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How Does Motivation Affect Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation and Test Anxiety among ESL Learners

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Abstract

Motivation has been recognized as instrumental in the foreign language learning as it influences the actions, responses or attitudes taken by the learners and affects the learner's attainment of the language. In Malaysia, students are required to learn the English language formally in the classroom for a significant number of years. However, current trends and research findings reveal that students are uncomfortable in learning English which is perceived as daunting and distressing. This study explores the perception of learners on their motivation in learning English and its influence on the fear of learning a foreign language. This quantitative study collected responses from 131 diploma students from one public university in Malaysia. A 5-point Likert-scale survey instrument was utilised that comprised of three sections: Section A on demographic profile; Section B on motivation to learn; and section C on fear of learning a foreign language. The findings showed that while fear of learning foreign language is prevalent among ESL students, their motivation was not directly affected.

Keywords: Motivation in Learning English, Fear of Learning a Foreign Language, ESL Learners.

Introduction

Background of Study

Motivation plays an exceptional role in a successful foreign language learning. Numerous literature on motivation in foreign language has been published (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015) but with the current challenges brought by the pandemic, motivation in language learning continuously presents new inputs to the researchers. Derived from Gardner's (1985) motivation theory, the author describes motivation as "the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (p. 10). In the same vein, Dornyei (2005) also confirms that

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motivation is a critical emotional state that affects language learning achievement. Hence, motivation has been recognized as instrumental in the foreign language learning as it influences the actions, responses or attitudes taken by the learners and affects the learner's attainment of the language.

In the Malaysian context, English language subject has been taught as a second language in an EFL context for 11 years. From the tender age of 7 to 17, Malaysian students are required to learn the English language formally in the classroom and rightfully after eleven years of learning the language, the students are supposed to be comfortable in learning it. However, this has yet to materialize as learning a second language is still considered a daunting and distressing process by the language learners (Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Inarguably, previous studies have shed light on these anxiety provoking elements and its effects on the students' psychological effects (Alrabai, 2014; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). Therefore, motivation in foreign language learning played a crucial role, to ensure the success of the language learning.

Over the past decade, studies related to motivation in foreign language learning have yielded interesting findings. Mantiri (2015) and Stoen and Haugan (2016) explain that there are various variables involved in ensuring the success of foreign language learning such as intelligence, attitudes, abilities and motivation. Nevertheless, motivation remains as the main factor as it affects the learners' attitudes and performance towards the target language (Biggs, 2014; Kazantseva et al., 2016). In another study conducted by Alrabai and Moskovsky (2016), the researchers concluded that motivation has the highest predictability power over other factors such as learner's autonomy, viewpoint or self-esteem in learning a foreign language. Hence, these findings validate the needs for the language instructors to appreciate the learners' motivation in learning the foreign language. In addition to that, it is also important to understand the variables that affect the learners' motivation in learning the foreign language.

Statement of Problem

Nowadays, there are many factors that affect ESL learners' in learning the foreign language. Gardner (1985) proposed that there are two main affective variables that influence the ESL learners in language learning, namely motivation and situational anxiety. Motivation, namely integrative motivation, calls for the ESL learners to be open to the target language community, culture and its speakers which may not necessarily be the native speakers. Situational anxiety however focuses on the anxiety associated with the process of learning or using the target language. Research has shown that affective variables are dependent on one another, and the causal relationship among the variables warrant further research (Gardner et al., 1997). Zheng (2008) also attested that the relationship of the affective sub-attributes are difficult to be understood and how it affects one another remains in quandary. Therefore, the present study examines the relationship of the sub-attributes that affect the ESL learners' motivation in learning the second language from one public university in Malaysia to add to the literature on this topic.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

How do learners perceive their motivation to learn a foreign language?

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- How does motivation in foreign language learning influence communication apprehension?
- How does motivation in foreign language learning influence fear of negative evaluation?
- How does motivation in foreign language learning influence test anxiety?
- What is the relationship between motivation and fear for learning a foreign language?

Literature Review

Motivation for learning a foreign language

Motivation has been the primary focus of debate and research, considered to be a critical component in language learning either second or foreign language for the past decades (Chung, 2013; Lamb and Arisandy, 2019). The extent to which academicians have been inclined to stay in this subject matter signifies the standing of motivation as well as its role in language acquisition. Students' learning-motivation is crucial in learning a language since it is what differentiates them from other learners, whether in terms of perseverance or attempts. Thus, it can be considered as a key determinant of language-learning success (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). There are two standpoints on which motivation to acquire a language can be assessed: 'integrativeness' and 'instrumentality', with the former applies to a desire to assimilate into the target language community via language, and the latter is linked to the rewards after completion of tasks outside language learning domain which illustrates the practical aspect of linguistic attainment (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Dörnyei, 1990). When language learners are driven, determination towards educational goal attainment comes naturally.

