

## INTEREST IN ACADEMIC DOMAIN AMONG INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY UTARA MALAYSIA

**Alhamdu**

Lecturer of Islamic Psychology Program  
Ushuluddin and Islamic Thinking Faculty of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang

[alhamdu@gmail.com](mailto:alhamdu@gmail.com)  
[alhamdu\\_uin@radenfatah.ac.id](mailto:alhamdu_uin@radenfatah.ac.id)

### *Abstract*

*The purpose of this study is to investigate the interest in academic domains among international undergraduate students at University Utara Malaysia. Quantitative research with focused on correlation design was chosen in this study, and the samples of this study consisted of 30 males students including 15 Somalia, 10 Uzbekistan, and 5 Nigerian students.*

*The result showed that the international undergraduate students of University Utara Malaysia have moderate level of interest in academic domains (64.33%), Meanwhile regression analysis showed highly significant correlation between situational interest and individual interest ( $r=0.842$  and  $p = 0.000$ ), and the finding also showed that situational interest was contributed to develop individual interest ( $R^2=0.709$ ).*

**Keywords:** *situational interest, individual interest, academic domain*

### **Introduction**

Recently, the academic domain has received particular attention. Educators and policymakers in some country and particularly at high school and university have been asked to consider student interest in recruiting students. This is important to consider because the interest is also considered as one factor for student success in academic domains that follow, because when the students have interest to the academic domains that they chosen, perhaps they have potential to get success in that domain. This assumption supported by Dewey (1913) as cited on Tin (2006) and Ainley et al (2002) who stated that interest plays an essential and necessary role in learning activities. When student was interested to the learning activities, student will be engage and pay

them attention to the classroom activities (Ainley, Hillman, & Hidi, 2002; Tin, 2006). Therefore the general objective of this study is to explore the role and position of interest in academic domains.

In recent years, research have been investigate that interest has a powerful positive effect in learning activity. Hidi et al (2002) described that interest could be effect cognitive performance and affective experience in academic learning. Hidi et al (2002) also mentioned that interest could be influence knowledge acquisition of students (Hidi, Berndorff, & Ainley, 2002). This argument supported by Alexander & Wade (2000) and McWhaw & Abrami (2001) who explained that the interest will greatly affect students' in learning process and learning activity. The student who is not interested to

learning process and learning activity, perhaps would have a tendency to not learn as well as possible, and eventually will influence quality of learning, because when students have interest students will prepare themselves as well in learning (Alexander & Wade, 2000; McWhaw & Abrami, 2001).

Further, researchers distinguish between situational and individual interest. Krapp (2002), Hidi et al (2002), Hidi (2006) Hidi & Renninger (2006) mentioned the situational interest as an interest that focusing on creating appropriate environmental factors. Situational interest is generated by certain conditions, situation or stimuli in the environment and it represents a relatively immediate affective reaction that focuses attention and that may not be long term. That is, once situational interest is triggered, it may or may not be maintained. Meanwhile, the individual interest stressed on predisposition of individual characteristic to re-engage with certain objects and events, and it will increase knowledge and value, as well as positive affect (Hidi, 2006; Hidi, et al., 2002; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Krapp, 2002).

Moreover, Krapp (2002) Hidi et al (2002), Hidi (2006) and Hidi & Renninger (2006) also described that actually individual interest is relatively stable and develop slowly over time, because affected by repeated experiences of situational interest (Hidi, 2006; Hidi, et al., 2002; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Krapp, 2002). It means, university as an educational institution has to consider the environment that influence and affect to trigger situational interest of students. However, in the fact university sometime not provided the appropriate environment for triggering the situational interest. In other hand, sometime occurred miss placement when university accepts the students, so that when the students come and sitting in their course, the students' uncomfortable feeling and tries to avoid the academic activity.

Therefore, in this study I will investigate that the environmental of University Utara Malaysia, particularly in academic domains could be influence to trigger the situational interest of international undergraduate students.

Specifically, the objective of this study is wants to investigate the interest in academic domains of international undergraduate students at University Utara Malaysia. At specific, the research questions of this study are:

1. What is the interest in academic domains of international undergraduate students at University Utara Malaysia?
2. Is there a relationship between situational interest and individual interest in academic domains of international undergraduate students at University Utara Malaysia?

