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Exploring Belief, Expectation and Behaviour in Learning A Foreign Language

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Abstract

There are many reasons that motivates people to learn a new language. Some people learn a language for practical reasons. Some just love the language and its people. Motivation to learn a language is the pushing factor for the learners to succeed. This motivation sometime becomes the drive for the learners participate in the learning process. This then reduces their fear of learning the language. This study is therefore done to investigate the influence of fear on the learning if a foreign language. This study used the classic theory of self-fulling prophecy by Merton (1948) as the base. The three factors in self-fulfilling prophecies (beliefs, expectations and behaviour) are scaffolded onto the three constructs of fear of foreign language learning to form the main variables of the study. 100 participants were purposely chosen. The survey adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). Apart from the demographic profile in Section A., there are 3 other sections. Section B has 11 items on beliefs, section 7 has 10 items on expectation and section D has 15 items on behaviour. Findings showed that learners beliefs, expectations and behaviour form the self-fulling prophecy in the learning of a foreign language. Learners beliefs such as being frightened and not being able to understand the teacher made them nervous of the learning activity. Next, the nervousness, is making them worry if they are unable to answer questions from the language teacher. Finally their behaviour is their justification for what they belief in themselves and how they expect their outcome of the learning to be. The findings in this study add to the existing theoretical framework on motivations to learn foreign languages.

Keyword: Foreign Language Learning, Fear, Beliefs, Expectations, Behaviour

Introduction

People learn a foreign language for many reasons, some learn communicate, some learnt to understand information , some learn for career development. According to Alizadeh (2016) motivation is a key factor for explaining the success or failure of any learning activity.

Two main culprits that hinder learning are anxiety and also the desire to be perfect. A language learner does not need to be perfect in the language they are learning. There are many factors that contribute to the success or failure of learning the language. For example, the learners' beliefs has an impact on his/her ability to learn the language well. According to Rahmat (2021), learners' prophecy is formed form self-imposed perception, then beliefs. The expectations can be positive or negative depending on the beliefs. This expectations will then lead to either a positive or negative outcome. Some learner may not have had a pleasant experience learning the language (Rahmat, 2020). Anxiety for foreign language learning causes other problems for learners. These problems may snowball to effect other performance and achievement in other language related areas; thus, creating a cycle of fear.

This study is therefore done to investigate the influence of fear on the learning if a foreign language. This study is done to answer the following questions:
- How do beliefs influence learners' fear of learning a foreign language?
- How do expectations learners' fear of learning a foreign language?
- How does behaviour learners' fear of learning a foreign language?

Literature Review
Motives and Fear of Learning Foreign Languages
There are many reasons that motivates people to learn a new language. According to Seven (2020), people often learn a language for practical reasons. Some just love the language and its people. Motivation to learn a language is the pushing factor for the learners to succeed. This motivation sometime becomes the drive for the learners participate in the learning process. This then reduces their fear of learning the language.

What causes fear of learning a foreign language? According to Zheng and Cheng (2018); Alizadeh (2016) learners have (a) class anxiety, they lack (b) test confidence and they have (c) test anxiety. Zheng and Cheng (2018); Seven (2020) also reported that there is a negative association between class anxiety and test confidence. There is also a negative association between test anxiety and test confidence. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) found three main factors that causes fear of foreign language learning. Firstly, learners may have (a) communication apprehension that causes them to avoid communication in the target language. Next, they this anxiety has also made them (b) fear negative evaluation. Lastly, they may also have (c) test anxiety.

Past Studies
The study by Batha et al (2018) was conducted to address the factors contributing to English FL speaking anxiety in the Jordanian context. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews on 20 freshman students attending Jadara University in Irbid, Jordan. NVivo software was used to manage the coding procedure in analysing the data, and respondents declared twelve factors leading to an increased level of speaking anxiety. Analysis of data revealed interesting findings. Firstly, fear of being perceived as showing-off, cultural barrier between male and female students, fear of impromptu questions and previous experience in school. The first two of these factors highlight the importance of considering the cultural backgrounds of learners when teaching English in an Arabic and/or Muslim context like Jordan. The other two factors reveal the inadequacy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in schools, and universities too.