Fear of learning a Foreign language

Fear of learning a foreign language or foreign language learning anxiety is related to a number of factors. Horwitz et al (1986) categorized fear of learning a foreign language as a specific anxiety reaction as they developed Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). They reported three factors to fear of learning a foreign language: communication apprehension (uneasiness to communicate in the language due to limited knowledge), fear of negative evaluation (concerns over self-image from others' views), and test anxiety (anxiousness during language assessments). Rahmat (2020) further elaborated on these factors with her Cycle of Fear of Foreign Language Learning. As learners embarked on a language learning journey, they would experience communication apprehension that leads to test-taking anxiety. This then develops further to fear of negative evaluation, eventually resulting in fear of foreign language learning.

Past Studies on Motivation to learn a foreign Language

Many studies have been done to investigate foreign language learning in relation with motivation particularly in regard to classroom experiences and language proficiency (Gearing, 2019; Evans & Tragant, 2020; Muñoz-Restrepo et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Gearing (2019) for instance explored the causal factors of demotivation and encouragement methods that second or foreign language learners adopted through qualitative research. This is implemented by acquiring data from 14 learners in South Korea through diaries and interviews on their former ordeal with the target language, as well as its community's impact on their motivation. He found that the classroom learning atmosphere, instructional methods and value placed on the language learned are what discouraged them from learning it. The study shows a relationship between demotivation and stressors either in the target language

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community or educational setting that is rooted from low proficiency (e.g. incomprehensible pronunciation).

These results are supported by Zhang et al.'s (2020) research study that indicates learners' language proficiency has a role within the foreign language acquisition context. 589 senior English majors taking a foreign language course from seven universities in Shaanxi Province, China participated in it, so as to observe the relationship between motivation and language proficiency using a linear regression analysis taken from questionnaire data. The researchers learned that participants' instrumental and integrative motivations significantly affected their second/foreign linguistic competence, and the relation between motivation and language proficiency is stirred by contentment in learning foreign languages which in turn facilitate their learning.

Past Studies on Fear of learning a foreign language

Fear of foreign language learning or foreign language learning anxiety has been extensively explored in these past years due to its significant and inevitable presence in foreign language acquisition. Foreign language learning anxiety, for instance, has been found to influence learners' stress and self-confidence levels in acquiring the language (Fitriah & Muna, 2019). In addition, it could also influence learners' willingness to participate in any language classroom activities (Dellah et al., 2019). In many of the studies as such, learners' language learning anxiety levels were measured, and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was primarily utilised to gather relevant data.

Since fear of language learning is irrefutably present in any foreign or second language classrooms, many studies have been conducted to determine the levels and factors of the learners' anxiety in specific language situations. With the objective to assess the participants' speaking anxiety during English oral presentation, Dellah et al (2019) disseminated Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to 199 UiTM Melaka students. The statistical analysis revealed that the participants experienced moderate level of foreign language anxiety with fear of negative evaluation and English language proficiency as significant factors that influenced their language anxiety. The study concluded that these two factors should be taken into consideration in tackling learners' fear of foreign language learning.

Some studies in the area also compared anxiety levels and factors among language learners from different learning institutions. Fitriah and Muna (2019) have done a study to investigate the factors that influenced language learners' anxiety and the types of anxiety they experienced. In this study, 30 English Department students of IAIN Lhokseumawe and 25 students of Al Muslim University in Acheh answered Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). It was found that students of IAIN Lhokseumawe had a higher anxiety level compared to students of Al Muslim University while the factors identified include lack of mental readiness and prior knowledge of classroom activities. The study encouraged language instructors to assess their learners' foreign language anxiety before implementing suitable strategies to overcome their anxiety.

Conceptual Framework

People embark on learning a foreign language for many reasons. Nevertheless, not all stay motivated until they succeed. According to Gardner (2001), motivation to learn a language includes elements like effort (the effort taken to learn), desire (the learner wanting to achieve the goal) and positive effect (enjoying the learning tasks). However, having fear of learning is normal for many but learners need to ensure that the fear does not hinder their learning. This

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is because fear of learning a foreign language can snowball into other performance and achievement (Rahmat, 2020).

