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Needs Analysis for the Development of a REBT–Expressive Arts Therapy Psychoeducational Intervention Module to Enhance Motivation and Social Skills among Students with Educational Needs (SEN)

Rosnah Md Zain¹, Mohd Azrin Mohd Nasir², Nur Hafizah Md Akhir³

¹School of Applied Psychology, Social Work & Policy, College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia. adriana.eu1009@gmail.com

^{2,3}School of Applied Psychology, Social Work & Policy, College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia.

ABSTRACT: Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) often face challenges in terms of motivation and social skills. However, the development of intervention modules based on their actual needs remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to identify the need for developing a Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy–Expressive Arts Therapy (REBT–EAT) Psychoeducational Intervention Module to enhance the motivation and social skills of students with SEN. This study employed a survey research design. Quantitative data were collected using two questionnaires developed by the researcher and validated by three experts in the relevant fields. The first questionnaire involved 10 respondents, comprising five Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers and five teachers from the Integrated Special Education Programme (ISEP), who were selected through purposive sampling from rural secondary schools in the state of Kedah, Malaysia. The second questionnaire involved 10 students with SEN categorised as having learning disabilities. The first set of findings indicated that the majority of teachers perceived students with SEN as having low levels of motivation and social skills, while the second set of findings confirmed that the students with SEN demonstrated a low level of motivation and a moderate level of social skills. These conditions contribute to difficulties among students with SEN in sustaining motivation and engaging in positive interactions with their peers and teachers. Findings from both data sources consistently demonstrated the need for a systematic and comprehensive psychoeducational intervention module that is appropriate to the context of students with SEN in rural secondary schools. This study provides empirical justification for the development of the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy–Expressive Arts Therapy (REBT–EAT) Psychoeducational Intervention Module as an intervention with the potential to enhance the motivation and social skills of students with SEN. The implications of this study are expected to provide guidance for Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers, special education teachers, and researchers in developing more effective psychosocial interventions for students with SEN.

1. INTRODUCTION

Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) constitute part of the diversity that exists within a school community (Ang & Lee, 2023). Therefore, this group should also receive the same educational rights as other students in mainstream education.

According to Razip and Shaffeei (2025), students with SEN have considerable potential as valuable assets in contributing to the nation's socioeconomic development. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2012) also acknowledged the importance of providing appropriate education for students with SEN. This is particularly important because the number of students with SEN has increased each year, requiring the government to address this issue promptly (Noor Sara Mashitoh, 2023; Yuzaila, Mohd Norazmi, & Syar Mezee, 2024). For this reason, guidance and counselling teachers are among the most important figures in supporting students with SEN (Mat Daros et al., 2012; Mohamad Hisyam & Siti Nor Idayu, 2017).

In the secondary school context, Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers play an important role as facilitators, counsellors, and guides in efforts to develop students' character and enhance their motivation. Based on the study by Sazalia and Rosadah (2019), Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers are also often perceived negatively for not providing the best services to clients. Many individuals perceive that these teachers should possess a variety of methods, techniques, and theories to assist clients. However, preliminary findings indicate that Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers frequently face limitations in terms of systematic and effective intervention modules for addressing low motivation and social skills among students with SEN. This situation creates a need to develop a comprehensive psychoeducational intervention module grounded in psychological theory and practical approaches appropriate to the special education context.

The development of inclusive education in Malaysia emphasises the importance of providing equitable learning opportunities for all students, including students with SEN. Although various policies and programmes have been implemented by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), issues related to motivation and social skills among students with SEN remain major challenges that require serious attention. Sukumaran et al. (2003) explained that the very slow social development of students with SEN contributes to low self-confidence. This factor not only affects academic achievement but also influences students' psychosocial well-being. According to Louis and Isaac (2016), this occurs because students with SEN experience difficulties in developing social interactions with their typically developing peers. These findings also support the study by Nawwar and Khairul Farhah (2022), which showed that a lack of motivation toward inclusive peers also prevents students with SEN from expanding their social interactions.

Referring to the study conducted by Tanaka et al. (2023), students with SEN continue to face various challenges within the education system that require appropriate educational and psychosocial support. Consistent with this, Bari et al. (2013) and Abdullah et al. (2015) also reported that curriculum implementation for students with SEN continues to face several weaknesses requiring attention. Therefore, the provision of psychoeducational interventions that are systematically planned and based on the needs of students with SEN should be prioritised within the school context. Although Zhang et al. (2024) did not specifically examine the implementation of psychoeducational interventions, their findings emphasising the importance of school support resources strengthen the need for structured support within the school environment to facilitate the development of students with SEN. Thus, these findings provide contextual support for the present study, which focuses on a REBT–Expressive Arts Therapy psychoeducational intervention as an approach to enhance motivation and social skills among students with SEN.