Rahmat, et. al (2022) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the factors that lead to the fear of oral presentation, especially fear of negative evaluation. This study also explored the relationship between all the three constructs; fear of negative evaluation, external and internal reasons. There were 129 respondents . The instrument used is survey. The survey has 4 sections, section A has items on demographic profile, section B has 9 items on fear of negative evaluation, section C has 7 items on external factors, and section D has 7 items on internal factors. Findings revealed that there is a weak positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation and external and internal factors. There is a strong positive relationship between external and internal; factors.

Next, the qualitative study by Hakim (2019) used a semi-structured interview and the focus-group discussion technique. It was also done to investigate the factors conducive to language anxiety in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students of the English Language Institute (ELI) of King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah in both classroom settings and in the social context. The participants were 60 EFL (the foundation year program) students. Findings showed that language anxiety is closely associated with how learners perceive the language learning process, their self-consciousness about the language and how they should be acting in any communicative setting, and also the linguistic complications they have to deal with in their interactions in English.

The study by Anwar & Lousi (2017) investigated factors influencing students' anxiety in language learning in private universities in Erbil. A quantitative research method was applied to measure students anxiety which consisted of fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension and test anxiety. There were 92 respondents. Multiple regression analysis was applied to test each research hypotheses. The findings of this study revealed that students' fear of negative anxiety had the higher level of anxiety towards learning language, on the other hand students test anxiety had lower value among other variables.

Chin et al (2016) conducted a study using The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which was developed by Horwitz et al (1986) was administered to 149 first year Diploma students. Data analysis on the FLCAS items were analysed using SPSS 22. The findings revealed that majority of the students experienced a moderate level of English language anxiety with anxiety of English classes being the main factor which contributed to the respondents' language learning anxiety, followed by fear of test, communication/ speech apprehension and finally fear of negative evaluation. The study also indicated that most of the students were unmotivated to attend English classes and unproductive in preparing language tests. Nevertheless, majority of the students perceived themselves as confident and not anxious when speaking with native English speakers.

Conceptual Framework
This study used the classic theory of self-fulling prophecy by Merton (1948) as the base. With reference to figure 1, according to Merton (1948), a person may begin a prophecy by starting with a definition of a situation -the (a) belief. This definition can be both true or untrue. This belief is then followed by many (b) expectations that the person built upon that belief. The beliefs and expectation then could encourage the person to display (c) behaviour that was built by the person.
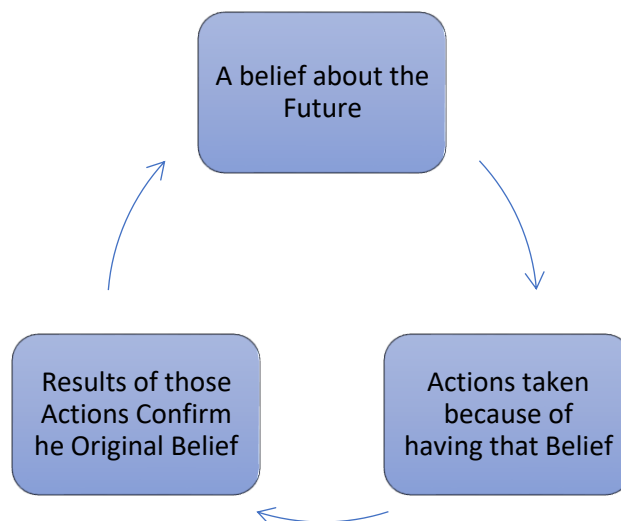
Figure 1- Self Fulling Prophecy (source: Merton, 1948)

The conceptual framework of this study is presented in figure 2. In the context of this study, self-fulling prophecy is based on the three main constructs of fear of foreign language learning by (Horwitz et al., 1986). The fear of foreign language learning begins with the learner having communication apprehension caused by the negative (a) beliefs that the person has on the language. Next, this belief leads to (b) expectations on the surrounding people fearing negative evaluation. The belief and expectations may them encourage the person to exhibit (c) behaviour that displays the beliefs and expectations.
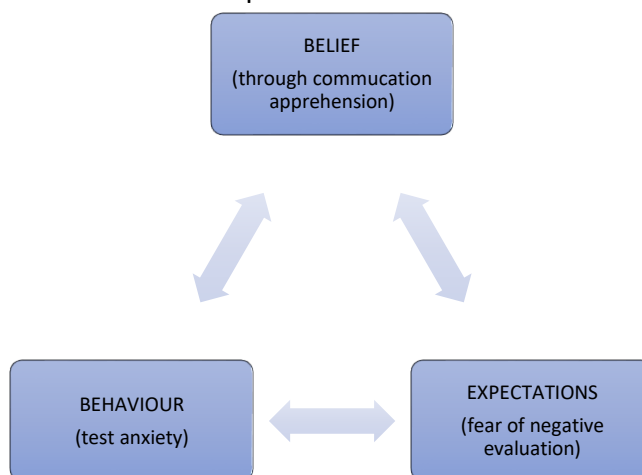

Figure 2- Conceptual Framework of the Study-The influence of belief, Expectations and Behaviour on Foreign Language Learning.

