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An Investigation of Learners' Motivational Drive to Learn Foreign Language: A Look at Vroom's Expectancy Theory

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Abstract

In this globalized world, foreign language learning has become increasingly imperative. Despite the absence of an optimal linguistic environment, a heightened level of motivation is essential for mastering a foreign language. Learners are likely to experience demotivation when they exert significant effort in language acquisition without experiencing immediate improvement in their language proficiency. Consequently, understanding the motivational constructs in foreign language learning, particularly at the onset of the learning process, is vital. To this end, a quantitative study was conducted utilizing Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory and Pintrich and De Groot's (1990) motivational scale theory as the conceptual framework. The study involved administering a 26-item survey, which used 5-point Likert scales to 108 respondents studying French as a foreign language at a beginner level in a Malaysian public university. The survey was divided into four sections: demographic profile, instrumentality, expectancy, and valence. The findings revealed that learners exhibited both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and had a positive perception of the importance of foreign language acquisition. Additionally, respondents had a strong belief in their ability to attain a high grade through hard work, although the fear of failure negatively impacted their motivation levels. Notably, there was a significant relationship between instrumentality, expectancy, and valence. These findings provide valuable insights into the motivational factors involved in foreign language learning at the beginner level and can potentially contribute to the cultivation of motivation in the foreign language classroom.

Keywords: Foreign Language Learning, French Language, Motivation, Motivational Construct, Vroom Expectancy Theory

Introduction

Background of Study

In today's globalized world, knowing how to speak a foreign language is increasingly considered as an advantage. Learning a foreign language offers various benefits for students beyond mere communicative purposes. Specifically, it can promote intercultural awareness and improve intercultural competence, which is increasingly vital in globalization (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). Additionally, foreign language learning has improved career prospects and developed transferable skills, such as flexibility, adaptability, and intercultural communication, that are highly valued in professional contexts. Furthermore, research indicates that learning a foreign language can improve self-confidence, well-being, and executive function (Pfenninger & Polz, 2018). The critical role of motivation in foreign language learning is widely acknowledged, as it is a key predictor of learners' engagement and effort in the learning process.

In the Malaysian context, foreign language learners are required to acquire a foreign language at a basic level without providing appropriate contextual and comprehensive resources. This lack of support renders the acquisition of a foreign language more challenging. Learners' motivation is a crucial factor that sustains their perseverance in learning the foreign language until they attain their desired learning objectives, which may include passing examinations, acquiring communication skills for survival, or traveling to a country where the target language is spoken. The learners' initial curiosity and eagerness to communicate in a foreign language typically result in high motivation at the outset of language learning. However, the difficulty of mastering a foreign language can impede learners' motivation as they may not immediately observe the fruits of their labor (Bakhtiyarova, 2021). Thus, comprehending the motivation of foreign language learners is essential to enable instructors to help students maintain a high level of motivation throughout their language learning journey.

Statement of Problem

Online learning has widened the possibilities for people to learn and acquire new languages. In the past, many were concerned that online learning might not be as efficient as in-person classes. However, online learning is now the new norm, creating opportunities for research on online language learning. Students' academic performance is very much dependent on their motivation as it influences their desire to reach the target. Students are human and as humans, motivation is one of the key factors in justifying quality learning. The study by Dweck et al. (2014) revealed that students are prone to fail and drop out if they are not motivated due to a lack of engagement with the learning process. In Vroom's Theory, motivation is measured by three domains (Vroom, 1964). The domains are expectancy, which is the need for effort leading to performance in learning; valence, which is the learners' feedback and instrumentality, which is the belief in achieving the rewards.

Studies in the past have demonstrated that the level of engagement demonstrated during online sessions determines whether or not online classes succeed. Motivation is explicitly linked to students' self-regulation of online assignment behavior. There were added advantages of coordinating both expectancy-value and achievement goal theories while constructing online-based assignment motivation profiles (Xu, 2022). Hassan @ Hussin et al (2021) did a study on gender differences in learning French online based on Vroom's expectancy theory. They found that gender motivation and their perceptions of online language learning differed. A study by Lokman et al (2022) found that the main incentive for

learning is still getting good grades. Students are significantly more motivated to learn by having extrinsic rewards compared to intrinsic rewards. Hence, it is essential to investigate the various factors that influence motivation in foreign language learning, taking into account learner variables such as proficiency level and perception towards the target language. This approach can significantly enrich the existing literature on the subject of motivation in foreign language learning.

This study is done to investigate the factors that influence motivation in foreign language learning, especially at a beginner level. The research objectives are:

- To determine the effect of instrumentality, expectancy and valence on the motivation in foreign language learning.
- To verify the relationship among motivational constructs for foreign language learning.

Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions:

- How does instrumentality influence learners' motivation to learn a foreign language?
- How does expectancy influence learners' motivation to learn a foreign language?
- How does valence influence learners' motivation to learn a foreign language?
- Is there a relationship between variables for motivational constructs for foreign language learning?

Literature Review

1.1 Demotivating Factors for Foreign Language Learning

According to You and Liang (2022), demotivation is the reduction of motivation level caused by negative external factors. In foreign language learning, demotivation is a common aspect (Gao & Liu, 2022). From various research conducted, it is discovered that there are several aspects influencing students' demotivation, such as learning anxiety (Xaypanya et al., 2017), learning content (Meshkat & Ebrahimi, 2012) and also the nature of the target language (Husniyah, 2019), to cite a few. By knowing and understanding the demotivating factors, educators can find effective ways to improve learners' motivation (Gao & Liu, 2022).

1.2 Motivating Factors for Foreign Language Learning

Vroom Expectancy Theory lies as the strong foundation for motivation in learning the foreign language. There are three main components of motivation in Vroom Expectancy Theory, which are Instrumentality, Expectancy and Valence (Agah et al., 2020). Vroom's Expectancy theory firstly, emphasizes that students will put effort in learning a foreign language as they foresee the expected result in learning, which is known as Instrumentality. Instrumentality can be described as the correlation between performance-accomplishment in which the students consider that their productive performance is instrumental in achieving the success that they have worked for (Lokman et al., 2022). Secondly, the theory presents that the students will devote their time to learning the foreign language based on the outcome that they will achieve, which is known as expectancy. Expectancy can be illustrated as students' perception on the quality of performance will be better if they work harder (Arora & Iyer, 2021). Finally, the theory proposes that the students will also dedicate their time to foreign language learning if they see the benefits in learning the foreign language, which is also known as valence (Nagle, 2021; Sang, 2021; Agah et al., 2020; Vroom, 1964). Osafo et al. (2021) also stated that valence could be implied as a stimulating element to achieve positive rewards in learning.

1.3 Past Studies on Motivation for Learning Language

Many studies have been done to investigate learning motivation. Tolman (1959) stated that humans consciously choose the actions they take based on their perceptions of the outcomes correlated with those actions and the likelihood of obtaining those outcomes. Based on Tolman's work, Vroom then (1964) came up with a theory called the expectancy theory, which is deemed to have the most comprehensive explanation on how an individual is motivated. According to the theory, an individual's desire for a reward (Valence), assessment of the probability that effort will lead to expected performance (Expectancy), and belief that performance will lead to rewarding (Instrumentality) are all factors of motivation.

There have been many past studies on Vroom's expectancy theory. Rahmat (2022) did an analysis of Vroom's theory on students' motivation to learn English as a foreign language. The study aimed to explore the motives behind learners learning English in a public university in Malaysia. The respondents were 35 students, and they answered a survey on how expectancy, instrumentality, and valence affect learners' motivation. Findings showed that learners did not learn English for amusement; instead, their motivations were influenced by their expectancy of what they will gain from the course. Their motivations are also influenced by their perceptions of the course's value and instrumentality, as they claimed that they need to acquire English for interaction.

Another study was done by Lokman et al (2022) on students' motivation in higher education based on Vroom's expectancy theory. The study aimed to explore the influence of motivation on learners. Data were collected through a survey of motivation scale, values, expectancy and affective component. The findings revealed that Students are significantly more motivated to learn by having extrinsic rewards compared to intrinsic rewards. However, it has been discovered that students are intimidated by the idea and experience of participating in learning sessions and taking assessments. This suggests that the curriculum should incorporate more effective components.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below shows the conceptual framework of the study. The framework is anchored by Vroom's expectancy theory (1964). According to Rahmat (2022), learners embark on a language learning process for many reasons; some feel the need to communicate, while others need more from knowing the language. Vroom (1964) stated that a person is motivated to pursue an intention (in this context-learning a foreign language) if he/she is pushed by three categories of motivational drive, and they are (A) Valence, (B) Expectancy and (C) Instrumentality. In the context of this study, the three drives by Vroom (1964) are then combined with the motivational scale by Pintrich & De Groot (1990). (A) Valence is recognised by the learner's affective components. Next, (B) Expectancy is displayed by expectancy components. In addition to that, a person's (C) Instrumentality is gained by his/her value components towards the initial intention of taking up the language course.

