

An Investigation of Learners' Drive to Learn Mandarin: A Case Study

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Abstract

Gaining insight into the fundamental motivations and variables that drive learners to strive for competence in Mandarin can be essential in facilitating students' attainment of Mandarin proficiency. This comprehensive understanding enables the creation of a supportive and engaging learning environment in which students are motivated and equipped with the necessary tools to excel in their Mandarin language acquisition. This quantitative study is conducted to investigate the elements that motivate students to learn Mandarin. The survey was completed by a random sample of 52 students taking a business course. The instrument used is a survey with a 5-Likert scale to identify the factors listed. The survey is divided into three sections, each serving a distinct purpose. Section one focuses on collecting demographic profile data, section two delves into motivational beliefs, and section three examines self-regulated learning strategies. By incorporating these sections, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' backgrounds, motivations, and learning approaches. Through data analysis, the researchers determined that motivational beliefs, such as self-efficacy, intrinsic value, and test anxiety, play a crucial role in determining the choices, behaviours, and outcomes of students during the process of learning Mandarin. Understanding how these motivational beliefs influence the selection, application, and modification of self-regulated learning strategies can provide valuable insights for the acquisition of Mandarin.

Keywords: Mandarin language learning, motivation, self-regulated learning, classroom learning environment

Introduction

Background of Study

Learning Mandarin as a second language is a challenging and unique task. The language's complexity, distinctive writing system, and tonal characteristics require a strategic and rigorous approach to achieve proficiency. Unlike alphabetic languages, Mandarin uses characters to represent morphemes or conceptual units, rather than individual words. Proficiency in Mandarin requires learning and mastering a vast vocabulary of Chinese characters, including intricate stroke sequences. According to Hong (2019), the decline in interest when the number of Chinese characters taught increased. This necessitates consistent practice and memorization. Characters are formed by combining radicals and components, which provide both semantic and phonetic clues. However, deciphering unfamiliar characters can be challenging due to the numerous intricate variations and combinations of these elements. Additionally, Mandarin differs from alphabetic languages in its lack of consistent phonetic cues, making accurate pronunciation more challenging, especially for non-native learners accustomed to the Roman alphabet. According to Gong et al. (2020), non-Chinese learners have found pitch range to be the most difficult aspect in acquiring Chinese intonation. Dan et al. (2021) highlighted that learners of Mandarin frequently make pronunciation errors in the final, initial, and tone aspects of the language. Listening comprehension can also be difficult, particularly in fast-paced situations with native speakers, due to unfamiliar phoneme elements and intricate tonal distinctions. According to Kim (2020), one reason people learn languages is to explore other cultures, gaining insight into different ways of life. This allows for greater empathy towards a diverse range of individuals and enhances the capacity to value unique human experiences. Mandarin and Chinese culture are closely related, and several terms and expressions have specific cultural meanings. It might be difficult for learners to interpret colloquial statements and implicit meanings without cultural context.

With China's prominent role in the global economy, learning Mandarin opens numerous professional opportunities in business and employment (Hananya, 2020). According to Duff and Doherty (2019), learners are motivated to actively learn Chinese due to socio-economic reasons, such as securing employment or engaging in business within the Chinese-speaking world. Students recognize that fluency in Mandarin greatly enhances their employability in international corporations, trade sectors, and diplomatic contexts. As China emerges as an economic superpower, the popularity of learning Chinese is on the rise, making it one of the most valuable assets in the global language landscape (Sharma, 2018). Students aim to attain proficiency in Mandarin to facilitate meaningful interactions and establish genuine connections with native speakers, recognizing its crucial role in international communication. In today's competitive job market, linguistic proficiency in Mandarin sets individuals apart, as employers value candidates who can foster cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. Furthermore, students in academic disciplines such as international relations, economics, linguistics, and Asian studies often choose to include Mandarin as an integral part of their education (Fong et al., 2018). Additionally, the rich cultural heritage of China attracts individuals with a deep interest in exploring its traditions, literature, art, and philosophy. Wen & Piao (2020) state that many learners are enthusiastic about acquiring Chinese language skills due to their deep connection with Chinese culture, evident in their hobbies like martial arts, Chinese visual arts, and contemporary media. Acquiring Mandarin proficiency enables students to navigate this complex geography effectively, communicate seamlessly with locals, and fully immerse themselves in authentic cultural experiences.

Statement of Problem

Learning Mandarin can be challenging for non-Chinese learners, especially in terms of pronunciation and writing Chinese characters (Hong, 2021; Cheong et al., 2019). Despite the difficulties, mastering Mandarin offers significant advantages. Hananya (2020) highlights numerous benefits that greatly enhance motivation to learn the language. However, Chua and Azlan (2019) discovered that the teacher emphasized that learners' motivation tends to decline upon beginning their Mandarin level 2 course. Veloo et al. (2019) found that students' motivation to learn Mandarin is strongly influenced by the classroom learning environment. According to Vital (2012), a positive learning environment can help increase student achievement. A conducive learning environment is one where learners feel relaxed, motivated, and inspired by their surroundings. In such an environment, learners are encouraged to explore their interests, ask questions, and actively participate in discussions. Students with self-discipline and organization are more motivated to learn Mandarin (Jung et al, 2021). According to Eccles and Wigfield (2002), it is important to understand how students' beliefs, values, and goals influence their motivation and behavior, and to develop interventions that promote positive outcomes. Students' perceptions can significantly affect their motivation levels and engagement in the learning process.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

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

- How do learners perceive motivational beliefs in their language learning?
- How do learners perceive self-regulated learning strategies in their language learning?

