

## An Investigation of Motivational and Burnout Factors among Learners Learning French As A Foreign Language

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### Abstract

Being motivated and experiencing burnout during studies are fairly common. Even with advanced educational structure, universally learners depend on their motivation to achieve their academic objectives while undergoing burnout simultaneously. Thus, this study aims to investigate how students perceive motivation and burnout especially among learners who are learning French as a foreign language and if there is a relationship between these two components. A purposive sample of 125 participants from a public university in Malaysia responded to a quantitative study that is done to explore these factors. Adapted from Pintrich and DeGroot (1990); Campos et al (2011), this study used 5 Likert-scale survey as a research instrument in which the survey is divided into three sections. Sections include demographic profile, 24 items on motivation section and 16 items on burnout section. The study found that learners are driven by extrinsic motivation and task beliefs rather than intrinsic motivation. This study also found that the affective component of motivation's section did not affect student's motivation greatly. On the other hand, students are found to be visibly burnout throughout their lesson albeit rather insignificant. Furthermore, data analysed using SPSS showed that there is a moderate positive relationship between motivation and burnout. Hence, this research suggests that educators are required to plan an adequate course of study to maintain students' healthy relationship between motivation and burnout. Seeking professional help to assist learners was suggested too.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Burnout, French Language, Foreign Language

**Introduction***Background of Study*

According to Dornyei and Ushioda (2021), motivation is something that drives a person in making decisions, the determination of the choice made and how diligent they are in striving for it. Motivation is also defined by Borah (2021) as a stimulant that pushes someone into work. Meanwhile, burnout in the sense of academic interpretation, is an academic pressure and dispiritedness derived from loss of enjoyment in learning, non-commitment towards academic progress and low motivation in achieving learning objectives (Ulsan, 2022).

There are a few factors that influence learners to learn foreign languages. As explained by Karaman (2021), these factors include age, culture, gender, anxiety, native language, amount of exposure and motivation. In 2017, Bodian studied 213 undergraduates who learn French as a foreign language concerning their motivation and achievement. The researcher found that the undergraduates are motivated to learn French both by integrative reasons and instrumental reasons while leaning more towards the latter reason. Despite that, it was concluded that the motivations and students' achievement did not show notable correlation.

Even with advanced educational structure, universally foreign language learners depend on their motivation to achieve their academic objectives while undergoing burnout simultaneously. The same case takes place in Malaysia, in which a total of 229 students from a public university in Malaysia participated in a study examining the amount of motivation and burnout among learners who took Arabic as a third language and whether there is a connection between both of them (Raup et al., 2023). It was found that the students are motivated especially in the extrinsic category compared to intrinsic category and enduring moderate burnout at the same time. Besides that, the connection between motivation and burnout was proved to be great.

**Statement of Problem**

Being motivated and experiencing burnout during foreign language studies are fairly common. The research by Yu et al (2020) studied 841 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduates of two universities from China concerning this subject. This research was done to analyse the correlation between motivation and burnout among these undergraduate students and if maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (ERS) could regulate the correlation. It is found that motivation and maladaptive ERD were heavily associated with burnout but in opposite directions. Beside that, it was also hypothesized that the association between motivation and burnout was greatly affected by the undergraduates' practice of avoiding and venting, two maladaptive ER.

Another study on motivation and burnout was made by Yuan (2018) which examines the connection between foreign language learning burnout (FLLB) and L2 motivational self system (L2MSS). Based on two questionnaires and quantitative research conducted by Yuan, ought-to L2 has an extensive effect on foreign language learning burnout, meanwhile second language learning experience has no extensive effect among the students.

Following that, Shazali et al (2023) mentioned in their study that the correlation between burnout and the drive to learn is a pressing matter and should be investigated thoroughly. This correlation not only influences student's self satisfaction and self-fulfilment,

students' motivation and burnout dynamic are also equally important for an educational institution to upkeep their goals and objectives.

In accordance with Karimi and Fallah (2021), it is necessary for upcoming motivation and burnout studies to utilize a scale of both qualitative and quantitative measures including diverse samples and various contexts especially through longitudinal experimental studies.

It is also worth noting that there is a lack of study in this topic especially in regards to French as foreign language locally in Malaysia. Thus, assuming this as a gap, this study aims to examine how learners perceive motivational components and burnout and if there is a relationship between both components in the learning of French as foreign language.

### **Objective of the Study and Research Questions**

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their motivation and burnout in the learning of French as a foreign language. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions

- How do learners perceive motivational components in the learning of French as a foreign language?
- How do learners perceive burnout in the learning of French as a foreign language?
- Is there a relationship between motivational components and burnout in the learning of French as a foreign language?

### **Literature Review**

This section discusses the motivation to learn foreign languages, burnout among students, past studies and also the conceptual framework of the study.

#### *Motivation to learn Foreign languages*

Motivation is one of the key factors that impacts the behaviors and strategies in foreign language learning. Numerous studies have been conducted to comprehend the role of motivation in foreign language learning. The social-educational model by Gardner (1985) has inspired a lot of research on the foreign language learning. According to the model, factors such as the learner's views towards the target language, the learning environment, and their own sense of self are associated with motivation. In the current Malaysia setting, a study by Yean et al (2022) found that in order to guarantee the effectiveness of teaching and learning process, students' learning motivation need to be considered at different stages.

