

The Level of Motivation Among Tahfiz Students in an Accelerated Program (Fast Track Spm) At a Private Secondary School

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ABSTRACT

More than 1,000 *Tahfiz* institutions registered with the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) are private, reflecting a high number of students in the private sector. One of the significant obstacles faced by private *Tahfiz* institutions (PTIs) is that their certificates are generally internal rather than formally recognized at higher levels. In an effort to provide inclusive educational opportunities, an SPM-accredited program has been introduced for *Tahfiz* students. The Fast Track SPM (FTSPM) program was introduced in 2012 and has since expanded to several PTIs, private academic schools, and local universities. Previous studies have left a gap in understanding how PTI students respond holistically to the implementation of FTSPM, with prior studies conducted focusing primarily on pedagogical approaches in selected subjects. This study aims to address this gap by examining students' acceptance in relation to their intrinsic motivation levels, guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This study employs an exploratory quantitative research design and was conducted at a private school in Muar. A total of 94 respondents participated in the survey, providing evidence that the program participants predominantly came from a *Tahfiz* background across various age groups. Overall, the findings indicate high satisfaction and low frustration regarding autonomy, relatedness, and novelty, as well as a moderate level of frustration in the competency domain, suggesting that the FTSPM program has effectively fulfilled their basic psychological needs. The program successfully fostered intrinsic motivation among the respondents, and the implementation should continue with attention to pedagogical or instructional strategies to address their lack of confidence in their competence.

Keywords: Fast Track SPM (FTSPM), *Tahfiz* students, intrinsic motivation, accelerated education, Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of *Tahfiz* education began during the early period of Islam's dissemination. Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the Malays acquired knowledge of Islam through two primary sources: Quranic teachers in their villages and the Sayyid lineage, regarded as a source of religious scholars and leaders (Ahmad & Yaacob, 2023). Along with the positive progression of Quranic education, a more systematic system of learning gradually developed within mosques, *surau*, and royal palaces, marking an important phase in the codification of Islamic education in the country (Ahmad & Yaacob, 2023).

According to Ismail (2018), the establishment of the first formal *Tahfiz* institution in Malaysia, located at *Masjid Negara*, Kuala Lumpur, known as *Kelas Pengajian Al-Quran dan Ilmu Qiraat*, was initiated by the late former Prime Minister, *Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj*, in 1966. It was later upgraded to *Darul Quran* (DQ) in 1988, which has since become the central reference center for *Tahfiz* education in the country (Ismail, 2018). The systematic structures of Quranic studies and memorization have expanded to include the establishment of state government institutions and, over time, the private education sector, due to their growing popularity and demand (Ismail, 2018).

Currently, the *Tahfiz* education system is divided into three different categories, which are (1) *Tahfiz* institutions under the administration of the federal government, (2) institutions managed by state governments, and (3) private *Tahfiz* institutions (Ismail, 2018; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2021). Private *Tahfiz* institutions are established and managed by individuals, companies, non-governmental organizations (NGO's), and political bodies, resulting in diverse streams and directions, depending on the vision and approach outlined by their respective founders (Yahaya et al., 2018; Ahmad Othman & Anas, 2020).

According to data collected from the official website of the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM), there are 1,245 *Tahfiz* institutions registered nationwide (SIMPENI, 2021). Table 1 presents the institutions classified according to type and education level (JAKIM, 2021). More than 1,000 are private institutions, reflecting a high number of students enrolled in the private sector. Furthermore, media reports suggest that numerous *Tahfiz* institutions operate without proper registration due to various factors, leaving a considerable number of students unaccounted for (Bernama, 2025). This situation highlights the urgent need for stringent oversight of these institutions' management and operations. Insufficient governance could compromise educational quality and impede students in the private sector from achieving their desired learning outcomes and future opportunities.