This study was conducted in rural secondary schools in the state of Kedah and involved Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers, ISEP teachers, and students with SEN themselves as the study sample. The selection of this sample is significant because Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers and ISEP teachers interact directly with students with SEN and have practical experience in managing issues related to students' motivation and social skills. In addition, the researcher examined the perspectives of students with SEN to determine their levels of motivation and social skills. This is because relatively few previous studies have included students with SEN themselves as the study sample. Therefore, their perspectives provide an important foundation for identifying the actual need for the proposed intervention module.

The study also aims to:

1. Identify the level of motivation among students with SEN.
2. Identify the level of social skills among students with SEN.
3. Identify the need to develop a psychoeducational module based on REBT theory using an Expressive Arts Therapy approach.

In addition, this study emphasises the importance of integrating a psychoeducational approach with creative and expressive arts therapy methods. The REBT–Expressive Arts Therapy (REBT–EAT) Psychoeducational Intervention Module is proposed as a conceptual framework capable of integrating cognitive, emotional, and expressive arts therapy components to enhance the

motivation and social skills of students with SEN. This approach is considered more holistic because it focuses not only on academic aspects but also on students' psychological and social well-being.

The study by Abdul Rahman et al. (2024) also supports the view that expressive arts therapy can help individuals explore themselves in a safe manner, develop greater self-understanding, strengthen resilience through creative elements that can be visually observed, and develop positive attitudes through each activity. This statement is further supported by Paguio (2021), who found that expressive arts therapy can enhance motivation, self-esteem, and communication between students with SEN and their families. In line with Laudza et al. (2026), the application of REBT among early adolescents is highly appropriate and can be used to develop positive attitudes and patterns of thinking about oneself. Based on previous studies, the researcher views REBT and expressive arts therapy as an appropriate combination for students with SEN in the early adolescent age range of 13 to 19 years.

Overall, this introduction emphasises that the study is not merely intended to identify the need for an intervention module, but also to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and effective special education model. With the REBT–EAT module, it is hoped that students with SEN can be guided to achieve their optimal potential, while Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers and ISEP teachers can obtain a more systematic pedagogical tool to support students' psychosocial development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher's review of studies conducted during the most recent five-year period in the field of Special Education indicates that numerous studies have been conducted both within Malaysia and internationally. However, the researcher found that most of these studies focused more on samples involving ISEP teachers themselves than on students with SEN. These include studies conducted by Rosilah and Mohd Hanafi (2022), Mohd Tajuddin and Shaffeei (2023), Mohamad Taha (2024), Sharifah Nurulaisyah, Johthi, and Noraini (2025), and Wong, Zulkifli, and Muhammed Fauzi (2025). All of these studies examined the competencies of ISEP teachers, encompassing various aspects such as knowledge, skills, readiness, and professional development.

In addition, the researcher found that previous studies in Special Education frequently employed interview and survey methodologies rather than quasi-experimental approaches. Studies using interview methodologies include those by Wong, Zulkifli, and Muhammed Fauzi (2025), Nazrah and Kama (2023), Nur Hazwani et al. (2023), and Mohamad Taha and Zaimuariffudin (2023). Studies employing survey research designs include Sharifah Nurulaisyah, Johthi, and Noraini (2025), Abu Yazid and Siti Nurliyana (2023), Mohd Tajuddin and Shaffeei (2023), and Sazalia and Rosadah (2019).

Therefore, the researcher identifies a gap in the field of special education, particularly regarding how to enhance the motivation and social skills of students with SEN. Students with SEN require interventions that are appropriate to their intellectual level, in line with the aspiration of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) that students with SEN should receive equal educational rights to those of students in mainstream education. Enhancing motivation is particularly important for students with SEN because it can affect their academic achievement, social development, and self-development (Norfakhriana, Suhaila, & Hafidzoh, 2023). This statement is also supported by the findings of Nurul Husna (2025), which demonstrated that the motivation of students with SEN can be enhanced through interventions involving recognition and appreciation.

In addition, a previous study conducted by Fatin Athirah et al. (2019) found that psychoeducational group counselling was effective in providing motivation and supporting the positive development of students with SEN. The approach addressed students' developmental needs by promoting positive changes in their thinking, behaviour, and emotional functioning. Furthermore, the psychoeducational group counselling intervention, which was conducted over four sessions, successfully improved the social skills, psychomotor skills, and self-management awareness of students with SEN. These findings suggest that psychoeducational group counselling can provide a structured and supportive approach to addressing the developmental, behavioural, emotional, and psychosocial needs of students with SEN.