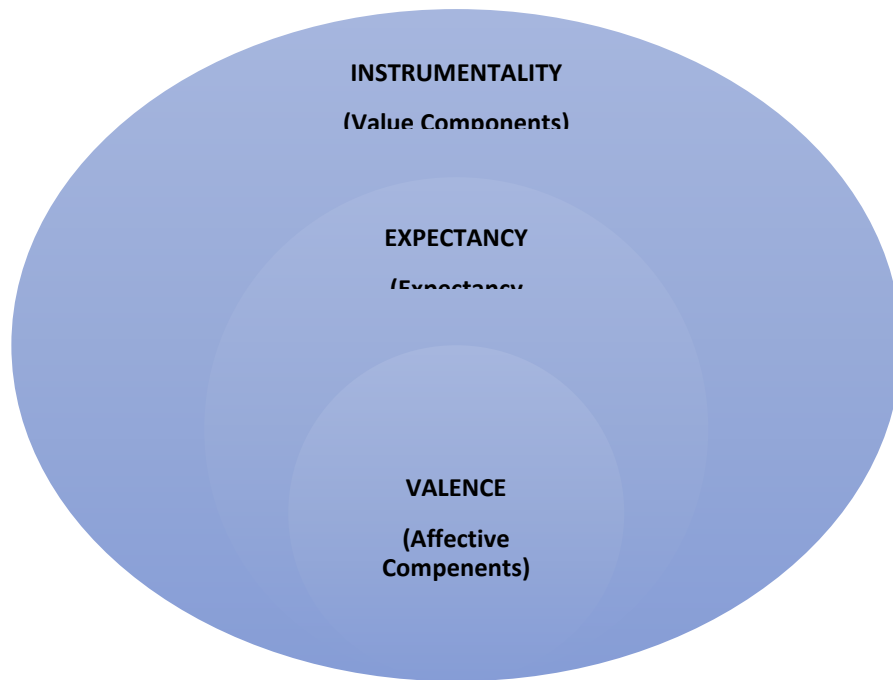


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study –
Learners' Motivation to learn a Foreign Language

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore students' motivations to learn foreign languages. A purposive sample of 108 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a survey. The instrument is adapted from Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. This theory is then scaffolded onto motivational scale by Pintrich and De Groot (1990) to reveal the sections in table 1 below. The instrument has 4 sections. Section A has 2 items on the demographic profile. Section B has 12 items on Instrumentality. Section C has 7 items on Expectancy, and section D has 5 items on Valence.

Table 1

Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECT	Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964)	MOTIVATIONAL SCALE (Pintrich & De Groot,1990).		VARIABLE	No Of Items	Total Items
B	INSTRUMENTALITY	VALUE COMPONENTS	(a)	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	12
			(b)	Extrinsic Goal Orientation	3	
			(c)	Task Value Beliefs	5	
C	EXPECTANCY	EXPECTANCY COMPONENT	(a)	Students' Perception of Self- Efficacy	5	7
			(b)	Control Beliefs for Learning	2	
D	VALENCE	AFFECTIVE COMPONENTS				5
		TOTAL NO OF ITEMS				24

Table 2

*Reliability of Survey***Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.883	24

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .883; thus, revealing good reliability of the instrument chosen. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1. Gender

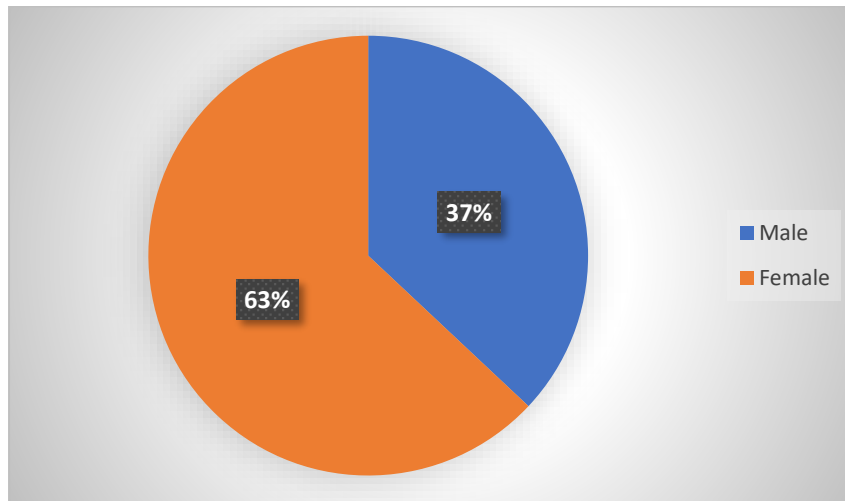


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 illustrates the demographic profile of 108 participants focusing on gender, where the proportion of male participants is 37% and the proportion of female participants is 63%.