Table 1. Classification of *Tahfiz* Institutions (SIMPENI, 2021)

Type of <i>Tahfiz</i> Institution	Quantity
State Maahad <i>Tahfiz</i> (Secondary)	19
State Maahad <i>Tahfiz</i> (Primary & Secondary)	1
Private Maahad <i>Tahfiz</i> (Secondary)	191
Private Maahad <i>Tahfiz</i> (Primary & Secondary)	1010
Private Maahad <i>Tahfiz</i> (primary)	24

Problem Statement

Tahfiz education aims to produce a generation that is emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually mature, in line with the aspirations of *ummah* development (Abdullah et al., 2017; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2021). Progressively, the development of *Tahfiz* education has begun to integrate Quranic studies into the academic curriculum of the mainstream education system, further enhancing the quality of the *Tahfiz* education landscape (Ismail, 2018; JAKIM, 2023). However, the private *Tahfiz* institutions (PTIs) face numerous challenges in maintaining a balanced integration of Islamic or Quranic education with the current academic curriculum, while adapting to ongoing developments in the national education system (Abdul Latiff & Jaafar, 2024).

Among the significant obstacles faced by the private *Tahfiz* institutions (PTIs) are the certification of their students. According to Ismail (2016) and Abdul Latiff and Jaafar (2024), the certificates issued by the PTIs are generally internal certifications without formal recognition at higher levels. The insight parallels studies by Samadi et al. (2022) and Abdul Latiff and Jaafar (2024), which urged stakeholders to develop a systematic framework for recognition and certification of *Tahfiz* education, encompassing both government and private institutions, and highlighted implications that may affect the future of *Tahfiz* students.

Currently, the only formal government-accredited certification available for *Tahfiz* students is offered by Darul Quran (DQ). Students from Pusat *Tahfiz* (PTIs) must undertake a separate examination, known as the *Sijil Tahfiz Malaysia* (STM), administered by DQ, to achieve official recognition and earn the title of Al-Hafiz (Darul Quran, n.d.). This certification is recognized both nationally and internationally, enabling students to gain admission to tertiary educational institutions or universities. However, the accreditation for the *Sijil Tahfiz Malaysia* (STM) is restricted to those who have memorized 30 Juz' of the Quran, leaving a gap as it falls short of comprehensively accommodating all students enrolled in PTIs (Darul Quran, n.d.).

Incorporating uniform certification from the mainstream education system is an ideal measure to equip the PTI students with formal credentials. To address this gap, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced *the Program Intervensi Tahfiz Swasta, which enables Tahfiz students aged 17 from PTIs to enroll in government schools and sit for the SPM examination* (MOE, 2021). PTIs have also implemented the *Modul Tahfiz Akademik*, allowing students aged 17 years and above to attend academic classes and register as private candidates for the SPM examination (Samadi & Hashim, 2022; Hashim & Abdul Rahim, 2019; Haneefa et al., 2023).

While this approach appears suitable for addressing current issues, it comes at the expense of quality education and foundational knowledge. The program implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) has so far been limited to a small number of schools and students (Abdul Kadir, 2019). Meanwhile, the initiatives undertaken by PTIs are managed independently by their respective administrations, raising concerns about their capacity and capability to provide quality education to students who have been excluded from the mainstream system for a specific period (Abd Razak, 2020). As private entities, PTIs fall beyond direct ministerial affiliation because they are registered under a different department (JAKIM, 2021). This governance gap may weaken instructional oversight and undermine students' preparation for *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM).

Media reports indicate that a proposal has been put forth at the ministerial level to allow Tahfiz students to gain admission to local universities through the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM) under the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) agenda (Jambun, 2025). The TVET-SKM pathway provides an alternative route to higher education, addressing concerns that Tahfiz students may lack the foundational knowledge needed for the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) due to their exclusion from the mainstream academic system. While this initiative is presented as inclusive, it has sparked considerable public debate, with critics questioning its potential effects on educational quality and student outcomes. Stakeholders caution that, if implemented without stringent oversight and thorough planning, it could compromise national education standards (Jambun, 2025).

To facilitate inclusive educational opportunities, an alternative pathway to *the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) has been introduced for students at private Tahfiz institutions (*PTIs*) seeking formal recognition. The Fast Track SPM (FTSPM) program was introduced in 2012 by Universiti Selangor (UniSel) in collaboration with *Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Selangor* (YAPIS) (Abd Rahim, 2015, 2017). The success of this program has prompted its expansion to several PTIs, private academic schools, and local universities (Abd Rahim, 2015, 2017). The program offers PTI students an accelerated learning pathway that prepares them for the SPM examination in a shorter time. It combines core academic subjects with selected electives tailored to align with the educational background of students in *Tahfiz* (Abd Rahim, 2015, 2017).

