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Motives to Learn English as a Foreign Language: An Analysis from Vroom's Theory

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Abstract

In Malaysia, English is a foreign language to many, and perhaps a second language for some. Many have seen the importance of English in Malaysia, more so during the pandemic. Information online is mainly written in English. In addition to that, online interactions has increased during online classes and language learners find themselves motivated to be better in their English. Getting language learners to stay motivated in foreign language classes is a challenge, now measures need to be taken to encourage language learners to remain motivated to learn foreign languages online. This study uses Vroom's (1964) classic motivation theory to explore the motives behind learners learning English in a public university in Malaysia. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory presents three components and they are expectancy, instrumentality and valence. 35 students responded to a survey that explored how learners' motivation is influenced by expectancy, instrumentality, valence. The instrument used is a survey adapted from Nguyen (2019). Apart from the demographic profile in Section A., there are 2 other sections. Section B has 7 items on expectancy, section C has 7 items on instrumentality and section D has 6 items on valence. Findings revealed that learners learn English for instrumental reasons. Their drive to learn English is what they expect to use their language proficiency for. Findings has interesting implications in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

Keywords: English, Motivation, Expectancy, Instrumentality, Valence

Introduction

Background of Study

In Malaysia, English is a foreign language to many, and perhaps a second language for some. Many have seen the importance of English in Malaysia, more so during the pandemic. Information online is mainly written in English. In addition to that, online interactions has increased during online classes and language learners find themselves motivated to be better in their English. According to Fandina, Munoz and Velandia (2019) and Rahmat (2012), language learners are pushed by their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsically, they feel the need to interact and to achieve autonomy when they communicate. In addition to that, motivation to learn a foreign language is also related to extrinsic regulations, as contextual factors also influence learning.

When it comes to learning English, learners' success is due to a variety of factors. Even when learners fear learning the language, this fear is reduced when they concentrate on how the language is facilitating them (Rahmat, 2022). Ryan & Deci (2000), students who are interested in the content of a subject are more engaged in learning compared to students who are grade focused who tend to succeed academically. So, learners' success in learning a language is dependent on their own effort to do so. Nevertheless, according to Rahmat (2018), the environment is also a factor that hinders or facilitates language learning. This study is done to investigate the factors that motivate learners to learn English. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How are language learners' motivation influenced by their expectancy?
- How are language learners' motivation influenced by their instrumentality?
- How are language learners' motivation influenced by their valence?

Literature Review

Motivation and Language Learning

Each language learner began learning the language for a variety reasons. Some may only feel the need to communicate with one another, while others need more form knowing the language. Seven (2020) describes motivation in learning as either primary or secondary motives. Primary motives include psychological needs are the basic needs to communicate while secondary motives include other benefits from being proficient in the language.

Gardner (1985) describes learners; motives as either integrative or instrumental. For language learning, instrumental motivation could be just as powerfully correlated with L2 achievement as integrative motivation. Integrative motives include three variables and they are integrative-ness, attitudes towards the learning situation and also the drive to learn the language.

Past Studies

The study by Ekiz & Kulmetov (2016) explored the role of motivation and factors affecting students' motivation in learning English as foreign language. Parental, environmental, and teacher's attitude-related factors were examined. The participants were 40 first grade student studying in English Language Teaching department. The participants were given a survey which consisted of several statements related with the mentioned factors. The current study showed that there were strategies and behaviours that motivate students but suppress positive attitudes towards English learning. The findings showed that learners were more motivated when their parents supported and encouraged them to learn English. The research also revealed that reinforcing the learner beliefs also motivated students and they were more motivated when they worked with their friends.

Another study was done by Samad et al (2012) and they investigated the relationship between motivation and language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Two aspects of motivation were considered in this paper i.e. instrumental and integrative. 100 Iranian students studying in UTM and from different faculties served as respondents to reflect a variety of ideas about learning a second language. Participants were those with IELTS band score 6 and above [high achievers] and below 6 [low achievers]. Findings showed that there is a correlation between high achievers' language proficiency and . integrative motivation. This indicated that high achievers L2 learners were highly integrative motivated.

