

Gender-Neutral Pathways to Positive Behavior: Investigating the Role of Self-Actualisation and Academic Achievement in Secondary Education

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Abstract

Self-actualisation and positive behaviour play a principal role in life, especially among students, enabling them to overcome challenges. This study aimed to explore the comparison of self-actualisation between genders and the relationship between self-actualisation scores and academic achievement in producing positive behaviour. A total of 259 secondary-level students, comprising 125 males and 134 females, participated in this quantitative study. Questionnaires were distributed to collect data, and correlation and t-test analyses were conducted. The findings indicated that there was no significant difference in self-actualisation between genders and academic achievement in producing positive behaviour. This indicates that the self-development programs and psychological interventions in schools are important for creating an environment that supports personal growth without gender bias. Similarly, the lack of a significant difference between academic achievement and self-actualization suggests that academic factors are not the only ones influencing students' positive behavior. Instead, other elements, such as emotional support, social involvement, and extracurricular experiences, may play a greater role in shaping students' behavior.

Keywords: academic achievement, educational environments, gender, positive behavior, psychological interventions, self-actualisation, social involvement



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1. Introduction

In recent years, social issues among teenagers have become a growing concern in Brunei Darussalam (Anshari et al., 2016; Musa & Idris, 2020). It is increasingly important to maintain the national philosophy of Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) (Sahari & Yahaia, 2018) to avoid the emergence of social issues among

teenagers, which can negatively impact their self-actualisation (Glaser et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2017; Schoofs et al., 2022). The MIB philosophy promotes the integration of religion, culture, and politics in daily life, which is deemed essential to preserving Brunei's national identity and maintaining social harmony. However, the increase in social

problems among teenagers suggests that there is a gap between the national philosophy and the way of life of some adolescents. This situation can have adverse effects on the self-actualisation of individuals, which may lead to negative behaviours such as substance abuse, vandalism, truancy, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Some studies found that the school climate, teaching competence, and the presence of students' non-cognitive skills have a very significant relationship with the student behaviour outcome (Aisyah et al., 2022; Aisyah & Sofiah, 2021; Kwee Leng & Buang, 2019; Wahyuni & Aisyah, 2020; Zynuddin et al., 2023).

It is important to explore the factors that contribute to the positive behaviour of students and their ability to overcome challenges in their lives. One of these factors is focusing on their self-actualisation, which is considered a key factor that may influence positive behaviour among students. Self-actualisation is defined as the process of fulfilling one's potential and becoming the best version of one-self (Maslow, 1943). It is essential for students to develop a high level of self-actualisation in order to achieve their goals and overcome challenges in their academic and personal lives.

Attitude influences each individual student (Kurniawan et al., 2023; Prayitno et al., 2019; Rasid & Buang, 2019). The success of an individual depends on their attitude (Ajzen, 2011; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Sturm & Bohndick, 2021). A positive attitude enables an individual to have high self-confidence and adapt easily to their surroundings (Gholamnejad et al., 2019; Sturm & Bohndick, 2021). Furthermore, to achieve a high level of self-actualisation, individuals must constantly self-reflect, which can be done through observation and self-experience, in addition to academic pursuits.

Previous studies have explored the relationship between self-actualisation and academic achievement (Aljaser, 2019; Grudistova et al., 2019; Rotar, 2022) as well as the differences in self-actualisation between genders (Kingsbury & Heylighen, 2019; Paliwal et al., 2023). However, there is limited research on the relationship between self-actualisation and positive behaviour among students in Brunei Darussalam. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the relationship between self-actualisation and positive behaviour among secondary school students in Brunei Darussalam.

The study emphasizes the importance of promoting self-actualisation and positive behaviour among teenagers. By doing so, a generation of individuals who are not only educated and skilled but also have a good quality of life and are resilient can be created. It is crucial to align the way of life of adolescents with the national philosophy of MIB to ensure the preservation of Brunei's national identity and social harmony.

Thus, this study aims to examine the relationship between self-actualisation and positive behaviour among secondary school students in Brunei Darussalam, with a focus on gender differences and academic achievement. By understanding the factors that contribute to positive behaviour among students, policymakers and educators can develop strategies to promote self-actualisation and positive behaviour among students, ultimately leading to a more educated, skilled, and resilient population.

