

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION IN STUDENTS WITH  
LEARNING DISABILITIES IN A 1:1 CLASSROOM SETTING

A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
California State University Channel Islands

In (Partial) Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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May 2022

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## Abstract

This study used concurrent mixed methods to examine the intrinsic motivation of adolescents with learning disabilities (LD) who are educated in a 1:1 classroom setting. Secondary aims sought to examine the impact of teacher perceptions, given several contextual factors, on student outcomes. In this study, it is evident through the data that intrinsic motivation is directly impacted by the perceptions and biases of teachers. It is clear that students feel a lack of motivation in the classroom if they don't feel a sense of belonging through fostering positive relationships with their teachers and feeling academically engaged. Overall, the majority of teachers felt that their students were highly engaged and motivated with learning content being taught in their classes, if they felt that they understood the learning profile of the student and had positive interactions with their student.

**Keywords** Intrinsic Motivation, Self-Determination Theory, Self-Efficacy, Academic Engagement, Learning Disabilities, Teacher Perceptions

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my family as they have supported me and guided me over the last two years, while going through major life changes and hardship. This research also could not have been possible without the support of Futures Academy as my work seeks to improve interventions used in their academic setting.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Statement of Problem**

The objective of this research is to understand how teacher perceptions and biases impact intrinsic motivation in students with learning disabilities in a 1:1 classroom setting. This research also seeks to understand how student learning and engagement are impacted by teacher perceptions in order to create a professional development program for teachers around implicit bias and education on working with students with learning disabilities. Through understanding existing literature on Self-Determination Theory (SDT; 1985), it is evident that there is an emerging need in supporting student motivation and engagement in an academic setting.

Deci and Ryan's SDT posited two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation (IM) and extrinsic motivation (EM). IM concerns an individual's ability to stay motivated due to their innate desire to perform and do well. EM concerns an individual's ability to perform and do well with the desire for an extrinsic reward or because there will be a consequence to the action. In an academic setting, the motivation of students with learning disabilities can be impacted by a number of factors, including teacher relationships, and the impact of teacher perceptions.

It is important to distinguish between IM and EM as it pertains to academic engagement, especially for students with learning disabilities, whose prior school experiences may interfere with their sense of academic self-efficacy.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following research question: How do teacher perceptions of student abilities impact the intrinsic motivation in students with learning disabilities in a 1:1 classroom setting?

Providing motivation is an essential aspect of teaching and learning and educators have an especially important role in the direction students take through their formal schooling (Kariuki & Mbugua, 2018). As a result of creating positive social and learning contexts for students, students may feel a stronger sense of connectedness to their academic community and feel more competent towards academic tasks, resulting in improved intrinsic motivation and improved student achievement. Given the positive impact IM can have on students' academic outcomes, it is imperative to further our understanding of IM in students with other disabilities (Daniel & Cooc, 2018). In this research, it is especially important to understand the impact of teacher perceptions as this is a 1:1 classroom setting, which presents different challenges for teachers and students.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Students with Learning Disabilities.** Though there is much support for students with learning disabilities in public schools and other educational settings, support can be limited in private and independent school settings (Gilmour, 2020). Students with learning disabilities are less likely to have support in private school settings as they are not mandated to receive specific support or accommodations as private schools are not bound to the same state and federal requirements as publicly funded educational institutions. As a result, students with learning disabilities may struggle more in a private school settings because there may be limited access to resources, such as: professional development for teachers, access to additional aid specific to their learning disability, and limited understanding of effective pedagogical approaches or interventions. Further, some students with LD are not able to make adequate progress in public general education settings due to the unique needs presented within their learning. These students

may benefit from a smaller, alternative educational setting to adapt to their specific needs for more engagement (Shogren, et. al., 2015).

