
The Role Of Peer Volunteers In Building Learning Motivation Of Students With Disabilities At University of Bina Mandiri Gorontalo

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ABSTRACT

Students with disabilities in higher education often encounter multifaceted challenges, including limited physical accessibility, persistent social stigma, and communication barriers, all of which significantly diminish their learning motivation. This qualitative study investigates the strategic role of Peer Volunteers in fostering academic motivation among students with disabilities at Universitas Bina Mandiri Gorontalo. Utilizing a case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis involving students with disabilities, volunteer coordinators, and the Head of the Disability Service Unit. The findings reveal that Peer Volunteers serve as a vital support system by providing academic assistance, emotional encouragement, and social bridging. This peer-to-peer intervention effectively reduces anxiety, enhances self-confidence, and promotes independence among students with disabilities. Furthermore, the study identifies that structured recruitment and specialized training for volunteers are essential for maintaining the quality of inclusive mentoring. The presence of Peer Volunteers not only overcomes technical learning obstacles but also cultivates a more inclusive campus culture. This research concludes that integrating peer mentoring programs into university policy is a fundamental strategy for promoting educational equality and ensuring the academic success of students with diverse needs.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of inclusive excellence in higher education has become a global imperative, yet the journey remains fraught with systemic challenges. For students with disabilities, the academic environment is often characterized by "hindrance stressors" barriers such as limited physical accessibility, persistent social stigma, and inadequate inclusive support that directly threaten their learning motivation and psychological well-being (Jie et al., 2025; Rahajeng et al., 2024). Learning motivation serves as the primary engine for academic success, fostering the self-confidence and independence necessary to navigate complex institutional landscapes. However, when students encounter these obstacles without sufficient support, the resulting stress can lead to academic burnout and a decline in resilient traits (Shen & Guo, 2025).

The relationship between individual psychological factors and institutional support is pivotal. Recent literature highlights that just as educators rely on a growth mindset and proactive personality traits to maintain work resiliency, students with disabilities require a supportive ecosystem to mitigate the negative impacts of stress (Kim & Kim, 2024). A growth mindset the belief that abilities can be developed through effort is a crucial determinant of how students perceive challenges (Shen & Guo, 2025). In the absence of a

proactive support system, however, the stress experienced by students with disabilities acts as a mediator that can either foster resilience or trigger psychological distress (Kamboj & Garg, 2021).

In this context, the mobilization of peer volunteers emerges as a transformative intervention. Peer support functions as a critical "social buffer," providing both academic scaffolding and emotional labor that standard institutional frameworks often fail to deliver (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Peer volunteers, as fellow students, are uniquely positioned to foster a sense of "psychological safety" and readiness for change, allowing students with disabilities to adapt more effectively to the rigorous demands of higher education (Kim & Kim, 2024). This peer-led synergy not only assists in the comprehension of course materials but also facilitates social integration, reducing the isolation that frequently hampers student motivation.

Universitas Bina Mandiri (UBM) Gorontalo, as an institution committed to educational equality, has strategically implemented a peer volunteer program through its Disability Service Unit. This program is designed to bridge the gap between institutional policy and the lived experiences of students with diverse needs. While global studies have extensively discussed the importance of emotional intelligence and resilient character traits in academic success (Kamboj & Garg, 2021), there remains a significant empirical gap in understanding how these mechanisms operate within local Indonesian higher education contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the specific role of peer volunteers in building and sustaining the learning motivation of students with disabilities at UBM Gorontalo. By examining the interplay between academic assistance, emotional support, and stress mitigation, this research provides a framework for how educational institutions can foster an environment where all students, regardless of their physical or sensory limitations, can achieve professional and personal excellence.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary studies. The research subjects consist of students with disabilities, Peer Volunteer Disability coordinators, and heads of disability service units. The collected data will be analyzed descriptively to understand the role of Peer Volunteer Disabilities in improving the learning motivation of students with disabilities. The research results show that the presence of Peer Volunteer Disabilities at Bina Mandiri University, Gorontalo, plays a very important role in helping to increase the learning motivation of students with disabilities.

The Peer Volunteer team is divided into 2 groups as shown in the following table:

Table 1: Data on Peer Volunteers and Students with Disabilities

No	Student Volunteer	Department/Semester	Student Volunteer	Department/Semester
1	Putri Aulya Hasan	Bachelor of Special Education/I	Qiran/Speech Impairment	Bachelor of Special Education/I
2	Nur Ayu Ningsih	Bachelor of Educational Technology/V		
3	Zihan Usman	Bachelor of Educational Technology/V	Ali Alhasni/Visual Impairment	Bachelor of Special Education/I
4	Muhammad Marham Mubaraq Lumi	Bachelor of Special Education/I		
5	Meilan Matiti	Bachelor of Educational Technology/V		

Source: Data ULD UBMG, 2024

IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interviews and observations at Universitas Bina Mandiri (UBM) Gorontalo reveals that peer volunteers serve as a multifaceted support system for students with disabilities. The findings are categorized into five key thematic areas that highlight the transformation of academic motivation and institutional inclusivity.