#### *Burnout among Students*

Defined traditionally as a "psychological syndrome characterized by gradual emotional fatigue, loss of motivation and reduced enthusiasm" (Vizoso, Arias-Gundin and Rodríguez, 2019) and portrayed as a response to chronic stress (Maroco and Campos, 2012), the notion of burnout is often referred as three kernel dimensions: Exhaustion, Cynicism and Reduced Efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). It is also categorized as a syndrome of mental exhaustion which is widely observed in various range of professions (Schaufeli and Taris, 2005). However, the study concerning this notion is vastly investigated among the sphere of teachers but underexplored among the sphere of students specifically learners' academic burnout. Regarded as a worrying issue worldwide, academic burnout, described as a feeling of exhaustion experienced by students, is caused due to high study demands (exhaustion),

having a detaching and isolated behaviour towards the environment of studies (cynicism) and feeling of incapability of achievement (inefficiency) (Zhang, Gan and Chan, 2007). Plus, from a psychological point of view, similar to other professions, students are emotionally and behaviorally occupied in numerous fundamental activities, categorized as “work”. These structured and mandatory activities or in another term “work”, are led towards a particular goal like passing an exam (Schaufeli and Taris, 2005). According to Hu and Schaufeli (2009), it becomes clear that burnout is not only limited to teachers because it can also appear among students.

#### *Past Studies on Motivation to learn foreign languages*

With the increasing knowledge of the pivotal role of academic motivation in foreign language learning, many studies have been published in the literature to comprehend the current setting. Research conducted by Mayumi and Zheng (2021), for instance, examined the students’ motivational subscale to learn, with a particular focus on the evolution and fluctuation during modern foreign language courses. This qualitative approach research employed a sample of five final-year individuals who are successful foreign language learners studying Chinese in the UK. For the investigation, the interviews conducted were semi-structured. As was the case in numerous studies, this study discusses integrative and instrumental motives. The study revealed that one of the most prevailing motivational subscales is students’ previous experiences of enjoyment in language learning. It is reported that enjoyment influences their choice of languages at the university. Another element that has been recorded is their prior success and confidence as language learners. Interestingly, the findings also suggest that a manifestation of their wish to make them stand out plays a crucial role in language learning impetus which can be interpreted as the emergence of their clear ideal multilingual self. Due to the number of respondents, there is a limit to exploring in depth of our understanding of language motivation. The study implied that integrative orientation has an impact on nourishing modern foreign language learning which is unfamiliar to students. The implications of these findings were also discussed about the culture(s), people, and society of the target language.

Another related study on motives in language learning by Rahmat (2022) explored the driving forces that push students into foreign language learning. A survey adapted from Nguyen (2019) was presented to 35 respondents to examine the motives for learning English as a Foreign Language. This quantitative study surveyed students in Malaysian higher learning institutions of learning during their initial semester to seek answers in depth. The questionnaire was used to measure expectancy, instrumental, and valency elements. Rahmat (2022) revealed that students are driven by the expectancy of what they can gain from the course. Additionally, it is also reported that their motivations are inclined by the way they perceive the instrumentality and the valence of the course. Also mentioned in Mayumi and Zheng (2021); Rahmat (2022) revealed that in her study students learn English for instrumental and integrative reasons. The study implies that understanding the motives behind language learning would enable teachers to promote the ideal foreign language setting for students.

#### *Past Studies on Burnout among learners*

According to Schaufeli and Taris (2005), burnout is regarded as a syndrome of mental exhaustion and it has occurred in a wide range of professions. Regarding this syndrome, numerous studies have been conducted relating to burnout among learners, particularly in

the context of learning a foreign language. One of them is a study investigated by (Li et al., 2021). This study aims to theorize foreign language learning burnout by providing its corresponding measurement. To achieve the findings, the 15-item *Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey* (MBI-SS) was adjusted as a way to fit a specific environment related to the study which is an English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This modified MBI-SS was then assessed among 1,718 Chinese secondary English Foreign Language (EFL) students. According to a series of reliability (item analysis, internal consistency) and validity (construct validity, convergent validity and criterion validity) test results, the findings portrayed that a final 10-item MBI-SS was obtained. In addition, as stated in the confirmatory factor analysis results and by basing on the origin of the tri-factorial structure of MBI-SS, it was confirmed that there is an existence of three-dimensional invariance in foreign language learning burnout which are Exhaustion, Cynicism and Reduced Efficacy. On top of that, the participants of this study were reported to have a low level of foreign language burnout.

Following the same notion which is burnout among learners, Liu (2023) pursued a study intending to determine the connection between student burnout and two key factors: perceived school climate and growth mindset among Chinese students in the milieu of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). To accomplish this study, several respondents of 412 intermediate English language learners from China participated in an online survey and completed valid measures of the three constructs. To establish the validity of the scales used to measure the three latent variables, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was utilized. Next, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was then used to examine the proposed model. The results of SEM illustrated that both perceived school climate and growth mindset had a primordial positive impact on EFL student burnout, with perceived school climate having an influential effect compared to the growth mindset. Based on the findings, it suggests that promoting a positive school ambience and fostering a student growth mindset, can be served as an auxiliary to reduce student burnout in a situation of EFL.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The motivation that pushes learners to embark on the learning of a foreign language may not remain constant. According to Rahmat et al (2021), learners stay motivated if they are confident about what they are learning. This confidence can make them give more attention to the learning activities. Another important motivational factor is also satisfaction that the learner gets at each milestone of the learning process. The conceptual framework of the study is presented in figure 1 below. This study is rooted from Pintrich and De Groot's (1990) components such as value, expectancy and affective. With reference to figure 1, sometimes even the most motivated learners may experience burnout. According to Campos et al (2011), burnout can be caused by learners' exhaustion and also feelings of disengagement.