In contrast, many positive outcomes in students with LD stem from supportive teacher-student relationships, which are central to the academic success and confidence of students. Positive teacher-student relationships are especially important when evaluating the outcomes of students with learning disabilities (Jones, et.al., 2014). For example, students who have a strong rapport with their teacher could potentially feel more comfortable interacting with their teacher and engaging with the content they are learning in the classroom, which could lead to a more conducive learning environment (Jones, et.al., 2014). This research seeks to understand how these same student-teacher relationships impact student learning in a 1:1 classroom setting.

The focus of this research study is to understand the role of intrinsic motivation as it pertains to the academic engagement of secondary school students with learning disabilities in a 1:1 classroom setting. Motivation is considered one of the most important foundations essential for students' academic development (Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009). Developing motivation is an essential aspect of learning, and educators have an especially important role in helping students to develop IM over the course of their formal schooling trajectory (Kariuki & Mbugua, 2018). Developing a strong sense of intrinsic motivation can help with promoting self-efficacy in students so they could have a stronger sense of accountability and involvement of their educational experience. This sense of self-efficacy, in which students believe they are capable of learning, results in improved IM and subsequent student achievement. Given the positive impact IM can have on students' academic outcomes, it is imperative to further our understanding of IM in students with other disabilities (Daniel & Cooc, 2018).

**The 1:1 Classroom Setting.** The 1:1 educational model is an educational setting that is designed to support students who have otherwise not been successful in accessing grade-level content in traditional learning environments. This educational model delivers individualized and personalized instruction to students with and without disabilities in an alternative school setting. Unlike the traditional large classroom size, the 1:1 model is unique in the implementation of curriculum that can be customized to individual learner needs. In this model, educators are able to adapt grade level curriculum to make learning accessible to students with varying learning needs. In the 1:1 setting, educators are able to tailor instructional activities to meet the unique needs of each student. In this model, just as in any educational setting, teachers face challenges with understanding and improving interventions used in a 1:1 classroom setting. One of these specific challenges include engaging students with the content they are learning in class, which is essential in improving student intrinsic motivation towards academic tasks, both inside and outside of the classroom. The model studied in this research is based on the 1:1 model from Futures Academy, a private school network made up of 16 campuses that span from northern California to southern California. Futures Academy is UC A-G approved, NCAA approved, Western Association for Schools and Colleges (WASC) and Cognia Accredited 6th-12th grade school serving middle school and high school students.

This study will look at self-determination theory in reference to working specifically with students with learning disabilities in the 1:1 educational setting. Since the existing literature is limited on teacher perceptions of students with learning disabilities in a 1:1 setting, there is a dearth of research examining the motivation of students educated in alternative small group settings.

## **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

### **Teacher Professional Development**

Professional development is essential for teachers as they continue to work with students who are typically developing (Deci & Ryan, 1985), but more importantly understanding how to continue to incentivize and reward students with learning disabilities (Deci & Ryan, 1985). If teachers are provided with the tools to implement effective strategies, there could be a difference in the way students learn and feel towards academic tasks, which is central to improving student achievement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Many of the interventions to support students with, include: Creativity, Applied Autonomy, Nurtured Heart Approach (NHA), Cooperative Learning, and Adolescent Goal Setting Intervention. Through review of the literature, it is clear that these interventions can help teachers manage implicit bias and their understanding that not all students with the same learning disability will react the same, behave the same, or express the same level of interest or disinterest in academic tasks. This research shows that there is a connection between the interventions that are used in the 1:1 setting and the lack of knowledge that teachers have due to a deficit in resources provided for teacher education as discussed with the introduction of Figure 1 (below).

As shown in Figure 1 (below), it is clear that low student achievement and motivation are the result of budgetary limitations. In this case, the budgetary limitation is specifically in an alternative for-profit education setting, where issues such as teacher education and development can be overlooked. It may be the case, where other issues such as development of more school sites or the expansion of other educational marketing initiatives may take root and cause for a deficit in funding teacher development and training or creating incentives programs for teachers.