Q2 Discipline

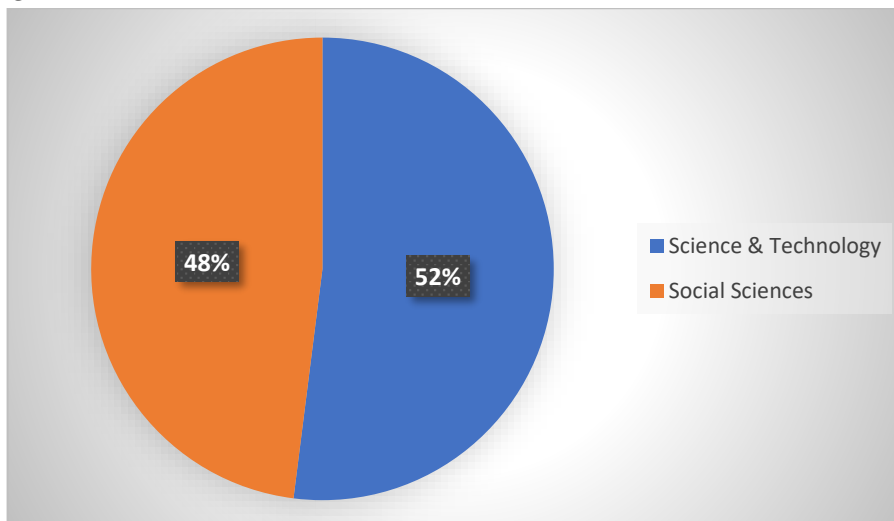


Figure 3- Percentage for Discipline

As shown in Figure 3, a sample of 108 respondents came from two major disciplines, with 52% in the science and technology discipline, and 48% in the social sciences discipline.

Findings for Instrumentality

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How does instrumentality influence learners' motivation to learn a foreign language? In the context of this study, instrumentality is measured by (a) intrinsic goal orientation, (b) extrinsic goal orientation, and (c) task value beliefs.

(a) INTRINSIC GOAL ORIENTATION (4 items)

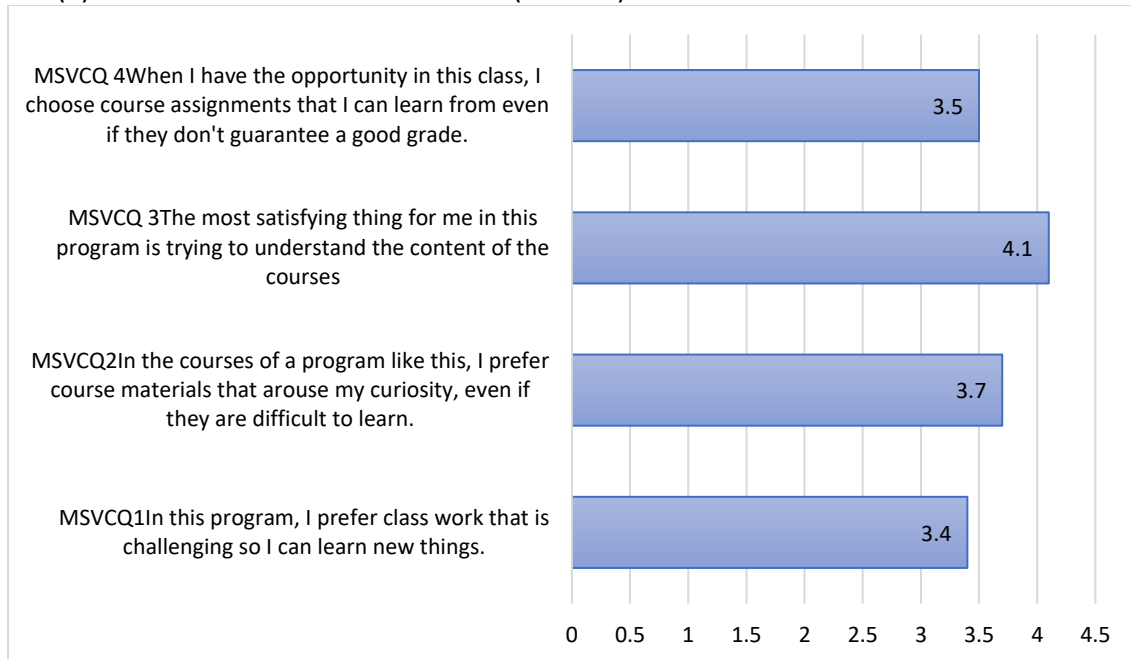


Figure 4- Mean for Intrinsic Goal Orientation

Figure 4 shows that for Intrinsic Goal Orientation, items 1, 2 and 4 have a mean lower than 4. The lowest is item 1 where the students indicate that they don't want to have challenging classwork ($M = 3.4$). Meanwhile, item 3 has the highest mean ($M = 4.1$). For the respondents, understanding the course content is the most satisfying thing for them.