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in figure 1 below. This study adopted the types of fear by (Horwitz et al., 1986). They listed the fear of learning a foreign language as (i) communication apprehension, (ii) fear of negative evaluation and (iii) test anxiety. Communication apprehension in learning a foreign language is an emotional state usually expressed by the learner when they feel anxious in the actual communication using the target language. Next, learners of foreign language may initially fear negative evaluation. This fear can stem from lack of confidence and may escalate to more snowballing failure of using the target language. Finally, learning a foreign language can put pressure on the learners when the people around them expect them to perform well in the target language.

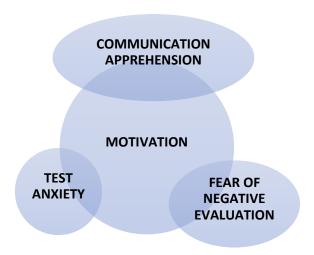


Figure 1-Conceptual Framework of the Study-How does Motivation Affect Fear of Learning a Foreign Language?

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 131 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Gardner (2001); Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 3 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 11 items on motivation to learn and section C has 33 items on fear of learning a foreign language.

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Table 1

Distribution of Items in the Survey

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SECTION	VARIABLE	SUB-CATEGORY	NO OF	
			ITEMS	
В	MOTIVATION TO LEARN			11
	(Gardner, 2001)			
С	FEAR OF LEARNING A	COMMUNICATION	11	33
	FOREIGN LANGUAGE	APPREHENSION		
	(Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope,	FEAR OF NEGATIVE	7	
	1986)	EVALUATION		
		TEST ANXIETY	15	
				44

Table 2
Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.872	44

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .872, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1 Gender

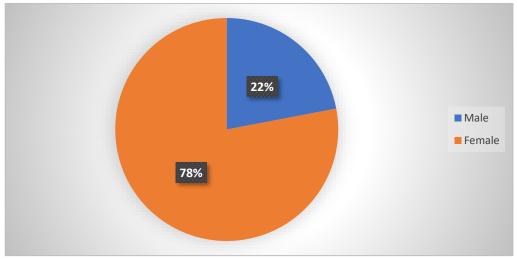


Figure 2-Percentage for Gender

This study aims at examining the relationship between motivation and other factors that may affect the foreign language learning. 131 diploma students from one public university in

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Malaysia participated in this study. These respondents were heterogeneous in terms of their semester of study which ranges from semester one to semester three of their academic programme as well as their age that spans from 18 to 20 years of age. Majority of the respondents were female with 102 respondents (or 78%) and only 29 respondents were male (or 22%).



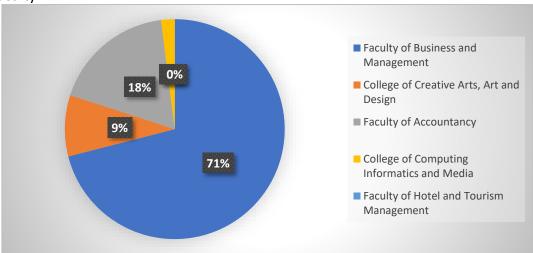


Figure 3-Percentage for Faculty

All of the respondents hailed from the social science courses. The respondents came from four faculties which were Faculty of Business and Management, Faculty of Accountancy, College of Creative Arts, Art and Design and Faculty of Mass Communication and Media Studies. The highest number of respondents came from the Faculty of Business and Management with 71% and this is followed by the respondents from Faculty of Accountancy with 18%. The least number of respondents come from the Faculty of Mass Communication and Media Studies with 2%.

Findings for Motivation

Finding about the research question 1 is presented below. The respondents were presented with 11 variables in the form of statements for this construct and required to decide on their preferences for each statement based on 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The finding includes the mean score on the respondents' intrinsic interests in learning a foreign language.

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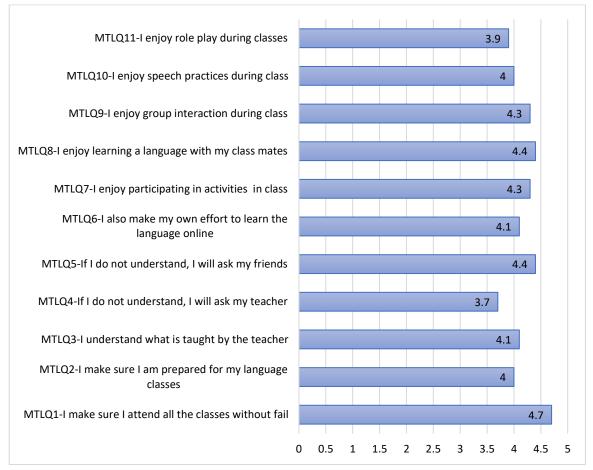


Figure 4: Mean for Motivation

In terms of the motivation to learn a foreign language, the highest mean was recorded for the statement *I make sure I attend the language classes without fail* with a mean of 4.7. This is followed by *If I do not understand, I will ask my friends* (mean = 4.4). The lowest mean recorded was 3.7 for *If I do not understand, I will ask my teacher*, which was for the statement relating to motivation to ask clarification from the teacher to aid understanding.