With the lack of professional development, private school teachers who may have limited training, may not have the opportunity to understand how to foster academic engagement or specific to this study, work with students with learning disabilities. Additionally, if there are no incentives programs for teachers, it can be assumed that it may be difficult for teachers to stay motivated to build an engaging academic environment for their students or build strong connections. Deficits in both these areas can severely impact the student as they may not feel as motivated during class if the student feels the teacher may not be as invested, or they may not build a strong connection with their teacher. Thus, this figure reveals the implications of not vesting enough resources in teachers, which in turn can impact student achievement.

**Figure 1**

*Teacher Resource Constraints and Impact on Student Achievement*



### **Intrinsic Motivation in Students with Learning Disabilities**

The primary purpose of this study was to measure teacher perceptions of intrinsic motivation in students with LD in a 1:1 classroom setting and to identify ways to improve IM in students with LD in a 1:1 setting. This study uses a mixed methods approach to examine IM from multiple perspectives. Specifically comparing previous educational literature of intrinsic

motivation towards academic tasks in students with LD and typically developing (TD) students. Daniel and Cooc (2018) examined IM in students in grades K-12 with and without learning disabilities as well as low-incidence disabilities. All of the students included in this specific study stemmed from a previous longitudinal study, Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) where the aim was to understand whether teachers' perceptions of students' academic IM varied by disability category. These studies suggest that students with learning disabilities tend to report lower IM compared with their typically developing peers (Daniel & Cooc, 2018).

Many students with LD who are educated in the 1:1 setting, choose this educational model because they were not successful in more traditional models. It is unclear, however, the extent to which the 1:1 setting has an impact on IM in these students. Given that much of the previous research on this topic primarily focuses on students who are educated on general education campuses, either in special education classrooms and mainstream classrooms, the IM of students in more restrictive settings is virtually unknown. Previous research has also focused more on IM in students who are TD, or students with intellectual disability, and little is known about the manifestation of IM in students with LD. As such, more research is needed to examine IM in as it presents in students with LD.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Self-Determination Theory***

Throughout the last couple of decades, educational researchers have become more interested in understanding SDT and investigating motivation in students as it relates to academic outcomes (Daniel & Cooc, 2018) . SDT breaks down motivation into two areas: IM

and extrinsic motivation EM, both two separate constructs of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

As more information about this topic becomes available, educational researchers have identified two different types of motivation in students that can predict academic performance and academic outcomes: EM and IM (Vallerand, 2000). EM refers to the willingness to complete a task for the sake of an external incentive such as recognition, reward, or avoidance of punishment. IM denotes engagement in a task purely out of curiosity to enhance feelings of competence and self-determination and it is also noted that IM provides a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction based on tasks being performed and completed (Daniel & Cooc, 2018).

As educators progressively improve instruction and interventions used with students in school settings, they found there were many factors that contributed to academic engagement (Evans, et al., 2019). Additionally, there are many interventions that have been implemented to encourage more engagement in academic tasks in the classroom, such as the concept of applied autonomy, the nurtured heart approach, adolescent goal setting intervention, fostering creativity, and allowing for cooperative learning. Each of these interventions have obtained different outcomes, either positing an increase or decrease in student motivation in the classroom. The ultimate goal is to understand how to effectively support student achievement and implement interventions that have a lasting impact for students which will be described in detail in our review of existing literature supporting effective interventions in traditional academic settings (Evans, et.al., 2019).

## Interventions

### *Applied Autonomy (Marshik, 2015)*

There are several interventions that have been utilized in fostering improvement in IM in students, including the concept of applied autonomy to give students the opportunity to demonstrate IM in the classroom when given a specific level of autonomy (Marshik, 2015). Applied Autonomy stresses the importance of giving students independence and academic choice to improve the way they approach academic tasks, and as a result improve their academic outcomes. In this study, autonomy refers to the amount of independence that students are given to complete academic tasks and as a result improve their competence towards completing academic tasks, which impacts students' intrinsic motivation. Researchers have found that teachers who facilitate instructional activities that are high in autonomy support are more likely than those low in autonomy support to explain the relevance of learning activities, create student-centered atmospheres, encourage student initiative, inquire about students' desires and needs, and attempt to understand students' emotional states (Marshik, 2015). High autonomy supportive strategies provide students full independence when working on academic tasks in the educational setting and low autonomy support is when little to no autonomy supportive strategies are used. Marshik (2015) found that children who were in classrooms with high autonomy supportive strategies had higher intrinsic motivation than their peers in low autonomy supported classrooms.

