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MCCLELLAND'S MOTIVATIONAL NEEDS AMONG GENERATION Z IN VOLUNTARY STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract
Generation Z is increasingly recognized for valuing meaningful experiences, personal growth, and social engagement rather than solely pursuing extrinsic rewards. Despite the growing importance of student organizations as voluntary learning environments, limited research has identified the dominant motivational needs of Generation Z students within nonprofit student organizations. This study aims to identify the dominant motivational needs of Generation Z students participating voluntarily in student organizations based on McClelland's Theory of Needs. A quantitative descriptive approach was employed using purposive sampling. Data were collected from 255 active Generation Z students involved in voluntary student organizations through a structured questionnaire measuring three motivational dimensions: need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power. The instrument demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.893. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that all motivational dimensions were rated highly. The need for achievement emerged as the most dominant motivational need, followed by need for affiliation, whereas need for power received comparatively lower, although still high, scores. The findings indicate that Generation Z students primarily perceive student organizations as platforms for competency development, experiential learning, and social collaboration rather than as avenues for obtaining formal recognition or leadership status. This study extends the application of McClelland's Theory of Needs to voluntary nonprofit student organizations and provides practical implications for designing student organization management strategies that better align with the motivational characteristics of Generation Z.
Keywords: *Generation Z, McClelland's Theory of Needs, student organizations, motivation, voluntary participation*

1. Introduction

Generasi Z Generation Z has grown up amid the rapid advancement of digital technology, providing them with extensive access to information, a strong capacity to adapt to technological changes, and patterns of social interaction that differ markedly from those of previous generations. These characteristics make Generation Z more receptive to new experiences, highly oriented toward self-development, and inclined to engage in activities that offer opportunities for learning, relationship building, and creating positive impacts within their communities. Unlike previous generations, whose activity choices were largely influenced by economic considerations, Generation Z also values opportunities to gain meaningful experiences, enhance competencies, and develop a strong sense of personal identity. This shift in orientation underscores the importance of understanding the motivational dynamics of Generation Z, particularly within the context of voluntary participation.

As Generation Z enters its productive years, it is projected to become the dominant segment of Indonesia's workforce. Utami and Siswanto (2021) estimated that Generation Z would account for approximately 77% of the Indonesian labour force by 2025. Nevertheless, the majority of this generation remains engaged in formal education, with approximately 87% currently enrolled as students in universities or polytechnic institutions (Andreas, 2024). This demographic profile indicates that today's university students are predominantly members of Generation Z who are in a critical phase of character development, competency enhancement, and preparation for future careers. Consequently, higher education institutions serve not only as providers of formal education but also as environments that facilitate the development of both academic and non-academic competencies required for professional success.

One of the most important platforms supporting this developmental process is student organizations. These organizations provide students with experiential learning opportunities through leadership roles, committee participation, community service, and various social initiatives. Such involvement enables students to develop communication skills, teamwork, leadership, decision-making abilities, problem-solving skills, and a strong sense of responsibility in carrying out organizational tasks. Beyond fostering non-technical competencies (soft skills), participation in student organizations also contributes to the development of technical competencies relevant to the labour market by exposing students to real-world situations that require critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability to change (Purwanto & Darmawan, 2020). Therefore, student organizations play a strategic role in preparing students to meet the demands of an increasingly dynamic and competitive workplace.

Despite the growing availability of alternative self-development opportunities, such as internships, professional certification programs, competitions, digital communities, and entrepreneurship, many Generation Z students continue to participate actively in student organizations. This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy because student organizations operate as nonprofit entities that rely on voluntary member participation without providing financial compensation, unlike business organizations. Nevertheless, many students willingly devote their time, energy, and even personal interests to support organizational activities. This suggests that students' involvement in student organizations is driven not solely by economic considerations but also by psychological factors that encourage them to participate, contribute, and maintain their commitment to organizational activities.

One of the most widely recognized frameworks for explaining individual motivation within organizational settings is McClelland's Theory of Needs. This theory proposes that individual behaviour is primarily influenced by three fundamental psychological needs: need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power. These needs are acquired through learning experiences and social interactions rather than being innate characteristics, resulting in varying levels of dominance across individuals. Differences in the prominence of these motivational needs influence why individuals choose to join organizations, establish social relationships, assume leadership roles, and sustain their involvement in organizational activities. Accordingly, McClelland's Theory of Needs provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding the motivation of Generation Z students participating in student organizations.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the continued relevance of McClelland's Theory of Needs across diverse contexts. Wirayudha et al. (2026) reported that Generation Z students tend to integrate achievement and affiliation needs within collaborative activities. Similarly, Munthe and Gunawan (2024) found that the need for achievement contributes significantly to students' engagement in academic activities. Other studies conducted by Siok et al. (2023), Vetiana et al. (2025), and Rother et al. (2024) further confirmed that the three motivational dimensions proposed by McClelland effectively explain various forms of individual behaviour in both educational and organizational contexts. Collectively, these findings indicate that individual motivation results from the interaction among the needs for achievement, affiliation, and power rather than being driven by a single psychological need.