Literature Review**Motivation to Learn**

Motivation to learn a new language, such as Mandarin, is a widely explored topic in literature (Cheong et al., 2019; Hong, 2021). According to Kamalruzaman et al. (2023), an individual's motivation arises from their own needs and when they can make their own decisions. Two primary forms of motivation have been identified: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation involves learning a language for personal satisfaction and enjoyment. It is often fueled by a fascination with the language's culture, literature, and unique traits (Deci & Ryan, 2008). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is rooted in external factors like parental or teacher pressure, the desire for better job prospects or higher salary, and the need to pass proficiency tests (Van & Habók, 2021). The allure of Mandarin, with its rich cultural heritage and global significance, often acts as a powerful intrinsic motivator, inspiring learners to embark on the linguistic journey (Wen & Piao, 2020). Furthermore, the practical benefits of Mandarin proficiency, such as improved job prospects in a globalized world, serve as strong extrinsic motivators. According to Xu & Liu (2023), individuals with a strong command of Mandarin are more likely to secure employment aligned with their expertise and understanding. This duality of motivation, where learners may initially be driven by external incentives but develop a genuine passion for the language and culture over time, highlights the dynamic nature of motivation in language learning. The complexity of motivation in language learning extends beyond intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Another important aspect is the role of personal goals and aspirations. Individuals may be motivated to learn Mandarin to connect with their heritage, communicate with family members, or simply challenge

themselves intellectually (Xu & Moloney, 2014). These personal motivations can be deeply meaningful and provide a sense of purpose throughout the language learning journey.

Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

Self-regulated learning entails the continuous practice of self-monitoring and self-direction to achieve learning objectives (Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007). These strategies encompass various learner-driven activities, such as goal setting, time management, resource selection, and metacognition. Among the various self-regulation strategies, students nowadays can leverage technology to enhance their Mandarin language proficiency and improve their skills (Anthonysamy et al., 2020). The increasing popularity of blended learning and the widespread availability of affordable devices have become a prevalent trend in higher education institutions. Students have become accustomed to using digital devices for a multitude of purposes, including communication, collaboration, and accessing diverse sources of information for future research endeavors. It is important to develop adaptive training methods that consider individual differences in self-regulation strategies (Theobald, 2021). Self-regulation plays a crucial role in successful classroom learning. Students who lack self-regulation may struggle to grasp the content prior to class, resulting in poor learning outcomes or disengagement during subsequent classroom activities. Conversely, students with strong self-regulation skills can effectively utilize and comprehend the material. Therefore, it is imperative to foster the development of self-regulated learning strategies to enable students to thrive in educational environments (Zheng et al., 2020). Teachers can adapt their courses to engage and support learners by providing personalized assistance, while learners can gain valuable insights and receive feedback on their learning progress (Santana-Monagas et al., 2022). Particularly when it comes to Mandarin language skills, teachers serve as prime examples in helping students cultivate effective self-study strategies (Chua & Azlan, 2019). Teachers should act as facilitators, being well-versed in all aspects of teaching and continuously improving their instructional methods.

Past Studies on Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

Marszalek, et.a . (2022) conducted a study to examine the association between intrinsic motivation, dispositional flow in the learning of foreign language. 116 students participated in the study. The instrument used was L2 Motivational Self Scale and the Dispositional Flow Sacle-2. The instrument used had good evidence of construct validity. Data was analysed using factor analysis. Findings showed there is a correlation between the constructs investigated. The findings thus suggested the flow in the classroom is an important route for learners to maximise their foreign language learning.

EIAdl & Polpol (2020) investigated how self-regulated learning strategies influence problem-solving skills and academic self-efficacy among high school students in the Sultanate of Oman. 80 students participated in this experimental study. 40 students were in the experimental while another 40 were in the control group. Learners went through activities on self-regulated learning for 12 weeks. Findings showed students in the experimental group developed robust creative problem skills and academic self-efficacy.

The study by Biber (2022) was done to look at self-regulated learning strategies used by students to prepare for their Mathematics exam in the 7th grade. This case study and qualitative methos study was done from data collected from high- and low-achievers. Data was collected from an interview. Descriptive analysis method was used to analyse the data. Findings showed high achievers used all the strategies. Findings also revealed that the self-

regulated strategies used by low achievers are self-assessment, seeking information and help, environmental regulation, and reviewing notes before maths exams.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study explores factors that influence learners' drive to learn a foreign language. According to Rahmat, et.al. (2021), learners are motivated to learn if they are aware that they can gain satisfaction, be given attention while learning, and achieve confidence after they have learnt the target language. This study adapts the motivational beliefs and self-regulated learning strategies presented by Pintrich, & De Groot (1990). Motivational beliefs are affected by self-efficacy, intrinsic value and test anxiety. In addition to that, motivated learners use self-regulated learning strategies such as cognitive strategy and self-regulation.