### *Nurtured Heart Approach (Glasser, 2016)*

In the review of other educational literature, the Nurtured Heart Approach was an intervention that was used to help parents reinforce positive behavior in their children and to disregard negative behaviors, which was adapted to be used in the educational setting in the

Kausik & Hussain (2018) study. The Nurtured Heart Approach (NHA) was developed by Howard Glasser to help parents understand how to manage the disruptive behaviors of children who have been diagnosed with some form of behavioral disorder (Kausik & Hussain, 2018). This intervention is based on three stands to help reinforce positive behavior: refuse to energize negativity and negative behaviors, energize the positive behaviors to encourage model behavior, and clarity surrounding rules and boundaries for ways to behave.

### ***Cooperative Learning***

Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy teachers utilize to improve students learning and social outcomes, and also improve their response toward academic tasks (In'Am & Sutrisno, 2021). Cooperative learning focuses on fostering an academic environment in the classroom that is peer based and intended to allow students to learn from their peers. This could potentially be an effective strategy in a 1:1 setting as more and more students are also encouraged to take what are considered "group" classes to allow for a maximized learning opportunity for students. Furthermore, cooperative learning can provide the opportunity to students to work in small groups and dissect the subject matter in depth through peer learning, which can improve self-efficacy and mitigate cheating on academic tasks. More specifically, cooperative learning gives students the opportunity to work with other students who are typically developing, which can allow for students with learning disabilities to feel more connected to their peers and to academic tasks happening in the classroom. Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that places students in small groups, offering students the opportunity to complete a task together to increase their own and each other's learning (Nguyen, et.al., 2021).

### ***Adolescent Goal Setting Intervention (AGSI; Lind, 2017)***

AGSI is an important intervention that has been used to promote a positive adolescent student-teacher relationships. This intervention is a brief, student-centered, weekly, one-on-one intervention designed to encourage positive student-teacher interactions while teaching students with emotional disturbance (EMD) goal-setting skills (Lind, et.al., 2017). Although it did prove useful in the short-term, there were no long-term results, as the effectiveness of the intervention was not measured as the students went into their late teens and young adulthood.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This study uses a concurrent (QUAL-quan) mixed methods design to examine teacher perceptions of IM in students with learning disabilities who are educated in a 1:1 classroom setting. This method allowed for a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions of students with learning disabilities in a 1:1 classroom setting. Secondary aims examined the extent to which implicit bias towards students and previous experiences with students with similar learning profiles. The research plan including the methodology, participants, coding process, themes, procedures, and analysis method are also primary components of this chapter.

### **Methods Selected**

The concurrent (QUAL-quan) mixed methods study was appropriate for this study as we sought to explore information regarding the experiences of students through conducting individual interviews while understanding the perspectives of teachers and teacher biases through collecting survey responses at the same time. The survey responses were collected at the same time that the individual interviews were being conducted.

## **Individual Interviews**

The interview process was conducted over a period of two weeks and conducted within school operating hours. During their study periods, students were asked to sit with the lead researcher in a 1:1 interview session for an uninterrupted period of 30 to 45 minutes. Students were asked a series of seven questions in the following categories: (1) interest/enjoyment (2) perceived competence (3) effort/importance (4) pressure/tension (5) perceived choice and (6) value/usefulness. The categories that the questions were broken down into were based on the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (McCauley & Tammen, 1987), which is a multidimensional measurement device intended to assess participants' subjective experience related to a target activity in laboratory experiments (McCauley & Tammen, 1987). The interview protocol included opening remarks, procedure details, consent and rules, and questions based on the IMI with sub-questions aimed at ensuring students gave detailed descriptions on their experiences in the 1:1 setting in relation to academic engagement.