Despite these contributions, most previous studies have focused on formal learning environments, leadership, educational institutions in general, or organizations characterized by formal employment relationships and explicit reward systems. Research specifically examining the dominant motivational needs of Generation Z students who voluntarily participate in nonprofit student organizations remains relatively limited. This represents an important gap because student organizations differ fundamentally from business organizations, as members participate voluntarily without contractual obligations or financial incentives. These distinctive characteristics suggest that students' motivational patterns within student organizations may differ substantially from those observed in other organizational settings. Consequently, an empirical gap remains regarding the dominant motivational needs of Generation Z students participating in nonprofit student

organizations, particularly within the context of Indonesian higher education.

Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to identify the dominant motivational needs of Generation Z students who voluntarily participate in student organizations based on McClelland's Theory of Needs. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined the applicability of McClelland's theory in formal educational settings or business organizations, this study positions nonprofit student organizations, which rely entirely on voluntary member participation, as its primary research context. Accordingly, this study is expected to provide empirical evidence that extends the application of McClelland's Theory of Needs to voluntary organizations within higher education. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide practical insights for student organizations in designing leadership development strategies, enhancing member engagement, and establishing organizational management practices that better reflect the motivational characteristics of Generation Z.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the dominant motivational needs of Generation Z students who voluntarily participate in student organizations through the perspective of McClelland's Theory of Needs.

2. Literature Review

Generation Z comprises individuals who were born and raised during the rapid expansion of digital technology, the internet, and social media, resulting in characteristics that distinguish them from previous generations. Continuous exposure to technology from an early age has fostered a high capacity for adaptation to technological change, a preference for rapid communication, and a strong tendency to integrate technology into various aspects of daily life, including learning and organizational activities. In addition, Generation Z is widely recognized for its strong orientation toward self-development, flexibility, collaboration, and the pursuit of meaningful experiences. These characteristics indicate that Generation Z is motivated not only by academic and economic achievement but also by opportunities to gain valuable experiences, expand social networks, and contribute positively to society (Seemiller & Grace, 2019).

Previous studies have shown that these characteristics influence how Generation Z selects and sustains its involvement in organizations. Compared with earlier generations, Generation Z is more likely to engage with organizations that provide learning opportunities, encourage participation in decision-making, foster collaborative working environments, and embrace open and inclusive organizational cultures. Rather than perceiving organizations merely as vehicles for achieving predetermined objectives, Generation Z views them as platforms for competency development, professional identity formation, and meaningful personal experiences. Consequently, the motivation of Generation Z extends beyond extrinsic rewards to include opportunities for personal growth, social interaction, and meaningful contributions to the broader community (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

Within the context of higher education, student organizations represent an important form of non-formal learning that plays a strategic role in students' personal and professional development. Participation in student organizations enables students to strengthen leadership, interpersonal communication, teamwork, decision-making, and organizational problem-solving skills. Unlike business organizations, student organizations operate as nonprofit entities that rely primarily on voluntary member participation. Consequently, students' involvement is driven more by intrinsic motivation than by financial incentives. Student organizations therefore provide an environment in which students can satisfy their needs for learning, personal growth, and leadership experience before entering the professional workforce (Gunawan & Munthe, 2024).

Although previous studies have extensively examined the characteristics of Generation Z and the role of student organizations, the findings consistently indicate that Generation Z's motivation is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by various psychological needs. Accordingly, a comprehensive theoretical framework is required to explain how these psychological needs shape

students' decisions to participate in and remain committed to student organizations. One of the most widely accepted frameworks for explaining this motivational process is McClelland's Theory of Needs.

McClelland's Theory of Needs proposes that individual behaviour is primarily influenced by three fundamental psychological needs: need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power. Unlike motivational theories that regard needs as innate characteristics, McClelland argues that these three needs are acquired through learning, social experiences, and interactions with the surrounding environment. Consequently, the relative dominance of each need varies across individuals, leading to differences in behaviour, decision-making, and organizational involvement (Siok, Sim, Rahmat, 2023).