### **The Concept of Interest**

Interest has a big impact on student learning and performance. Dewey (1913) as cited on Tin (2006) and Ainley et al (2002) stated that interest plays an essential and necessary role in learning. It means, student could be difficult to follow the learning activities when they don't have interest (Ainley, et al., 2002; Tin, 2006). Meanwhile, Alexander & Wade (2000) and McWhaw & Abrami (2001) explained that the interest will greatly affect students' in learning process and learning activity. The student who is not interested to learning process and learning activity, perhaps would have a tendency to not learn as well as possible, and eventually will influence quality of learning, because when students have interest students will prepare themselves as well in learning (Alexander & Wade, 2000; McWhaw & Abrami, 2001). So, when student interested to learning activities, perhaps students will be show appropriate behavior such as more

attention, more active, and more engage in activities that supported to the learning.

Basically, interest refers to inner tendency of individual. Pintrich (1989) and Schiefele (1991) as cited in McWhaw & Abrami (2001), Pintrich & Schunk (1996) and Schiefele & Krapp (1996) defined interest as a positive feeling about the topics, subject area or activities. So, in this meaning interest could be express with happy or not happy when student doing something or do they activities (McWhaw & Abrami, 2001; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Shciefele & Krapp, 1996). Meanwhile, krapp (2002), Renninger et al (2002), Hidi & Renninger (2006) and Hidi (2006) described interest as a unique motivational variable and as a psychological state that occurs during interaction between individual and objects or activity that their interest. In this interaction including a process of willingness to engage on specific object or activity, and in this process also characterized by increased attention, concentration and positive affects to the object or activity (Hidi, 2006; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Krapp, 2002; Renninger, Ewen, & Lasher, 2002). It means, interest in this context could be seen from student participation in specific object or activity. When student were interested to specific object or activity, student will show more active participation including attention, concentration and happiness to the object or activity.

Based on explanation above, researcher concluded interest as a positive feeling including engagement, attention, concentration, happiness and willingness to spend more time to specific object or activity in academic domains.

### **The Kinds of Interest**

Interest is not innate or natural, but interest grows and evolves based on individual ages and experiences. Krapp (2002) explained that interest grew and

developed based on relationship between individual purpose and environmental factor. Further, Krapp (2002) distinguished interest in two parts, there are; subjective interest and objective interests. Subjective interest refers to associated feelings toward experiences, including expectation to pleasant or unpleasant in specific object or activity. Meanwhile, objective interest refers to positive reaction of environment toward object or activity (Krapp, 2002).

Furthermore, based on the definition of interest above Krapp (2002), Hidi et al (2002), Hidi & Renniger (2006) and Hidi (2006) described that interest consisted in three parts, there are:

#### **a. Individual (Personal) Interest**

Individual interest is a predisposition of individual characteristic and relatively stable. Individual interest involves knowledge, positive affect and value, and develops slowly over time, and affected by repeated experiences of situational interest. Individual interest also refers to specific topic, object or activity, such interest in reading, interest in sport, interest in specific subject and others.

#### **b. Situational Interest**

Situational interest is an interest fostered by conditions or environmental factors. Most researchers were defined situational interest as an immediate affective response to certain conditions or stimuli in the learning environment that focuses one's attention on the task, which may or may not last over time. For example; interest to read books related to the assignment, essay, project paper and thesis and other.

#### **c. Interest as a Psychological State**

Interest as a psychological state is an interplay between personal or individual interests and environmental conditions or situational interest. The process of interest as a psychological state including increased attention, positive effect, concentration, and an increased willingness to learn. For

example; a student who has a strong interest to read about human motivation, will show often behavior to read books, journal, essay, magazine, story about motivation, both at home, at school, or at library, the student is psychologically a high interest to read about human motivation.

An addition, Hidi and Renninger (2006) and Hidi (2006) stated that interest can develop through four phases, there are;

1. Situational interest is triggered (started)
2. Situational interest is sustained (continued)
3. Situational interest becomes less-developed individual interest. (more stable dispositional form of interest)
4. Situational interest becomes a well-developed individual interest.

Those phase described that basically interest started from stimulus in the environment. When the environment was able to support and give easiness facility in specific topic, object or activity, perhaps situational interest of the student will emerge. Then, when situational interest was continued, situational interest will become more stable and finally will settle as individual interest. Those phases only describe in both of individual and situational interest, but it still important because according to Wigfield et al., (2004), both of situational and individual interest could be supported and influenced learning activities and learning performance of student, because when students have interest to the specific topic, object or activity, perhaps student will create the strategies and will engage themselves to that topic, object or activity (Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004).