## **Recruitment**

IRB approval was obtained prior to the start of the study. Participants were recruited from an alternative private school setting utilizing the 1:1 classroom format located in suburban Los Angeles. Adolescents consented to the study, parent consent was obtained on behalf of their children, and teacher consent was also obtained. For this concurrent mixed methods (quant-QUAL) study, data was collected at one period of time, at the end of the school year in May. Since this study took place in a smaller school setting, the total enrollment at the school was 60 students, including 45 full-time students and 25 part-time students, 15% of the total population (n=10 students) participated in the study. Approximately 22% of the participants were middle

school students (n=2), approximately 78% (n=7) were high school students. The ages of the student participants ranged from 12 through 18 years.

## **Participants**

There were several categories of participants in the study, including students and teachers. The student participants were students who attended the 1:1 private school and were concurrently enrolled in the school during the Spring 2021 term. Student participants were between the ages of 12-18 and included grade ranges from 6th through 12th grade. Each of the students participated in individual interviews via zoom or in-person.

## **Student Demographic Survey**

Student participants also answered a brief, six-question demographic questionnaire where they shared the following demographic information: (1) gender (2) age (3) grade level (4) race/ethnicity (5) learning disability and (3) type of education plan they had. In the study, approximately 56% were male and 44% of the students were female, all participants were between the ages of 14 to 17, 78% were high school students and approximately 22% were middle school students. Approximately 89% of the student participants were white and only 11% were of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 22% students identified with having a diagnosis of AD/HD = 33% (hyperactive = 22%; inattentive = 11%), 11% identified as having auditory processing, 11% identified as having dyslexia, and 44% were unspecified.

**Demographic survey.** A demographic survey was created for this study. Participants were asked to complete a demographic survey in response to the following areas: (1) gender (2) age (3) grade level (4) race/ethnicity (5) learning disability and (6) type of education plan the student

held. The responses to the demographic helped inform the responses in the teacher questionnaires.

### **Teacher Participants**

Teacher participants were concurrently instructing their students in the 1:1 setting and had one or more of the students who participated in the study. The experience level of teachers ranged anywhere from one to ten years of teaching experience; while some teachers previously taught in group public school and private school settings, others did not have any previous teaching experience. The teacher participants completed survey questionnaires that were scored on a Likert-type scale.

One teacher for every student-participant was recruited. Teacher participants were recruited as a result of working in the 1:1 classroom setting with the students. Teacher participation was completely voluntary and teacher participants were recruited through a blast email sent out to all teachers in the school. Teachers were determined eligible for participation if they had one or more student-participants in their class to give an accurate representation of academic performance and engagement of each student.

### **Confidentiality and Pseudonyms**

Throughout the data collection process, students, parents, and teachers were assured that the information they shared was confidential. Teacher survey responses were not disclosed to students, student interview responses were not shared with teachers, and parent remarks/comments were not shared with students or teachers. Pseudonyms are used to emphasize the anonymity of the research and to allow for members of the research study to have a copy of the results in complete anonymity.

## **Teacher Questionnaires**

Teachers were asked to complete questionnaires that asked a series of ten questions that evaluated their perceptions of the students who participated in this study. Each of the following areas contributed to intrinsic motivation levels in students. Questions were based on the following areas: (1) grit, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) self-efficacy, (5) learning strategies, (6) classroom effort, (7) social perspective-taking, (8) emotional regulation, and (9&10) engagement. Questions were scored on a Likert-type scale and were given the values 1 through 5, with the value of 1 being “very unlikely” and 5 being “extremely likely”. Teachers were assigned to a current or former student, and completed one survey for each student assigned to them. Each question gave insight into the teacher's understanding and perspective of the student after having taught the student for at least one academic semester.