Furthermore, Razip and Shaffeei (2025), in a study involving students with SEN, found that communication problems and difficulties in conveying information and expressing their needs limited the development of their social interactions. In addition, the level of language comprehension among students with SEN is also low. Therefore, any intervention developed should consider the selection and use of simple language that is easily understood by students with SEN.

Based on findings from previous studies, it can be concluded that there is a strong justification for developing a psychoeducational intervention module to assist Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers in enhancing the motivation and social skills of students with SEN. It is hoped that the developed module will benefit students with SEN by enhancing their motivation and social skills and, consequently, assisting them in achieving better employability after completing school.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey research design. The survey method was appropriate for obtaining the preliminary information required by the researcher quickly and accurately before conducting the main study. The quantitative data obtained were analysed descriptively using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

This study was conducted in several rural secondary schools in the state of Kedah, Malaysia. This was because the rate of absenteeism was found to be higher in rural schools than in schools categorised as urban. The study population consisted of Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers and ISEP teachers serving in rural secondary schools. A total of 10 respondents, comprising five Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers and five ISEP teachers, provided feedback. In addition, 10 students with SEN were also included as respondents in this study.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Expert Validation Findings

To evaluate the instrument developed by the researcher for obtaining preliminary information regarding the needs of the study, three experts in the field of counselling were selected. The findings are presented as follows:

Table 1: Demographic Information of Experts

Expert	Position and Workplace	Years of Service	Area of Expertise
1	Matriculation College Counsellor	14	Counselling
2	Teacher Education Institute Lecturer	18	Counselling
3	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	31	Counselling

As shown in Table 1, three experts were involved in the evaluation process of the research instrument. The first expert was a Matriculation College Counsellor with 14 years of service experience in counselling. The second expert was a lecturer at a Teacher Education Institute with 18 years of service experience, expertise in counselling, and teaching responsibilities related to Guidance and Counselling services for the needs of students with SEN. The third expert was a Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher with 31 years of service experience in counselling.

Overall, all three experts had backgrounds in counselling, with service experience ranging from 14 to 31 years. The diversity of their workplaces—namely, a matriculation college, a Teacher Education Institute, and a school—enabled the instrument to be evaluated on the basis of professional experience across different educational and counselling service contexts. Their experience also provided a relevant basis for assessing content appropriateness, item clarity, and the suitability of the needs assessment instrument developed.

Section A: Motivation Construct

Expert ratings for each item are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Evaluation of the Motivation Construct

Item	Statement	E1	E2	E3	Experts Scoring 3/4	I-CVI
A1	I show an interest in attending school.	4	4	4	3	1.00

A2	I make an effort to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher.	4	4	4	3	1.00
A3	I easily give up when faced with difficult tasks.	4	4	4	3	1.00
A4	I demonstrate determination to achieve success in learning.	4	4	4	3	1.00
A5	I pay attention while the teacher is teaching.	4	4	4	3	1.00
	S-CVI/Ave					1.00

Note. E1 = Expert 1; E2 = Expert 2; E3 = Expert 3; I-CVI = Item-Level Content Validity Index; S-CVI/Ave = Scale-Level Content Validity Index based on the Average Method. Score 1 = Highly Irrelevant, 2 = Irrelevant, 3 = Relevant, and 4 = Highly Relevant.

Based on the evaluation conducted by three experts for Section A, the Motivation Construct, the findings showed that all five developed items received a score of 4 (Highly Relevant) from all three experts. The items covered interest in attending school, effort in completing tasks assigned by the teacher, the tendency to give up when facing difficult tasks, determination to achieve success in learning, and attention while the teacher is teaching.

Specifically, Item A1, “I show an interest in attending school”; Item A2, “I make an effort to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher”; Item A3, “I easily give up when faced with difficult tasks”; Item A4, “I demonstrate determination to achieve success in learning”; and Item A5, “I pay attention while the teacher is teaching” each received a score of 4 from all three experts. These findings indicate complete agreement among the experts that all items were highly relevant for representing the motivation construct to be measured among students with SEN.

Based on the calculation of the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI), each item from A1 to A5 obtained an I-CVI value of 1.00 because all three experts rated every item as relevant or highly relevant. Subsequently, the Scale-Level Content Validity Index based on the Average Method (S-CVI/Ave) for the Motivation Construct was 1.00. This value indicates complete agreement among the experts regarding the content relevance of all items for the construct.