Yet another study on motivation of learning a foreign language is done by (Hassan@ Hussin et.al., 2021). The aim of the study was to see if there are gender differences in the learning as French as a foreign language, specifically in terms of valence, instrumentality and also expectancy. 170 students responded to the survey; 44 were male learners and 126 were female learners. Findings showed that there are variations in gender motivation and perceptions of online learning.

Conceptual Framework

This study is rooted from Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory to explore the motives behind why learners are motivated to learn English. The expectancy theory presents three components and they are expectancy, instrumentality and valence. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. Learners' motivation to learn a language can be understood by what effort they are giving in order to gain knowledge of the language. This is known as the expectancy factor. Next, learners' drive is further enhanced by what type of performance they are aiming for. This is the instrumentality factor. Finally, learners' drive to be proficient in the language stems from what results they expect to get from the learning. This is known as the valence factor.

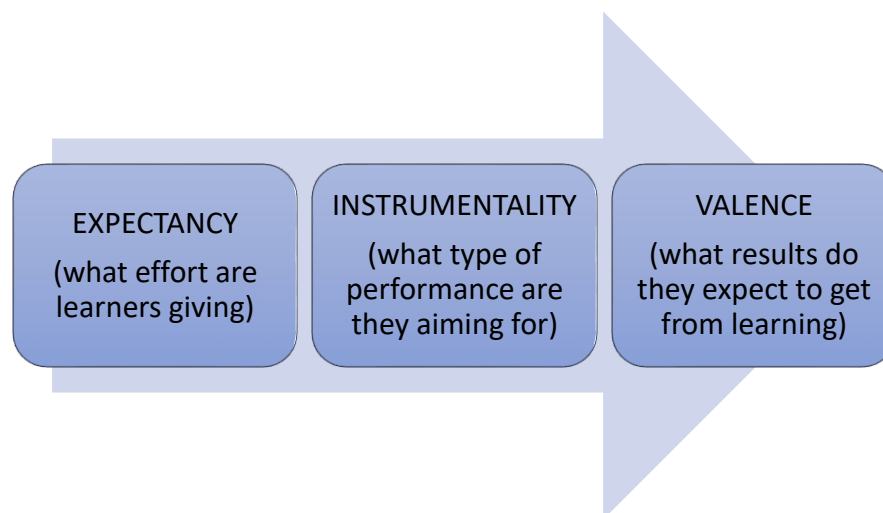


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-
Understanding Language learners' Motivation using Vroom's (1964) theory

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to investigate motives for learning English among students in higher institutions of learning during their early semester. 35 participants were purposely chosen from a public university in Malaysia. The instrument (refer to table 1) used is a survey adapted from Nguyen (2019). Apart from the demographic profile in Section A., there are 2 other sections. Section B has 7 items on expectancy, section C has 7 items on instrumentality and section D has 6 items on valence.

Table 1- Distribution of Items in Survey

Section	Type of Motivation	No of Items
B	Expectancy	7
C	Instrumentality	7
D	Valence	6
		20

Table 2-Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.887	20

Data is collected via goggle form and analysed using SPSS version 26. With reference to table 2, the SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach analysis of .887; thus, showing high internal reliability for the instrument. Data is presented in terms of percentage for the demographic profile and mean scores to answer the research questions.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