(b) EXTRINSIC GOAL ORIENTATION (3 items)

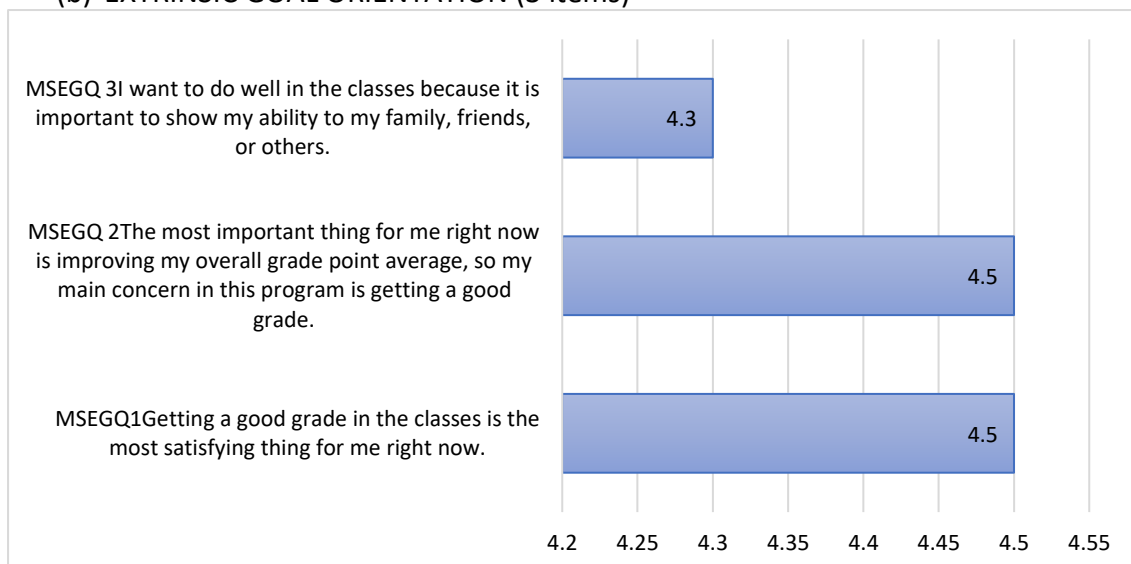


Figure 5- Mean for Extrinsic Goal Orientation

As shown in Figure 5, all mean for extrinsic goal orientation is higher than 4.0. Item 1 and item 2 both have the mean of 4.5. This reveals that getting a good grade is very important to the respondents. Meanwhile item 3, with the mean 4.3, shows that the respondents want to

do well in the classes. For them, it is important to show their ability to their family, friends, or others.

(c) TASK VALUE BELIEFS (5 items)

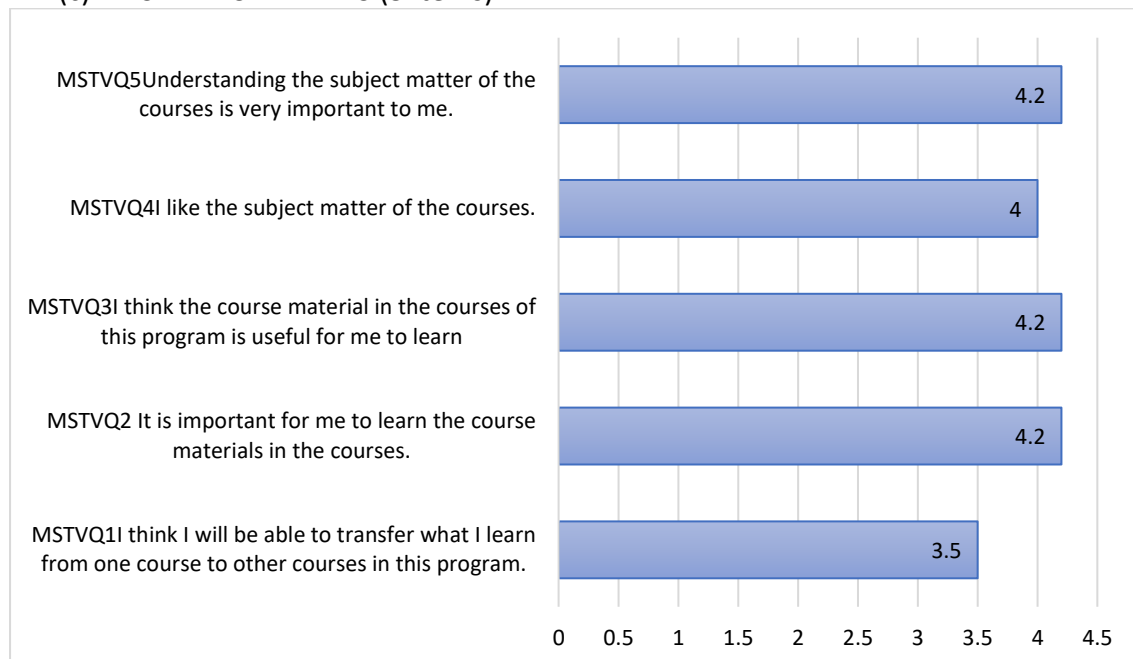


Figure 6- Mean for Task Value Beliefs

Figure 6 shows that for Task Value Beliefs, item 1 has the lowest mean ($M = 3.5$). Whereas items 2, 3 and 5 have the same mean ($M = 4.2$). The respondents reveal that it is useful (item 3) and important (item 2) for them to learn the course material and to understand the subject matter (item 5).