The following questions were asked: (1) If this student fails to achieve an important goal, how likely is he/she/they to try again? (2) How often does this student stay focused on the same goal for months at a time? (3) Overall, how focused is this student in your classroom? (4) During the past 30 days, how considerate was this student to his/her/their classmates? (5) How confident is this student in his/her/their ability to learn all the material presented in your class? (6) Overall, how well do this student's learning strategies help him/her/them learn more effectively? (7) Overall, how much effort does this student put forth in your class? (8) Overall, how much effort does this student put into figuring out what you are thinking? (9) How often is this student able to control his/her/their emotions when he/she/they need to? (10) Overall, how interested is this student in your class? .

**Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI; McCauley & Tammen, 1987).** The interview questions were adapted from the IMI. The IMI assesses participants' interest/enjoyment, perceived competence, effort, value/usefulness, felt pressure and tension, and perceived choice while performing a given activity. The motivation subscale was adapted for this study and there were a total of 15 qualitative questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview questions were adapted from the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (McCauley & Tammen, 1987). In the analysis of the interview responses, I used deductive ground up reasoning. First, I read all the transcripts, then I established preliminary codes and developed operationalized definitions for each code. Then, I employed line-by-line coding with all of the transcripts and once the codes were analyzed, themes emerged. The codes were identified as sub-themes through the main themes that emerged. For example, the interviews revealed that students who were given an assignment preference by their teacher were given a preference. These questions were adapted to give insight on how teacher perceptions impact intrinsic motivation in students in the classroom in correlation to effort and academic engagement.

In my analysis of the teacher questionnaire responses, I read through all the teacher responses and looked at how teachers responded specifically to each question. The data revealed that some teachers felt their students were not as motivated or goal-oriented based on the criteria the questions were developed from (grit, self-management, social awareness, etc.) despite the majority of teacher responses indicating that students were more motivated and goal-oriented. For example, 90% of teachers felt their students were more inclined to pursue a goal even after their student failed the first time, while only 10% of teachers responded that their student was not

likely to pursue a goal after failing the first time. The responses to nearly all the questions indicated that teachers all felt similar sentiments towards the motivation and engagement of their students with learning disabilities.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

In this section, we will be unpacking the results through understanding teacher questionnaire responses and their perceptions of students. The following themes emerged from the student interviews: student engagement in the 1:1 classroom setting, student connection with their teachers, and student perspective. Further, through the lens of student perception, findings reveal the extent to which students felt supported in the classroom through their identified modality of learning. Additionally, we will be exploring the data through figures presented to understand how teachers felt about their students in various areas (grit, self-management, etc.). These data give insight to teacher perceptions and the impact they have on academic engagement and intrinsic motivation of students with learning disabilities in a 1:1 setting.

### **Student Perceptions of Teachers**

Analysis of transcripts reveals the following themes: (1) academic choice, (2) student-teacher relationship, and (3) learning preference. Each of these themes is broken down into codes that were emergent throughout each category of questions as they came up in the interviews, these included: learning modality, assignment preference, making connections, positive reinforcement, quality of relationships (between teacher and student). It is evident through each of the themes that students felt supported by some of their teachers and did not feel the same level of support by other teachers. Many of the factors that supported student engagement and

motivation in the classroom were dependent upon their connection with their teacher and how the content was taught in regards to learning preference.

Through the individual interviews with students, it is evident that their experiences with teachers were consistent. The interviews revealed the following themes: (1) academic choice, (2) student-teacher relationship, and (3) learning preference and were identified through specific conversations with students regarding their interactions with the content, their teachers, and their classroom environment. Most students felt that they were able to continuously stay academically engaged if they maintained a strong relationship with their teacher, were understood in reference to their learning disability and the modality in which they learned best, and when they felt the teacher was passionate about teaching. Students who felt supported, understood their learning disability and how to navigate that in an academic setting, while also being empowered to take ownership of their academic experience.

