

EXPLORATION OF STUDENT'S MATHEMATICAL CONNECTION ABILITY BASED ON LEARNING MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore and explain students' mathematical connection abilities based on their levels of learning motivation. A qualitative investigative approach involved junior high school students categorized into three motivation levels: high, moderate, and low. Data were collected through a learning motivation questionnaire and problem-solving tasks to assess students' mathematical connection skills. The results revealed that highly motivated students demonstrated the strongest abilities, characterized by their capacity to connect various mathematical concepts, effectively use visual representations, and apply concepts in real-life and interdisciplinary contexts. In contrast, moderately motivated students tended to rely on basic procedures without developing a comprehensive conceptual understanding, while students with low motivation struggled to comprehend and relate concepts, often copying information without formulating appropriate solution strategies. These findings highlight the critical role of learning motivation in fostering mathematical connection skills. Therefore, implementing instructional strategies that enhance student motivation—such as problem-based and contextual learning approaches—is essential for promoting more profound understanding and stronger mathematical connections.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mathematics requires students to possess advanced cognitive abilities, including the capacity to establish mathematical connections. Mathematical connection skills enable students to relate mathematical concepts to various contexts, including real-world situations, interdisciplinary applications, and different areas within mathematics (Bannor et al., 2024; Jahring, 2020). Cultivating this ability deepens conceptual understanding, enhances problem-solving capabilities, and strengthens mathematical reasoning (Bahar et al., 2023). The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics underscores the significance of mathematical connections, asserting that recognizing interrelationships among concepts leads to more meaningful learning experiences (Arifin et al., 2024; Hasbi et al., 2019). Students with strong mathematical connection skills transfer their knowledge more effectively and demonstrate productive and flexible thinking when solving problems (Jawad, 2022; Sulistiyowati & Wahyuni, 2024). In addition, these skills contribute to improving critical thinking and logical reasoning (Sari et al., 2023).

Research has categorized mathematical connections into several classifications, such as patterns, variables, and arguments (Kholid & Dewi, 2024). In addition, the development of mathematical connection skills is influenced by various factors, including teaching strategies, mathematics anxiety, student self-confidence, and learning motivation (Haerudin et al., 2021; Suparti & Netriwati, 2021). In particular, contextual teaching approaches and non-routine problems have improved the ability to form meaningful mathematical connections (Khairunnisak et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Nieto et al., 2023). Among these factors, learning motivation plays an important role because motivation drives students' engagement and persistence in learning mathematics (Dai et al., 2023; Siagian et al., 2022). Motivated students tend to explore relationships between concepts more and develop a deeper understanding of mathematical content. Therefore, educators are encouraged to design teaching strategies that foster motivation while emphasizing the interconnected nature of mathematical ideas (Khairunnisak et al., 2020; Purnama & Rahayu, 2023).

Learning motivation plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic achievement, particularly in mathematics education. Motivation drives students to engage with learning materials, persist through challenges, and develop a positive attitude toward mathematics (Lazareva & Ustinova, 2020). It is generally classified into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to an internal drive to learn for personal satisfaction, whereas extrinsic motivation involves external rewards or pressures (Serin, 2018). Students with high motivation tend to exhibit stronger cognitive engagement, mathematical connection skills, and problem-solving abilities compared to those with low motivation (Siagian et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Conversely, a lack of motivation can hinder students' cognitive engagement, limiting their ability to establish meaningful relationships between mathematical concepts (Sholeha et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2022). Understanding the relationship between students' motivation and their mathematical connection abilities can help educators design teaching strategies that foster both cognitive and affective aspects of learning.

Several studies have explored mathematical connection abilities in different contexts. Raniri et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between students' mathematical connections and resilience, finding that students with high resilience demonstrated stronger conceptual integration in mathematics learning. Kemhay et al. (2025) examined the influence of gender on mathematical connections, identifying

performance variations between male and female students. Lumbanraja et al. (2025) highlighted the effectiveness of problem-based learning in enhancing mathematical connection skills. However, research directly linking students' learning motivation to their mathematical connection abilities remains limited. Most existing studies focus on cognitive strategies or demographic factors, leaving a gap in understanding how motivation influences students' ability to form mathematical connections.