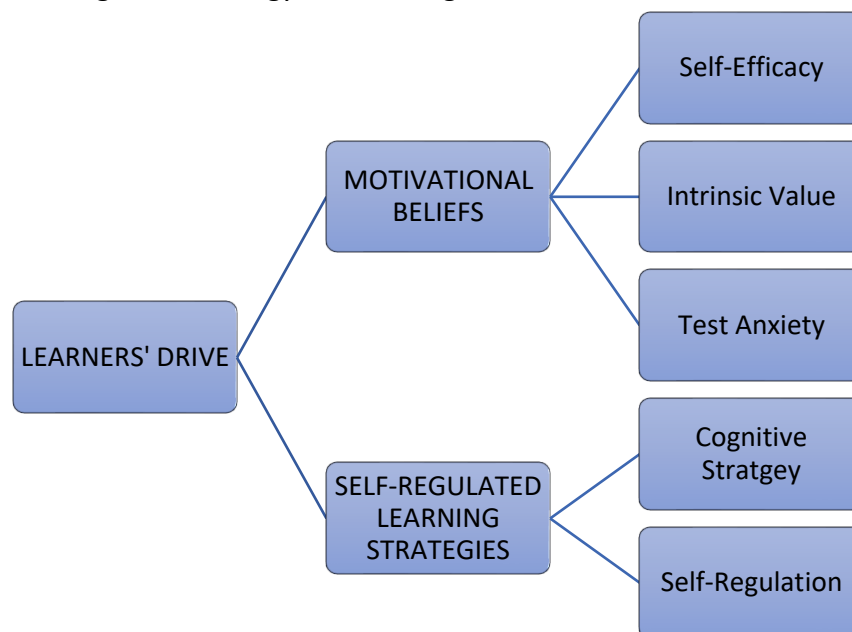


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Learners' Drive to Learn Mandarin

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore driving factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 52 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Pintrich & De Groot (1990) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has three sections. Section one has items on demographic profile. Section two has 22 items on motivational beliefs. Section C has 22 items on self-regulated learning strategies.

Table 1-
Distribution of Items in the Survey

PART	STRATEGY		SCALE	No Of Items	Total Items
TWO	MOTIVATIONAL BELIEFS	A	SELF-EFFICACY	9	22
		B	INTRINSIC VALUE	9	
		C	TEST ANXIETY	4	
THREE	SELF-REGULATED LEARNING STRATEGIES	D	COGNIVE STRATGY USE	13	22
		E	SELF-REGULATION	9	
	TOTAL NO OF ITEMS				44

Table 2- Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.943	44

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .943, 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

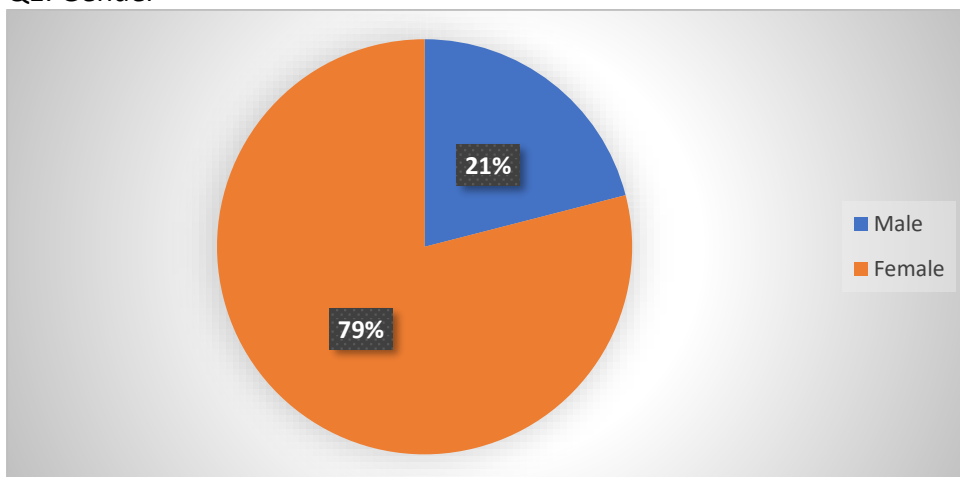


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 shows the percentage of gender. The majority of the respondents are female (79%). 21 % are male respondents.