When asked about academic engagement, students felt that their experiences were largely based on the academic choice that was provided by the teacher, “I think I probably enjoy English the most. It just brings up the most interesting prompts for writing. And there are a lot of interesting things that I get to research for essays and stuff like that.” Additionally, students felt more supported with the material when it was presented in a way where it was more accessible for them in terms of learning modality, “And I like, what I like to do is I like listening to books while I read, so I’ll listen to them, read it and I’ll skim or I’ll read the words while they’re saying it, which is easier for me because I get very distracted.” Though consistent, it was evident that interactions with teachers also negatively and positively impacted a student’s engagement and academic performance, “But what helps me learn is like knowing that my teachers kind of there

for me and that if I'm confused with something, that making sure that I feel comfortable enough to ask for help. Through student experiences, it is apparent that there is a need for professional development in different areas pertaining work with students.

## **Themes**

### ***Theme 1: Academic Choice***

Learning modality came up in reference to the way students perceived they learned best, including hands-on, visually, or in an auditory capacity. This included the way that the content was taught in the classroom, where students were presented with options of how the content was disseminated to them during class. For example, teachers and students had access to a learning management software called Canvas, where in-class content was published for student view and where homework was also made available for student view. In classes where students were given a preference, there were two options to select from to learn the material in class, “. . .for my Outsiders project, I was allowed to choose between two different things, which was on Prezi or making like a newspaper thing, and I was going to choose the newspaper thing at first, but it wasn’t working. So we just did the Prezi, which I actually liked better because it’s a lot more fun and it’s easier to do.”. This indicated that teachers were still willing to give options, while some teachers only gave one option, not allowing for academic choice of how the content would be disseminated.

### ***Theme 2: Student Teacher Relationship***

Students were more inclined to attend class and stay engaged in the classroom when they felt a personal connection to their teachers as they felt more comfortable in the classroom and asking for help. When positive reinforcement was implemented in the classroom to incentivize

students to complete in-class assignments or to participate, “But knowing that someone is that cares for you. It really, really helps, personally for me, I can improve by having positive reinforcement and knowing that something’s hard, learning to understand that not everything is going to go your way.”. Students felt more inclined to continue engagement throughout the remainder of the course and felt more encouraged by the teacher to learn.

### ***Theme 3: Learning Preference***

Assignment preference referred to the different types of assignments that students were given the option of completing, whether it be for homework or a project-based assessment, students felt more supported and connected to their teachers when given the option. Questions specific to learner preference included assignment preference, being given the choice of doing project based assessments rather than traditional assessments, and given assignment preference, “. . . before, at some of my older schools or earlier years, I find it kind of boring (history), like, this isn’t relevant while you’re learning about it. Whereas my teacher now kind of uses examples from modern history, and I started to realize, oh learning about learning history is really important.”. This inclined students to feel more connected to the content being taught in class and encouraged them to complete academic related tasks.

### **Teacher Perceptions of Students**

In the first question, teachers were asked about student goal-setting and if students were likely to pursue goals that they set forth after they failed the first time. The majority of teachers responded that their student was neither likely or unlikely to attempt the goal again. In the second question, the majority of teachers agreed that their students were occasionally focused during class throughout the semester. In the third question, it appeared teachers rated that a

majority of students were mostly focused during the class period. Question four surveyed whether or not teachers found that their student was considerate during the class period and revealed that most students were considerate during their class period and attentive. In question five, teachers reported a general lack of confidence in accessing and mastering the material being taught in their class among students. Question six focused on student learning, teachers reported improved student learning outcomes when they aligned instructional strategies to student learning profiles. In question seven, teachers indicated that the majority of students were not putting forth as much effort as they should towards academic tasks. In questions eight and nine, teachers reported feelings of students formulating assumptions about teacher biases. Question ten revealed that most teachers felt that their students were neither likely or unlikely to be as interested in their course, potentially impacting the dynamic of the student-teacher relationship.