Although the implementation has been ongoing for more than a decade, studies and empirical evidence on students' outcomes and experiences remain underexplored or in their infancy. Based on the researcher's observation, FTSPM programs have been offered by private schools, local universities, and PTIs by compressing two years of upper secondary education from the mainstream system into a 10 to 12-month period using an accelerated learning format (Abd Rahim, 2017; Jaafar et al., 2019; Fadzil et al., 2020). Although it is effective within a shorter timeframe and accessible to students aged 17 and older, these students often face heavy academic workloads, have limited foundational knowledge, and find it challenging to adapt to the new academic system compared with their *Tahfiz* background (Abd Rahim, 2017).

In addition, most existing research on the program has been conducted by researchers from local universities that offer the program themselves, with a focus primarily on pedagogical approaches in selective subjects such as Arabic, English, and History (Jaafar et al., 2019; Fadzil et al., 2020; Ahmad Zahidi et al., 2021; Abdul Halim et al., 2022; Fadzil et al., 2024; Ismady et al., 2024). This tendency seems primarily influenced by universities' stronger research capabilities, better access to respondents, and more substantial resources for conducting empirical studies (Hassan et al., 2024). While such a focus is valuable, it raises concerns that it may unduly emphasize topics related to Tahfiz students' Quranic memorization, potentially neglecting a broader array of educational or scholarly inquiries.

Extant literature exhibits a critical gap in understanding how private Tahfiz institutions (PTIs) adapt holistically to implementing the *Dasar Pendidikan Tahfiz Negara* (DPTN) or a relevant framework. To address this lacuna, this study examines the implementation of the *Fast Track Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (FTSPM) program within a Ministry of Education (MOE) registered private school. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this research investigates students' intrinsic motivation by evaluating how their experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, or the frustration thereof, influence engagement, persistence, and satisfaction within an accelerated academic context. Furthermore, this study evaluates the perceived novelty of the FTSPM program through firsthand student experiences, offering empirical insights to strengthen existing accelerated religious-secular curricula.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the educational context, students' motivation and acceptance of an educational program significantly influence the attainment of learning goals, sustained engagement in learning activities, and overall academic performance (Romero-Frías et al., 2020). Accordingly, this section is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which offers a robust psychological framework for understanding how various forms of motivation, particularly intrinsic and extrinsic regulation, influence learners' engagement, persistence, and educational outcomes.

Elements of Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a psychological theory that relates to motivation and personality development, explaining how individuals interact with their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT, the optimal level of motivation, deep engagement in activities, and overall well-being of individuals depend on the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competency, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Autonomy refers to an individual's sense of volition and the perception that their actions align with personal choices and preferences (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Within SDT, autonomy does not imply independence; it reflects an individual's intention to engage in an activity based on their interests and values, rather than on internal or external pressure (Koestner & Holding, 2020).

Next, competency refers to an individual's confidence in effectively mastering tasks or challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Satisfaction of this need is associated with intrinsic motivation as individuals feel capable of engaging in a task and achieving desired results (Elliot, Dweck, & Yeager, 2018).

Relatedness refers to the individual's feeling of connectedness and the extent to which interactions and relationships with others provide a sense of being valued and supported by their surroundings. According to Chiu (2022), perceived relatedness significantly influences students' behaviour as they adapt to unfamiliar learning environments. In the context of the FTSPM program, this psychological need is particularly critical, as students must readjust to a formal academic system while preparing for the high-stakes SPM examination.

Within the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework, novelty is emerging as an essential subscale to be measured alongside autonomy, competence, and relatedness, all of which contribute to fostering intrinsic motivation in students (González-Cutre et al., 2016; Stoa & Chu, 2023). Novelty refers to the goal of offering students a new experience (Conesa & Duñabeitia, 2021). By measuring this component, the program can be evaluated as new and different, thus satisfying their psychological need.

SDT underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation in individuals, defined as engagement in activities driven by genuine interest and enjoyment that arise naturally. By fulfilling the basic psychological needs and forming intrinsic motivation, an activity or task undertaken by an individual becomes meaningful and personally satisfying (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Romero-Frías et al., 2020). This contrasts with extrinsic motivation, which relies on external rewards such as praise, grades, or social pressure. This form of motivation generally becomes less

stable and may decline the individual's engagement if these external factors become irrelevant or removed (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The framework has also been extensively used as a practical tool for assessing the well-being of both students and school staff (Pfeiffer, 2020). It offers valuable insights and practical measures to help school leaders develop initiatives that enhance psychological needs and overall satisfaction in the school environment (Pfeiffer, 2020). Consequently, the literature suggests that educational leaders and program designers should deliberately cultivate learning environments that support students' basic psychological needs, ensuring that accelerated programs remain effective, equitable, and responsive to learners' developmental and motivational profiles.