Based on explanation above, we know how interest trigger and emerge. However, those explanations not talking about what aspects that contribute to develop interest, because understanding and knowing the

aspects that contribute to develop interest is also necessary and crucial.

### **The Aspect of Interest**

Interest grew and developed based on relationship between individual purpose and environmental factor. Therefore, it is important to prepare good environment so that the student will involve, enjoy and tend to possess knowledge base on the topic, object or activity that they interested. Further, Krapp (2002, 2005) and Hidi (2006) stated that have two aspects that contribute to develop interest, there are cognitive and affective aspects (Hidi, 2006; Krapp, 2002, 2005).

#### **a. Cognitive Aspect**

A cognitive aspect refers to personal values and goal. It associated with anything that can be beneficial and lead to personal satisfaction derived from interest. It means interest in cognitive aspects was grow and develop base on prejudice, expectation and conviction that lead to achieve cognitive advantage including values and goals of the topic, object or activity. When student was discovery satisfaction and profit in their object or activity, interest could be permanent, even it will grow stronger. Conversely, if there is no satisfaction and profit in their topic, object or activity, interest could be weakening, or even disappeared (Hidi, 2006; Krapp, 2002, 2005). For example, student has interest to specific subject, perhaps student will feel confident and spent more time and effort to engage him/her self to follow activities that related to that subject, because student believe and expect that activity will bring benefits, values and personal satisfaction. When the profit and satisfaction were became a reality, interest to that subject could be remain, even it will grow stronger. Conversely, if the satisfaction and benefits of activity in that subject do

not become reality, interest could be weakened or even disappear and be replaced by other subject or activity.

#### **b. Affective Aspect**

An affective aspect refers to feeling related to the experience. This aspect emphasized on feelings and personal experiences including the attitude toward people who assumed can influence each others, such as parents, teachers, public figure and friends in social peers. This affective aspect has a greater role in developing interests. It means the affective aspect have tendency to be last longer to change, therefore it is important to consider how to trigger and build the affective aspect as well to develop students interest (Hidi, 2006; Krapp, 2002, 2005). For example, student who has a good model in reading (such as parent, teacher, friends, and peers) and also has good relationship with the model, so perhaps student will follow and engage themselves to do reading activity, and eventually interest to do reading activity will become stronger and develop. Conversely, when student has a bad model and bad experience in reading activity usually student will avoid reading activity and will change it to other topic, object or activity.

#### **Methodology**

Methodology selected in this research is survey research with focused on correlation design. The author chose this method because this study intended to determine the level of interest in academic domains of students and want to examine the relationship between situational and individual interest in academic domains of international undergraduate students at university Utara Malaysia.

#### **Population and Samples**

Population in this study is international undergraduate students of

university Utara Malaysia including across countries of students, with the samples characteristics concerned to the students who are still actively following the lectures, is at undergraduate level students and, the ages between 18 until 22 years old. Additionally, based on data from unit KM Portal, RIMC and Centre for International Affairs & Cooperation (CIAC), the population of international undergraduate students at University Utara Malaysia consisted of 1674 students, including 1006 males and 668 females. According to that data and based on the table of Krejcie & Morgan (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), actually the author have determined the sample size in this study consisted of 312 students. However, because some of limitations to arrange all of international students in short time, so the author determine only 30 males of international undergraduate students that consisted of 15 Somalia, 10 Uzbekistan, and 5 Nigerian.

#### **Research Instrument**

Two research instruments used in this study including situational interest scale and individual interest scale. Situational interest scale was adapted from situational interest scale by Garcia et al (2010), and the items consisted of 12 items. Meanwhile individual interest scale was adapted from individual interest scale by Pintrich et al (1993) as cited on Garcia et al (2010), and the item consisted of 8 items (Linnenbrink-Garcia, et al., 2010).

#### **Analysis Data**

This study is to examine two research questions there are what the interest in academic domains of international undergraduate students at University Utara Malaysia, and is there a relationship between situational interest and individual interest in academic domains of international undergraduate students at University Utara

Malaysia?. Further, for answer both of the research questions the author used statistic descriptive for answering research question 1 and regression analysis for answering research question 2. Both of this analysis will be made by using the statistical program SPSS (*Statistical Product and Service Solution*) 19.0 for windows.