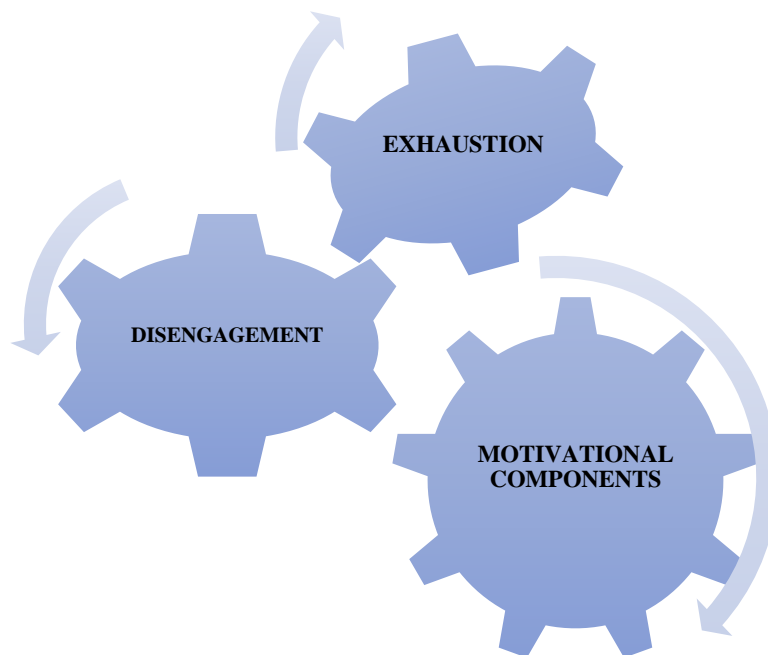


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Motivational and Burnout Factors among Learners learning French as a Foreign Language

**Methodology**

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation and burnout factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 125 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Pintrich and DeGroot (1990); Campos et al (2011) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 3 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 24 items on motivation. Section C has 16 items on burnout.

Table 1  
*Distribution of Items in the Survey*

SECT	MAIN CONSTRUCT	COMPONENT		VARIABLE	No Of Items	Total Items	
B	MOTIVATION Pintrich & De Groot (1990).	VALUE	(i)	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	24	
			(ii)	Extrinsic Goal Orientation	3		
			(iii)	Task Value Beliefs	5		
			EXPECTANCY	(i)	Students' Perception of Self- Efficacy	5	
				(ii)	Control Beliefs for Learning	2	
			AFFECTIVE			5	
C	BURNOUT (Campos, et.al (2011))	EXHAUSTION			8	16	
		DISENGAGEMENT			8		
TOTAL NO OF ITEMS						40	

Table 2

*Reliability of Survey*

### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.920	40

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .920, 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

This section presents the findings by answering the research questions of the study. The presentation of findings begins with the report of findings for the demographic profile in the form of percentages.

#### *Findings for Demographic Profile*

##### Q1-Gender

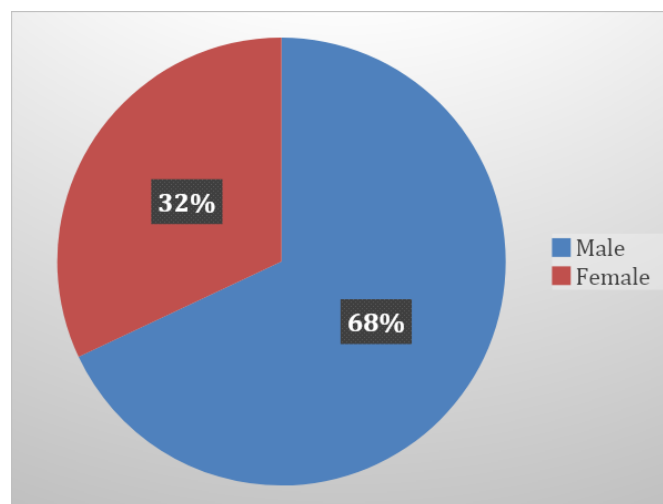


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 presents the distributions of respondents (in percentage) in this study according to their gender. The majority of the respondents in this study were male, which comprises 68% of the respondents. The remaining 32% respondents were female.

## Q2-Course

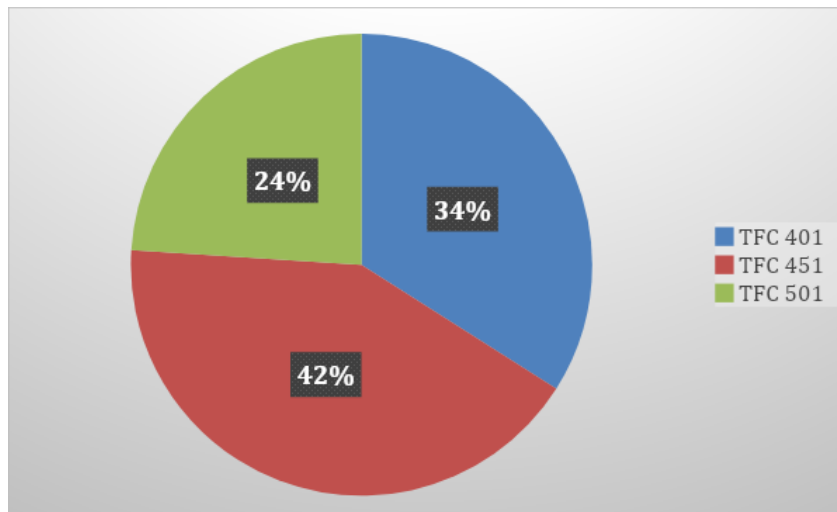


Figure 3- Percentage for Course

This study has involved students taking French as a foreign language from level 1 (TFC401), level 2 (TFC451) and level 3 (TFC501). As presented in Figure 3, 42% of respondents were from the second level of French language (TFC451), and 34% were students taking the first level of French language, followed by the third level of French language TFC501 (24%).