Unlike previous research that has primarily relied on quantitative methodologies, this study provides a deeper understanding of students' perspectives, challenges, and cognitive processes through qualitative analysis. By adopting a case study approach, it seeks to capture the nuances of students' motivation levels and their impact on mathematical connection skills in a real-world classroom setting. The findings offer valuable insights for educators in developing more effective pedagogical strategies to enhance students' learning experiences. This study aims to describe and explain students' mathematical connection abilities based on students' learning motivation in junior high school students. By identifying patterns and correlations between these variables, this study aims to provide insight into how motivation influences students' ability to establish mathematical relationships. The findings will contribute to the development of effective pedagogical strategies that enhance student engagement and understanding in mathematics learning. Furthermore, understanding these relationships can help educators create learning environments that support both cognitive and affective development, ultimately improving students' overall mathematical proficiency.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative investigative approach to examine students' mathematical connection abilities based on their levels of learning motivation. The research was conducted at a junior high school in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province. The participants consisted of 30 seventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling based on the criteria that they actively participated in classroom learning and voluntarily agreed to be part of the study.

The study followed a systematic process in its data collection procedures. First, three experts developed and validated a learning motivation questionnaire and a set of problem-solving tasks to ensure their validity and reliability. The motivation questionnaire comprised 36 statement items, while the problem-solving task comprised three questions about plane figures. These tasks were constructed based on mathematical connection indicators, including (1) connections between mathematical topics, (2) connections between mathematics and other disciplines, and (3) connections between mathematics and everyday life (Hidayati & Jahring, 2021).

Second, the validated motivation questionnaire was administered to all participants to categorize them into high, moderate, and low-motivation groups. This categorization was based on the range method or frequency distribution (Sugiyono, 2015). Finally, participants were given problem-solving tasks to complete. Their responses were then analyzed in depth and classified according to their level of motivation.

Data analysis in this study followed four stages: data presentation, reduction, interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014; Sanjani et al., 2024). In the data presentation stage, students' problem-solving results were categorized based on indicators of mathematical connection ability. During data reduction, relevant

information was selected and simplified to align with the research objectives. The interpretation stage involved synthesizing the findings into a coherent narrative, emphasizing students' mathematical connection skills about their motivation levels. Finally, in the conclusion-drawing stage, the relationships between categories were analyzed, and strategies were proposed to improve students' mathematical connection abilities. Data triangulation was employed by cross-verifying information from multiple data sources to ensure the validity of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The measurement results of students' learning motivation in this study, which followed the range method, are presented in Table 1.


Table 1. Results of grouping students based on their motivation level

Score interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
108 - 144	High	10	33.33
72 - 107	Moderate	12	40
36 - 71	Low	8	26.67
Total		30	100

Table 1 presents the distribution of students' learning motivation categorized into three levels: high, moderate, and low. The majority of students (40%) fall into the moderate motivation category, followed by 33.33% in the high motivation category, and 26.67% in the low motivation category. This variation in motivation serves as a basis for investigating students' mathematical connection abilities in problem-solving.

1. Mathematical Connection Ability in a highly motivated group

The presentation of the results of solving the problem of the representative of the high group subject in the first problem is presented in Figure 1. This task involved calculating the perimeter and area of a trapezoid.

Dik : 

Dit : k dan L

Jawab :

AB = CD = $\frac{AD - BC}{2} = \frac{250 - 150}{2} = \frac{100}{2} = 50$

AF = ED = $\sqrt{EC^2 + CD^2}$

$= \sqrt{120^2 + 50^2}$

$= \sqrt{14400 + 2500}$

$= \sqrt{16900} = 130 \text{ m}$

Jadi keliling = AD + DE + EF + FA

$= 250 + 130 + 130 + 130$

$= 640 \text{ m}$

Luas = $\frac{1}{2}(a+b) \times t = \frac{1}{2}(250 + 150) \times 120 = \frac{1}{2}(400) \times 120$