Methodology
This quantitative study is done to investigate the causes of the students' anxiety upon learning foreign language. 100 participants were purposely chosen from a public university in Malaysia. The instrument (refer to table 1). used is a survey adapted from (Horwitz et al., 1986). Apart from the demographic profile in Section A., there are 3 other sections. Section B has 11 items on beliefs, section 7 has 10 items on expectation and section D has 15 items on behaviour.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in Survey

SECTION	FACTORS	NO OF ITEMS
B	Beliefs	11
C	Expectations	7
D	Behaviour	15
	TOTAL NO OF ITEMS	33

Table 2
Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.795	33

Data is collected via google form and analysed using SPSS version 26. With reference to table 2, the SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach analysis of .795 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
Introduction
This section presents the findings by answering the research questions of the study. The presentation of findings begins with the report findings for the demographic profile in the form of percentages.

Findings for Demographic Profile
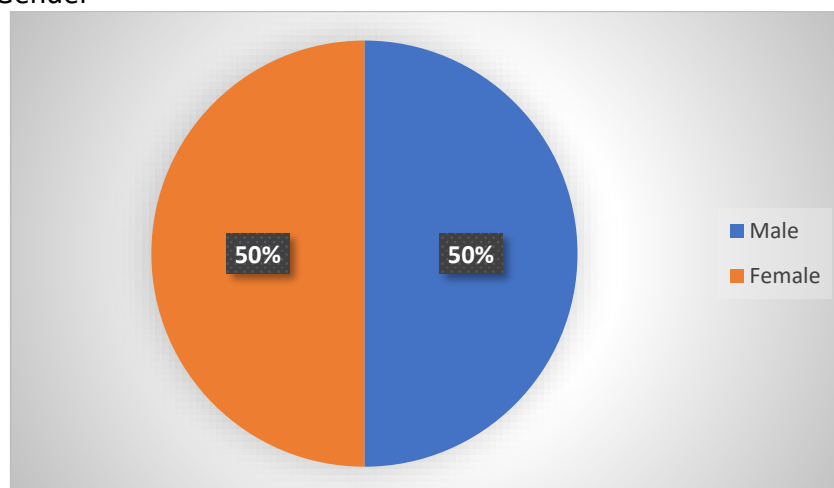Findings For Gender

Figure 3- Percentage for Gender
Figure 2 shows the percentage for Gender whereby male and female are equally at 50%.
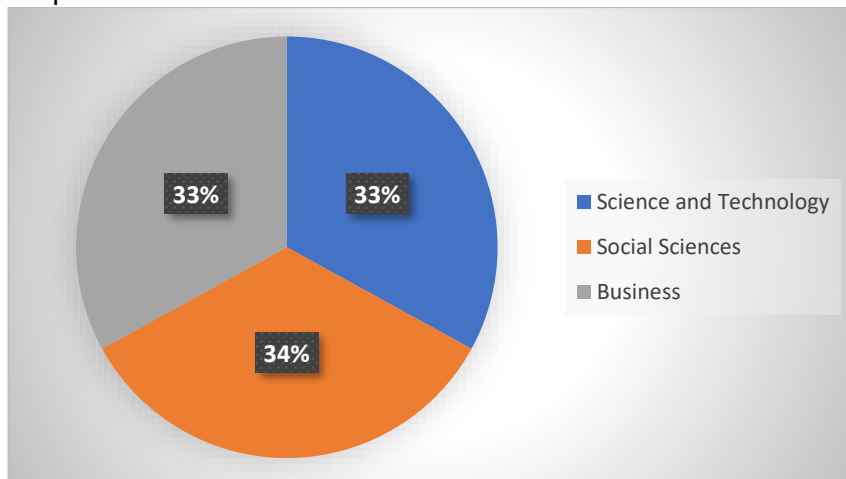
Findings for Discipline

Figure 4- Percentage for Discipline

Figure 3 shows distribution by disciplines. 34% shows that respondents are from Social Sciences and 33% are from Science and Technology and Business.