Individual behaviour is partially determined by an individual's self-concept (Saputro & Sugiarti, 2021), which refers to the cognitive and affective beliefs an individual hold about themselves, including their strengths, potentials, weaknesses, and personality traits. Through their self-concept,

individuals can predict their likelihood of success or failure in various situations (Lu et al., 2017). The development of self-concept is influenced by a range of factors, including an individual's childhood experiences and their immediate environment, both of which play a crucial role in shaping an individual's self-concept (Lohbeck et al., 2021). Given the important role of self-concept in shaping individual behaviour, understanding the factors that contribute to the development of a positive self-concept is essential for promoting positive behaviour and well-being.

The concept of self-actualisation is closely related to an individual's self-concept, as the former refers to the process of fulfilling one's potential and becoming the best version of oneself (Maslow, 1943). In other words, self-actualisation is crucial in developing a positive self-concept and promoting positive behaviour and well-being. Individuals who have achieved a high level of self-actualisation have a strong sense of self-worth, which is an essential aspect of a positive self-concept (Gopinath, 2021). Moreover, the development of self-actualisation is influenced by various factors such as personal experiences, education, and cultural and social environments (Grudistova et al., 2019; Rotar, 2022).

As Maslow stated, self-actualisation is the final stage of psychological development that can be achieved when all the basic and mental needs are fulfilled (Maslow, 1970; McLeod, 2018). Self-actualisation also activates all capacities of the organism. Expressing one's creativity, seeking spiritual enlightenment, pursuing knowledge, and desiring to contribute to society are all examples of self-actualisation. Therefore, understanding the relationship between self-actualisation and self-concept can provide insight into how to promote positive behaviour and well-being among individuals, particularly among

teenagers who are at a crucial stage in their personal and academic development.

a. Self-Actualisation

Self-actualisation is a fundamental concept in psychology, referring to the process of fulfilling one's potential and becoming the best version of oneself (Maslow, 1943). This process is continuous, as individuals strive to fulfill their potential throughout their lives. Self-actualisation involves the exploring and realizing of one's unique talents, abilities, and desires, leading to a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Research has consistently shown that self-actualisation is closely linked to various aspects of well-being, including higher levels of life satisfaction, happiness, and overall psychological functioning (Compton, 2018; Kaufman, 2018). Self-actualized individuals experience greater inner peace, authenticity, and satisfaction in their daily lives. They possess a strong sense of identity and self-awareness, enabling them to confront challenges and make choices that align with their values and aspirations. Ryan & Deci (2018) emphasized the role of self-discovery and self-reflection in the path to self-actualisation, involving the exploration of one's deepest desires, values, and beliefs. This process requires a deep understanding of oneself, including strengths and weaknesses.

Moreover, cultivating self-actualisation has broader social implications. Self-actualized individuals are more likely to contribute positively to their communities, pursuing endeavors that benefit not only themselves but also others. Consequently, self-actualisation is closely connected to pro-social behaviour, empathy, and a sense of connection with others (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006, 2018). This fosters the development of a compassionate and harmonious society, wherein individuals

strive for self-actualisation while also promoting the well-being of others.

In the field of education, integrating the principles of self-actualisation can foster a more holistic approach to learning and support students' personal growth. Educational systems that prioritize self-actualisation recognize the significance of individuality and uniqueness in students. By encouraging students to explore and maximize their passions, interests, and talents, these systems help them develop a sense of identity and purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2018; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). Educational environments that provide opportunities for self-expression and self-discovery empower students to become active participants in their own learning journeys.

Self-actualisation in education also involves creating a supportive and nurturing atmosphere where students feel safe to take risks, accept challenges, and cultivate a growth mindset (Nofle & Robins, 2007). Educators play a crucial role in promoting self-actualisation by fostering autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and a sense of competence in students. When students are motivated by their own interests and passions, they are more likely to engage actively in the learning process and exhibit a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Ryan & Deci, 2018; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018).