### Finding and Discussion

Reliability and validity statistic of instrument used in this study showed high score that appropriate to use to analyze this study. Data Cronbach's Alpha showed 0.905 scores with items validity moved from 0.351 to 0.750. It mean, this instrument qualify for using to analyze the interest in academic domains.

Further, statistic descriptive in this study (table 1) showed that the mean of interest is 72.50 with standard deviation 6.490. This data showed that basically the international undergraduate students of university Utara Malaysia have moderate level of interest in academic domains (64.33% or 19 students). The data also showed that students who have high level of interest only 20% or 6 students, and students have low level of interest is 16.67% or 5 students (see table 2 below).

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interest	30	56	80	72.50	6.490
SI	30	36	48	43.80	3.347
II	30	20	32	28.70	3.415
Valid N (listwise)	30				

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Categorization of Interest**

Standard Deviation	Skor	Categorize	N	%
$X \geq 1.0$ SD	$X \geq$ 79	High	6	20 %
$-1.0$ SD $\leq$ $X \leq 1.0$ SD	$66 \leq$ $X$ $\leq 78$	Moderate	19	64.33 %
$X \leq$ SD	$X \leq$ 65	Low	5	16.67 %
Total			30	100 %

Meanwhile, when we measure situational interest and individual interest differently, the data also showed almost the same result. Mean of situational interest (SI) is 43.80 and SD = 3.347. Meanwhile individual interest (II) showed M = 28.70 and SD = 3.415 (see table 1). This data also described that actually situational interest of international undergraduate students are 70% or 21 students in moderate level, 20% or 6 students in high level and 10% or 3 students only in low level of situational interest (see table 3). Meanwhile, data in table 4 showed that individual interest of international undergraduate students are 64.33% or 19 students in moderate level, 26.67% or 8 students in high level, and only 10% or 3 students only in low level of individual interest. This result also showed that actually the situational interest of students were develop to individual interest gradually, because when we measure the situational interest and individual interest differently we found that 6.67% or 2 students in moderate level of situational interest were develop to highly level in individual interest.

**Table 3**  
**Descriptive Categorization of Situational Interest**

Standard Deviation	Skor	Categorize	N	%
$X \geq 1.0$ SD	$X \geq 47$	High	6	20 %
$-1.0$ SD $\leq X \leq 1.0$ SD	$40 \leq X \leq 46$	Moderate	21	70 %
$X \leq$ SD	$X \leq 39$	Low	3	10 %
Total			30	100 %

**Table 4**  
**Descriptive Categorization of Individual Interest**

Standard Deviation	Skor	Categorize	N	%
$X \geq 1.0$ SD	$X \geq 32$	High	8	26.67 %
$-1.0$ SD $\leq X \leq 1.0$ SD	$25 \leq X \leq 31$	Average	19	64.33 %
$X \leq$ SD	$X \leq 24$	Low	3	10 %
Total			30	100 %

Moreover, the data of regression analysis in this study (table 5) showed that the coefficient correlation of Pearson's product moment ( $r$ ) was 0.842 and  $p = 0.000$ ; it means  $p < 0.01$ . So it can say that the research question 2 was can answered and it can be concluded that there was a highly significant correlation between situational interest and individual interest. Meanwhile the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was 0.709. This score indicates that the contribution of situational interest is 70.9% as a predictor of individual interest triggered, and 29.1% is influence by other indicators.

**Table 5**  
**Descriptive Test of Hypothesis**

Correlation	R	$R^2$	p	Contribution	Declaration
Individual Interest * Situational Interest	0,842	0,709	0,000	70.9%	Highly Significant

Based on the result of data above, we know that actually this study showed have highly correlation between situational interest and individual interest. The data also described that situational interest could be predictor for triggering and developing the individual interest. Further, the result of this study was supported the study by Garcia et al (2010) who measuring the situational and individual interest differently in academic domains. Garcia et al (2010) were down the research concerning to the interest in mathematics subject. This research was conducted in grade 7 through 12 grades and consisted of 284 samples. The result of Garcia study also showed that individual interest and situational interest were highly correlated ( $r = 0.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Moreover, Garcia et al (2010) also found that students with higher situational interest in mathematic subject at the beginning of the school year had higher levels of individual interest in mathematic subject by the end of the year. Garcia also found that situational interest have contribute to develop individual interest in mathematic subject (Linnenbrink-Garcia, et al., 2010).