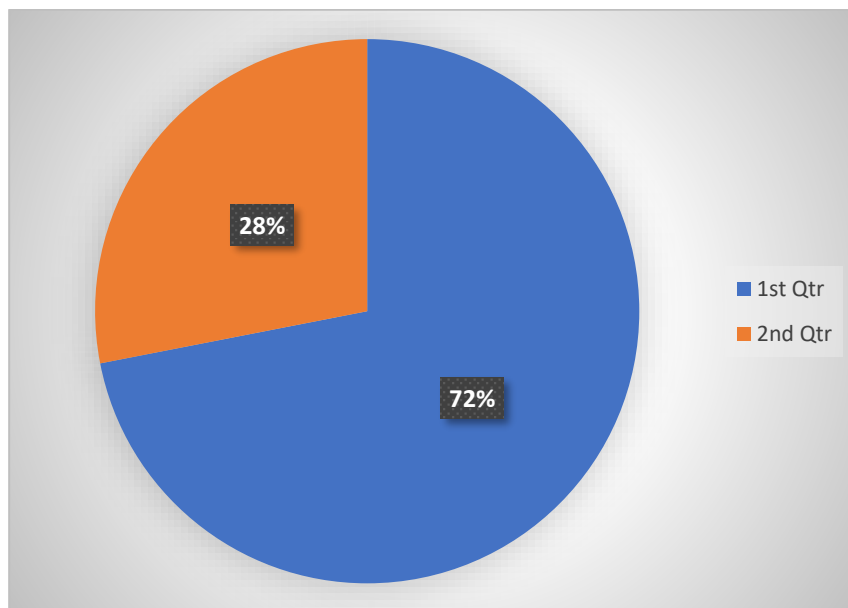


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 presents the percentage for gender. 75% are male while 25% of the respondents are female.

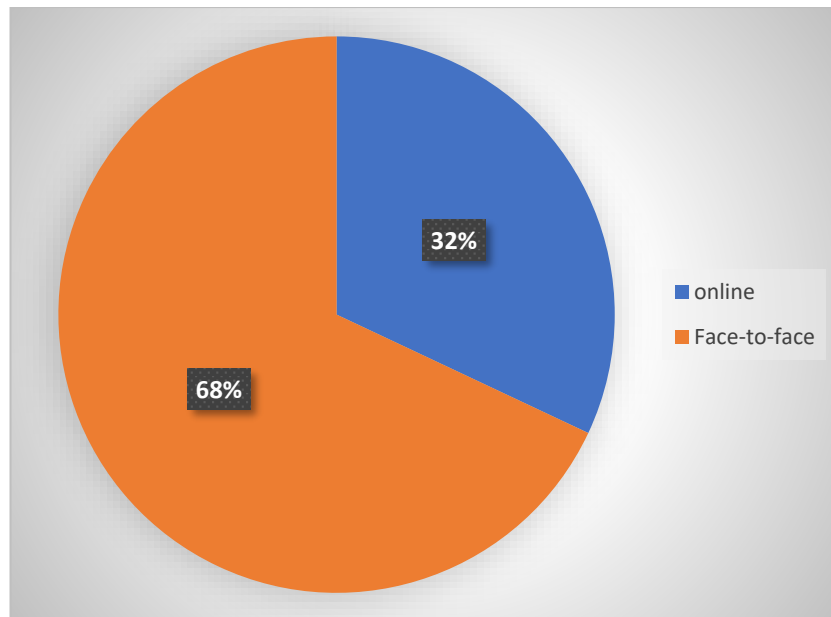


Figure 3- Percentage for Class mode

Figure 3 shows the percentage for class mode. 32% of the respondents attended online classes while 68 % attended face-to-face classes.

Findings for Expectancy

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How are language learners' motivation influenced by their expectancy?