4.2 Findings for Expectancy

This section presents data to answer research question 2: How does expectancy influence learners' motivation to learn a foreign language? In the context of this study, expectancy is measured by (a) students' perception of self-efficacy and (b) control beliefs for learning.

(a) STUDENTS 'PERCEPTION OF SELF-EFFICACY (5 items)

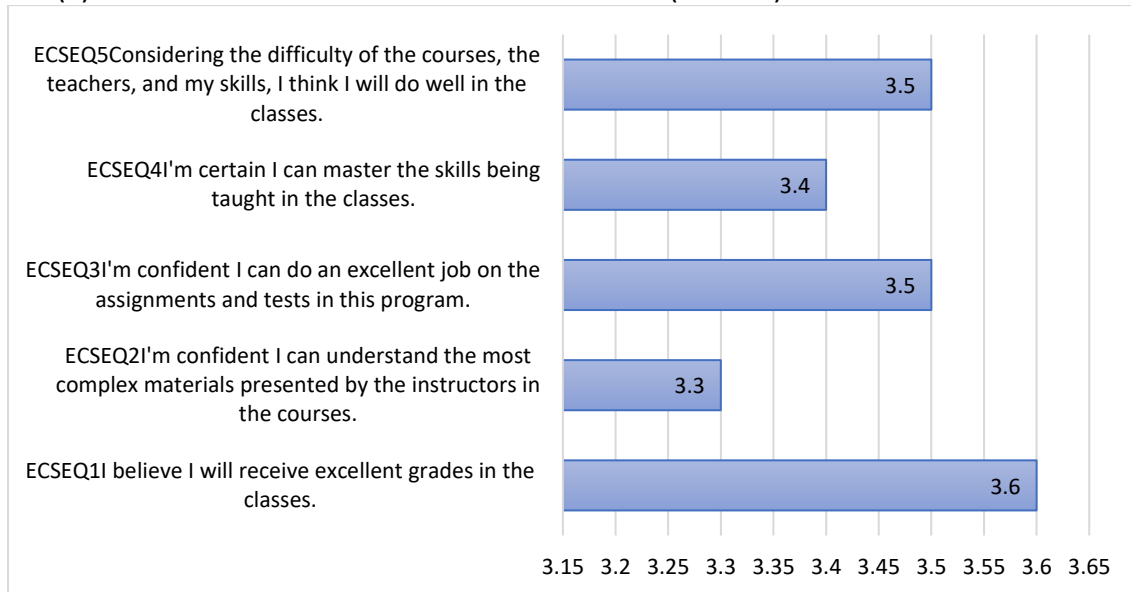


Figure 7- Mean for Students' perception of Self-Efficacy

Figure 7 illustrates the mean score for “Students’ perception of Self-Efficacy”. The highest mean score with 4.1 is the respondent believes he/she will receive excellent grades in the classes. The second and third mean score with 3.5 reflects that the respondent is confident he/she can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in this program, and considering the difficulty of the courses, the teachers, and his/her skills, he/she think he/she will do well in the classes. The fourth mean score of 3.4 implies the respondent is certain he/she can master the skills being taught in the classes. The final mean score in this category with 3.3 is he/she is confident he/she can understand the most complex materials presented by the instructors in the courses.

(b) CONTROL BELIEFS FOR LEARNING (2 items)