Accelerated Education (AE)

Accelerated education is designed to expedite curriculum delivery, enabling students to attain uniform, accredited certification in a shorter period and subsequently reintegrate into the formal education pathway (AEWG, 2017). It focuses on learning foundational mastery and excludes non-core subjects. The Accelerated Education Program (AEP) focuses on delivering a compressed curriculum within a shorter timeframe, employing conventional teaching approaches (Fitzpatrick, 2020; Näslund-Hadley, 2023).

Conceptual Alignment Between FTSPM, Accelerated Education (AE), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

In Malaysia, the FTSPM program shortens the number of years of schooling for upper secondary students and streamlines the curriculum, concentrating solely on core subjects and select electives (Abd Rahim, 2017). However, the transition to a new educational system and unfamiliar academic topics can induce considerable stress, and challenges persist despite the program's emphasis on inclusivity for PTI students. Fadzil et al. (2023) found that PTI students' enrollment in the FTSPM program was driven by personal interest, indicating that self-motivation plays a significant role in students' decisions to pursue this program. Therefore, exploring the importance of intrinsic motivation is essential for understanding the success of *Tahfiz* students within the FTSPM framework.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), when students perceive that their learning environment supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they are better equipped to overcome the AEP's demanding academic structure and maintain consistent effort toward academic achievement. Several empirical studies supported the importance of intrinsic motivation in accelerated or intensive programs. Leong et al. (2022) underscore that students in accelerated medical programs showed no significant differences in outcomes or burnout levels compared to those in regular programs. The accelerated program (AP) enabled faster completion, addressed workforce shortages, reduced costs, and maintained educational quality (Schreiner, 2019; Leong et al., 2022; CESE, 2022).

Similarly, Obi (2019) and Hamilton (2023) found that adults and non-traditional students with high intrinsic motivation and strong self-confidence were able to complete their accelerated studies despite life challenges, including work and family responsibilities. A close relationship with classmates and lecturers also contributes to higher commitment and academic achievements (Obi, 2019). While a study by Wan Zainal Alam (2020) suggested that motivation alone does not necessarily affect students' accomplishments, Zamecnik et al. (2022) reported minimal dropout rates among adult learners due to the flexibility offered by the accelerated course they enrolled in. This highlights the crucial role of a supportive and adaptable learning environment in sustaining motivation.

Earlier studies have examined students' intrinsic motivation across different educational settings and programs. Research by Zamecnik et al. (2022) highlighted that understanding students' motivation is fundamental, as it significantly influences learner behavior and outcomes. One of the major outcomes of significant motivation among learners is increased engagement and participation (Ahmad, 2020; Jeon, 2022; Nyamekye, 2025). Ahmad (2020) further noted that intrinsic motivation contributes more to a program's sustainability than extrinsic motivation. However, the intrinsic motivations of *Tahfiz* students remain underexplored, and this study aims to investigate them.

It is essential to note that instructional design plays a pivotal role in influencing student motivation. Research by Khayat et al. (2021) and Teppo et al. (2025) suggests that improvements in pedagogical strategies significantly enhance students' motivation and overall achievement. Furthermore, studies by Teppo et al. (2025) and Parrish et al. (2025) demonstrate that monotonous learning experiences can lead to a decline in motivation as students progress in their studies. Within the context of the accelerated educational program, any potential decrease in motivation over time may be further exacerbated by the pressures associated with national examinations, which function as the primary means of assessment. Therefore, understanding students' fundamental psychological needs is crucial for designing a more tailored and personalized educational program.

