

## **Balancing Individual and Situational Interests Among Learners: A Case Study**

**<sup>1</sup>Siti Hasma Hajar Mat Zin**

**<sup>2</sup>Noor Syazana Ngarisan**

**<sup>3</sup>Nurul'Aini Harun**

**<sup>4</sup>Nurfarhana Hassan**

**<sup>5</sup>Noraisyah Abdl Aziz**

**<sup>6</sup>Noor Hanim Rahmat**

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>School of Computing and Mathematics, College of Computing, Informatics and Mathematics, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Segamat Campus

<sup>6</sup>Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Kampus Pasir Gudang

Corresponding Author: Noor Syazana Ngarisan (syazana@uitm.edu.my)

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### **Abstract**

Motivation is a priority for academic learning and success. However, motivation has frequently been ignored by educators although it is a crucial part of their responsibility. Several studies were conducted to investigate motivation among learners but there is very little empirical data available on specific components of motivation in learning. This study aims to explore learners' individual and situational interest in their motivation to learn using quantitative survey methods. The result will show how learners' individual interest and situational interest influence their learning motivation, also the relationship between individual and situational interest for learning motivation. A sample of 181 participants among undergraduates at one Malaysian public university responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Schiefele (2009) and Pintirch & De Groot (1990). The survey contains 4 sections where section A has items on demographic profile while section B has 12 items on situational interest and section C has 12 items on individual interest. The data is analyzed using SPSS collected data is presented in terms of mean scores to answer the research questions.

Overall results show that the motivating variable has a potentiating effect on students' learning during the teaching and learning process and is useful for educators who work with students.

**Keywords:** Situational Interest, Individual Interest, Interest-Driven Learning, Motivation

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION 1.1 Background of Study**

Recent scholars have emphasized the need to support interest-driven learning in learning environments (Evans, Won, & Drape, 2014) because interest can lead to a high level of motivation. Educators often find themselves in a difficult situation on how they can relate a certain subject or topic to their students' personal interest. The task is definitely challenging because especially in Malaysia one class in school or higher learning institution normally consists of 30 to 40 students and sometimes even more. This is important because it is a common belief that students have a tendency to do better and engage more if they learn something related to their personal interest. Educators must try to find a way to get students to be fascinated in everything they are supposed to learn during their entire schooling session or until the end of the course.

According to Palmer, Dixon and Archer (2016), students will develop individual interest in a certain subject or topic with constant and regular experiences of situational interest. For example, a student who develops an individual interest in mathematics will spend more time solving more questions and often have a discussion with other people about topics related to mathematics. However, the duration to which extent this does happen has not been established yet. A study done by Jung, Yan and Borge (2016) shows how problems can emerge from diverse individual interests and how these problems can lead to decreased engagement of individuals in the group project. Strong existing individual interests and diverse areas of expertise within a group can create problems with joint understanding, which may lead members to dismiss the ideas of others.

Situational interest is a relatively brief reaction to highly stimulating factors in the immediate environment, whereas individual interest is a relatively long-term preference for a particular subject or activity. The obvious distinction between the two categories is that situational interest is spontaneous and context-specific while personal interest is enduring and contextgeneral (Schraw & Lehman, 2001). It has been proposed that regular experiences of situational interest in a subject may eventually lead to the development of individual interest in that subject. Unlike personal interests such as art or music that are developed over a long period of time, situational interest is temporary and triggered by the external environment.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

According to several researchers, there are four main factors that influence students' motivation: competency, control or autonomy, interest, and relatedness (Murray, 2011; Seifert, 2004). For a student to be motivated, at least one of these criteria needs to be met. The motivation will be higher if more and stronger requirements are met across more dimensions. Motivation is a critically important component, especially for academic learning and success. In each training situation, motivating students to learn is a top priority. One of

the main duties of an educator is to motivate students. Every lesson presentation should contain it, and the educators should make sure of that. To ensure the students' interest and to focus attention on what needs to be studied, motivation should be initiated during the lesson's introduction (Borah, 2021). By acknowledging the instrumentality of learners' goals, instructors, educators, and syllabus designers can be responsive to their motivations. It is simple to improve students' instrumentality by emphasising more practical abilities like effective interpersonal communication and self-expression.