By aligning the educational experience with students' individual needs and aspirations, educators can foster a sense of purpose and relevance, leading to improved academic outcomes. Furthermore, an education that focuses on self-actualisation equips students with essential life skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and resilience. These skills enable students to navigate the complexities of the modern world and adapt to the ever-changing challenges they may face. Nurturing self-actualisation in

education empowers students to become life-long learners and active contributors to society.

b. Positive Behaviour

Individuals' psychological and societal growth depends on their ability to behave positively. Pappas et al. (2018) assert that a person's past experiences can be utilized as a means of learning, monitoring, and acquiring constructive conduct. As behaviour is strongly influenced by one's personality, attitude plays a crucial role in determining how individuals behave (Ajzen, 2011; Allport, 1935). Attitude, in turn, refers to the subjective evaluation of values and is influenced by socio-cultural factors, perceptions, and previous experiences (Allport, 1935; Allport & Lindzey, 1954; Fazio, 2007). It is shaped by the socio-cultural environment in which an individual is raised, reflecting their beliefs, values, and judgments. Therefore, attitudes are not only subjective but also influenced by geographical aspects and cultural contexts.

Teachers sometimes blame students' mistakes on bad habits like laziness and lack of enthusiasm in a learning environment. According to Allport & Lindzey (1954), attitude is the mental preparation and structured neurons gained by experience that has a dynamic impact on a person's response. Therefore, it is clear that attitude is acquired through the individuals in one's immediate environment, and experience also has a significant impact. A person willing to exploit their potential for personal improvement in a positive direction also has a positive attitude. Positive attitudes and behaviours indicate cognitive activity, and successful people frequently act on their thoughts (Malinowska-Cieřlik et al., 2019).

Research studies show positive behaviour dramatically affects a person's well-being, social connections, and academic success (Verma, 2022). According to Arslan &

Zincirli (2020), pupils who report higher subjective well-being demonstrate more effective learning. Tendhar & Mesquita (2020), positive behaviour is also linked to increased resilience in the face of stress and adversity. Therefore, encouraging individuals to behave positively is crucial to advancing their well-being and success.

Positive reinforcement, which entails praising people for their constructive acts and behaviours, is one strategy for encouraging positive conduct in people (Skinner, 1953) in (Budiman, 2017). Positive reinforcement effectively encourages individuals to behave positively, particularly in educational contexts (Scott & Landrum, 2020). To motivate students to exhibit positive behaviour, such as turning in assignments on time or participating in class discussions, teachers might utilize positive reinforcement.

Schools play a crucial role in ensuring students ensuring that students develop positive attitudes or behaviors towards certain matters in their lives (Getie, 2020). Teachers are among the personnel who play an important role in guiding the students to good akhlaq. Hence, teachers should have good behaviour so that they can be the role model to others as well as to give a positive image to their teaching profession.

According to numerous studies, good teachers are those who have good imagination, know how to motivate their students, creative in using various strategies in their lessons, utilize new materials and activities in their teaching-learning process (Elias & Yaakub, 2006; Mardati et al., 2024; Widodo et al., 2023; Yarudin et al., 2022; Yusmaliana et al., 2022, 2023, 2024; Yusmaliana & Suyadi, 2019; Yusmaliana & Widodo, 2019; Zakaria & Yusmaliana, 2023). Creating a happy and encouraging environment is another aspect of promoting positive behavior.

This entails encouraging open communication, fostering positive relationships between people, and giving people the tools and resources they need to succeed (Aisyah et al., 2020; Astuti et al., 2022; Martos Humán et al., 2022; Purnomo et al., 2022). According to research, promoting a happy environment can boost social interactions, academic achievement, and overall well-being (Elmi, 2020).

The growth of social-emotional learning (SEL) abilities is crucial in encouraging healthy behaviour. According to Hymel et al. (2017), SEL entails the development of capabilities linked to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making. Additionally, addressing and preventing destructive behaviours, such as bullying and hostility, encourages positive behaviour. Therefore, fostering positive behaviour in individuals is essential to create a secure and inclusive environment that addresses negative and promotes positive behaviours.