In conclusion, the motivational dynamics observed in the accelerated educational program or FTSPM context can be theoretically situated within Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which offers a robust explanatory framework for examining how accelerated structures influence learner motivation. When aligned with Accelerated Education (AE) principles, SDT explains how instructional design in the FTSPM program may support or hinder students' autonomy, perceived competence, and sense of relatedness factors that are critical for sustaining motivation under examination-oriented and time-compressed learning conditions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Context

The present study employs an exploratory quantitative research design to examine psychological need satisfaction and frustration among Tahfiz students framed by Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The research context is situated within the FTSPM program at a private school in Muar, Johor. This setting offers a unique environment to investigate how traditional theological studies interface with modern academic curricula through an educational psychology lens. Crucially, this site selection was guided by institutional accessibility and logistical feasibility, ensuring high administrative cooperation during data collection. However, given that this study represents an initial, exploratory foray into this specific institutional context, the researcher acknowledges that utilizing a single-site sample may limit the external validity and overall explanatory power of the findings, a trade-off accepted to establish baseline empirical insights.

Population and Sampling Strategy

The target population comprises students enrolled in the FTSPM program between three different cohorts from year 2023 to 2025, totaling 194 students, of whom 166 are registered as full-time students. To capture nuanced experiences specific to this educational pathway, a non-probability purposive sampling method was implemented. The inclusion criteria set are the respondents must be enrolled in private Tahfiz programs prior to entering the academic course and participate as full-time students in the FTSPM program during the data collection window. This specific group represents the ideal target sample, as their immediate transition from rigorous, full-time theological environments into the structured FTSPM academic curriculum ensures they possess the direct, continuous lived experience necessary to evaluate changes in psychological need satisfaction and frustration across these differing educational frameworks.

The standard empirical guidelines for small populations suggest a minimum sample size of 30 to 50 respondents for baseline quantitative analysis, based on Roscoe guideline (1975) (Mohd Noor & Mohamad Fuzi, 2024). The final sample of 94 usable responses were gathered.

Research Instrumentation and Adaptation

To measure the constructs of interest, the survey instrument adapted and integrated items from two established psychological scales, which were translated into *Bahasa Melayu* and contextualized for the *Tahfiz* students. The instrument comprises 24 items, structured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The **Need Satisfaction Scales** consist of 17 items and were adapted from the Basic Psychological Needs in the Classroom Scale (BPN-CS; Conesa & Duñabeitia, 2021) to evaluate the four subscales: autonomy, competence, relatedness, and novelty. In addition, the **Need Frustration Scales**, comprising 7 items, were adapted from the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS; Chen et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2016) to capture the corresponding obstructive dimensions of the subscales.

To protect semantic and conceptual integrity during cross-cultural adaptation, a forward-and-back translation protocol was executed (Adelia et al., 2021). Content validity was subsequently verified by an expert review panel comprising academics from a local public university and a registered professional school counsellor. Minor linguistic and contextual adjustments were made based on their comments to ensure readability for the target demographic and were carried out by a language lecturer at the International Islamic University Malaysia, Pagoh campus.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted digitally *via* a structured online questionnaire deployed through Google Forms, optimizing accessibility for the student cohort. The survey was open for a month, from October 31st to November 30th, 2025. To maximize response rates, automated reminders were sent to the students' group via the school coordinator. For students who graduated in 2023 and 2024, the questionnaire will be shared via the school's official Telegram account to collect responses over one month, with the school's approval to ensure transparency. For the current cohort, the researcher conducts a special session to facilitate their participation during data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was digitally obtained from all respondents prior to accessing the survey items.

Reliability Analysis

A pilot assessment was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the adapted scales. The global Cronbach's alpha for the 17 need satisfaction items was 0.884 while for the 7 need-frustration items, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.841, both indicating strong internal consistency (Nunnally, 1994). Both dimensions exceed the conventional acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming the instrument's stability for subsequent descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (Nunnally, 1994). The structural distribution of the constructs across the subscales is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. SDT Subscales and Measurement Items (N = 24 Items)

SDT Subscales		Item	N
Need Satisfaction	Autonomy	Q1, Q5, Q9, Q14	4
	Competency	Q2, Q6, Q10, Q15	4
	Relatedness	Q3, Q7, Q12, Q16	4
	Novelty	Q4, Q8, Q11, Q13, Q17	5
Total need satisfaction items			17
Need Frustration	Autonomy	Q18, Q22	2
	Competency	Q19, Q23	2
	Relatedness	Q20, Q24	2
	Novelty	Q21	1
Total need frustration items			7

Prior to data collection, official permission is obtained from the school, along with individual consent from students aged 17 and older and parental consent. This process is designed to clarify the research purpose and inform each participant of their right to confidentiality and their option to withdraw from the study at any time. Data analysis will employ descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, utilizing the

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 30.0. The results are reported in alignment with the scale presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Mean Scores

Mean scores	Rating level
1.00 – 1.80	Very low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
3.41 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very high

RESULTS

A total of 97 respondents participated in the study; however, only 94 met the selection criteria and were included in the final analysis. The participants' ages range from 17 to over 25 years, showing that many students older than 18 years do not have SPM. The demographics of the respondents are detailed in Table 4.