$= 24000 \text{ m}^2$

Jadi keliling atap adalah 640 m dan luasnya adalah 24000 m²

Dik : garis diagonal 150 dan 120

Dit : k dan L

Jawab :

BC = EF

AB = CD

AB = CD = $\frac{250 - 150}{2}$

$= \frac{100}{2}$

$= 50$

Sisi miring = $\sqrt{120^2 + 50^2}$

$= \sqrt{14400 + 2500}$

$= \sqrt{16900}$

$= 130$

Luas = $\frac{a+b}{2} \times t$

$= \frac{250 + 150}{2} \times 120$

$= \frac{400}{2} \times 120$

$= 200 \times 120$

$= 24000$

Figure 1. High group students' answers to the first problem

Figure 1 illustrates that students in the high-motivation group successfully solved the first problem by applying a systematic procedure. They utilized the Pythagorean Theorem to calculate the perimeter and area of the trapezoid. In their problem-solving process, these students demonstrated a clear understanding of the given information, formulated appropriate strategies, and applied them sequentially to arrive at a solution. However, variation in solution quality was observed. For example, while S-01 provided a correct and complete response, S-02's answer lacked completeness; S-02 failed to determine the perimeter and only calculated the area. Additionally, S-02 did not include proper units in the answer. Another notable finding is that S-01 employed visual representations to clarify the relationships among involved mathematical concepts. Figure 2 presents the response of a high-motivation student to the second problem, which required connecting geometric concepts with knowledge of bacterial growth.

2. Dik: populasi bakteri = $4,2 \times 10^7$
 panjang wadah = 10 cm
 lebar wadah = 7 cm
 dit: kepadatan bakteri dim wadah

kepadatan bakteri = $\frac{\text{populasi bakteri}}{\text{luas wadah}} = \frac{4,2 \times 10^7}{10 \times 7} = \frac{4,2 \times 10^7}{70} = 6 \times 10^5 \text{ bakteri/cm}^2$

Dik: populasi bakteri $4,2 \times 10^7$
 panjang = 10 cm
 lebar 7 cm
 Dit: kepadatan bakteri

$= \frac{4,2 \times 10^7}{10}$
 $= 4,2 \times 10^6$

S-01's answer in high group

S-04's answer in high group

Figure 2. High group students' answers to the second problem

Figure 2 shows that students in the high-motivation group were able to solve the second problem, which required linking mathematical concepts with other fields. The task involved applying the concept of rectangular area within the context of bacterial growth. These students demonstrated the ability to connect mathematical concepts to scientific contexts, reflecting an understanding of the broader applicability of mathematics. Nevertheless, variations in the quality of responses were noted. For instance, S-01 provided a correct solution, while S-03 made an error in the use of the formula. The correct calculation step should have been " $\frac{4,2 \times 10^7}{10}$ ", but S-03 wrote " $\frac{4,2 \times 10^7}{10 \times 7}$ " resulting in an incorrect final answer. Figure 3 shows the high-motivation students' responses to the third problem, which involved associating mathematical concepts from plane geometry, particularly the square and kite.

Figure 3 illustrates that students in this group successfully solved the third problem using a systematic approach. They demonstrated their ability to connect mathematical concepts related to squares and kites, with their solutions reflecting a solid understanding of the relationships among various geometric figures. However, S-02 exhibited a similar pattern to the first problem by again omitting the appropriate units in the final answer.