Positive behaviour is a norm for all human beings in all situations and conditions (Gross & Vostroknutov, 2022; Kamijo et al., 2020), even though the behaviour may differ from one individual to the other. Nevertheless, one common point is that there are general criteria that everyone can learn, enhance, and practice. One of the requirements is to possess positive behaviours, such as being patient, hardworking, tolerant, and caring, which is beneficial for people and at the same time able to help others in need, share, and help people solve their problems. People are constantly tested with various issues and matters; thus, when having a positive attitude, they will be able to face the future no matter what obstacles come ahead, they will try their best to solve the problems calmly (Malinowska-Cieřlik et al., 2019). Conversely, those with a negative attitude will

always think negatively of themselves and believe that they are not able to succeed or have any good potential like others. Positive behaviour is, therefore, crucial for both personal and social growth. It can be discovered through observation and inquiry into a person's past. Positive reinforcement, a positive and supportive atmosphere, enhancing social-emotional learning abilities, and addressing destructive behaviours are just a few methods for encouraging positive conduct in people. People can succeed in many areas of their lives and significantly contribute to their communities' well-being by encouraging constructive behaviour.

Eighty-five percent of one's achievement depends on their attitude, and only 15 percent depends on their creativity (Abdullah, 2008). Positive or negative attitude can help to shape future attitudes and the attitudes portrayed reflect an individual's personality (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2002). According to counseling cases in secondary schools, most students struggle to concentrate during lessons, sleep during class, fail to submit their assignments on time, skip school, experience stress, and have inconsistent attendance (Dembo et al., 2016; Gubbels et al., 2019; Horanicova et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2020; Rahiminia et al., 2020). Hence, this study aims to investigate whether the mentioned issues are related to the students' self-actualisation.

Researches (Anjum et al., 2022; Kaczmarek & Trambacz-Oleszak, 2021; Nagabharana et al., 2021; van Loon et al., 2020) have shown that most teenagers have high levels of stress. This is not surprising, as with the advent of new technologies, teenagers tend to follow and take other people as their role models (Ciranka & van den Bos, 2019; Croes & Bartels, 2021; Hurd et al., 2009; Kearney & Levine, 2020; Nakanishi et al., 2019; Van Hoorn et al., 2017). There are times when they face conflicts within themselves or with others (Horanicova et al., 2022).

The first educators of a child are the parents. As much as parents may want to, they cannot solve their child's social problems. They probably do not understand the intricacies of the child's social world enough to even suggest a good solution. But even if they could solve their child's problem, they should not try to. To develop a healthy sense of self as a capable person, a child needs to learn how to solve problems on their own (Leerkes et al., 2011). For example, both parents and teachers can play a crucial role in providing teenagers with emotional support and teaching them how to solve problems (Ceka & Murati, 2016; Hoferichter et al., 2021; Stern & Hertel, 2022). Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this study.

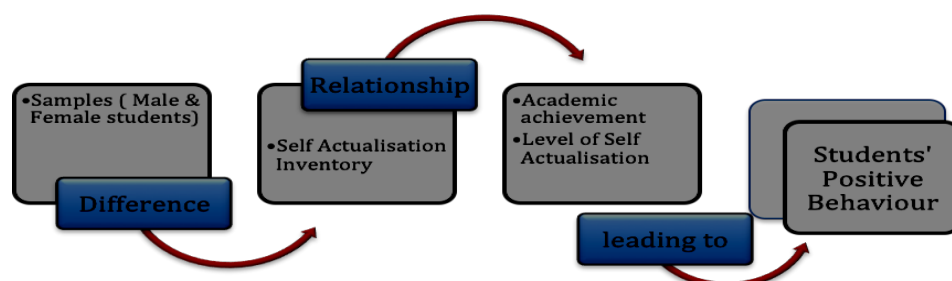


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

2. Methods

This is a descriptive study that uses inferential statistics for data analysis.

Correlational statistic were used to see the relationship of the level of self-actualisation and the students' academic achievement.