As shown in the table, more than half of the respondents have completed their Tahfiz education and memorized all 30 chapters of the Quran (*khatam*). Several respondents also obtained “*Syahadah*” certification, which is awarded to students who have shown fluency and accuracy in Quranic memorization through a formal assessment.

Table 4. Respondents' Demographic.

Years spent in Tahfiz institutions	N	%	Memorized chapters of the Quran	N	%
1 – 2 years	10	10.3	1 to 10 chapters	17	17.5
3 – 5 years	40	41.2	11 – 20 chapters	16	16.5
More than 5 years	44	45.4	21 – 30 chapters	2	2.1
Not applicable	3	3.1	Completed (<i>khatam</i>)	35	36.1
			Completed with a formal assessment (<i>Khatam dan syahadah</i>)	16	17.0
			Not applicable/Could not recall	11	11.7
Total	97	100.0	Total	97	100.0

Table 5 displays the mean and standard deviation scores for each subscale examined. The mean score for the satisfaction of needs, reflecting perceptions of relatedness and novelty, was notably high. In contrast, perceptions of autonomy and competency also received high scores. Conversely, the mean score for the frustration of needs, based on perceptions of autonomy, relatedness, and novelty, was relatively low, while the perception of competency achieved a moderate score.

Table 5. SDT Basic Psychological Need results

SDT Basic Psychological Need	Need satisfaction Mean (SD)	Interpretation	Need Frustration Mean (SD)	Interpretation
Autonomy perception	4.15 (0.59)	High	2.38 (1.07)	Low
Competency perception	3.93 (0.58)	High	3.06 (1.16)	Moderate
Relatedness perception	4.28 (0.62)	Very high	2.34 (1.03)	Low
Novelty perception	4.52 (0.50)	Very high	2.00 (1.23)	Low

DISCUSSION

The participating respondents of the FTSPM program came from PTI's *Tahfiz* background, representing a variety of age groups, all of whom had completed their *Tahfiz* studies or obtained "Syahadah" as described in the preceding section. These findings align with previous studies indicating that certifications awarded by *Tahfiz* schools are often internally oriented (Ismail, 2016). Therefore, formal academic accreditation, such as *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM), is crucial for enhancing their qualifications for admission to higher institutions or for securing formal employment.

Despite obtaining the highest credentials from their *Tahfiz* programs, students find themselves constrained by systemic requirements that require nationally uniform certifications or qualifications. Thus, this study further underscores the (Abd Rahim, 2017) FTSPM program's role as a viable alternative educational pathway that effectively bridges the gap between *Tahfiz* education and the formal academic system. In this context, the program's ability to accommodate students who have exceeded the age limit for entry into mainstream education is particularly commendable.

The high level of perceived autonomy identified in this study suggests that FTSPM students experience a significant degree of volitional agency in their learning process. This finding is evidenced by high satisfaction and concurrently low frustration rates regarding autonomous choice, indicating that the institutional framework supports independent decision-making. This aligns with the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) articulated by Koestner and Holding (2020), who underscore that satisfaction with autonomy directly reflects volitional engagement rather than external compliance.

Within the FTSPM ecosystem, this psychological need is operationalized through actionable student choices, such as subject selection, co-curricular participation, and engagement in supplementary academic sessions. For these post-secondary learners (aged 18 and above), such institutional flexibility is critical; as Mynard and Shelton-Strong (2022) note, autonomy functions as an internal motivational state that energizes individuals to manage their educational environments in alignment with personal goals proactively.

Although independence can be beneficial, a deficit of adequate guidance can pose challenges that lead to negative outcomes, such as passive learning or disengagement, particularly for those entering formal academic settings (Donaldson et al., 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to achieve a balance between autonomy and institutional support to prevent students from withdrawing from their studies or experiencing academic anxiety.