Q2 Level of Study

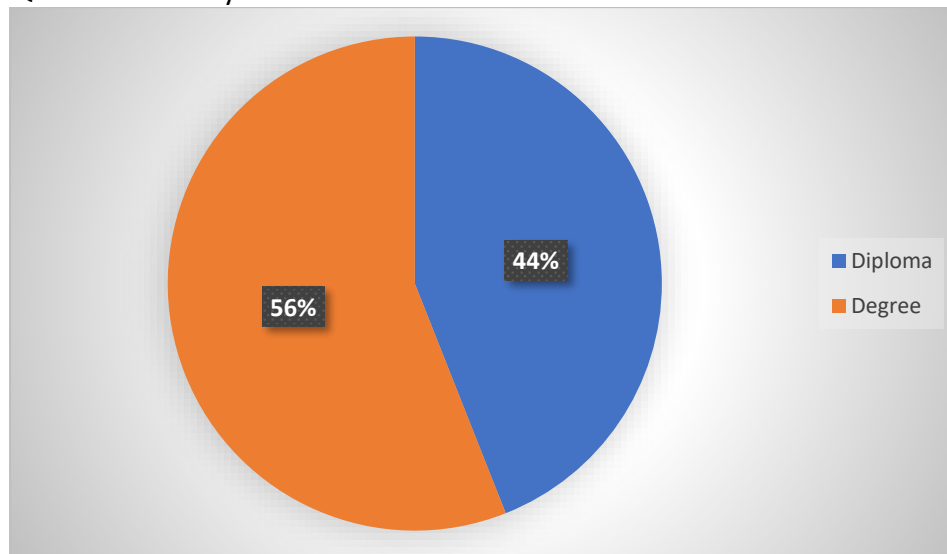


Figure 3- Percentage for Level of Study

Figure 3 shows the percentage for level of study. 56% are doing their degree studies. 44 % are doing their diploma studies.

Q3 Mode of Study

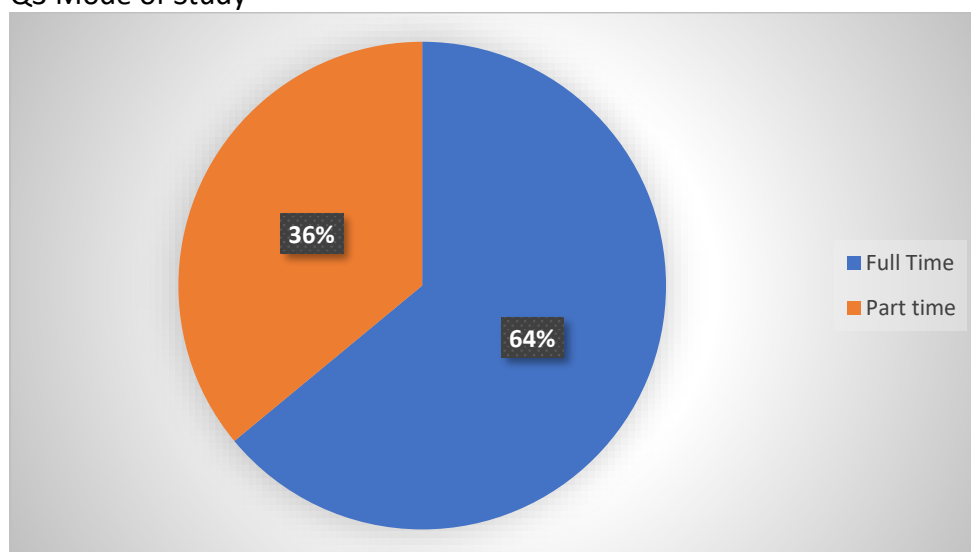


Figure 4- Percentage for Mode of Study

Figure 4 shows the percentage for mode of study. The majority of respondents are full-time students. 35% are part-time students.

Findings for Motivational Beliefs

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive motivational beliefs in their language learning? In the context of this study, motivational beliefs are measured by (i) self-efficacy, (ii) intrinsic value, and (ii) test anxiety.

SELF-EFFICACY (9 items)