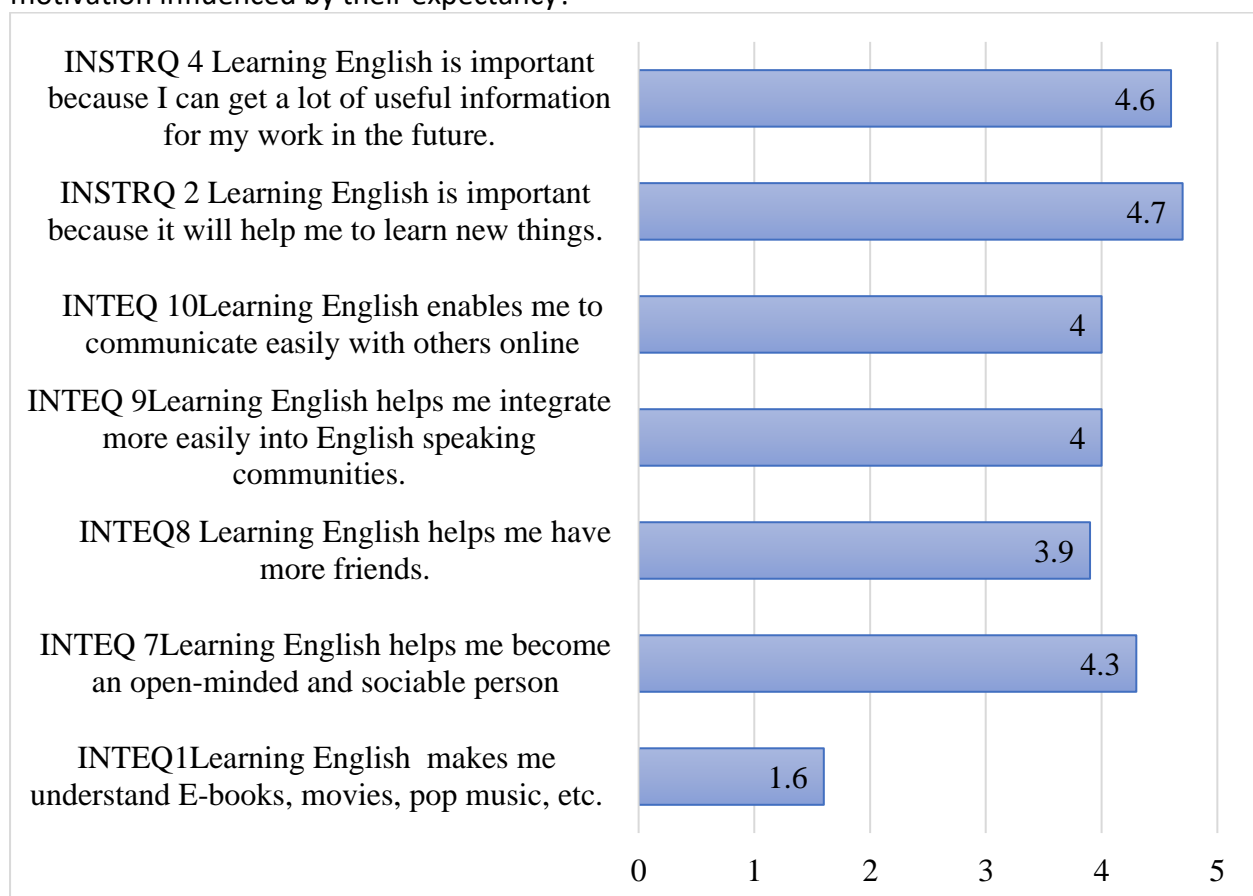


Figure 4- Mean for Expectancy

The mean for expectancy is presented in figure 4. Interestingly, the respondents reported low mean score (1.5) for “learning English makes me understand e-books, movies , pop-music, etc”. The highest mean (4.7) was reported for “Learning English is important because it will help me to learn new things” . This is followed by a mean of 4.6 for “Learning English is important because I can get a lot of useful information for my work in the future”.

Findings for Instrumentality

This section answers research question 2: How are language learners’ motivation influenced by their instrumentality?