Findings for Communication Apprehension

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How does communication apprehension influence foreign language learning?

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Communication Apprehension

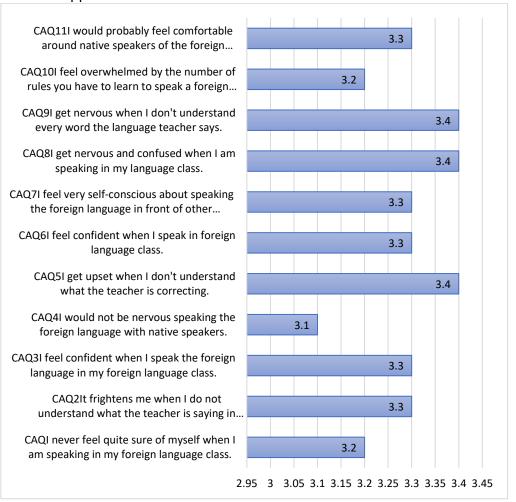


Figure 5: Mean for Communication Apprehension

Figure 5 displays the mean scores for Communication Apprehension. The highest means recorded was 3.4 by three statements, *I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting, I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class,* and *I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.* The lowest mean score of 3.1 was recorded by *I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.*

Findings for Fear of Negative Evaluation

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How does fear of negative evaluation influence foreign language learning?

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Fear of Negative Evaluation

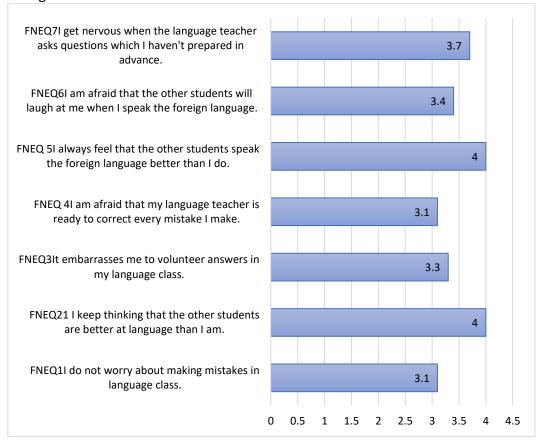


Figure 6 : Mean for Fear of Negative Evaluation

The measure for fear of negative evaluation included seven items and are presented in figure 6. The highest mean was recorded for two statements, I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am, and I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do (means of 4.0). Next was I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance (mean 3.7). The lowest mean items were I do not worry about making mistakes in language class, and I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make with means of 3.1.

Findings for Test Anxiety

This section presents data to answer research question 4- How does test anxiety influence foreign language learning?

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TEST ANXIETY

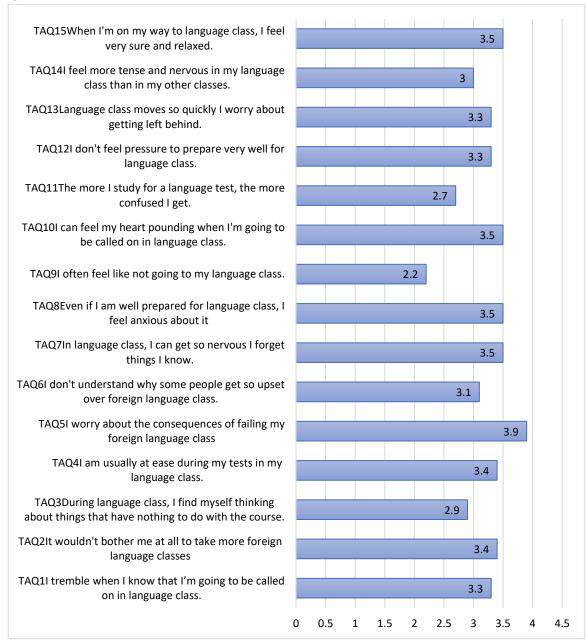


Figure 7: Mean for Test Anxiety

Table 7 presents the mean score for test anxiety. The highest mean was 3.9 for *I worry about* the consequences of failing my foreign language class. This is followed by *In language class, I* can get so nervous *I forget things I know (TAQ7)*, Even if *I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it (TAQ8)*, *I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class(TAQ10)*, and *When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed (TAQ15)* with means of 3.5. The lowest mean recorded was 2.2 for the item *I often feel like not going to my language class*.