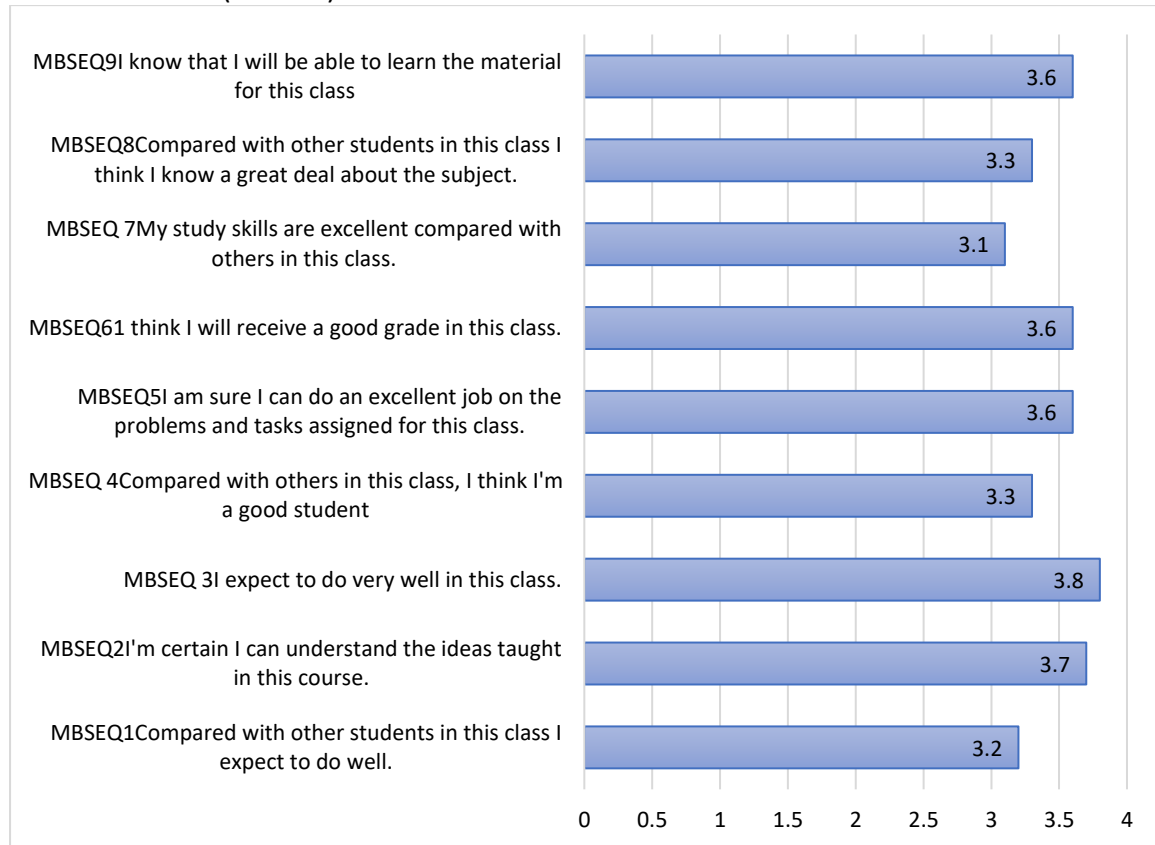


Figure 5- Mean for Self-Efficacy

Figure 5 presents the mean for self-efficacy. The highest mean is 3.8 for the item “MBSEQ2I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course”. This is followed by the mean of 3.7 for the item “MBSEQ2I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course”. Three items share the same mean of 3.6 and they are “MBSEQ5I am sure I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for this class”, “MBSEQ61 think I will receive a good grade in this class” and “MBSEQ9I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class”

INTRINSIC VALUE (9 items)

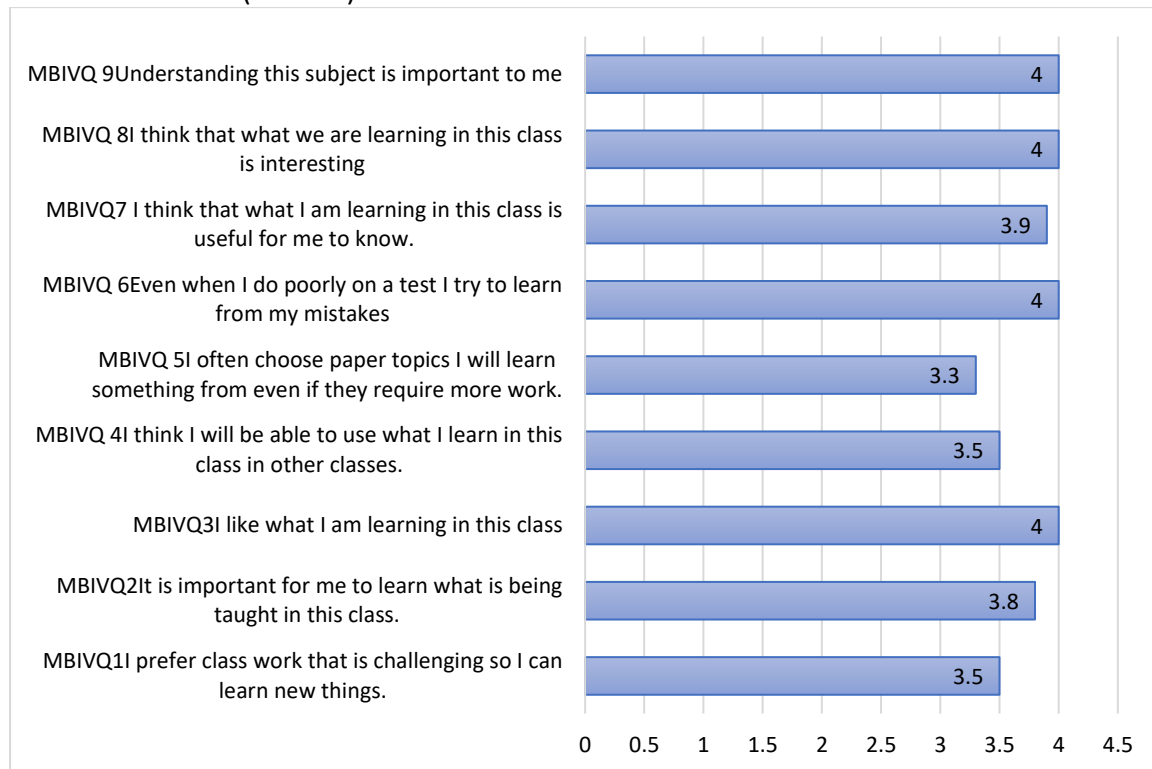


Figure 6- Mean for Intrinsic Value

Figure 6 shows the mean for intrinsic value. Four items share the same highest mean of 4 and they are “MBIVQ 3 I like what I am learning in this class”, “MBIVQ 6 Even when I do poorly on a test I try to learn from my mistakes”, “MBIVQ 8 I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting” and “MBIVQ 9 Understanding this subject is important to me”.