## Q3 -Discipline

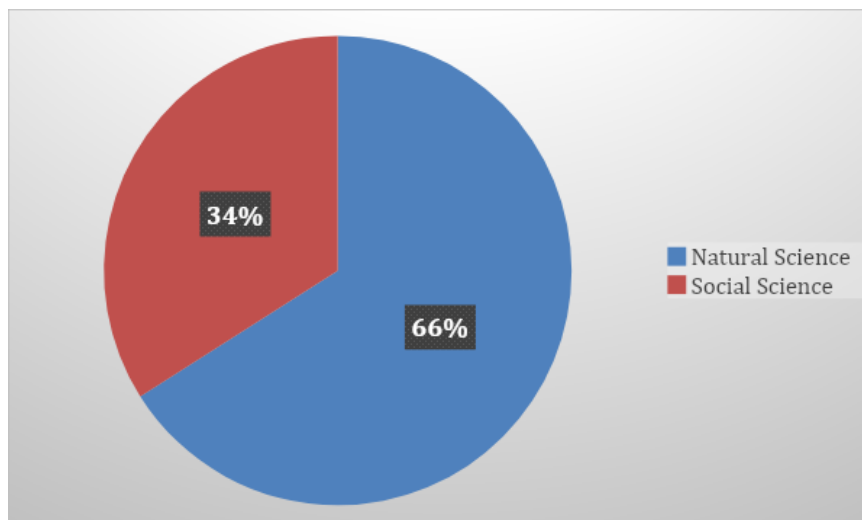


Figure 4- Percentage for Discipline

Figure 4 shows the percentage of respondents' discipline. Majority of the respondents are from Natural Science discipline (66%) followed by students from Social Science (34%).

*Findings for Motivational Components*

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive motivational components in the learning of French as a foreign language? In the context of this study, motivational components are measured by (A) Value components, (B) Expectancy components and (C) Affective components.



Value Component

Value components are measured by (i) intrinsic goal orientation, (ii) extrinsic goal orientation and also (iii) task value beliefs.

(i) Intrinsic Goal Orientation (4 items)



Figure 5- Mean for intrinsic goal orientation

By referencing the mean for intrinsic goal orientation illustrated in Figure 5, the highest mean (4.2) reveals that a great number of respondents felt satisfied in trying to understand the content of the courses. This is followed by the second highest mean (3.6) which portrayed that the respondents prefer course materials that arouse their curiosity even if the courses are difficult to learn. Lastly with the lowest mean (3.5), shared the same mean between 2 statement items, it shows that the respondents prefer class work that is challenging to learn new things and when given the opportunity, the respondents choose course assignments that they can learn from even if they are unsure in giving a good grade.

(ii) Extrinsic Goal Orientation (3 items)

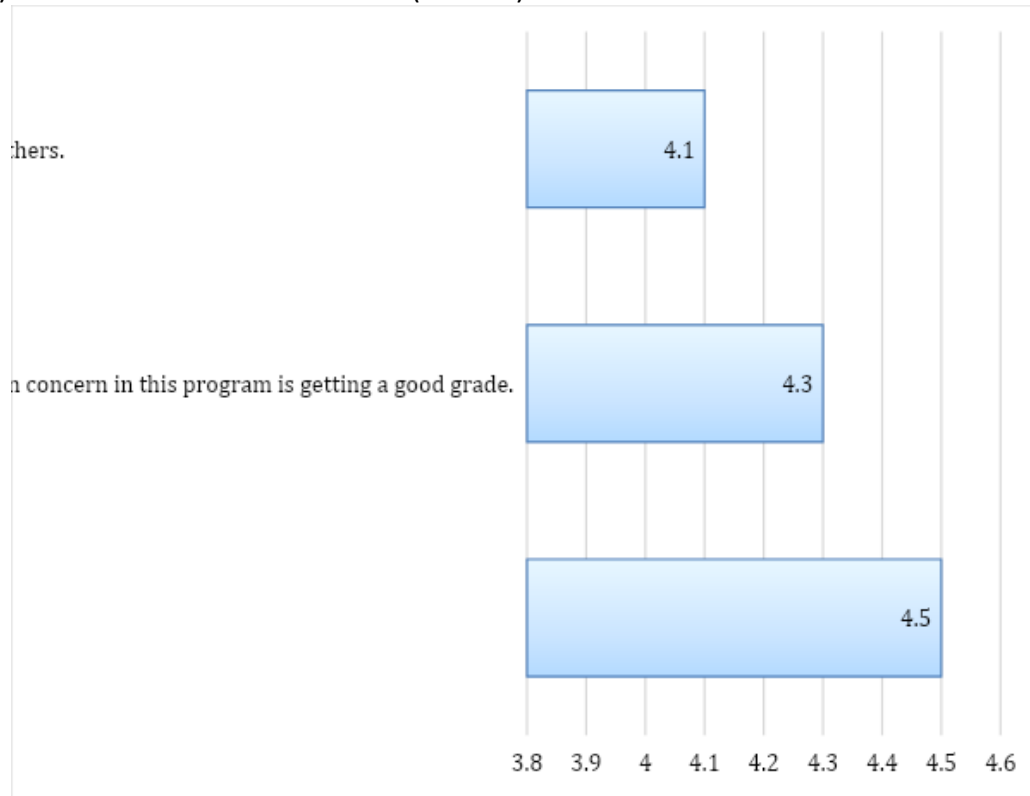


Figure 6- Mean for Extrinsic goal orientation

Illustrated in Figure 6 concerning the mean for extrinsic goal orientation, the highest mean (4.5) represents that the majority of respondents agreed that getting a good grade in the classes is the most satisfying thing for them. This is followed by the second highest mean (4.3) where the most important thing for the respondents right now is improving their overall grade point average which signifies that the main concern in this program is getting a good grade. Unfortunately, with the lowest mean (4.1), the respondents do not agree with wanting to do well in the classes because it is important to show their ability to family, friends and others.