Overall, the expert evaluation findings provide strong support for the content validity of Section A. All developed items were rated as highly relevant by all three experts and were appropriate for representing the aspects of motivation to be measured in the needs assessment of students with SEN. Therefore, all five items in the Motivation Construct may be retained for use in the research instrument, subject to any improvements in language or presentation should specific recommendations be provided by the experts.

Section B: Social Skills Construct

Expert ratings for each item are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Evaluation of the Social Skills Construct

Item	Statement	E1	E2	E3	Experts Scoring 3/4	I-CVI
B1	I can cooperate with friends in group activities.	4	3	4	3	1.00
B2	I respect my friends' opinions.	3	3	4	3	1.00

B3	I initiate conversations with friends in a positive manner.	4	4	4	3	1.00
B4	I am able to control my emotions when facing conflict.	4	4	4	3	1.00
B5	I demonstrate confidence when interacting with teachers and friends.	3	3	3	3	1.00
	S-CVI/Ave					1.00

Note. E1 = Expert 1; E2 = Expert 2; E3 = Expert 3; I-CVI = Item-Level Content Validity Index; S-CVI/Ave = Scale-Level Content Validity Index based on the Average Method. Score 1 = Highly Irrelevant, 2 = Irrelevant, 3 = Relevant, and 4 = Highly Relevant.

Based on Table 3, the evaluation of the five items in the Social Skills Construct by three experts showed that all items received either a score of 3 (Relevant) or 4 (Highly Relevant). These findings indicate that all three experts agreed that all developed items were relevant for measuring the social skills construct among students with SEN.

Specifically, Item B1, “I can cooperate with friends in group activities,” received a score of 4 from two experts and a score of 3 from one expert. Item B2, “I respect my friends’ opinions,” received a score of 3 from two experts and a score of 4 from one expert. These findings show that all three experts accepted both items as relevant, although there were differences in the degree of relevance assigned.

Item B3, “I initiate conversations with friends in a positive manner,” and Item B4, “I am able to control my emotions when facing conflict,” each received a score of 4 from all three experts. These evaluations demonstrate complete agreement that both items were highly relevant for measuring aspects of social skills among students with SEN.

Meanwhile, Item B5, “I demonstrate confidence when interacting with teachers and friends,” received a score of 3 from all three experts. Although this score was lower than those for Items B3 and B4, a score of 3 was still categorised as Relevant according to the evaluation scale used. Therefore, all three experts agreed that Item B5 was relevant for measuring the social skills construct. The Content Validity Index (CVI) calculations showed that all items from B1 to B5 obtained an I-CVI value of 1.00 because all three experts assigned a score of 3 or 4 to each item. Subsequently, the S-CVI/Ave value for the overall Social Skills Construct was 1.00. This value indicates complete agreement among the experts regarding the relevance of all items to the construct being measured.

Overall, the expert evaluation findings provide strong support for the content validity of the Social Skills Construct. All five items were rated as relevant or highly relevant by all three experts and had an I-CVI value of 1.00. Therefore, based on the expert evaluation, these items demonstrate very good content validity support for use in measuring the social skills construct in the SEN Needs Assessment Instrument.

Section C: Overall Evaluation of the Instrument

Expert ratings for each item are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Expert Evaluation of the Overall SEN Needs Assessment Instrument

Item	Statement	E1	E2	E3	Experts Scoring 3/4	I-CVI
C1	All items in Construct A are appropriate for measuring the motivation construct.	4	4	4	3	1.00

C2	All items in Construct B are appropriate for measuring the social skills construct.	4	3	4	3	1.00
C3	The language used is clear and easy to understand.	3	3	4	3	1.00
C4	The arrangement of the items is appropriate.	4	3	4	3	1.00
C5	The number of items is sufficient.	4	4	4	3	1.00
C6	This instrument is suitable for use in the actual study.	4	3	4	3	1.00
	S-CVI/Ave					1.00

Note. E1 = Expert 1; E2 = Expert 2; E3 = Expert 3; I-CVI = Item-Level Content Validity Index; S-CVI/Ave = Scale-Level Content Validity Index based on the Average Method. Scores of 3 and 4 were categorised as relevant in the CVI calculation.

Based on the evaluation of the overall SEN Needs Assessment Instrument by three experts in Table 4, all six evaluated aspects received scores ranging from 3 (Relevant) to 4 (Highly Relevant). These findings indicate that all three experts provided positive evaluations of the suitability of the developed instrument. For Item C1, concerning the suitability of all items in Construct A for measuring the motivation construct, all three experts assigned a score of 4 (Highly Relevant). This finding indicates complete agreement among the experts that the developed items were highly relevant for measuring the motivation construct. For Item C2, concerning the suitability of all items in Construct B for measuring the social skills construct, two experts assigned a score of 4 and one expert assigned a score of 3. This indicates that all three experts agreed that the items were relevant for measuring the social skills construct.