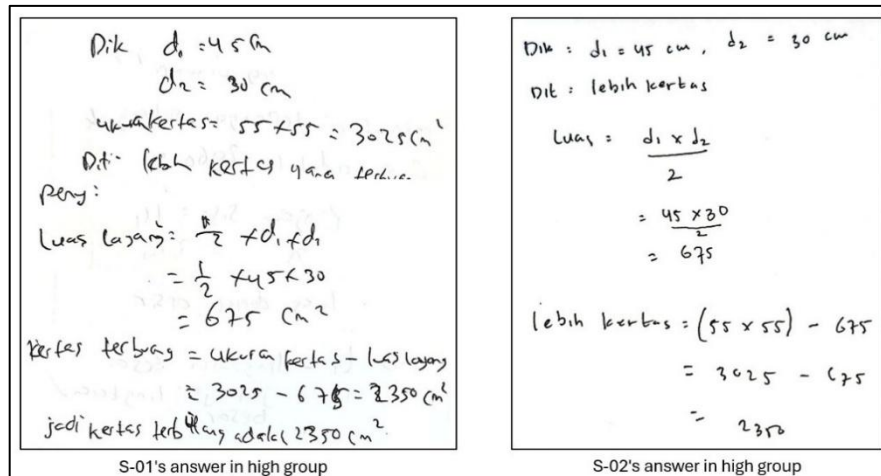


Figure 3. High group students' answers to the third problem

2. Mathematical Connection Ability in the moderate motivation group

A representative of the sample answers of moderate group subjects in the first problem is presented by Figure 4.

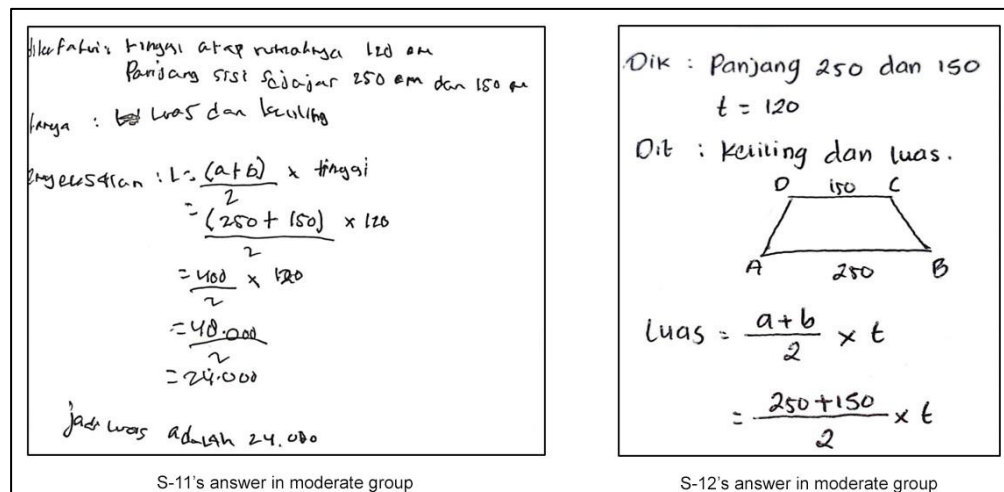


Figure 4. Moderate group students' answers to the first problem

Figure 4 indicates that students in the moderate-motivation group made a commendable effort to solve the first problem by following basic problem-solving steps. They were able to identify key information and understand the problem's objective. However, their work focused solely on calculating the area, without proceeding to determine the perimeter. Moreover, it can be seen that student S-12 employed visual representations to support the problem-solving process. Figure 5 presents this group's responses to the second problem.

Figure 5 shows that students in the moderate-motivation group encountered difficulties in solving the second problem. They managed to identify basic information and understand the objective of the task but were unable to proceed to the solution stage. One student (S-15) attempted a solution, but the approach taken was incorrect. These findings indicate that although

students made efforts to solve the problem, they were not successful. Figure 6 presents their responses to the third problem.