## (iii) Task Value Beliefs (5 items)

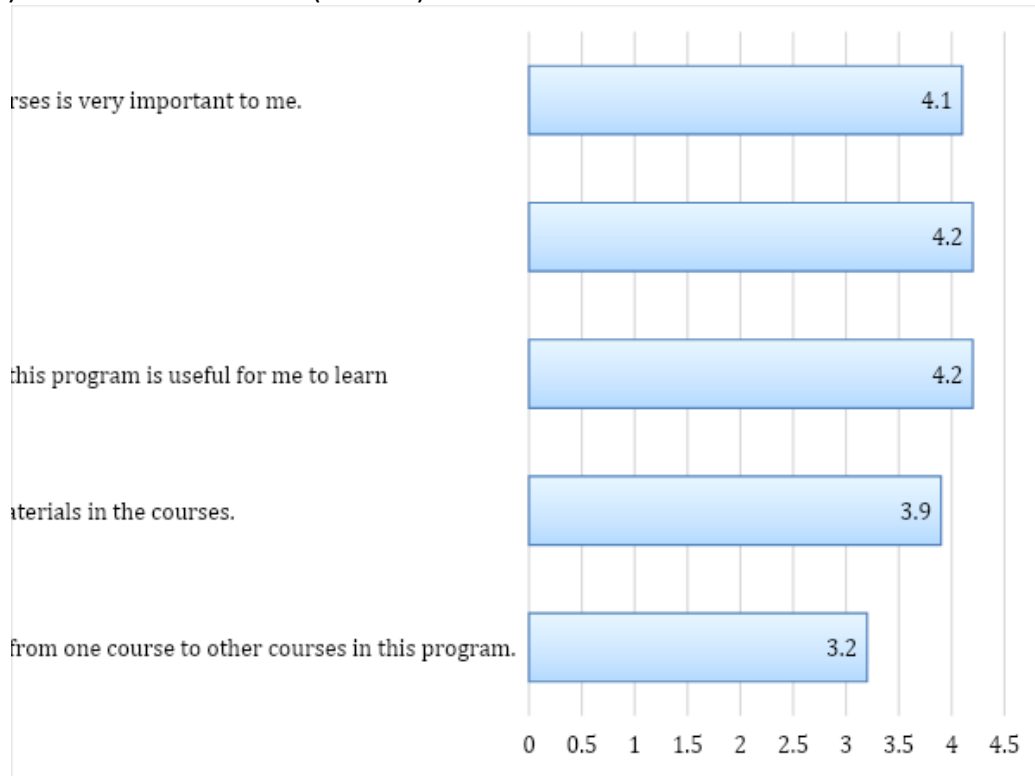


Figure 7- Mean for Task Value Beliefs

Based on Figure 7 which accentuated the mean for task value beliefs, the highest mean (4.2), where the mean is similar for the 2 statements items, illustrates that the vast majority of respondents agreed with the fact that the course material in the program is useful for them to learn and they agreed about liking the subject matter of the courses. Next, the second highest mean (4.1), proves that understanding the subject matter of the courses is very important for the respondents and this is followed by the third mean (3.9), which for the respondents, they need to learn the course materials in the courses. Sadly, with the lowest mean (3.2), the respondents did not agree with the fact that they were able to transfer what they learned from one course to other courses in this program.

## B. Expectancy Component- 7 items

Expectancy is measured by

- (i) students' perception of self-efficacy and
- (ii) control beliefs for learning.

(i) Students' Perception of Self-Efficacy (5 items)