(i) TEST ANXIETY (4 items)

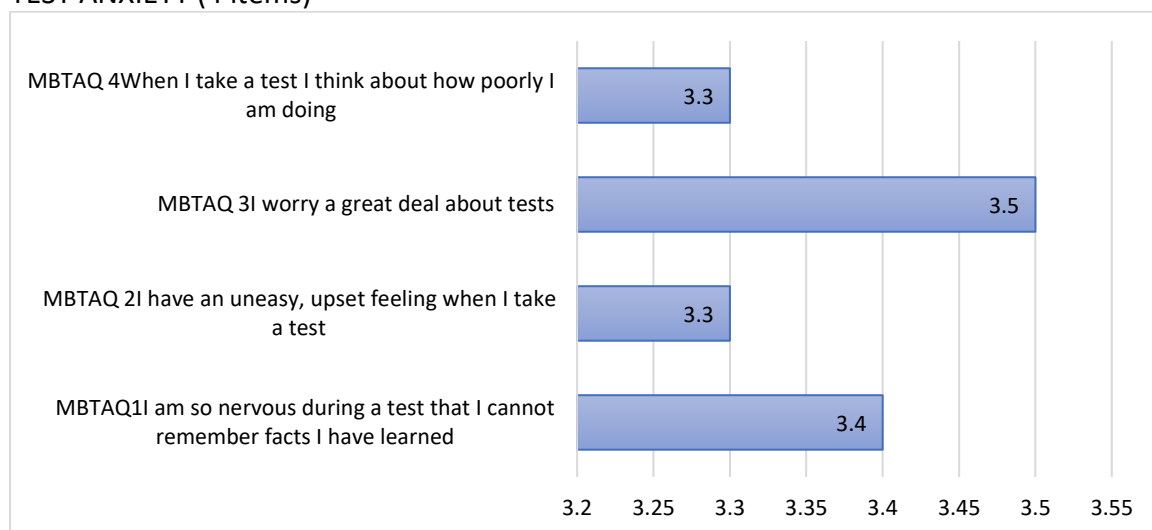


Figure 7- Mean for Test Anxiety

Figure 7 presents the mean for test anxiety. The highest mean is 3.5 for the item “MBTAQ 3 I worry a great deal about tests”. Next, the item “MBTAQ 1 I am so nervous during a test that I cannot remember facts I have learned” reveal a mean of 3.4. Finally, two items

share the same mean of 3.3 and they are “MBTAQ 2I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take a test” and “MBTAQ 4When I take a test I think about how poorly I am doing”.

1.2 Findings for Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive self-regulated learning strategies in their language learning? In the context of this study, this refers to (i) cognitive strategy use, and (ii) self-regulation.

(i) COGNITIVE STRATEGY USE (13 items)