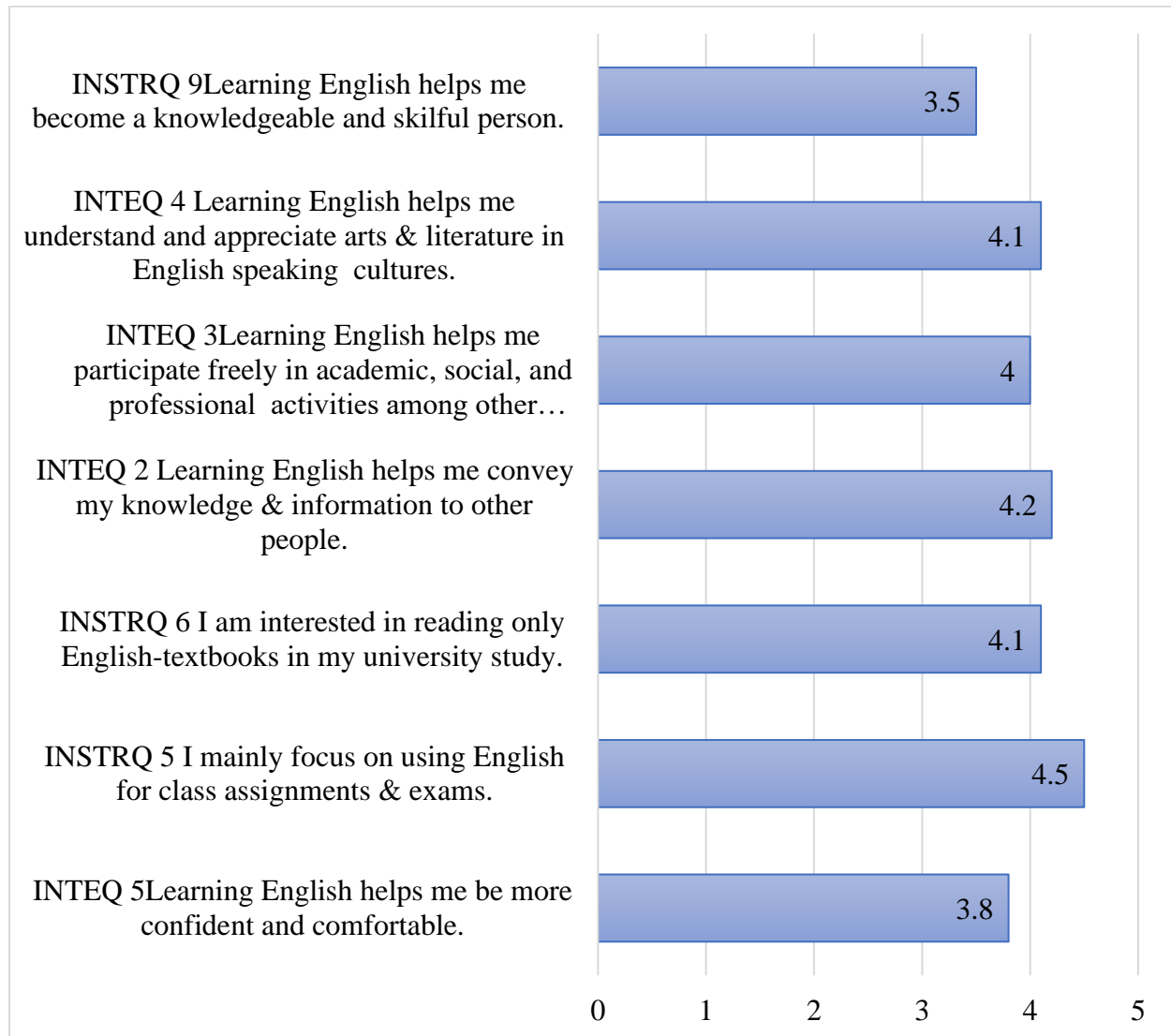


Figure 5- Mean for Instrumentality

Figure 5 shows the mean for instrumentality. The highest mean (4.5) is for “ I mainly focus on using English for class assignments & exams.”. This is followed by a mean of 4.2 for “Learning English helps me convey my knowledge & information to other people” . Two items had the same mean of 4.1 and they are “I am interested in reading only English-textbooks in my university study” and “Learning English helps me understand and appreciate arts & literature in English speaking cultures”.

Findings for Valence

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How are language learners' motivation influenced by their valence?