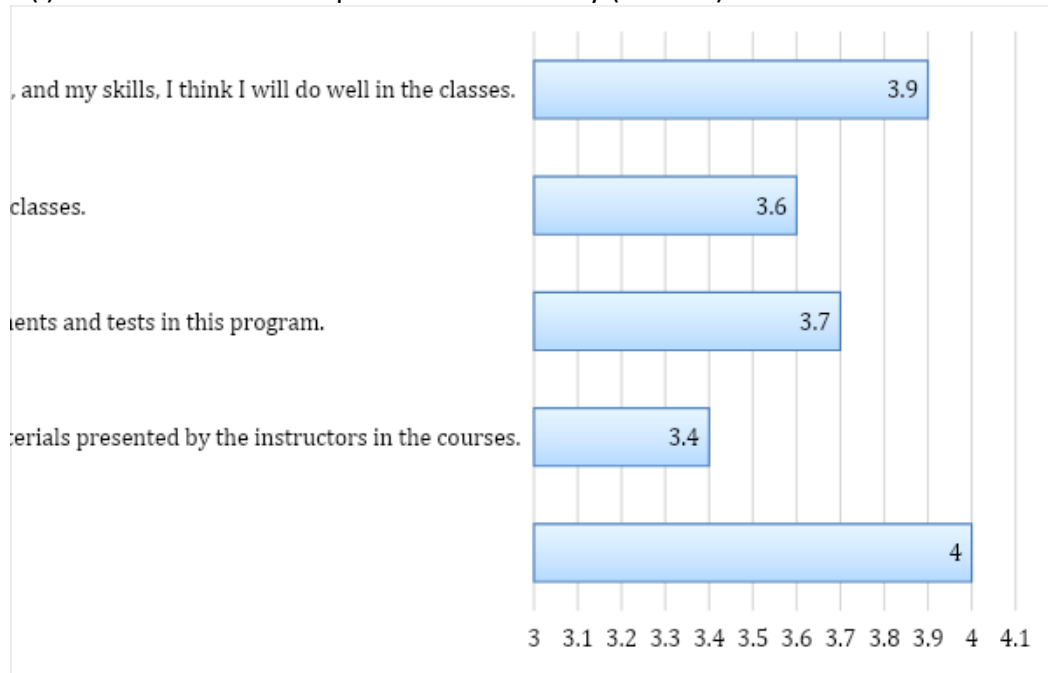


Figure 8- Mean for Students' perception of Self-Efficacy

According to Figure 8 which illustrates the mean for students' perception of self-efficacy, the highest mean (4) highlights that most of the respondents believe that they will receive excellent grades in the classes. Followed with the second highest mean (3.9), shows that by considering the difficulty of the courses, the teachers and respondents' skills, the respondents believe to do well in classes. As for the third mean (3.7), the respondents are confident in executing an excellent job on the assignments and tests conducted in this program. Next, for the fourth mean (3.6), the respondents are certain in mastering the skills being taught in the classes. Lastly, with the lowest mean (3.4), most of the respondents disagreed with feeling confident in understanding the most complex materials presented by the instructors in the courses.

(ii) Control Beliefs for Learning (2 items)

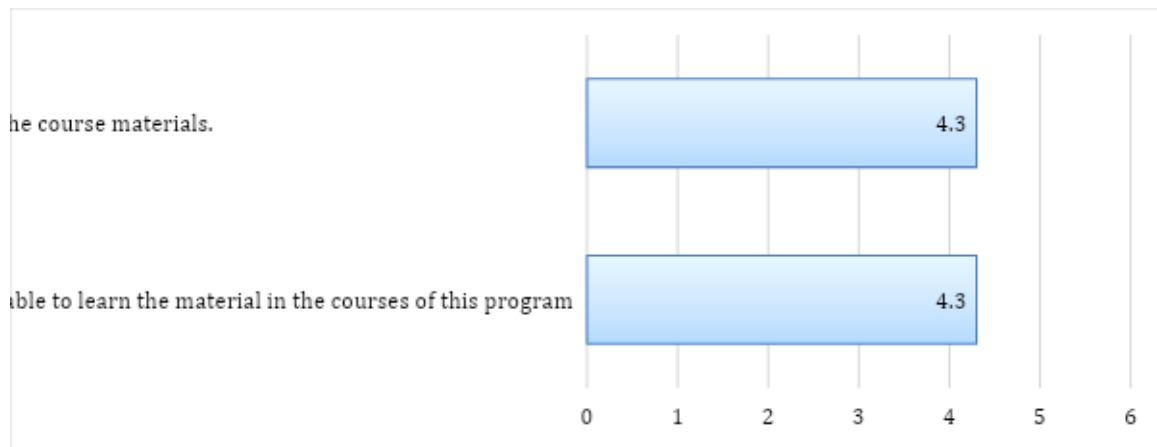


Figure 9- Mean for Control Beliefs for learning

Figure 9 shows the Control Beliefs for Learning. Both items 1 and 2 share the same mean score ( $M = 4.3$ ). This reveals that the respondents agree that if they study in appropriate ways, they will be able to learn the material in the courses of this program and if they try hard enough, they will understand the course materials.

Affective Component -reversing (5 items)