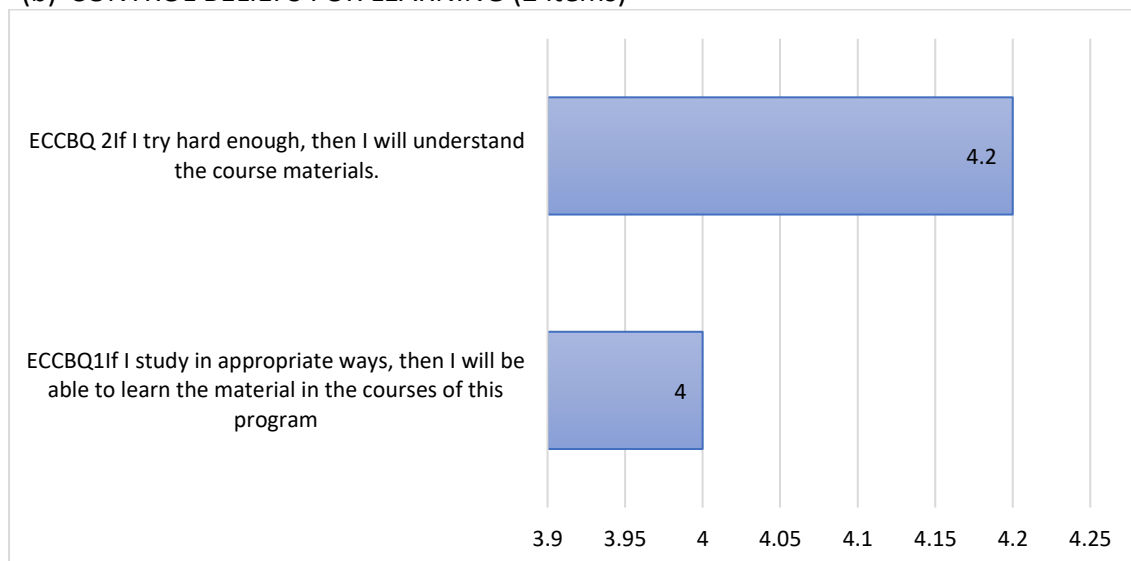


Figure 8- Mean for Control Beliefs for learning

Figure 8 depicts students’ “Control Beliefs For Learning”. The highest mean score in this category with 4.2 is the respondent claims that if he/she tries hard enough, then he/she will

understand the course materials. The second mean score of 4 represents the respondent stating that if he/she studies in appropriate ways, then he/she will be able to learn the material in the courses of this program.

Findings for Valence

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How does valence influence learners' motivation to learn a foreign language? In the context of this study, valence is measured by affective components.

AFFECTIVE COMPONENT -reversing (5 items)

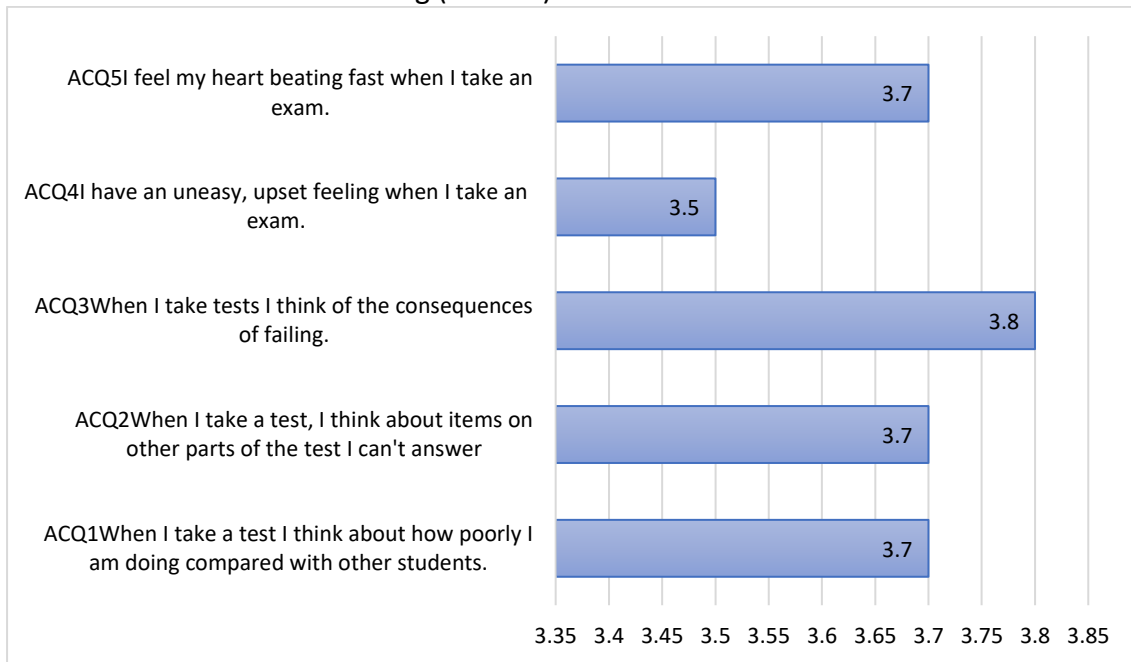


Figure 9- Mean for Affective Components

Figure 9 displays the mean score for “Affective Component”. The highest mean score with 3.8 is the respondent believes that when he/she takes tests, he/she thinks of the consequences of failing. The second, third and fourth statements in the questionnaire share the same mean score of 3.7 which indicate the respondent claims when he/she takes a test, he/she thinks about how poorly he/she is doing compared with other students, the respondent also believes when he/she takes a test, he/she thinks about items on other parts of the test he/she can't answer, and the third statement is he/she feels his/her heart beating fast when he/she takes an exam. The fifth mean score of 3.5 denotes that the respondent has uneasy, upset feeling when he/she take an exam.