Within the context of Generation Z, these three motivational needs provide a useful framework for explaining why students choose to participate in student organizations. Students with a dominant need for achievement are generally motivated to seek challenges, improve their competencies, and acquire experiences that enhance their future career prospects. In contrast, those with a stronger need for affiliation tend to value opportunities to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships, collaborate with others, and become part of a supportive community. Meanwhile, students characterized by a high need for power are more likely to be motivated by opportunities to lead, influence others, and contribute to organizational decision-making processes.

The need for achievement refers to an individual's desire to attain high standards of performance, accomplish challenging tasks, and receive feedback regarding performance outcomes. Individuals with a strong need for achievement generally prefer tasks that allow them to demonstrate their capabilities, assume responsibility for their performance, and continuously improve the quality of their work.

These characteristics are consistent with those of Generation Z, which is strongly oriented toward continuous learning, competency development, and measurable achievement. Previous studies suggest that Generation Z students are particularly attracted to organizations that provide authentic learning experiences, opportunities to develop leadership competencies, and preparation for future careers. Consequently, student organizations serve as an appropriate platform for satisfying achievement needs through leadership roles, committee assignments, and the implementation of challenging organizational programs.

The need for affiliation reflects an individual's desire to establish positive interpersonal relationships, gain social acceptance, and belong to a particular group. Individuals with a high need for affiliation generally prioritize cooperation, harmonious communication, and mutually supportive social relationships.

For Generation Z, social relationships play a fundamental role in shaping both learning experiences and organizational involvement. Members of this generation tend to prefer organizational environments that encourage collaboration, facilitate the exchange of ideas, and foster a strong sense of belonging. Consequently, student organizations provide an effective setting for fulfilling affiliation needs through interpersonal interaction, teamwork, and the expansion of social networks. The fulfilment of these needs contributes to stronger organizational commitment and sustained member participation.

The need for power should not be interpreted solely as the desire to control others but rather as the motivation to influence the environment, lead organizational change, and make meaningful contributions to organizational success. Individuals with a strong need for power are generally motivated to assume responsibility, lead teams, and coordinate organizational activities.

Within student organizations, these needs are expressed through opportunities to serve as organizational presidents, program coordinators, or leaders of student initiatives. Such experiences

not only strengthen leadership competencies but also enhance self-confidence, decision-making abilities, and preparedness to face organizational and professional challenges. Therefore, student organizations provide an important environment in which students can satisfy their need for power through authentic leadership experiences.

Based on the synthesis of previous studies, it can be concluded that the motivation of Generation Z students participating in student organizations cannot be adequately explained by a single psychological need. The need for achievement motivates students to enhance their competencies and pursue high levels of performance, the need for affiliation strengthens social connectedness and organizational commitment, while the need for power encourages leadership, organizational influence, and meaningful contributions to organizational success. These three motivational needs complement one another and collectively shape the unique motivational structure of each individual. Consequently, identifying the dominant motivational need is essential for understanding the characteristics of Generation Z students who voluntarily participate in student organizations. This study not only extends the application of McClelland's Theory of Needs to nonprofit student organizations but also provides a conceptual foundation for developing leadership strategies and organizational management practices that better align with the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z (Rother et al, 2024).

3. Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive research design to identify the dominant motivational needs of Generation Z students who voluntarily participate in student organizations based on McClelland's Theory of Needs. A descriptive design was selected because the primary objective of the study was to describe the prevailing patterns of students' motivational needs rather than to examine causal relationships among variables.

The study was conducted at Maranatha Christian University, Bandung, Indonesia. Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms in September 2024. The target population comprised Generation Z students who were actively serving as members of student organizations. A non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling approach was employed to select respondents based on the following criteria: (1) active university students belonging to Generation Z, (2) currently serving as members or officers of student organizations, (3) voluntarily participating in organizational activities, and (4) possessing prior experience in student organizational activities.

The minimum sample size was determined based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014), who suggested that an adequate sample should range from five to ten times the number of research indicators. Applying the recommended ratio of 10:1 to the six measurement indicators resulted in a minimum required sample of 60 respondents. A total of 255 valid responses were ultimately collected, all of which met the established inclusion criteria and were deemed suitable for statistical analysis, thereby substantially exceeding the minimum sample size requirement.