Basically, if students perform well in their academically, this is an indication that they have positive behaviours which contribute to high level of self-actualisation.

a. Research Objectives

In this research, the researcher aims:

1. To investigate the level of self-actualisation of the secondary school students based on their gender; and
2. To investigate the correlation value between the level of self-actualisation and their academic performance.

b. Research Questions

1. Is there any significant level of self-actualisation among the secondary school students based on their gender?
2. Is there any correlation value between the level of self-actualisation and their academic performance in building their positive attitude?

c. Research Instrument

For this study, the researcher used the Self Actualisation Inventory by Jones & Crandall (1986). This inventory is a short-form measure of self-actualisation and is based primarily on modified items from the Personal Orientation Inventory (LeMay & Damm, 1968), which is the most widely accepted measure of self-actualisation. Additionally, the researcher used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory to contextualize the study and explain how needs can be

identified and how individuals might start working toward their own self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2018). There are 30 items in the inventory representing five dimensions (based on the Maslow Theory) namely, physiological needs, security, love (social), self-esteem and self-actualisation. The researcher also added another dimension, the spiritual dimension which is adapted from the Augustina's Emotional Spiritual Quotient and these items are modified according to the national philosophy of Melayu Islam Beraja (also known as Malay Islamic Monarchy, MIB) (Madin et al., 2021). Scales used in the questionnaire are a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The questionnaire for this study has been validated by three experts in the field and a pilot test was conducted, obtaining 0.793 as the reliability value for the instrument.

3. Result and Discussion

This part of the paper will outline the results of the study in answering the research questions proposed.

a. Background of the Respondents

This study involved two government secondary schools and both of which are mixed-gender (male and female) schools.

As shown in Table 1, the respondents from School consisted of 48% (N=125) male and 52 % (N=134) female students. The total number of respondents was 259, of which 252 were in Year 11 and only 7 were in Year 10.

Table 1. Demographic of the respondents: Gender and School Type

No.	Gender	Number	Percentage
1	Male	125	48
2	Female	134	52

The demographic profile presented in Table 1 indicates that the respondents were distributed relatively evenly across gender

groups, with female students slightly outnumbering male students. This balanced composition provides an appropriate basis for

conducting comparative analyses between male and female participants while minimizing the potential influence of unequal group sizes on the statistical findings. Moreover, the inclusion of respondents from government secondary schools ensures that the data represent students who share comparable educational settings and learning environments. Such

demographic characteristics enhance the credibility of the subsequent analyses by providing a sufficiently balanced sample for examining the relationship between gender, self-actualisation, and students' positive behaviour within the context of secondary education.

Table 2. Percentages of Students' Achievement in the First Term

Marks	Number	Percentage
70-79	3	1.2
60-69	6	2.0
50-59	51	20
40-49	101	39
0-39	98	38
Total	259	100

b. Level of Self-actualisation Among the Students: Gender Wise

Research instrument used has six dimensions namely the physiological needs, security needs, love, social, spiritual and self-actualisation. Table 3 shows the level of self-actualisation arranged from the highest to the lowest (ascending order). It can be observed that the Spiritual Needs dimension scored the highest percentage and the needs for love showed the minimum percentage.

Results showed that the spiritual dimension in self-actualisation scored the highest. This supported the study done by [Che Su et al., 2010](#); [Mu'awanah et al., 2020](#); [Satpathy & Samanta, 2022](#) whereby they believed that the spiritual dimension that the students possess can aid them in making decisions that help them become better human beings.

These findings suggest that spiritual well-being is an important aspect of self-

actualisation for students, influencing their overall life satisfaction and moral development.

Further, it was observed that the Love Needs dimension had the lowest percentage. This dimension, according to Maslow, shows that an individual needs another individual as friends, partners, and acquaintance, neighbours and so forth. Hence, if this dimension has a low percentage, this can give an indication that the students have disoriented personalities, potentially resulting in aggressive or antisocial behavior ([Mohamad & Hashim, 2011](#); [Taormina & Gao, 2013](#); [Vila, 2021](#)).

This implies the need for greater emotional support and education regarding interpersonal relationships. Addressing this gap has the potential to reduce aggressive and antisocial behaviour, improve flow and emphasis on the conclusion.