Findings for Beliefs

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do beliefs influence learners' fear of learning a foreign language?
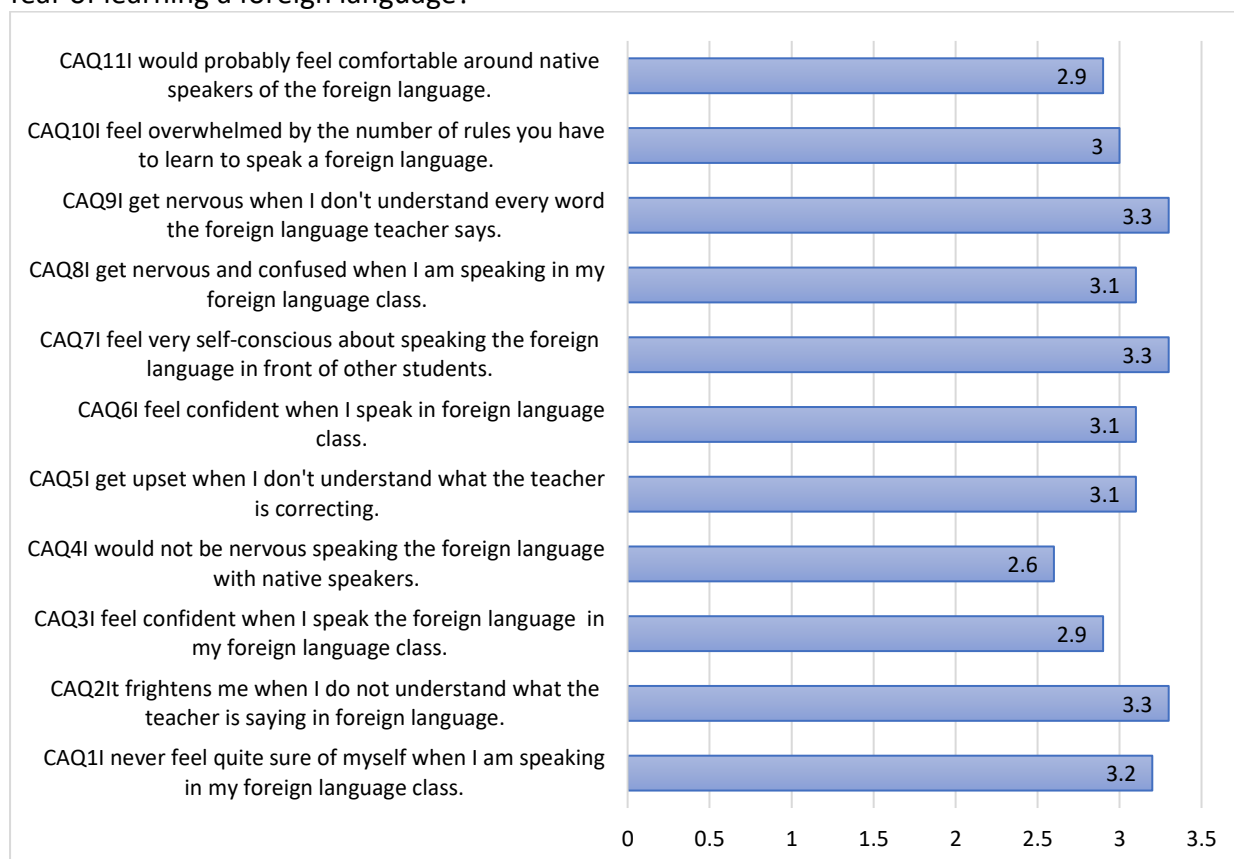

Figure 5- Mean for Beliefs

Figure 4 shows the mean for beliefs. Three items share the highest mean of 3.3 and they are "frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in foreign language.", "feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students" and "get

nervous when I don't understand every word the foreign language teacher says". Next, the item "never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class" had a mean of 3.2 .