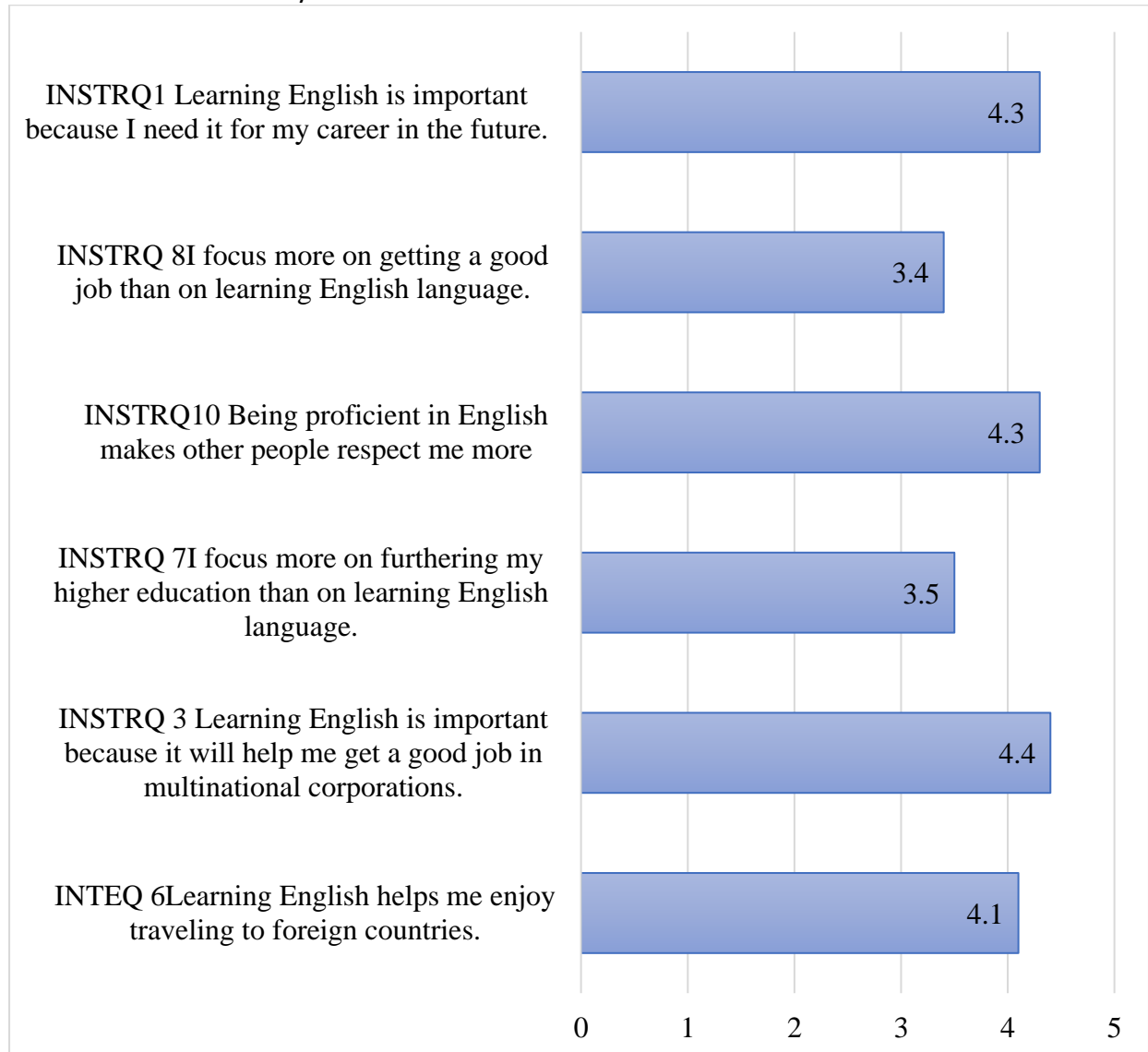


Figure 6- Mean for Valence

Figure 6 presents the mean for valence. The highest mean of 4.4 is for “Learning English is important because it will help me get a good job in multinational corporations”. This is followed by a mean of 4.3 for two items and they are “Being proficient in English makes other people respect me more” and “Learning English is important because I need it for my career in the future”. It is interesting to note that the lowest mean at 3.4 is for “focus more on getting a good job than on learning English language”.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

A summary of the findings revealed that learners they did not learn English for entertainment purposes. Learners' motives to learn a foreign language is influenced by their expectancy towards what they can get out of the course. Their motives are also influenced by the way they perceived the instrumentality and also the valence of the course. They claimed to need

English for interaction. This is also reported by Ekiz & Kulmetov (2016) who reported that learners claimed they learn English to communicate better. Next, respondents in this study also reported that they learnt English to better convey information. They needed to improve their English to complete their assignments and answer test exams. The study by Samad, Etemanzadeh, & Far (2012) also reported that learners needed for both instrumental and integrative reasons. Finally, respondents reported that they wanted to learn English to gain respect. They needed English for their career. The study by Hassan@ Hussin, et.al. (2021) also reported similar findings that learners motivate to learn a foreign language for instrumentality, and also to gain valence.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Learners embark in the learning of foreign languages have different motives for learning the language. Some learnt for instrumental reasons. Some learnt for integrative reasons. Time has changed the way learners view because learners reasons for learning as changed drastically over the years. Teachers teaching English as foreign language need to consider learners' motives. Knowing what drives learners can also help teacher better plan learning activities to make the most out of the classroom learning. Future researchers could investigate deeper into more motivational factors that push learners to want to succeed in the foreign language classes. Researchers could also investigate what hinders learning in foreign language classrooms.

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