The research instrument was developed based on McClelland's Theory of Needs, encompassing three motivational dimensions: need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power. These dimensions were operationalized into six measurement items assessed using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Prior to data analysis, the instrument was evaluated for validity using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure that each measurement item accurately and consistently represented the intended construct. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. The analysis focused on identifying the motivational dimension with the highest mean score in order to determine the dominant motivational need among Generation Z students who voluntarily participate in student organizations.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

A total of 255 valid responses were collected and deemed suitable for further analysis. Based on the demographic profile of the respondents, the majority were female (185 respondents, 72.55%). In terms of age, most respondents were 20 years old (96 respondents, 37.65%). Regarding academic performance, the majority reported a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of above 3.00 (243 respondents, 95.29%). Furthermore, most respondents originated from Bandung (144 respondents, 56.47%), had been involved in student organizations for less than one year (173 respondents, 67.84%), and were affiliated with the Student Executive Board (BEM) (40 respondents, 15.69%). Overall, these demographic characteristics indicate that the respondents adequately represent Generation Z students actively participating in student organizations.

Prior to the main analysis, the research instrument was evaluated for validity and reliability. The validity test revealed that all six motivational indicators were statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$), indicating that each item effectively measured the intended motivational construct. Consequently, all measurement items were considered valid and retained for subsequent analysis. In addition, the reliability test produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.893, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, thereby demonstrating a high level of internal consistency and confirming that the instrument was reliable for measuring students' motivational needs.

The descriptive statistical analysis revealed that all motivational indicators obtained mean scores above 5.00 on the seven-point Likert scale, indicating a generally high level of motivation among Generation Z students participating in student organizations. None of the indicators fell within the low category, suggesting that student organizations successfully fulfill students' psychological needs as conceptualized by McClelland's Theory of Needs.

The highest mean score was recorded for Indicator X1, which measures the opportunity to develop skills and competencies (Mean = 5.82). This finding suggests that Generation Z students perceive student organizations primarily as platforms for self-development rather than merely as places for social interaction or administrative involvement. Student organizations are viewed as experiential learning environments that enable students to strengthen leadership competencies, communication skills, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. This finding is consistent with the characteristics of Generation Z, who generally place greater value on continuous learning, competency development, and personal growth than on material rewards or external recognition.

The second-highest mean score was obtained for Indicator X4, which reflects the existence of supportive interpersonal relationships among organizational members (Mean = 5.67). This result indicates that respondents perceive the social climate within student organizations positively. Harmonious interpersonal relationships appear to be an important factor encouraging students to remain actively involved in organizational activities. These findings further support the proposition that the need for affiliation represents one of the primary motivational drivers among Generation Z students, as they highly value collaboration, mutual support, and a sense of belonging within their organizational environment.

The third-highest mean score was obtained for Indicator X3, which measures cooperation among organizational members (Mean = 5.57). This finding indicates that collaborative relationships among members have been effectively established within student organizations. It further suggests that student organizations function not only as platforms for individual competency development but also as important environments for fostering social networking, enabling students to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships that contribute to both their personal and professional development.

Within the need for power dimension, Indicator X6, which measures opportunities to participate in organizational decision-making, achieved a mean score of 5.52, while Indicator X5, representing opportunities to occupy leadership positions, obtained a mean score of 5.47. These findings indicate that respondents perceived student organizations as providing opportunities to

participate in decision-making processes and assume leadership responsibilities. Although these two indicators received slightly lower scores than those associated with the need for achievement and need for affiliation, both remained within the high category. This suggests that Generation Z students appreciate leadership opportunities; however, leadership positions are viewed as opportunities for learning and personal growth rather than as primary motivations for organizational involvement.

The lowest mean score was recorded for Indicator X2, which measures organizational recognition and appreciation (Mean = 5.29). Nevertheless, this score still falls within the high category. This finding indicates that formal recognition is not the primary factor motivating students to remain actively involved in student organizations. Instead, Generation Z students appear to place greater value on opportunities for learning, meaningful social relationships, and organizational experiences than on symbolic forms of recognition or external rewards.

Overall, the respondents' motivational priorities can be ranked as follows:

1. Opportunities for skill and competency development (Mean = 5.82)
2. Supportive interpersonal relationships among members (Mean = 5.67)
3. Collaboration and teamwork (Mean = 5.57)
4. Participation in determining organizational goals (Mean = 5.52)
5. Opportunities to assume leadership positions (Mean = 5.47)
6. Organizational recognition and appreciation (Mean = 5.29)

These findings demonstrate that the motivation of Generation Z students is primarily driven by self-development and social connectedness rather than by status, authority, or formal recognition. Student organizations are therefore perceived as environments that facilitate competency development, collaborative learning, and interpersonal interaction rather than as platforms for pursuing prestige or hierarchical positions.