Regarding language use (C3), two experts assigned a score of 3 and one expert assigned a score of 4 to the statement that the language used was clear and easy to understand. Although all experts rated the language aspect as relevant, this finding indicates that language clarity could be given attention during the instrument improvement process, particularly to ensure that each statement is easily understood by students with SEN. For the appropriateness of item arrangement (C4), two experts assigned a score of 4, while one expert assigned a score of 3. This finding indicates that the overall arrangement of items in the instrument was considered appropriate. Subsequently, for the adequacy of the number of items (C5), all three experts assigned a score of 4, indicating complete agreement that the number of items contained in the instrument was sufficient.

For Item C6, which evaluated the suitability of the instrument for use in the actual study, two experts assigned a score of 4 and one expert assigned a score of 3. This finding indicates that all three experts considered the instrument relevant for use in the actual study. Based on the Content Validity Index (CVI) calculation, all six evaluation aspects obtained an I-CVI value of 1.00 because all three experts assigned scores of either 3 or 4. Subsequently, the S-CVI/Ave value for Section C was 1.00, indicating complete agreement among the experts regarding the relevance of the overall instrument evaluation aspects.

Overall, the expert evaluation findings indicate that the SEN Needs Assessment Instrument received a very good evaluation in terms of the suitability of items for the motivation and social skills constructs, clarity of language, arrangement of items, adequacy of the number of items, and suitability of the instrument for use in the actual study. These findings provide expert support for the overall suitability of the instrument for conducting the SEN needs assessment.

4.2 Findings from Teachers

Based on the findings from the first questionnaire administered to 10 respondents comprising Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers and ISEP teachers, the survey results are presented as follows:

Section A: Demographic Information

Table 5: Demographic Information of Respondents

Respondent	Position	Years of Service	Professional Qualification
1	ISEP Teacher	16	Bachelor's Degree (Guidance and Counselling)
2	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	17	Bachelor's Degree (Guidance and Counselling)
3	ISEP Teacher	17	Bachelor's Degree (Cognitive Science)
4	ISEP Teacher	3	Bachelor's Degree (Special Education)
5	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	12	Bachelor's Degree (Guidance and Counselling)
6	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	15	Bachelor's Degree (Guidance and Counselling)
7	ISEP Teacher	4	Bachelor's Degree (Public Management)
8	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	16	Bachelor's Degree (Psychology/Counselling)
9	ISEP Teacher	20	Bachelor's Degree (Fine Art and Design)
10	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	15	Bachelor's Degree (Guidance and Counselling)

N = 10

Section B: Feedback Survey Concerning Students with SEN

Table 6: Students with SEN in my school have a low level of motivation

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	6 (60%)	3 (30%)	10 (100%)

Table 6 shows the findings for the stated item. Only 1 respondent (10%) disagreed with the statement. A total of 6 respondents (60%) agreed, while 3 respondents (30%) strongly agreed with the statement that students with SEN in their school have a low level of motivation.

Table 7: Students with SEN in my school have a low level of social skills

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	7 (70%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)

Table 7 shows the respondents' feedback on the item. The findings indicated that 2 respondents (20%) disagreed, 7 respondents (70%) agreed, while 1 respondent (10%) strongly agreed with the statement that students with SEN in their school have a low level of social skills.

Table 8: There is a specific intervention module that I use to enhance the motivation of students with SEN

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
5 (50%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)

Table 8 shows the number and percentage of respondents' feedback on the item. The findings indicated that 5 respondents (50%) strongly disagreed, 2 respondents (20%) disagreed and 2 respondents (20%) were uncertain, while 1 respondent (10%) agreed with the statement that there is a specific intervention module that they use to enhance the motivation of students with SEN.

Table 9: There is a specific intervention module that I use to enhance the social skills of students with SEN

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
7 (70%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)

Table 9 shows the number and percentage of respondents' feedback on the item. The findings indicated that 7 respondents (70%) strongly disagreed, 1 respondent (10%) disagreed, while 2 respondents (20%) were uncertain about the statement that there is a specific intervention module that they use to enhance the social skills of students with SEN.

Table 10: A specific intervention module is needed to help enhance the motivation of students with SEN

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)

Table 10 shows the respondents' feedback on the item. The findings indicated that all 10 respondents (100%) strongly agreed that a specific intervention module is needed to help enhance the motivation of students with SEN.