Table 3. Level of Self-Actualisation (6 dimensions)

No.	Dimensions	Percentage
1	Spiritual	69
2	Social Needs	65.4
3	Physiological Needs	64
4	Security	48

No.	Dimensions	Percentage
5	Self-Actualisation	40
6	Love	31.4

The descriptive analysis of the six dimensions of self-actualisation provides a general understanding of students' psychological and personal development. However, these descriptive findings alone do not explain whether self-actualisation differs across demographic characteristics, particularly gender. Given that gender has frequently been identified as a potential factor influencing psychological

development and behavioural outcomes, it is important to examine whether male and female students exhibit different levels of self-actualisation. Therefore, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean self-actualisation scores between the two gender groups, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Difference on the Self-Actualisation Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	S.D	Df	T	Sig
Male	125	93.5	5.5	257	-0.009	0.993
Female	134	93.5	4.5			

Although self-actualisation can be influenced by gender, as evidenced by various studies such as Piragasam (2018) which found that male gifted students tend to show higher levels of self-actualisation compared to female students, and the research by Okech & Renée Chambers (2012) which found that among Black university students, females reported higher levels of self-actualisation than males. The findings of this study suggest that there may be other factors that affect students' levels of self-actualisation in Brunei Darussalam. In other words, it was found that the concept of self-actualisation was found to be more influenced by individual and spiritual factors rather than universally consistent factors like gender differences. This is consistent with the research on secondary school students conducted by Singh (2016), which also found no significant gender differences in self-actualisation.

c. Correlation between Self Actualisation Level and Students' Academic Achievement

This section aims to answer the second research question posed: "Is there any correlation between the level of self-actualisation and the academic performance in building the students' positive attitudes?"

Data analysis showed that no significant difference was found between the level of self-actualisation and students' academic achievement. Schools in similar environments do not appear to affect the level of self-actualisation among students. Nevertheless, schools in the rural areas may contribute to some differences in students' perspectives due to lack of facilities, recreational places and so forth. According to Che Su et al. (2010), the success of an institution in implementing social values as well as the relationship between one individual to the other can affect the development of the teenagers.

Table 5 shows the correlation level between self-actualisation and students' academic performance in shaping positive attitude was not found to be significant ($p=0.470$; $p>0.05$). This may be caused by the

inability of respondents to fulfil the basic needs according to the Maslow hierarchy. According to Maslow, individuals must fulfill their basic needs before progressing to higher

levels. If basic needs are unmet, it becomes difficult for them to fulfill other higher-level needs.

Table 5. Correlation between the Level of Self-Actualisation and Students' Academic Achievement

	Value	Df	Significant
Pearson	3.552	4	0.470
Total	258		

On the whole, data analysis showed that attitude, self-actualisation and students' academic achievement do not have a significant relationship with one another. It can be assumed that each component plays its own role in contributing and motivating positive behaviour or attitude among the students.

Even though the relationship is not significant, it is ultimately up to the students to plan and achieve their objectives in life, whether they want to prioritise their academic or focus on maintaining a positive attitude in order to achieve their self-actualisation. Therefore, schools need programs that can foster autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and a sense of competence in students (Ryan & Deci, 2018; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018), so that they feel safe taking risks, accepting challenges, and developing a growth mindset (Nofle & Robins, 2007) for their future.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, self-actualisation plays important role in shaping positive behaviour of an individual and this aspect should not be taken lightly. A high level of self-actualization can indirectly help individuals to be more motivated and positive thinking. In the context of secondary school students, a high level of self-actualization can help them achieve better academic results because they will be more motivated to be successful and they will be stronger in not involving

themselves with negative activities. Of course, there could be other factors contributing to the positive behaviors of students and having high self-actualisation level is just one of them.

As an interpretation of the results of this study, it is concluded that there is a gender balance in self-actualization where both males and females have the same ability to actualize themselves. Furthermore, this shows that self-development and psychological interventions applied in schools have successfully created an environment that supports personal growth without gender bias.

Moreover, the results showing no significant difference between academic achievement and self-actualization indicates that academic factors are not the only significant influences on students' positive behavior. This suggests that other elements, such as emotional support, social involvement, and extracurricular experiences, may play a greater role in shaping students' behavior.

These findings can be used to design more inclusive educational programs that focus not only on academic achievement but also on the development of social and emotional skills. Such programs can help students develop strong self-confidence and self-esteem, which in turn encourages positive behavior.

5. Authors Contribution

Gamal Abdul Nasir Zakaria: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft; **Desfa Yusmaliana:** Methodology, Writing – Review & Editing; **Zaimah Hj Abdullah:** Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing; **Mussa Saidi Abubakari:** Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing; **Ibrahim Narongrakshakhet:** Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing; **Barot Amonov:** Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing.

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