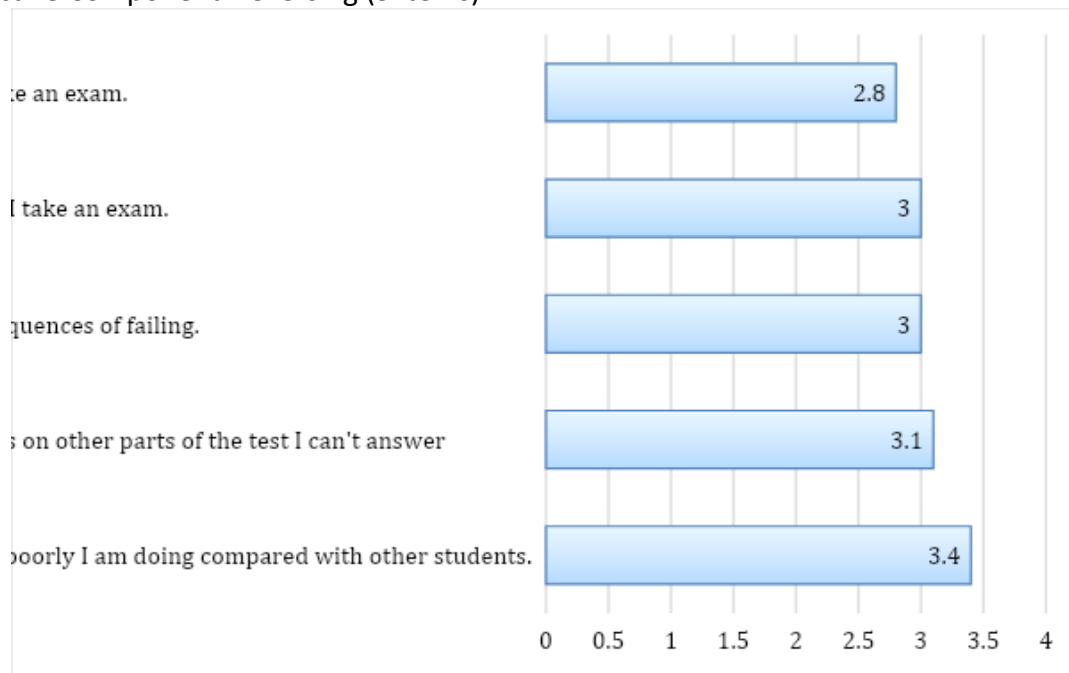


Figure 10- Mean for Affective Components

Figure 10 shows the Affective Component. The lowest is item 5 where it indicates that most respondents' disagree that they felt their heart beating fast when taking an exam ( $M = 2.8$ ). Meanwhile, item 1 has the highest mean score ( $M = 3.4$ ). This shows that the respondents neither agree nor disagree that when they take a test, they think about how poorly they are doing compared with other students.

## 1.2 Findings for Burnout

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive burnout in the learning of French as a foreign language? In the context of this study, burnout can be caused by (i) exhaustion and (ii) disengagement.

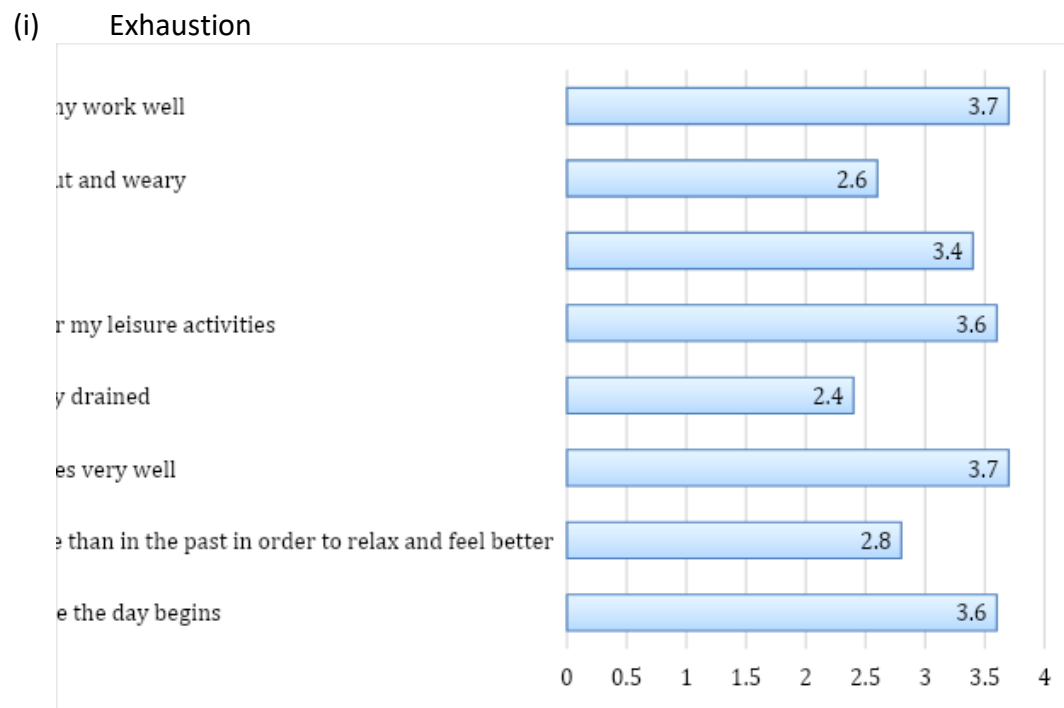


Figure 11- Mean for Burnout (Exhaustion)

By referring to Figure 11 – Mean for burnout, item EQ3 ‘students can tolerate pressure of the studies’ and EQ8 ‘they can manage the amount of the work well’ have the highest readings in comparison to the other items and the mean readings recorded a similar value (M=3.7). ‘Students feel tired before classes’ and ‘they have enough energy for leisure activities’ items demonstrated a similar mean score of 3.6. However, with a mean score of 3.4, ‘students usually feel energized after classes’. Followed by ‘the students tend to need more time than in the past to relax and feel better after classes’ (EQ2: 2.8) and ‘they usually feel worn out and weary after classes’ (EQ2.6:2.6). Finally, another item which recorded the lowest mean value is EQ4 (M=2.4), which suggests that students often feel emotionally drained during classes.