Table 11: A specific intervention module is needed to help enhance the social skills of students with SEN

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)

Table 11 shows the respondents' feedback on the item. The findings indicated that all 10 respondents (100%) strongly agreed that a specific intervention module is needed to help enhance the social skills of students with SEN.

Table 12: The employability of students with SEN is low because of limitations in motivation

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	7 (70%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)

Table 12 shows the respondents' feedback on the item. The findings indicated that 7 respondents (70%) agreed that the employability of students with SEN is low because of limitations in motivation, while 1 respondent (10%) was uncertain and 2 respondents (20%) strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 13: The employability of students with SEN is low because of limitations in social skills

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	7 (70%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)

Table 13 shows the respondents' feedback on the item. The findings indicated that 7 respondents (70%) agreed that the employability of students with SEN is low because of limitations in social skills, while 1 respondent (10%) was uncertain and 2 respondents (20%) strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 14: The Expressive Arts Therapy approach is suitable for application in interventions to enhance the motivation and social skills of students with SEN

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	4 (40%)	5 (50%)	10 (100%)

Table 14 shows feedback on the item stating that the Expressive Arts Therapy approach is suitable for application in interventions to enhance the motivation and social skills of students with SEN. The findings showed that only 1 respondent (10%) was uncertain about the statement, while 4 respondents (40%) agreed and 5 respondents (50%) strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 15: The development of module activities such as “Making a Collage, Imagery Technique, and My Idol” can enhance the motivation of students with SEN

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (30%)	7 (70%)	10 (100%)

Table 15 shows the findings for the item stating that the development of module activities such as “Making a Collage, Imagery Technique, and My Idol” can enhance the motivation of students with SEN. The findings showed that 3 respondents (30%) agreed with the statement, while 7 respondents (70%) strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 16: The development of module activities such as “Your Name, My Name, Making Emojis, and Creating a Puppet” can enhance the social skills of students with SEN

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (30%)	7 (70%)	10 (100%)

Table 16 shows feedback on the item stating that the development of module activities such as “Your Name, My Name, Making Emojis, and Creating a Puppet” can enhance the social skills of students with SEN. The findings showed that 3 respondents (30%) agreed with the statement, while 7 respondents (70%) strongly agreed with the statement.

Section C: Main Issues Involving Students with SEN

Table 17: Three Main Issues Involving Students with SEN

Respondent	Position	Main Issue	Second Issue	Third Issue
1	ISEP Teacher	Absenteeism	Fighting	Romantic relationships
2	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	Absenteeism	None	None
3	ISEP Teacher	Absenteeism	Social withdrawal	Not socialising with friends

4	ISEP Teacher	Absenteeism	Family finances	Communication
5	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	Absenteeism	Communication	Lack of interest in learning
6	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	Absenteeism	Verbal bullying	Fighting
7	ISEP Teacher	Absenteeism	Verbal bullying	Fighting
8	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	Absenteeism	School dropout	Low self-motivation
9	ISEP Teacher	Absenteeism	School dropout	Low motivation
10	Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teacher	Absenteeism	None	None

Table 17 shows the respondents' feedback based on the three main issues involving students with SEN in the respondents' schools. The findings indicated that absenteeism was the primary issue faced by students with SEN. The second issues faced by students with SEN included fighting, social withdrawal, family financial problems, communication, verbal bullying, and school dropout (being expelled from school or leaving school). The third issues included romantic relationships, not socialising with friends, communication, lack of interest in learning, fighting, and low motivation.

4.3 Findings from Students with SEN

Based on the findings from the second questionnaire administered to 10 respondents comprising students with SEN, the survey results are presented as follows:

Section A: Respondent Demographics

Table 18: Respondent Demographics (Students with SEN)

Respondent	Gender	Age (Years)
1	Male	13
2	Male	14
3	Male	14
4	Female	14
5	Female	15
6	Female	15
7	Male	17
8	Male	17
9	Male	18
10	Male	19

N = 10

Based on the demographic analysis in Table 18, this study involved 10 respondents comprising students with SEN categorised as having learning disabilities. In terms of gender, most respondents were male, with seven respondents (70.0%), while three respondents (30.0%) were female. This finding indicates that the composition of the study respondents was dominated by male students compared with female students. In terms of age, respondents ranged from 13 to 19 years, with a mean age of 15.60 years. Specifically, one respondent (10.0%) was 13 years old, three respondents (30.0%) were 14 years old, two respondents (20.0%) were 15 years old, two respondents (20.0%) were 17 years old, one respondent (10.0%) was 18 years old, and one respondent (10.0%) was 19 years old. Overall, this age distribution indicates that the study respondents represented various stages of adolescence within the secondary special education context.