The findings further reveal that Generation Z students perceive student organizations as important vehicles for competency development. This is reflected in the highest mean score obtained for opportunities to develop skills and abilities. Such findings are consistent with the defining characteristics of Generation Z, who place considerable emphasis on lifelong learning, continuous competency development, and preparedness for future careers.

From the perspective of McClelland's Theory of Needs, the need for achievement emerged as the most dominant motivational dimension. Students are motivated not primarily by organizational recognition but rather by opportunities to improve their competencies through active participation in organizational activities. Consequently, student organizations are perceived as environments for self-actualization and long-term investment in personal and professional development.

At the same time, the relatively high scores obtained for cooperation and interpersonal relationships indicate that the need for affiliation also plays a substantial role in shaping students' motivation. Student organizations provide supportive social environments in which students can establish networks, receive peer support, and develop a strong sense of belonging. These findings are consistent with the characteristics of Generation Z, who generally prefer collaborative, inclusive, and participatory organizational environments.

Although the need for power received comparatively lower mean scores than the other two motivational dimensions, it nevertheless remained within the high category. This finding suggests that students do not participate in student organizations primarily to obtain authority or formal leadership positions. Instead, leadership opportunities are viewed as valuable learning experiences through which students can strengthen their leadership competencies, decision-making abilities, and organizational skills.

The findings of this study have important practical implications for the management of student

organizations. Rather than relying primarily on formal recognition systems, student organizations should prioritize competency development initiatives, mentoring programs, leadership training, and collaborative learning opportunities. Such strategies are likely to be more effective in sustaining the engagement of Generation Z students, whose motivation is predominantly driven by opportunities for personal growth, meaningful social interaction, and experiential learning rather than by extrinsic rewards.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the dominant motivational needs of Generation Z students who voluntarily participate in student organizations based on McClelland's Theory of Needs. The findings indicate that, overall, Generation Z students demonstrate a high level of motivation toward participation in student organizations, as reflected by mean scores exceeding 5.00 across all motivational indicators on the seven-point Likert scale. These results suggest that student organizations effectively fulfill the psychological needs of their members and continue to serve as relevant platforms for student development in the digital era.

The findings further reveal that the need for achievement is the most dominant motivational dimension. Generation Z students perceive student organizations as environments that enable them to develop competencies, enhance practical skills, gain authentic experiences, and prepare themselves for future careers. In addition, the need for affiliation also emerged as a significant motivational factor, reflected in students' strong appreciation for teamwork, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and a sense of belonging within the organization. Although the need for power was likewise rated highly, it was not identified as the primary motivational driver. Instead, leadership opportunities were perceived as valuable learning experiences and avenues for personal growth rather than as means of acquiring authority or social status.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the relevance of McClelland's Theory of Needs in explaining the motivational characteristics of Generation Z students within the context of voluntary nonprofit student organizations. Furthermore, the study extends the application of McClelland's framework beyond its traditional use in business organizations and formal workplace settings by demonstrating its applicability to nonprofit organizations operating in higher education. The findings provide empirical evidence that Generation Z students' participation in student organizations is driven primarily by opportunities for personal development, continuous learning, and meaningful social relationships rather than by formal recognition or hierarchical status.

The findings offer several practical implications for the management of student organizations. Rather than emphasizing formal recognition and symbolic rewards, organizational leaders should prioritize competency development through leadership training, mentoring programs, collaborative learning, and active member involvement in organizational decision-making. Student organizations should also provide broader opportunities for members to gain practical experience through organizational projects and leadership responsibilities. Moreover, fostering an organizational culture characterized by collaboration, support, and inclusiveness should become a strategic priority, as these factors have proven to be essential in sustaining the long-term engagement of Generation Z students.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a descriptive research design limits the ability to explain causal relationships between motivational needs and organizational behaviour among students. Second, the respondents consisted exclusively of students actively involved in student organizations; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other forms of voluntary organizations or to students who do not participate in organizational activities.

Future research is encouraged to adopt explanatory research designs that examine the influence of each dimension of McClelland's Theory of Needs on other organizational variables,

such as organizational commitment, student engagement, leadership effectiveness, organizational citizenship behaviour, and organizational performance. Comparative studies across different types of student organizations, membership duration, higher education institutions, geographical regions, and demographic characteristics are also recommended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the motivational dynamics of Generation Z in various voluntary organizational settings. Furthermore, employing mixed-methods or qualitative approaches would offer deeper insights into the underlying reasons why Generation Z students choose to sustain their participation and commitment within student organizations.

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