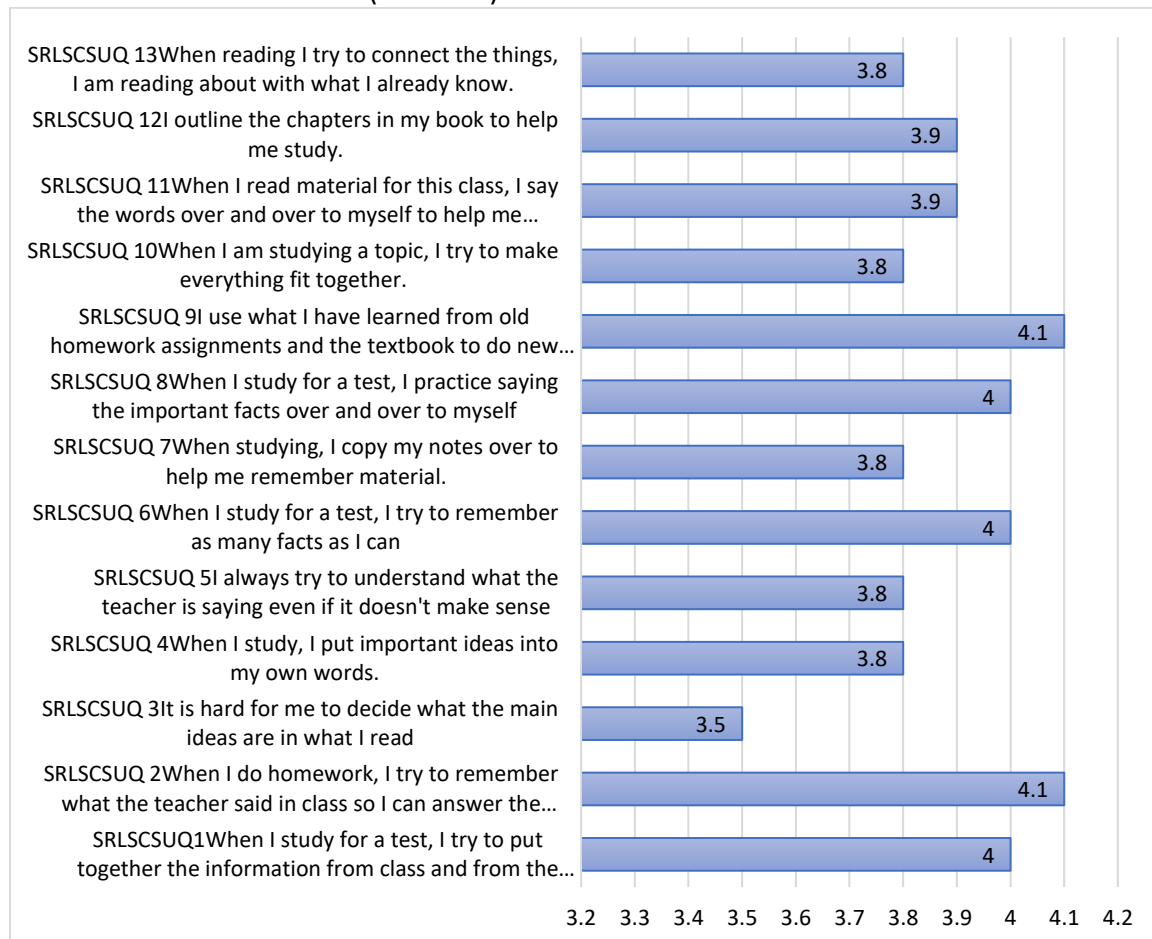


Figure 8- Mean for Cognitive Strategy

Figure 8 shows the mean for cognitive strategy. Two items share the highest mean of 4.1 and they are “SRLSCSUQ 2When I do homework, I try to remember what the teacher said in class so I can answer the questions correctly” and “SRLSCSUQ 9I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to do new assignments”. Next, three items share the same mean of 4 and they are, “SRLSCSUQ 1When I study for a test, I try to put together the information from class and from the book”, “SRLSCSUQ 6When I study for a test, I try to remember as many facts as I can”, and “SRLSCSUQ 8When I study for a test, I practice saying the important facts over and over to myself”. The lowest mean is 3.5 for the item “SRLSCSUQ 3It is hard for me to decide what the main ideas are in what I read”.

SELF-REGULATION (9 items)