Findings for Expectations

This section presents data to answer research question 2: How do expectations influence learners' fear of learning a foreign language?
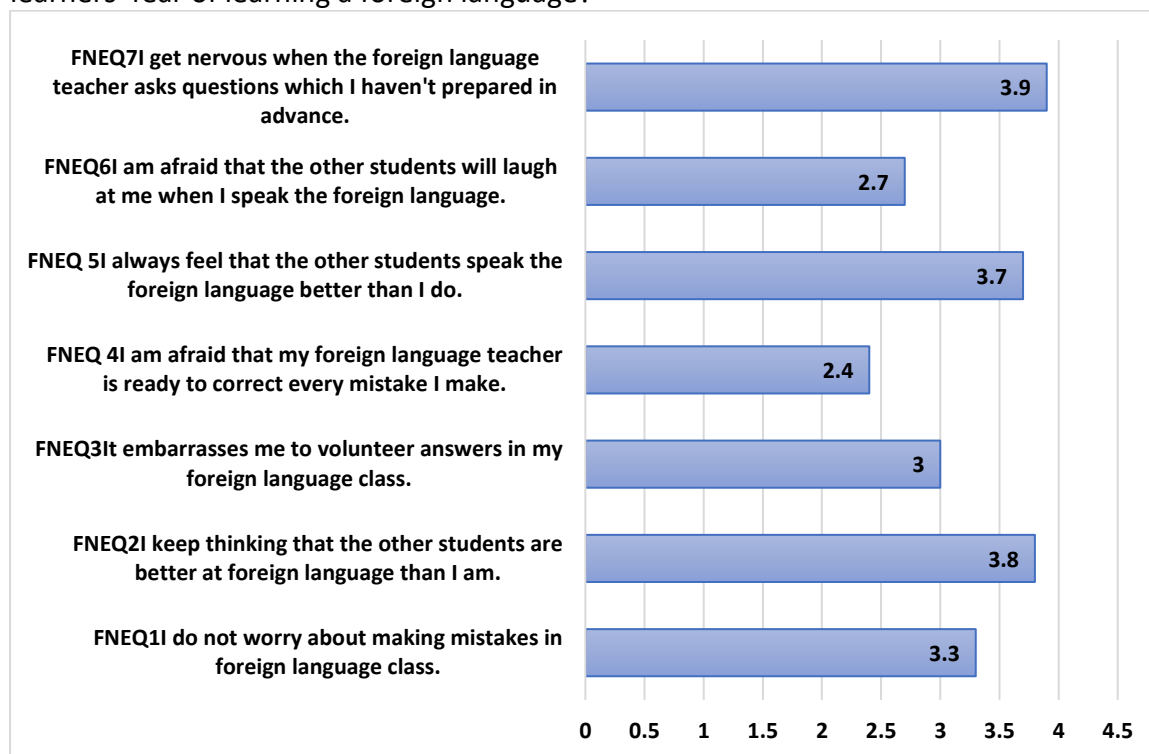

Figure 6- Mean for Fear of Expectations

Figure 6 shows the mean for expectations. The highest mean if 3.9 for the item "get nervous when the foreign language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance". This is followed by a mean of 3.8 for "keep thinking that the other students are better at foreign language than I am". The item "always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do" had a mean of 3.7.