Nowadays, motivation has frequently been ignored by educators, although it is a crucial component of students' success in school and in life. Teachers and educators should take part in motivating students in their learning process. They are going to be in a better position to assist and support students who have experienced learning difficulties for a long time if they have a better understanding of how each of the motivating objectives, types, and dimensions affects learning. Though several studies were conducted to investigate motivation among learners, there is very little empirical data available on specific components of motivation in learning, such as balancing individual and situational interests. Therefore, this study is conducted to investigate the level of motivation components and identify the relationship between each variable. This study will show that the motivating variable has a potentiating effect on students' learning during the teaching and learning process. The information provided in this study is useful for teachers and other educators who work with students.

### 1.3 Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore learners' individual and situational interest in their motivation to learn. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions; ● How do learners' situational interests influence their learning motivation?

- How do learners' individual interests influence their learning motivation?
- Is there a relationship between individual and situational interest for learning motivation?

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Motivation for learning (to include individual & situational interest)

Motivation is a very important factor that would affect the success in learning. Ryan and Deci (2000) stated that motivated learners are able to do challenging learning activities which would encourage them to actively engage in finding out appropriate strategies to facilitate their learning. Edelson and Joseph (2004) suggested that interest plays a powerful role in motivating learning. Interest can be explained in terms of situational interest and individual interest, where situational interest is described as a psychological state distinguished by increased attention and immediate feelings experienced in a particular situation. On the other hand, individual interest is known as an enduring predisposition to re-engage with a particular object or topic over time (Hidi and Renninger, 2006).

### 2.2 Past Studies on Motivation to Learn

A study by Gustiani (2020) investigates students' motivation toward online learning, which has been gaining more widespread application ever since the Covid-19 pandemic era. The research used a qualitative approach where eight students at the English Department of Sriwijaya Polytechnics were selected for individual in-depth interview and an additional

fourteen students from the same department were selected for focus group interview. Based on the findings, it was found that the students' motivation toward their online learning was intrinsically influenced by their desire for new knowledge and enjoyment in experiencing new learning methods. It was also extrinsically affected by external adjustment and environmental conditions.

Next, Chua and Azlan (2019) studied factors that encourage motivation among non-native Mandarin speakers to learn Mandarin language. The study was conducted through interviews on 11 Mandarin level 2 students from one of the universities in Kelantan, Malaysia. These students were selected based on their grades in Mandarin level 1 course, which ranges from C- to A. From the research, it was found that most respondents were motivated to continue their learning due to future career prospects, self-interest and to gain good grades in their studies. From these studies, it can be seen that interest plays an important part in encouraging motivation among students.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

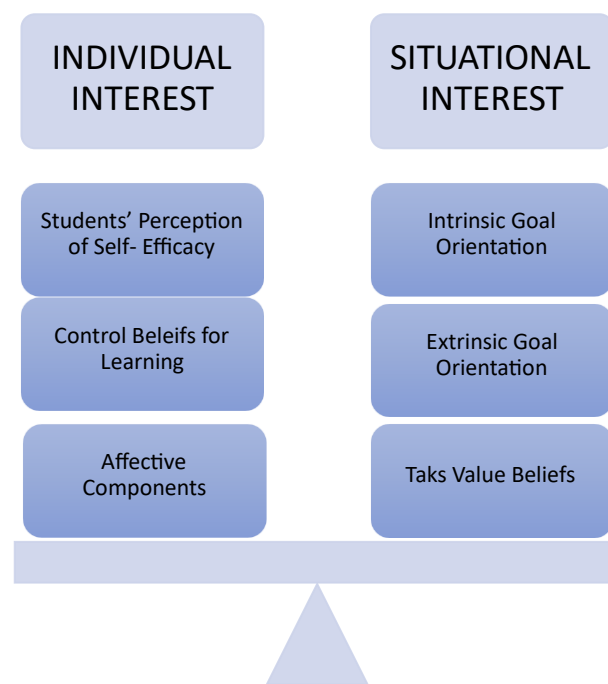


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study – Balancing Individual and Situational Interest among Learners

Instructors need to be aware of the motivational factors of students in their classroom. According to Rahmat (2022), knowing what drives learners helps instructors gauge what to expect from them (the learners); what motivates or demotivates them from learning Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study explores the factors that balances individual and situational interest among learners. The study is rooted from Schiefele (2009) who presented that learners' interest can be categorised into individual and situational interest. Individual interest (II) is a learner's intrinsic, relatively unchanging set of long-term preferences. Situational interest (SI) is activated temporarily by aspects of the immediate (teaching & learning) situation. The type of interest is then scaffolded onto Pintrich, & De Groot's (1990) motivational elements. Situational interest is measured by value components

such as intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation and task value beliefs. Next, individual interest is measured by expectancy and affective components. Expectancy components are measured by students’ perception of self- efficacy and control beliefs for learning.