The finding of this study also proved the theoretical of interest by Krapp (2002, 2005) Hidi et al (2002), Hidi (2006), and Hidi & Renniger (2006). They mentioned that situational interest can develop into individual interest. Further, they also described that interest can develop through four phases, there are; situational interest is triggered

(started), situational interest is sustained (continued), situational interest becomes less-developed individual interest (more stable dispositional form of interest), and situational interest becomes a well-developed individual interest. Those arguments described how important the role of environment to provided stimulus that can trigger situational interest of students. It means, when the environment was able to provided, support and gives easiness facility in academic domains, perhaps situational interest of the student will emerge. Then, when situational interest was continued, situational interest will become more stable and finally will settle as individual interest as well.

### Conclusion

Generally this study can answer research questions 1 and 2. However, the result of this study cannot be generalize because some limitations of this study, such as sample size and methodology. This study only used 30 males' samples of international undergraduate students, so perhaps the data was not portrayed the real condition of interest of international undergraduate students of University Utara Malaysia. In other hand, perhaps the data also will show differently when we use females or both of males and females as samples in this domains. Therefore, for the next study in this domain I suggested to use large sample size including both of males and females. Second limitation refers to methodology. Actually, this research is better to use pre-test and post-test design, so the data will appear the real condition about how the situational interest develop to individual interest. Therefore, pre-test and pos-test design, and quasi experimental is better as possible to use in the next study.

However, in general the findings of this study have to consider by educational institution, including policy maker, school management, school administrator, and

teachers or lecturers to build the environment that provided stimulus that can trigger the situational interest of students in academic domains. It is important to consider because according to Wigfield et al (2004), McWhaw & Abrami (2001), and Alexander & Wade (2000), interest will greatly affect students' in learning process and learning activity, and eventually also will influence the success or failure of students in academic domains.

### References

- Ainley, M., Hillman, K., & Hidi, S. (2002). Gender and interest processes in response to literary texts: situational and individual interest. *Learning and Instruction, 12*, 411-428.
- Alexander, P. A., & Wade, S. E. (2000). Contexts that promote interest, self-determination, and learning: lasting impressions and lingering questions. *Computers in Human Behavior, 16*, 349-258.
- Hidi, S. (2006). Interest: A unique motivational variable. *Educational Research Review, 1*, 69-82.
- Hidi, S., Berndorff, D., & Ainley, M. (2002). Children's argument writing, interest and selfefficacy: an intervention study. *Learning and Instruction, 12*, 429-446.
- Hidi, S., & Renninger, K. A. (2006). The four-phase model of interest development. *Educational Psychologist, 41*, 111-127.

- Krapp, A. (2002). Structural and dynamic aspects of interest development: theoretical considerations from an ontogenetic perspective. *Learning and Instruction, 12*, 383-409.
- Krapp, A. (2005). Basic needs and the development of interest and intrinsic motivational orientations. *Learning and Instruction, 15*, 381-395.
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 30*, 607-610.
- Linnenbrink-Garcia, L., Durik, A. M., Conley, A. M., Barron, K. E., Tauer, J. M., Karabenick, S. A., et al. (2010). Measuring Situational Interest in Academic Domains. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 70*(4), 647-671.
- McWhaw, K., & Abrami, P. C. (2001). Student Goal Orientation and Interest: Effects on Students' Use of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 26*, 311-329.
- Pintrich, P. R., & Schunk, D. H. (1996). *Motivation in Education; Theory, Research, and Applications*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Renninger, K. A., Ewen, L., & Lasher, A. K. (2002). Individual interest as context in expository text and mathematical word problems. *Learning and Instruction, 12*, 467-491.
- Shchiefele, U., & Krapp, A. (1996). Topic interest and free recall of expository text. *learning and Individual Differences, 8*(2), 141-160.
- Tin, T. B. (2006). Investigating the nature of 'interest' reported by a group of postgraduate students in an MA in English language teacher education programme. *System, 34*, 222-238.
- Wigfield, A., Guthrie, J. T., Tonks, S., & Perencevich, K. C. (2004). Children's Motivation for Reading: Domain Specificity and Instructional Influences. *The Journal of Educational Research, 97*(6), 229-309.