Experiences of Accompanying Students with Disabilities

The accompaniment process has a profound impact on the academic trajectory of students with disabilities. Interview results indicate that consistent mentoring fosters a sense of empowerment, allowing students to navigate academic challenges with greater confidence. This aligns with recent studies suggesting that peer mentoring boosts self-efficacy and emotional well-being by providing a safe space for meaningful interaction (Athamanah et al., 2020; Kresi & Nagar, 2023). Beyond academic comprehension, students appreciate the development of life skills and independence. Furthermore, peer volunteers reported a significant increase in their own awareness of inclusion, mirroring the transformative learning identified by Gibbons et al. (2018), where mentors gain enhanced empathy and self-awareness through their role.

Assessment of Learning Effectiveness

Regular assessment of learning effectiveness is vital for sustaining motivation. Participants noted that receiving tailored support directly correlates with their readiness to engage in complex coursework. This empirical finding is supported by self-determination theory, which posits that environments emphasizing personal growth and skill-building activities foster intrinsic motivation (Fisher et al., 2020). By identifying the specific needs and abilities of students with disabilities, volunteers can assist faculty in developing adaptive learning strategies. Such systematic assessment not only tracks academic progress but also reinforces the student's sense of belonging within the academic community (Leane et al., 2025).

Communication Needs and Technological Support

Effective communication serves as the cornerstone of the mentoring dynamic. Students with disabilities expressed a need for adaptive communication methods—such as

sign language and simplified instructional language—and technological aids like text-to-speech tools. According to Deksissa Bejji et al. (2025), social support acts as a crucial mediator that reduces psychological distress; in this context, clear communication reduces the anxiety associated with sensory or physical barriers. Peer volunteers emphasize that institutionalizing communication training for both lecturers and students is essential to foster a truly inclusive environment where academic roles can be fulfilled without hindrance (Bromley et al., 2021; Vasyukov et al., 2024).

Peer Volunteer Recruitment and Training Process

The sustainability of the Disability Service Unit (ULD) at UBM Gorontalo depends on a structured recruitment process, which currently includes administrative screening and intensive interviews. Findings suggest that the quality of mentoring is highly dependent on the "readiness for change" and specialized training provided to volunteers. Structured programs that include orientation and tailored mentorship strategies are proven to be more effective in fostering long-term resilience among mentees (Gibbons et al., 2018; Velmurugan et al., 2025). This institutionalized approach ensures that volunteers are not merely helpers but are trained facilitators of academic independence.

Suggestions and Future Outlook for Inclusion

The aspirations of both volunteers and students center on the total institutionalization of inclusivity. There is a strong call for improved physical accessibility and the provision of advanced assistive technologies. Recent research underscores that partnerships between disability services, faculty, and community organizations are vital for the sustainability of these programs (Akoto et al., 2022; Munjanja & Hendricks, 2025). Beyond infrastructure, participants highlighted the need for emotional support programs to help students manage stress. By integrating stress-mitigation strategies and awareness campaigns, the university can normalize disability, thereby fostering an environment where students with disabilities can achieve professional excellence (Lombardi et al., 2016; Velmurugan et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that peer volunteers play a transformative and indispensable role in fostering the learning motivation of students with disabilities at Universitas Bina Mandiri Gorontalo. The presence of these volunteers serves as a primary support system that addresses not only technical academic hurdles but also provides significant emotional scaffolding. Through consistent accompaniment, students with disabilities are empowered to enhance their self-confidence, independence, and resilience, enabling them to navigate the complexities of a higher education environment more effectively.

The findings demonstrate that social support provided by peers is a decisive factor in the academic success of students with diverse needs. This support functions as a strategic bridge that connects the students' potential with university resources while mitigating the negative impacts of academic stress and social stigma. The effectiveness of this program is highly dependent on a structured recruitment process and specialized training for volunteers, ensuring that the assistance provided is targeted and promotes long-term academic independence rather than dependency.

Ultimately, the integration of a structured peer volunteer program is essential for

any institution committed to true educational equality. To sustain these positive outcomes, it is recommended that universities formalize peer mentoring through official institutional policies, provide adequate assistive technologies, and conduct regular inclusivity awareness training for all academic staff. By strengthening this supportive ecosystem, the university can ensure equitable access to education and provide a fair opportunity for students with disabilities to achieve their full professional and personal potential.

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