Overall, the demographic profile indicates that the study respondents comprised students with SEN within the adolescent age range, with a relatively broad variation in age. This age distribution enabled the study to obtain an initial overview of the experiences and needs of students with SEN at different developmental stages within the secondary school context. However, given the small number of respondents and the unequal gender composition, these demographic findings should be interpreted descriptively and are not intended to be generalised to the entire population of students with SEN. Instead, the demographic information serves to provide context regarding the characteristics of the respondents involved in the study and to assist in the more systematic interpretation of the needs assessment findings.

Table 19: Items in the Motivation Construct

Item	Statement	M	SD	Level
1	I show an interest in attending school.	1.90	0.99	Low
2	I make an effort to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher.	2.40	0.84	Moderate
3	*I easily give up when faced with difficult tasks.	3.80	0.92	High*
4	I demonstrate determination to achieve success in learning.	2.10	0.88	Low
5	I pay attention while the teacher is teaching.	2.30	1.25	Low
	Overall Motivation Construct Score	2.18	0.86	Low

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. The mean interpretation ranges are 1.00–2.33 (Low), 2.34–3.66 (Moderate), and 3.67–5.00 (High).

**Item 3 is a negatively worded item and was reverse scored before the construct score was calculated.*

Based on Table 19, the motivation construct obtained an overall mean score of 2.18 (SD = 0.86), indicating that the motivation level of students with SEN was low. The item with the lowest mean score was “I show an interest in attending school” (M = 1.90, SD = 0.99), indicating that the majority of respondents showed limited interest in attending school. In addition, the fourth item, “I demonstrate determination to achieve success in learning,” also recorded a low score (M = 2.10, SD = 0.88), indicating that respondents’ determination to achieve academic success remained unsatisfactory.

In contrast, the second item, “I make an effort to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher” (M = 2.40, SD = 0.84), indicated that respondents demonstrated a moderate level of effort in completing assigned tasks. The third item showed a high tendency to give up easily, with a mean score of 3.80 (SD = 0.92). However, this was a negatively worded item and was reverse scored before the overall motivation construct score was calculated. Meanwhile, the item “I pay attention while the teacher is teaching” obtained a mean score of 2.30 (SD = 1.25), which was also at a low level.

Overall, the findings indicate that the motivation level of students with SEN remained low and required intervention to enhance their interest in attending school, determination in learning, attention during the teaching and learning process, and resilience when facing challenging tasks.

Table 20: Items in the Social Skills Construct

Item	Statement	M	SD	Level
1	I can cooperate with friends in group activities.	2.40	1.07	Moderate
2	I respect my friends' opinions.	2.00	0.94	Low
3	I initiate conversations with friends in a positive manner.	3.30	1.16	Moderate
4	I am able to control my emotions when facing conflict.	2.50	1.35	Moderate
5	I demonstrate confidence when interacting with teachers and friends.	2.60	1.26	Moderate
	Overall Social Skills Construct Score	2.56	0.74	Moderate

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. The mean interpretation ranges are 1.00–2.33 (Low), 2.34–3.66 (Moderate), and 3.67–5.00 (High).

Based on Table 20, the social skills construct recorded an overall mean score of 2.56 (SD = 0.74), indicating that the overall social skills level of students with SEN was moderate. The item with the highest mean score was the third item, “I initiate conversations with friends in a positive manner” (M = 3.30, SD = 1.16), indicating that respondents had a moderate tendency to initiate social interactions positively. However, this level had not yet reached the high category. In contrast, the second item, “I respect my friends’ opinions,” recorded the lowest mean score (M = 2.00, SD = 0.94), indicating that the aspect of respecting peers’ views still required strengthening. The first item, “I can cooperate with friends in group activities,” and the fourth item, “I am able to control my emotions when facing conflict,” obtained mean scores of 2.40 and 2.50, respectively, while the fifth item, “I demonstrate confidence when interacting with teachers and friends,” obtained a mean score of 2.60. All of these items were at a moderate level except the second item, which recorded a low level. Although the overall social skills level of students with SEN was moderate, item-level analysis indicated that several aspects of social skills still required strengthening. These findings, together with teachers’ perceptions and evidence from previous literature, provide justification for the need to develop a systematic intervention to strengthen the social skills of students with SEN.

Overall, the findings indicate that students with SEN continue to have needs in several aspects of social skills, particularly respecting peers’ opinions, cooperating in group activities, regulating emotions when facing conflict, and developing confidence when interacting with teachers and peers. Therefore, these aspects should be considered in the development of the content and activities of the intervention module.