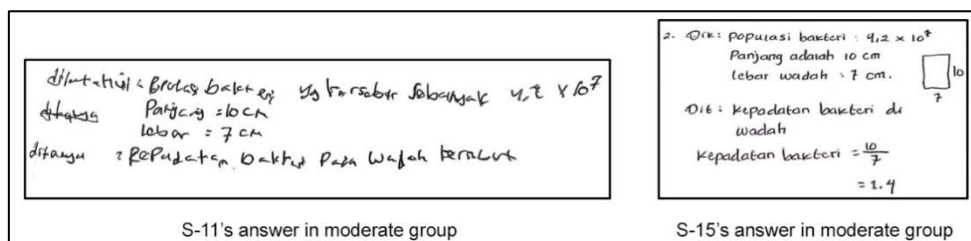


Figure 5. Moderate group students' answers to the second problem

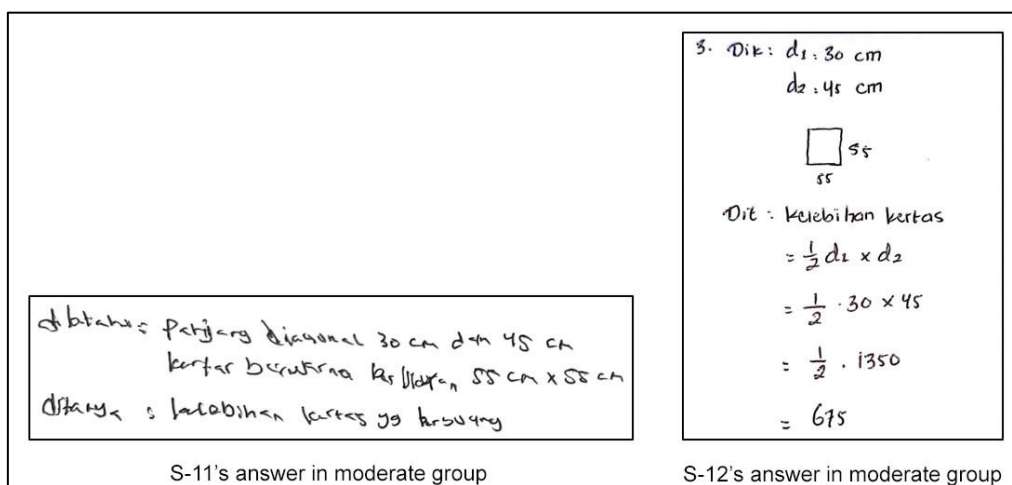


Figure 6. Moderate group students' answers to the third problem

Figure 6 illustrates that students in the moderate-motivation group attempted to solve the third problem, although they faced limitations in reaching a final solution. Variation in responses was observed in this group: some students only reached the stage of identifying information and understanding the problem's goal, while others attempted a solution but failed to complete it. Some responses also showed the use of visual representations.

3. Mathematical Connection Ability in low-motivation group

The representative of the sample answers of the low group subjects in the first problem is presented by Figure 7.

Figure 7 shows that students in the low-motivation group were unable to correctly solve the first problem. However, there was evidence of effort to engage with the task. For example, student S-24 not only noted the problem information but also attempted several solution steps, though the steps taken were incorrect. Figure 8 presents the response of low-motivation students to the second problem.