### **Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand how teacher perceptions and bias impacted intrinsic motivation in students with learning disabilities in a 1:1 classroom setting. Through conducting individual student interviews and gathering teacher perceptions through questionnaires, it is evident that teacher perceptions impact the academic engagement and intrinsic motivation of students with learning disabilities, specifically in a 1:1 setting. The findings in this study will help inform topics surrounding professional development for teachers that may have not had formal training, licensure, or credentialing in working with students with learning disabilities. Through the findings in this specific study, it is also evident for the need to educate teachers on the impact of their own bias of students and how that may impact students in the learning environment that they are cultivating. This study builds on existing research using

self-determination theory to examine intrinsic motivation of students with disabilities in an alternative education setting. Findings suggest that teacher perceptions of student engagement and ability impacts student intrinsic motivation. This research highlights the the need for specialized professional development focused on improving the intrinsic motivation of students with learning disabilities. Findings also reveal the gaps that exist in understanding how to improve academic engagement in alternative educational settings, such as the 1:1 setting.

In this study, findings suggested that teacher perceptions were strong indicators of how engaged the student would be in the classroom. Student IM was heavily influenced by the attitude of the teacher, the learning modalities used, and the environment they created in their classrooms. Teacher perceptions were heavily influenced by previous experiences they had teaching students with specific learning disabilities, thus creating an environment that was not conducive for learning and not mindful of the student experience. Students revealed that they were more likely to stay engaged and participate in classroom activities and motivated to do better in class overall if their teacher conveyed interest in the content being taught. This study revealed the importance of establishing professional development surrounding teacher biases and working with students with learning disabilities due to the reality that teachers in private schools are not required to go through credentialing programs, which facilitate knowledge surrounding bias and other important topics.

It is clear that the findings in this study reveal how IM in students is impacted by teacher perceptions, specifically in a 1:1 classroom setting. Interventions proposed in existing literature, such as the AGSI or the Nurtured Heart Approach, could inform the need for professional development for teachers in the 1:1 setting working with students, not only with learning

disabilities, but could also include those who do not identify with having a learning disability. The hope for this research is to inform other educators on the need and importance to understand how to support students with existing interventions.

### **Implications**

Although there is an abundance of research on self-determination theory in a larger classroom setting, there is not yet research in a 1:1 mainstream classroom setting. Furthermore, existing research focuses on multiple disabilities, including intellectual and learning disabilities, while this research focuses on students with identified learning disabilities in a 1:1 setting. This research can help practitioners in the 1:1 mainstream classroom setting with improving their professional development programs and training for teachers surrounding topics such as: teacher bias, perceptions, and working with students with learning disabilities. Additionally, further research to be conducted on students in a 1:1 setting, whether or not they identify with a diagnosed learning disability. Research in this study can also foster the implementation of interventions piloted in a larger classroom setting and be adapted to the 1:1 mainstream classroom setting.

### **Limitations**

The limitations in this study include the smaller sample size as the overall student enrollment in a 1:1 private school varies depending upon the following variables: location, financial accessibility, and parent education. Additional limitations include the teacher sample size as employment could potentially be lower in smaller, alternative school settings. The final limitation is that the survey that was administered to the teachers in this study has not been norm referenced.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Research in this study focuses on examining the perspectives of students and teachers in the 1:1 setting and approaches that have been piloted to foster student engagement in a larger classroom setting. While there is no current research on these interventions being implemented in a 1:1 setting, these are still effective interventions that can be piloted to determine if they are effective in the 1:1 setting. This could potentially allow for research to be conducted by fellow practitioners in the form of a longitudinal study to examine the progression or digression of IM over time. The research in this study may also provide practitioners the opportunity to conduct further research on self-determination theory and implications of teacher bias and perceptions over a longer period of time and with a larger sample size, including both teachers and students.

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