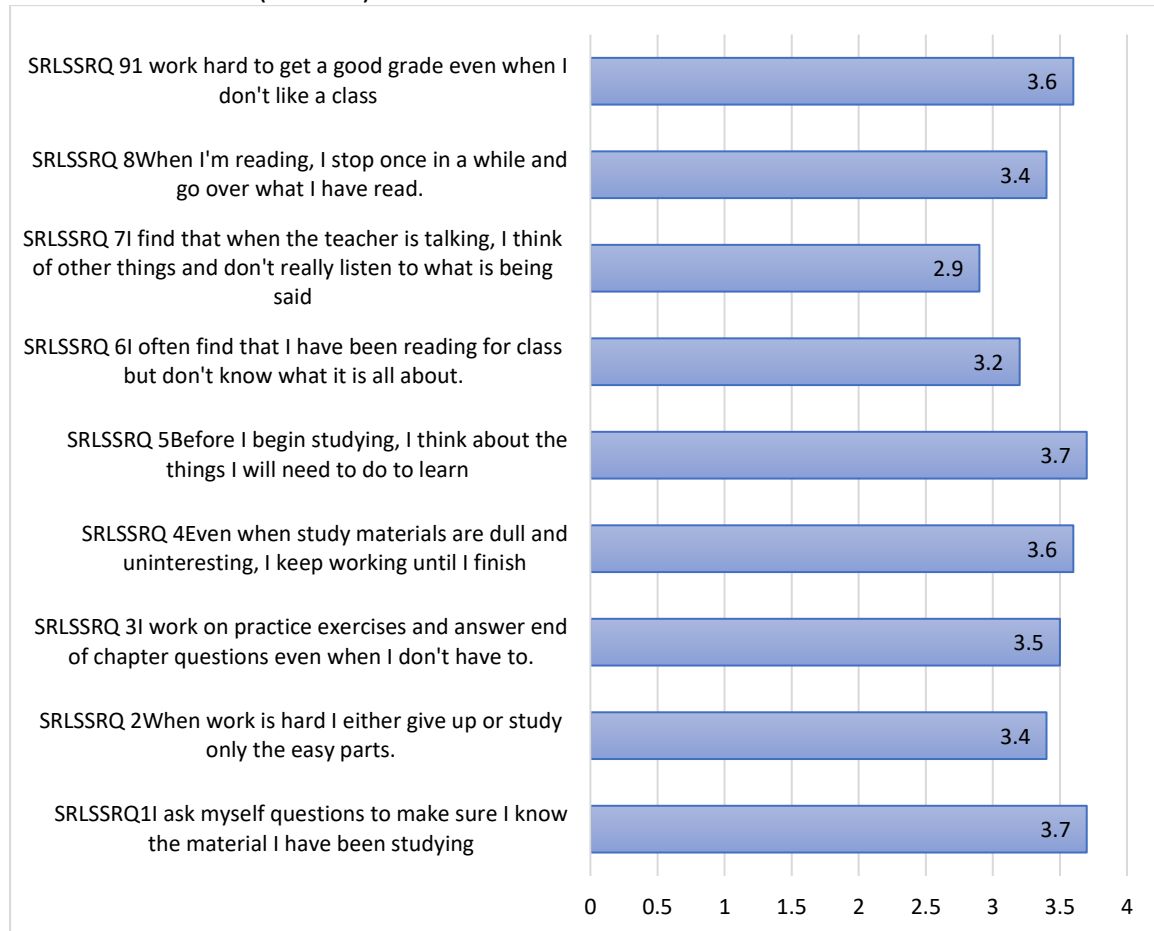


Figure 9- Mean for Self-Regulation

Figure 9 shows the mean for self-regulation. Two items share the highest mean of 3.7 and they are “SRLSSRQ1 I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying”, and “SRLSSRQ 5 Before I begin studying, I think about the things I will need to do to learn”. Next, two items share the mean of 3.6 and they are “SRLSSRQ 4 Even when study materials are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish” and “SRLSSRQ 91 work hard to get a good grade even when I don't like a class”. Then lowest mean is 2.9 for the items “SRLSSRQ 7 I find that when the teacher is talking, I think of other things and don't really listen to what is being said”.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

In summary, learners need to be in control of their own learning outcome. They need to have self-efficacy, intrinsic value and also test anxiety. Self- efficacy in learning is achieved when learners feel they have control over their own learning. They understand what is taught to them and if they have control over their own learning. Learners' need positive intrinsic value to maintain their interest in learning. This value helps learners cope even if sometimes some aspects of learning may fail, they will remain motivated to learn further. Learners do have test anxiety, and this anxiety pushes them to want to learn more. The findings in this study is in accordance with the study by Marszalek, et.al. (2022) who reported that there is an association between intrinsic motivation, dispositional flow in the learning of foreign

language. Dispositional flow refers to a person's feelings of personal control over situation and the outcome.

Next, this study also revealed that having cognitive strategy skills help learners link old knowledge to new knowledge. This strategy also helps learners to make sense of what they have learnt and are learning. In addition to that learners who use self-regulation strategies are able to be independent learners. They will keep learning even if they learning activities do not interest them. The use of the strategies helps them to stay focuses to maximize learning. Simialrly, EIAdl & Polpol (2020) and also Biber (2022) also found that how self-regulated learning strategies influence problem-solving skills and academic self-efficacy. These learners stay pivoted in their learning goals.

This research considers motivation not only as the first step to engage but also as the techniques learners use to enhance and maintain their Mandarin language learning. Self-regulation is crucial for learners to actively managing and monitoring cognitive and metacognitive processes during Mandarin learning. This can be done by comprehending the connection between expectations (self-efficacy) and task values (intrinsic and extrinsic) that result from student motivation in a learning environment. In addition to that, learners can merge these elements with self-regulated learning processes, students can be empowered with practical applications of motivation and self-regulated learning. This comprehensive approach empowers learners to actively take charge of their Mandarin language learning, fostering a deeper understanding and mastery of the language.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The motivational aspects were strongly connected to students' cognitive engagement and academic performance in the classroom. (Pintrich & De Groot,1990). Educators can learn a great deal about how motivating beliefs affect the choice, application, and modification of self-regulated learning strategies by exploring this complex relationship in further detail. By comprehending how self-regulated learning strategies are chosen based on motivational beliefs, educators can modify their teaching methods to better meet the needs of each individual student. To have a better understanding of how learners' ideas about their motivation for learning Mandarin influence their use of self-regulated learning strategies, future research could undertake a thorough analysis of internal and external factors. These views are formed in part by a variety of factors, including perceived relevance, personal interest, and peer and teacher influence. It is imperative that educators and language programs acknowledge and value the unique motivating frameworks of each student and adjust their pedagogical approaches accordingly. According Veloo et al.'s (2019), by creating a supportive and motivating learning environment, educators can foster intrinsic motivation and strengthen learners' determination to master Mandarin. Additionally, future research could also explore the role of cultural background and prior language learning experiences in shaping learners' beliefs about motivation to learn Mandarin. Understanding how cultural factors influence motivation can help educators tailor instructional materials and activities to better meet the needs and interests of diverse learners. By considering a comprehensive range of internal and external factors, educators can design effective teaching methods that foster intrinsic motivation so that learners can speak Mandarin autonomously and proficiently.

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