**3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 181 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Schiefele (2009) and Pintirch & De Groot (1990) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 12 items on situational interest. Section C has 12 items on individual interest.

Table 1- Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECT	TYPE OF INTEREST (Schiefele, 2009)	CONSTRUCT		Motivation (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990)	No Of Items	Total Items		
B	SITUATIONAL INTEREST (Schiefele, 2009)	VALUE COMPONENTS	(a)	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	12	12	
			(b)	Extrinsic Goal Orientation	3			
			(c)	Task Value Beliefs	5			
C	INDIVIDUAL INTEREST (Schiefele, 2009)	EXPECTANCY COMPONENT	(a)	Students’ Perception of Self-Efficacy	5	7	12	
			(b)	Control Beliefs for Learning	2			
		AFFECTIVE COMPONENTS					5	
		TOTAL NO OF ITEMS					24	

Table 2- Reliability of Survey

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.901	24

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .901, 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.

#### 4.0 FINDINGS

##### 4.1 Findings for Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of respondents comprises three items, which are gender, education level, and discipline of their studies.

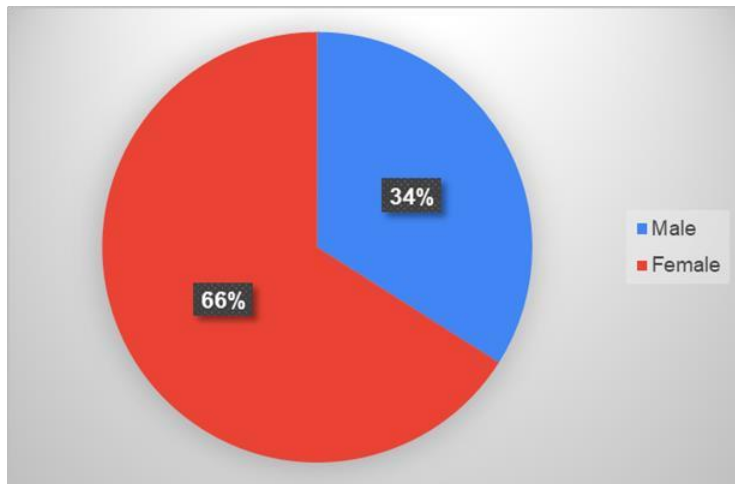


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 displays the gender distribution of the respondents. There were 66 percent female and 34 percent male students out of a total of 181 students.

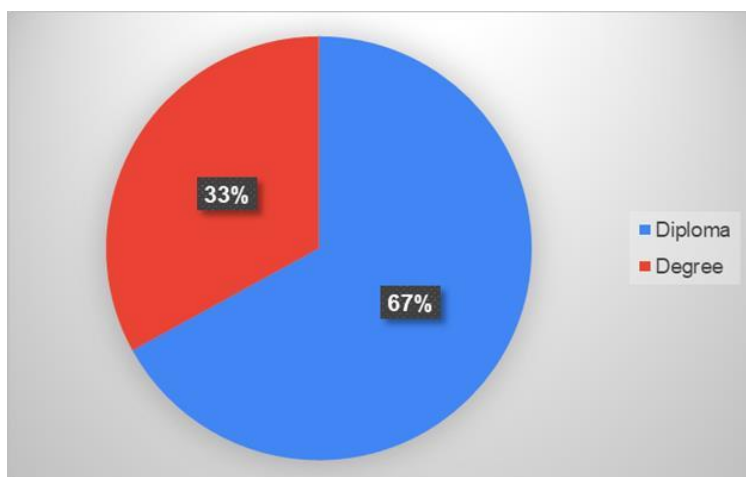


Figure 3 - Percentage for Education Level

The second item of the demographic profile is the education level of the students, which comprises two categories, diploma and degree. Figure 3 shows that 67 percent of the students were diploma students and 33 percent were degree students.

