learning and discussion platforms, while high school students appreciated access to deeper philosophical resources and meditation guidance applications.

Comparing these findings with other religious education contexts reveals interesting parallels. Francis et al. (2019) documented similar developmental progressions in religious education, finding that teaching approaches must adapt based on students' developmental stages. Their research identified how younger students in religious educational settings respond primarily to external reinforcement, while adolescents increasingly connect religious learning to personal identity and values. These parallels suggest common developmental patterns across different religious educational contexts despite theological differences.

3.3. Discussion

The study's findings expand theoretical understanding of religious education motivation in several key ways. The identified pattern of motivational transition from extrinsic to intrinsic aligns with Azid et al.'s (2023) research but reveals a more complex spiral progression specific to religious learning contexts. Unlike their findings suggesting linear development, this study shows that religious

motivation develops through fluctuating periods where external and internal factors interact differently at each developmental stage.

The dominant role of extrinsic factors among elementary students supports Maslow's theory as applied by Cahyono et al. (2022), confirming that addressing basic needs for security and recognition provides essential foundations for higher-level motivation. However, this study extends their framework by demonstrating how specific Buddhist concepts like impermanence and compassion can serve as developmental bridges toward intrinsic motivation when introduced appropriately.

For junior high students, peer influence emerged as a critical motivational factor, supporting Isman et al.'s (2023) findings on social influences in learning. This study adds valuable nuance by revealing how peer relationships in religious education contexts simultaneously affect both learning motivation and spiritual identity formation—an interaction not previously explored in depth. As one SMB teacher observed:

"Junior high is when students really start questioning their religious identity, especially when they're minorities in their schools. Having peers who share their faith creates a safe space to explore these questions together." (Teacher B, SMB Dhamma Sasana)

The predominance of intrinsic motivation among high school students aligns with Al-Said's (2023) self-determination theory applications. A novel contribution of this study is identifying how specific Buddhist concepts—particularly mindfulness practices and compassion-focused activities—accelerate the transition to intrinsic motivation, creating practical pathways for educators to cultivate self-directed religious learning.

The study also contributes methodologically to understanding multi-level religious education. The identified motivational patterns suggest that SMB programs should adopt differentiated approaches based on developmental stages while maintaining cohesive spiritual frameworks. This extends Darani et al.'s (2023) findings on teacher creativity in SMB by providing a structured developmental model for adapting teaching strategies across educational levels. This approach aligns with Jackson's (2021) research on teaching about religions in intercultural education, which emphasizes the importance of age-appropriate pedagogical strategies that acknowledge students' developmental stages while maintaining conceptual integrity across educational levels.

Regarding technology integration, this study builds upon Mujiyanto et al.'s (2022) research on audiovisual media in SMB by demonstrating how technological needs evolve with educational level. Rather than treating technology as a uniform motivational tool, this research reveals stage-appropriate applications—from interactive storytelling for elementary students to philosophical exploration platforms for high school students.

The importance of socio-cultural context in Buddhist education supports Sadtyadi's (2020) arguments for contextualizing religious education. This study extends his work by demonstrating specific mechanisms through which local values facilitate understanding of Buddhist concepts across different age groups. These connections were particularly valuable at transitional stages, helping students bridge concrete and abstract understandings of spiritual concepts.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the small sample size (N=38), while representing the complete population of Buddhist Sunday School students in Wonogiri Regency, limits the generalizability of findings to broader contexts. The regional specificity of the sample means results may not apply to SMBs in more urban or different cultural settings where educational resources and community characteristics differ.

Second, the absence of a control group makes it difficult to determine if the observed motivational patterns are unique to Buddhist religious education or represent general developmental trends across religious and secular education contexts. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures motivational dynamics at a specific point in time rather than tracking individual students' motivational development longitudinally.

The use of self-reported data, despite triangulation methods, introduces potential social desirability bias, particularly in religious education contexts where expressing disinterest might be

perceived negatively. Finally, while the study identified correlational relationships between motivational factors and learning enthusiasm, causal relationships cannot be definitively established without experimental interventions specifically targeting each motivational factor.

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides important insights into the varying motivational patterns among students in Buddhist Sunday Schools across different educational levels. The findings show a clear developmental trend: elementary students are mainly driven by extrinsic motivation ($R^2 = 0.72-0.77$), junior high students begin to balance extrinsic and intrinsic factors ($R^2 = 0.46-0.52$), and high school students are largely motivated by intrinsic factors ($R^2 = 0.61-0.67$). These results highlight the need for age-appropriate motivational strategies—ranging from visual aids and parental support for younger students, to identity exploration and peer engagement in adolescence, and deeper philosophical and service-based learning for older students. While the study offers practical guidance for designing more effective and developmentally aligned instructional methods in religious education, it is limited by its cross-sectional nature and specific cultural context, which may affect broader applicability. Future research should adopt longitudinal and intervention-based designs to explore the lasting impact of these strategies, and conduct comparative studies across various religious traditions to identify universal and context-specific trends. Such efforts will deepen our understanding of spiritual motivation and support the development of more engaging, lifelong religious education programs for youth.

Conflicts of Interest: “The authors declare no conflict of interest.”

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