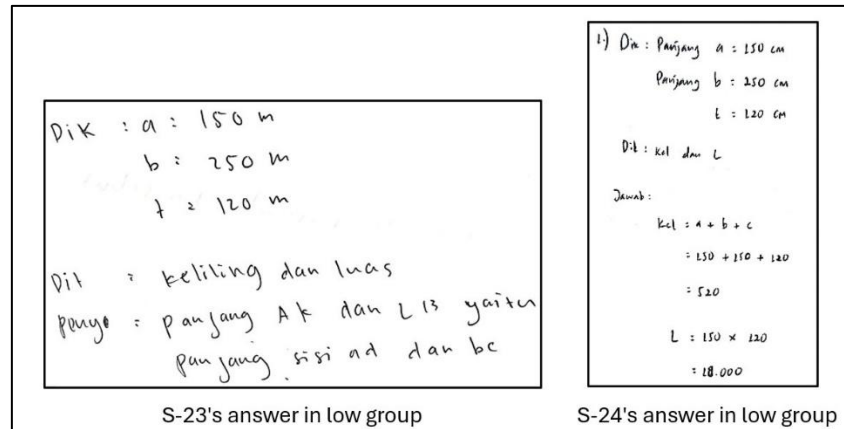


Figure 7. Low group students' answers to the first problem

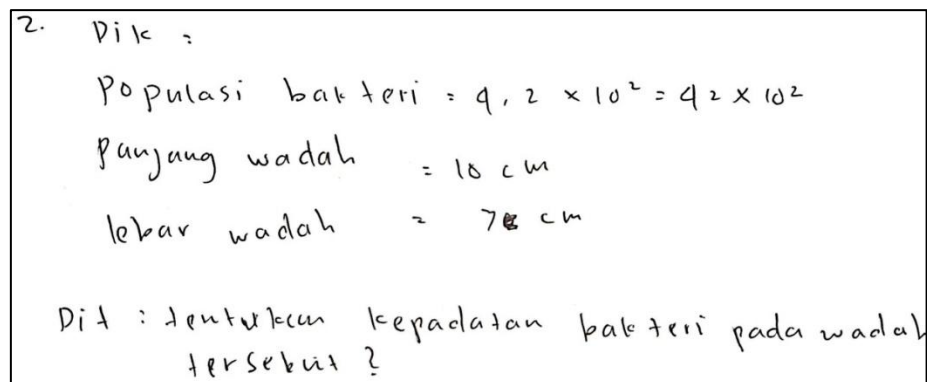


Figure 8. Low group students' answers to the second problem

Figure 8 demonstrates that students in the low-motivation group showed limited ability to solve the second problem. They were able to restate the given information but could not proceed to the solution stage. This pattern was consistent across other students in the same group. Similar characteristics were also observed in their responses to the third problem.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a significant relationship between students' levels of learning motivation and their mathematical connection abilities in problem-solving, particularly in the context of geometry. Students in the high-motivation group demonstrated the most advanced characteristics of mathematical connection ability. In the first problem, they successfully solved tasks related to the perimeter and area of a trapezoid using a systematic approach. Their steps—including understanding the problem context, selecting appropriate strategies (such as applying the Pythagorean Theorem), and performing accurate calculations—reflect strong procedural mastery supported by conceptual understanding. This finding aligns with Ulya et al. (2016), who stated that highly motivated students tend to develop structured and goal-oriented solutions. Moreover, visual representations, such as diagrams to clarify the relationships between geometric elements (as seen in the response of subject S-01), serve as an important indicator of conceptual mastery in mathematical connections. This supports Romli (2017) argument that highly motivated students are likelier to utilize visual representations to strengthen their understanding and inter-conceptual links. Despite

some technical shortcomings, such as S-02's omission of units in the answer, this group still demonstrated the ability to integrate mathematical information holistically.

In the second problem, which assessed cross-disciplinary connections between mathematics and science within bacterial growth, the high-motivation group could relate area concepts to real-world phenomena. Subject S-01 successfully solved the problem, while S-03 made a calculation error. This supports Finn's (2020) assertion that although high motivation increases the likelihood of success, misconceptions may arise if instruction does not emphasize conceptual understanding. Nevertheless, the ability of highly motivated students to engage in cross-disciplinary contexts reflects a high degree of cognitive flexibility (Siagian et al., 2022; Tririnika et al., 2024).

In the third problem, which required connecting concepts of plane figures such as squares and kites, students in the high-motivation group again demonstrated their ability to integrate symbolic and visual representations. This indicates procedural competence and a conceptual ability to relate and apply mathematical ideas. These findings are consistent with Yanto et al. (2022) and 'Azizah et al. (2021), who found that highly motivated students connect mathematical topics, integrate knowledge across disciplines and relate mathematical learning to everyday life. In addition, their ability to select appropriate strategies and evaluate their thought processes indicates a strong metacognitive awareness (Mulbar et al., 2021).

In contrast, students in the moderate-motivation group exhibited partial and still limited mathematical connection abilities. In the first problem, they were able to identify basic information and calculate the area but often did not proceed to determine the perimeter. This finding suggests a tendency to rely on memorized procedures without a deep conceptual understanding. Some students, such as S-12, began using diagrams as visual aids, indicating emerging conceptual potential, though it was not yet fully developed.

In the second problem, the limitations in bridging mathematics with scientific contexts became more apparent. Most students in the moderate group could only mention the basic information provided in the problem without successfully developing a solution strategy. For example, S-15 attempted to solve the problem but demonstrated a misconception using the formula. This shows that students in this group lacked cognitive flexibility and struggled to make cross-contextual connections. These findings are in line with reports from Mirna et al. (2023), Utami (2022), and Agsya et al. (2019), who noted that moderately motivated students often face challenges in applying knowledge comprehensively and conceptually. Mutialawati et al. (2024) also emphasized that insufficient conceptual exploration results in a fragmented understanding of mathematics learning.