Findings for Relationship between variables

This section presents data to answer research question 4: Is there a relationship between variables for motivational constructs for foreign language learning?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between instrumentality, expectancy, and valence, data is analyzed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in tables 3, and 4 below.

Table 3
 Correlation between Instrumentality and Expectancy

Correlations

		TOTALMEANI NSTRUMENT ALITY	TOTALMEANI EXPECTANCY
TOTALMEANINSTRUMEN TALITY	Pearson Correlation	1	.643**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	108	108
TOTALMEANIEXPECTAN CY	Pearson Correlation	.643**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	108	108

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between instrumentality and expectancy. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between instrumentality and expectancy ($r=.643^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between instrumentality and expectancy.

Table 4
 Correlation between Instrumentality and Valence

Correlations

		TOTALMEANI NSTRUMENT ALITY	TOTALMEAN VALENCE
TOTALMEANINSTRUMEN TALITY	Pearson Correlation	1	.261**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	108	108
TOTALMEANVALENCE	Pearson Correlation	.261**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	108	108

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between instrumentality and valence. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between instrumentality and valence ($r=.261^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive

correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a weak positive relationship between instrumentality and valence.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Regarding the impact of instrumentality on learners' motivation in foreign language learning, three factors were assessed: intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, and task value beliefs. The results indicate that the respondents are primarily motivated intrinsically, as their satisfaction stems from comprehending the course content. However, they also exhibit extrinsic motivation, as they strive for a good grade. Additionally, the students maintain a favorable perception of the importance and usefulness of understanding and learning course materials, indicating positive task value beliefs. These findings align with Lemos and Veríssimo's (2014) research, which revealed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation coexist without contradiction. Rezaee et al (2015) also found task value beliefs to be a strong predictor in foreign language learning.

Concerning the influence of expectancy component on learners' motivation in learning a foreign language, two elements were measured: students' perception of self-efficacy and control beliefs for learning. The results demonstrate that learners maintain a robust conviction that they will achieve an excellent grade and comprehend the course materials if they exert sufficient effort. They have a high expectation towards themselves. This is consistent with Teng's (2021) study, which demonstrated that students who perceive their ability to control their learning process and academic performance tend to be more motivated and utilize effective learning strategies.

To explore the influence of valence on learners' motivation in foreign language learning, the study measured the affective component and its effects on students' motivation. The results suggest that students often consider the potential negative consequences of failure when preparing for a test, which could adversely impact their motivation levels. Consistent with Ahmetović et al.'s (2020) findings, fear of failure and psychological anxiety are associated with lower levels of motivation.

Pearson correlation analysis reveals a robust and statistically significant correlation between instrumentality and expectancy, while a weak and statistically significant correlation exists between instrumentality and valence. Nonetheless, a positive correlation among all three variables can be inferred.

The findings of this study enrich the existing literature on motivation in foreign language learning, especially for beginner learners. Using Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory and scaffolded onto Pintrich and De Groot's (1990) motivational scale, a more comprehensive understanding on the factors influencing the motivation in learning a foreign language can be obtained. Learners will be motivated if they foresee their performance and efforts will lead to their desired results (instrumentality). Thus, from this study, learners think that the importance of knowing the usefulness of learning a foreign language and also getting good results might motivate them highly in foreign language learning. Other than that, learners agreed on their self-efficacy in learning a foreign language by putting in much effort. From the study, especially correlation analysis, it can be shown that once they understand the importance of learning a foreign language and getting good results, they are motivated to learn because they believe in themselves to get the desired state if they put hard work on it. This finding is vital for beginner learners to have a higher level of motivation in learning a foreign language at a beginner level.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

As revealed by the findings, learners exhibit both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation during their foreign language learning process. To bolster learners' extrinsic motivation, a well-structured grading system for assignments and assessments could be enhanced. Furthermore, educators are encouraged to facilitate a better understanding of course materials to strengthen learners' intrinsic motivation. Emphasis on the usefulness and relevance of the course in a professional context could heighten learners' motivation to acquire a foreign language. Additionally, educators may foster learners' self-belief and motivation by recognizing and praising their competencies. It is crucial for educators to establish a learning environment that reduces learners' psychological anxiety and mitigates their fear of failure. Overall, it is important for educators to assist learners in cultivating their motivation and encourage them to reflect on their motivational process so that they can maintain a heightened level of motivation in foreign language learning.

Future research ought to concentrate on examining the correlation between learners' variables, motivation level, and academic accomplishment. Diverse learners' variables, such as gender, proficiency level, age, socioeconomic status, among others, may exert an impact on their motivation level and academic performance. In addition to the use of self-report questionnaires, interviews could be employed to elicit a deeper comprehension of learners' motivation and their motivation level changes throughout the learning process.

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