## (ii) Disengagement

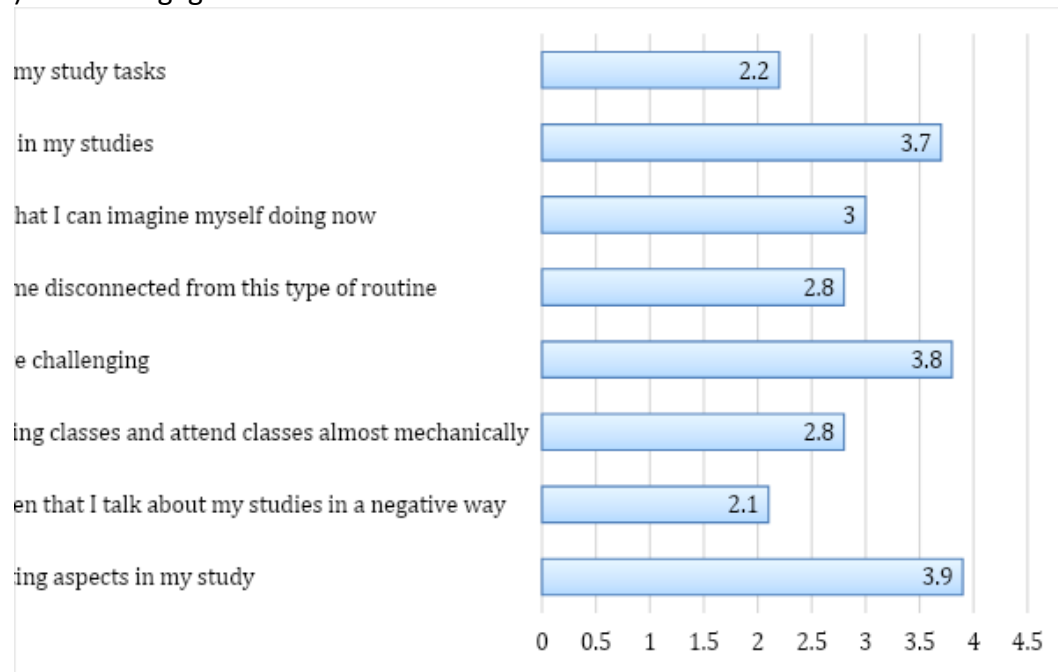


Figure 12- Mean for Burnout (Disengagement)

Figure 12 presents the mean for burnout-disengagement. Among all 8 items, DQ1 recorded the highest mean ( $M=3.9$ ), which indicates that the students always find new and interesting aspects in the study. Another item that showed a high mean value is DQ3 ( $M=3.8$ ) which suggests that the students find the studies to be positively challenging. It is followed by 'the students feel more and more engaged in the studies' ( $M=3.7$ ). Next, 'the students think that studying is the only thing they can imagine doing now' with a mean slightly lower ( $M=3$ ). Item DQ3 'lately, students tend to think less during classes and attend classes almost mechanically currently' and DQ5 'over time, they can become disconnected from this type of routine' recorded a similar reading value ( $M=2.8$ ). The analysis demonstrated the lowest mean score of 2.1 for 'It happens more and more often that the students talk about the studies negatively' and item DQ8 'sometimes the students feel sickened by the study tasks' recorded the second lowest value at 2.2.

*Findings for Relationship between motivational components and burnout*

This section presents data to answer research question 3- Is there a relationship between motivational components and burnout in the learning of French as a foreign language? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between motivational components and burnout, data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3 below.

## Correlations

		MOTIVATION 2	BURNOUT
MOTIVATION2	Pearson Correlation	1	.449**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	125	125
BURNOUT	Pearson Correlation	.449**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	125	125

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

Table 3 shows there is an association between motivation and burnout. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between motivation and burnout. ( $r=.449^{**}$ ) 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 moderate positive relationship between motivation and burnout.

## Conclusion

### Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study has shown how students perceive motivation and burnout during their French lesson as a foreign language along with correlation of these subjects. Through the motivational value components, evidently students are driven by extrinsic motivation compared to its counterparts, intrinsic motivation. Similar findings by Raup et al (2023) also showed foreign language learners' tendency towards extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic motivation. Besides that, task value beliefs are considered paramount to intrinsic motivation as well. This is because students appear to recognize the importance of their lesson while being interested in the subject matter of the courses.

This research also displayed how students perceive motivation through other components including expectancy component and affective component. Following the expectancy components, it was discovered that learners had a higher control beliefs for learning compared to their perception of self-efficacy owing to the fact that students believed they will be able to understand and learn their course material. Despite that, in line with study by Anuar et al (2023), this study also found that the affective component did not significantly affect students' motivation as this component exhibits slightly lower mean scores in contrast to other motivation sections.

Next, to explore the perceptions of learners on their burnout in the learning of French as a foreign language, this study has incorporated two sections of question consisting of exhaustion and disengagement. Based on the data retrieved, students are visibly burnout throughout their lesson albeit rather insignificant. Regardless of feeling emotionally drained during classes or feeling sickened by their studies, yet students still found new and interesting aspects in studies. On top of that, the predominance of learners can tolerate the pressure of their studies quite well.



Hence, this study denoted that students are indeed motivated while being burnout at the same time. However, these two elements are seen at different levels. While students appear to be highly motivated, their burnout's degrees are rather lower than former element. To conclude, learners' motivation and burnout together brings a moderate positive relationship. This research signified that students' burnout was indeed influenced by their motivation though in a fair amount. These findings are supported by Shazali et al.(2023) who as well found a comparable result of moderate positive relationship between the two subjects.

#### *Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research*

Based on the findings above, it is clear that students' study journey in foreign language learning is heavily intertwined with their motivation and burnout. Thus, it is important for students to maintain a healthy relationship between these two components to ensure a smooth educational pathway by keeping burnout levels at bay and ensuring that they are perpetually motivated. Thus, it is imperative that educators along with educational institutions to plan adequate courses of study that could accommodate learners to maintain a balanced correlation between motivation and burnout.

Besides that, according to Suárez-Colorado et al. (2019) motivation and burnout factors are interrelated with one's mental health. Therefore there is no doubt that students' mental health is not an insignificant matter and should not be taken lightly. Learners who are struggling mentally should seek professional help and coping tools. Nevertheless, educators and families are also important in helping learners to keep their mental health in check by providing unconditional mental support along with attention needed.

As the world and civilization continue to develop, students' perception on motivation to learn and academic burnout may also change. Hence, future researchers shall look into different causes that influence one's motivation and burnout. In addition, more research regarding this topic could be done for students who are learning different foreign languages. Besides that, different research techniques could be incorporated in the investigation to collect better data such as direct interviews together with prolonged observation on learners' behaviour.

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