When solving the third problem, some students in the moderate-motivation group managed to identify key elements of the task but could not complete the solution. Their efforts were mostly limited to initial steps, such as reading and understanding the problem, without proceeding to in-depth analysis or using effective strategies. Some students used diagrams, indicating potential, though not yet supported by comprehensive connection skills. Therefore, instructional strategies that promote connection skills through exploration, reflection, and real-world application are needed. This finding is supported by Kurnia et al. (2019), who suggested contextual learning as a practical approach for developing the conceptual skills of moderately motivated students.

Meanwhile, students in the low-motivation group demonstrated the weakest characteristics in mathematical connection ability. In the first problem, they generally only copied information from the problem without formulating a strategy or progressing to solution steps. Subject S-24, for instance, attempted a solution, but the approach taken was incorrect, reflecting limited conceptual and procedural understanding. Similar issues were observed in the second and third problems. Most students in the low group merely restated the problem's information without processing it or making meaningful attempts to solve it. There was no evidence of effort to connect mathematical concepts to other disciplines or everyday life. These findings are consistent with research by Pujakusuma (2019) and Rismawati and Khairiati (2020), who stated that low-motivation students tend to lack persistence and self-confidence, making it difficult to solve problems requiring conceptual understanding.

Moreover, negative attitudes toward mathematics—such as perceiving it as irrelevant to their lives—contributed to their reluctance to explore and build inter-conceptual connections. Nevertheless, Millaty (2021) emphasized that students in this group still have growth potential when supported in an engaging and supportive learning environment. Interactive and contextual instruction that emphasizes real-life applications has been effective in helping them develop a more profound understanding.

These findings underscore the crucial role of learning motivation in shaping students' mathematical connection abilities. Highly motivated students demonstrated flexible thinking, deep conceptual understanding, and the ability to integrate knowledge across contexts. Conversely, students with moderate and low motivation exhibited more procedural, fragmented understanding and struggled to establish cross-concept or interdisciplinary links. Therefore, increasing students' learning motivation should be accompanied by implementing instructional strategies that foster meaningful cognitive engagement. Teachers and educators must integrate both motivational and cognitive dimensions in mathematics instruction. Approaches that utilize real-world contexts and diverse representations and encourage metacognitive reflection are key to strengthening conceptual connections (Asmawati et al., 2019; Ulya et al., 2016). Through this comprehensive approach, students across all motivation levels will have greater opportunities to develop robust mathematical connection abilities, which are fundamental to long-term mathematical literacy and lifelong learning (Mone et al., 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore and explain students' mathematical connection abilities based on their levels of learning motivation. The findings indicate that students' motivation levels significantly influence their mathematical connection abilities. Highly motivated students demonstrated the strongest abilities, characterized by their capacity to connect various mathematical concepts, effectively utilize visual representations, and apply concepts in real-life and interdisciplinary contexts. In contrast, moderately motivated students tended to rely only on basic procedures without developing a comprehensive conceptual understanding, while low-motivation students struggled to comprehend and relate concepts, often merely copying information without formulating appropriate problem-solving strategies.

These findings underscore that the development of mathematical connection abilities cannot be separated from efforts to enhance students' learning motivation. Therefore, educators must design instructional approaches beyond content mastery and

foster cognitive engagement through contextual learning, using multiple forms of representation, and strengthening metacognitive awareness. Such approaches can support students across different motivation levels in developing more meaningful and robust mathematical connections.

While this study offers important insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach with a limited number of participants, restricting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Moreover, the study focused solely on the relationship between learning motivation and mathematical connections without considering other potential influencing factors, such as individual learning strategies or social-environmental influences. Future research is encouraged to adopt broader methodological approaches, such as mixed-methods or quantitative studies, to validate these findings on larger samples. Furthermore, in-depth investigations into learning interventions that enhance both student motivation and mathematical connections are necessary to provide concrete recommendations for effective teaching practices in schools.

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