Beyond autonomy, students' sustained engagement in the FTSPM program also hinges on their perceived competence in meeting academic demands. The findings show that a high score in perception of competence, alongside moderate competence frustration, reflects that students perceived as having confidence in the study require additional support to master the academic content more effectively. The implementation of the FTSPM program uses an accelerated learning format that compresses two years of educational content into a single year, which may affect students' ability to understand the subjects fully. In addition, exclusion from mainstream education puts students at a disadvantage in foundational knowledge essential to their studies, thereby undermining their confidence.

According to Meng et al. (2024), competence frustration, when effectively managed, can be transformed into a motivational drive for students to perform better. This underscores that the FTSPM program's effectiveness also depends on the instructional and pedagogical strategies and academic support provided. By strengthening these supports, competence frustration may be channeled into productive learning engagement, thereby enhancing students' academic performance and persistence. Therefore, at this juncture, the implementation of this intervention must be supported by the relevant departments at both the state and national levels to ensure uniform implementation.

Another critical dimension within SDT is perceived relatedness, which reflects students' social and interpersonal interaction within the learning environment. The findings indicate a high level of perceived relatedness and low

frustration, demonstrating that the program successfully provided a safe and supportive environment that enabled Tahfiz students to adapt to the academic system and prepare for the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM)

The sociocultural homogeneity of the student cohort may explain this phenomenon. A shared school of thought appears to foster robust in-group solidarity and mutual alignment among peers, thereby mitigating social anxiety and minimizing the salience of interpersonal differences. These findings align with Salvan and Luzano (2025), who underscore that student homogeneity promotes their psychological well-being. In the same vein, Indriani et al. (2025) underscore that an inclusive school culture is essential for promoting engagement and collaborative learning. However, while creating a safe and inclusive environment may be best for helping students gradually reintegrate into an academic path, questions remain about students' ability to adapt to a more diverse mainstream education or community context in the longer term.

Research findings on perceived novelty indicate high satisfaction and low frustration among students, suggesting that the FTSPM program successfully met their psychological needs. By integrating additional academic credentials, the program enhanced the intrinsic value of the students' existing *Tahfiz* certification. This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) lens, as in Hsu et al. (2022) and Stoa and Chu (2023), which posits that satisfaction from novelty directly drives student effort and positive engagement. Crucially, the FTSPM program transcends basic remedial education; by introducing contextually relevant, cognitively demanding challenges tailored specifically to the students' unique religious backgrounds, it significantly deepens the overall quality of the learning experience.

Although the program is an accelerated initiative with a compressed curriculum and a shortened timeframe, the findings indicate that students' basic psychological needs are met. In sum, the FTSPM program demonstrates potential as a sustainable intervention that bridges Tahfiz education and the mainstream academic system without compromising students' psychological needs. The program managed to instill intrinsic motivation among the respondents, and the implementation should continue with attention to pedagogical or instructional strategies to address their limited confidence in their competence.

Limitations

This study was conducted at a private secondary school that implemented the FTSPM program and involved only students enrolled there. As such, the findings may not be fully generalizable to a larger population of private *Tahfiz* institutions students due to the variations in educational settings. Results may vary in different contexts and learning environments. Nevertheless, the results provide meaningful preliminary evidence that may inform the design and adaptation of the FTSPM program for PTI students more broadly.

In addition, the study focuses solely on intrinsic motivation, measuring satisfaction and frustration with basic psychological needs, guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Academic achievements were not examined, limiting the ability to establish a relationship between motivational factors and academic performance; this could be another avenue for future research. The current descriptive analysis could be expanded to multivariate analysis in the future. Lastly, the number of samples should be increased to offer greater explanatory power, thereby requiring another sampling method, such as convenience sampling.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study provides valuable insights into the demographic profiles and motivational experiences of PTI students participating in the fast-track program, highlighting the importance of formal certification alongside a background in *Tahfiz*. The FTSPM program plays a critical role in bridging the gap between *Tahfiz* education and the mainstream academic system. Future research is recommended to examine students' academic achievement and outcomes following participation in the program, and to compare these with those of students in mainstream educational pathways.

In addition, further investigation into the success factors is essential to improve implementation, particularly by enhancing competency through pedagogical and instructional strategies, thereby contributing to the effectiveness and sustainability of the accelerated program.

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