Findings for Relationship between Motivation and fear for learning a foreign language
This section presents data to answer research question 5- What is the relationship between
motivation and fear for learning a foreign language?

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To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is anlaysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3, 4, and 5 below.

Table 3
Correlation between Motivation to Learn and Communication Apprehension

Correlations

		TOTALMEAN MOTIAVTION 2LEARN	TOTALMEAN COMMUNICA TIONAPPRE
TOTALMEANMOTIAVTIO N2LEARN	Pearson Correlation	1	.218*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.013
	N	131	131
TOTALMEANCOMMUNIC ATIONAPPRE	Pearson Correlation	.218*	1
ATIONAPPRE	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	
	N	131	131

^{*.} Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between motivation to learn and communication apprehension. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between motivation to learn and communication apprehension (r=.218*) 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 a weak positive relationship between motivation to learn and communication apprehension.

Table 4
Correlation between Motivation to Learn and Fear of Negative Evaluation

Correlations

		TOTALMEAN MOTIAVTION 2LEARN	TOTALMEAN FEARNEGATI VE
TOTALMEANMOTIAVTIO N2LEARN	Pearson Correlation	1	064
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.470
	N	131	131
TOTALMEANFEARNEGA	Pearson Correlation	064	1
TIVE	Sig. (2-tailed)	.470	
	N	131	131

Table 4 shows there is an association between motivation to learn and fear of negative evaluation. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between

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motivation to learn and fear of negative evaluation (r=-.064*) 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 a very weak negative relationship between motivation to learn and communication apprehension.

Table 5
Correlation between Motivation to Learn and Test Anxiety

Correlations

		TOTALMEAN MOTIAVTION 2LEARN	TOTALMEAN TESTANXIET Y
TOTALMEANMOTIAVTIO	Pearson Correlation	1	.026
N2LEARN	Sig. (2-tailed)		.772
	N	131	131
TOTALMEANTESTANXIE	Pearson Correlation	.026	1
TY	Sig. (2-tailed)	.772	
	N	131	131

Table 5 shows there is an association between motivation to learn and test anxiety. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between motivation to learn and test anxiety (r=.026*) 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 a very weak positive relationship between motivation to learn and communication apprehension.

Discussion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The findings suggested that the respondents have significant amount of motivation in foreign language learning. The results showed that the various respondents are intrinsically motivated to attend and actively participate in the ESL foreign language classes. The main contributing factor to students' motivation could well be their peers as statements related to group and peer interaction recorded higher means. The results also highlighted the fact that they actively engage with the teacher, participated in classroom language activities and self-preparedness, which may have boosted motivation. This finding corroborates to the findings of Rahmat (2020) that students are affected by their surroundings. In this case, this group of respondents believed that the support that they received from their surrounding increased their motivation.

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Table 6

Summary of Correlation between Motivation and Fear of Fear of Foreign Language Learning

Research Questions	Pearson <i>r</i>
How does motivation in foreign language learning influence	.218
communication apprehension?	
How does motivation in foreign language learning influence	064
fear of negative evaluation?	
How does motivation in foreign language learning influence	.026
test anxiety?	

Next, Table 6 presents the summary of the relationship between motivation and the affective variables of fear of learning a foreign language. The findings suggested that there was a weak positive relationship between motivation and communication apprehension. A weak negative relationship was found for the relationship between motivation and fear of negative evaluation. A weak negative relationship between motivation and test anxiety was also reported. All three affective variables were found to be insignificantly contributing or affecting motivation in foreign language learning. These findings showed that while motivation among the ESL students was fairly high, they were less fearful while learning in the ESL foreign language class. This finding is inline with the findings by Azhar et al. (2022) where it was found that while students are confident of their (language) skills, they reserve some fear of language learning in uncontrollable situations.

Suggestions for Future Research

As shown by the findings of this study, students' high level of motivation might have slightly caused their communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety to be present but manageable. Future researchers might be interested in examining other factors that might be affecting to this high level of motivation among these group of students, mainly focusing on course design, assessment, and delivery. Furthermore, it would be worth to know the value of cooperative learning and its affect to motivation in such foreign language classes as it was found to heavily increase motivation.

Conclusion

This study has shown that while fear of learning foreign language is prevalent among EFL students, their motivation was not directly affected. The findings also supported the notion that motivation is the key factor that influences foreign language learning that determines the success and attainment of learning a foreign language (Alrabai, 2014; Dornyei, 2005; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). The fact that motivation does not rely on other factors also support previous findings by (Alrabai and Moskovsky, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial that teachers and instructors of foreign language classroom value the motivation that learners have and become aware of any other affective variables that might upset the motivation level of EFL learners.

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