Findings for Behaviour

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How does behaviour learners' fear of learning a foreign language?
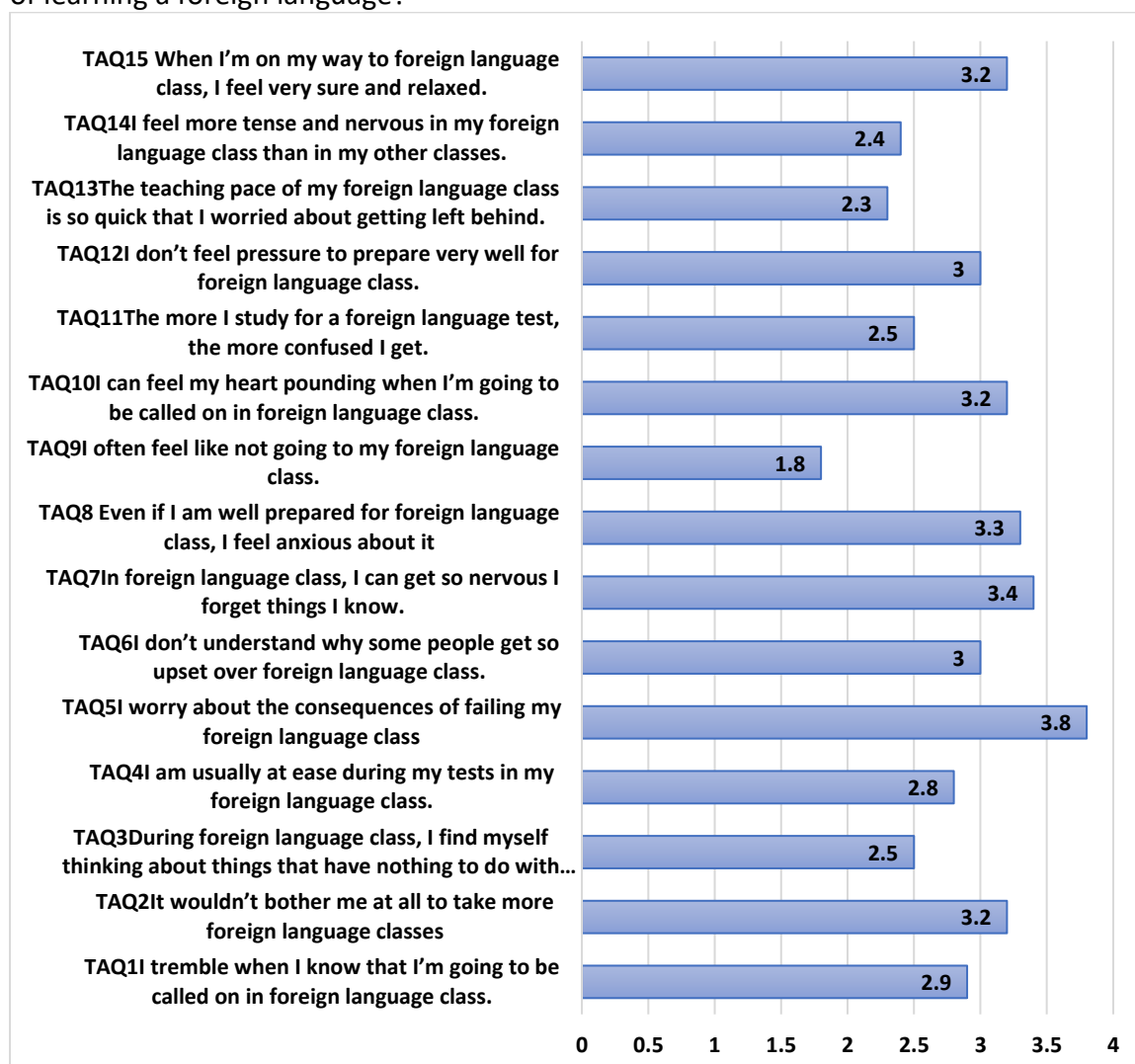

Figure 7- Mean for Behaviour

Figure 7 shows the mean for behaviour. The highest mean is 3.8 for the item "worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class". Next is a mean for 3.4 for the item " foreign language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know". The item "Even if I am well prepared for foreign language class, I feel anxious about it" had a mean of 3.3. Three items had the same mean of 3.2 and they are "wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes", "can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in foreign language class" and "When I'm on my way to foreign language class, I feel very sure and relaxed".

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

In summary, learners beliefs, expectations and behaviour form the self-fulling prophecy in the learning of a foreign language. Learners beliefs such as being frightened and not being able to understand the teacher made them nervous of the learning activity. Next, the nervousness, is making them worry if they are unable to answer questions from the language teacher.

Finally their behaviour is their justification for what they belief in themselves and how they expect their outcome of the learning to be.

Findings in this study is in accordance with past studies. The study by Batha et al (2018) also found that the fear of being, fear of impromptu questions and previous experience in schools held learners back to succeed. In addition to that, Rahmat, et.al (2022) also revealed that there is a weak positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation and external and internal factors. There is a strong positive relationship between external and internal factors. What learners perceive about themselves from within has an influence on how they perceive their learning, and in turn the success of the learning.

The studies by Hakim (2019); Chin et al (2016) also found that language anxiety is closely associated with how learners perceive the language learning process, their self-consciousness about the language and how they should be acting in any communicative setting, and also the linguistic complications they have to deal with in their interactions in the target language. Sadly, this fear can lead to more anxiety that can hinder more learning success (Anwar & Lousi, 2017) .

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research
The teaching of language could have one extra component and that is how to deal with language learning anxiety. It is encouraged that language instructors not only learning activities that are less stressful for the learners, but also re-think of more enjoyable ways to testing language skills that do not put extra stress in students beside normal stress of facing evaluation. Future research could focus on what language learners do to overcome their anxiety. Future research could also look into the relationship of variables on language learning fear.

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