Table 21: Summary of Descriptive Analysis by Construct

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Level
Motivation	2.18	0.86	Low
Social Skills	2.56	0.74	Moderate
Overall Needs Assessment	2.37	0.75	Moderate

Overall, based on Table 21, the descriptive analysis indicates that the level of need among students with SEN for the motivation construct ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.86$) was low, while social skills ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.74$) were at a moderate level. The overall mean score for the study was 2.37 ($SD = 0.75$), indicating that there remains room to improve both aspects through appropriate intervention. These findings support the need to develop the REBT–Expressive Arts Therapy Psychoeducational Intervention Module to help enhance the motivation and social skills of students with SEN.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings obtained indicate that the levels of motivation and social skills among students with special educational needs (SEN) have not yet reached an optimal level and consequently affect their academic achievement and psychosocial well-being. This is consistent with previous studies emphasising that motivation and social skills are important components in ensuring the effectiveness of inclusive education. Therefore, the need for a systematic intervention module grounded in psychological theory is highly pressing.

The role of teachers, particularly Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers and Integrated Special Education Programme teachers, was found to be highly significant in developing the character and enhancing the motivation of students with SEN. However, the findings of this study also revealed that teachers face limitations in terms of resources, specific modules, and appropriate intervention strategies. These constraints create challenges in their efforts to support the holistic development of students with SEN and consequently strengthen the need to develop a new intervention module.

The proposed development of the REBT–Expressive Arts Therapy (REBT–EAT) Psychoeducational Intervention Module is viewed as an approach with considerable potential because it integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioural principles with elements of expressive arts therapy. This approach not only helps students with SEN manage emotions and irrational thoughts but also provides them with opportunities to express themselves creatively. This is believed to enhance motivation and strengthen the social skills required for daily interactions at school.

In addition, the proposed REBT–EAT module may benefit Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers by providing a more systematic and practical psychoeducational framework. These teachers can use the module as a guide in planning interventions appropriate to students' needs, reducing workload, and improving the effectiveness of the support provided. With a comprehensive module, inclusive education efforts can be implemented in a more focused and effective manner in line with the aspiration of the MOE in the Malaysia Education Plan 2026–2035 to ensure that students with SEN achieve their potential according to their respective abilities (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2026).

Overall, the discussion of this study emphasises that the development of the REBT–Expressive Arts Therapy psychoeducational intervention module is not only relevant to the current needs of students with SEN but also has the potential to contribute to strengthening the special education ecosystem in Malaysia. The module is expected to serve as a primary reference for Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers in efforts to enhance students' motivation and social skills and to empower the role of these teachers in schools to implement more effective interventions. In this way, inclusive education can be realised more comprehensively and with greater impact.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of the study indicate that the main issue involving students with SEN in schools is absenteeism compared with other issues. This suggests that students with SEN who do not have a high level of motivation may contribute more substantially to school absenteeism and subsequently increase the dropout rate among students with SEN. Frequent absenteeism among students with SEN reinforces the view that they may feel uncomfortable and unhappy in the school

environment, possibly because their motivation to learn and achieve success is low. In addition, students with SEN may also experience limited enjoyment in interacting and socialising with peers and teachers at school.

Accordingly, a holistic and comprehensive psychoeducational intervention module should be developed to assist Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers in secondary schools in addressing the problems of students with SEN whose motivation and social skills have not yet reached a high level. The development of this intervention module is also intended to serve as a primary guide for Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers in preventing and addressing issues involving students with SEN at school, such as absenteeism, fighting, talking back to teachers, school dropout, bullying, and other related issues.

Furthermore, through the development of this module, Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers can indirectly enhance their skills, knowledge, and competencies in implementing the psychoeducational intervention module. Careful planning in terms of time management for group guidance sessions, required facilities, appropriate activities, and the costs involved should receive serious attention so that the REBT–Expressive Arts Therapy psychoeducational intervention module can be implemented effectively and successfully achieve its intended objectives. Therefore, students with SEN who have low levels of motivation and social skills should be assisted promptly by Full-Time Guidance and Counselling Teachers to ensure that they can achieve psychosocial well-being and position themselves for strong career employability after completing school.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Rosnah Md Zain: Conceptualization, Investigation, & Data Analysis.

Mohd Azrin Mohd Nasir: Supervision, Writing—Review & Editing.

Nur Hafizah Md Akhir: Supervision, Writing—Review & Editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The questionnaire and methodology for this study were approved by the Human Research Ethics committee of the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) (Ethics approval reference number: UUM/CAS/AHSGS/E-5).

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