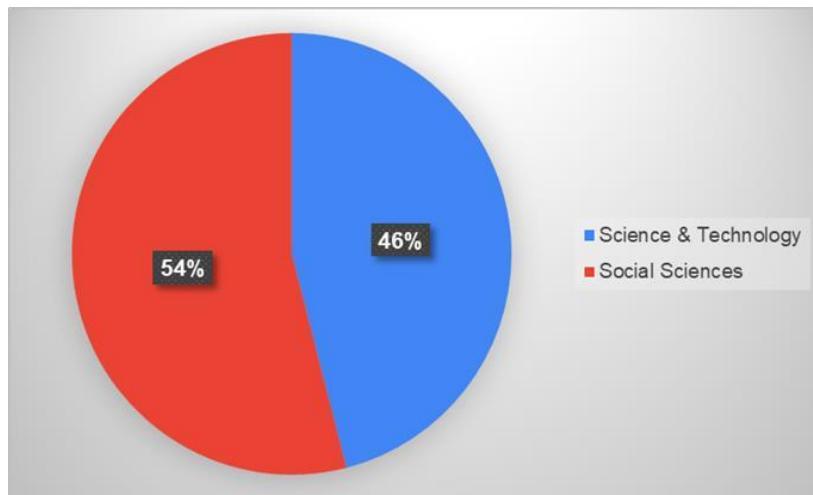


Figure 4 - Percentage for Discipline

The third item of the demographic profile is the discipline of the studies. Figure 4 depicts that 46 percent of the students were in the Science and Technology stream, while 54 percent of the students were in the Social Sciences stream.

#### 4.2 Findings for Situational Interest

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners' situational interest influence their learning motivation? In the context of this study, situational interest is measured by 3 value components such as (i) intrinsic goal orientation , (ii) extrinsic goal orientation and (iii) task value beliefs.

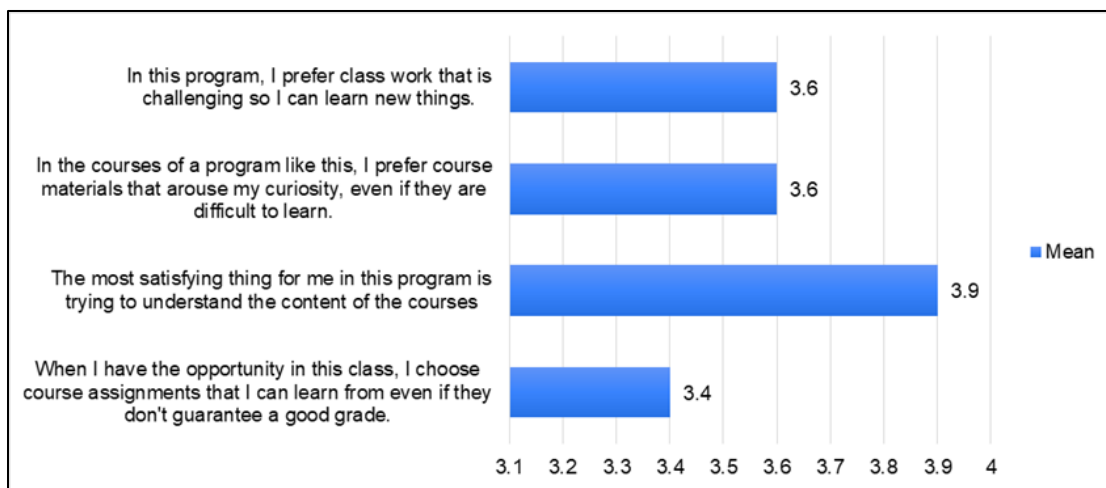


Figure 5 - Mean for Intrinsic Value

Figure 5 presents the mean score for intrinsic value, which comprises four items. The highest mean is 3.9 for the item, namely "The most satisfying thing for me in this program is trying to understand the content of the courses". The second highest mean is 3.6 for two items. The items are "In this program, I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things" and "In the courses of a program like this, I prefer course materials that arouse my curiosity, even if they are difficult to learn". The lowest mean is 3.4, which belongs to the item named "When I have the opportunity in this class, I choose course assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade." The findings for the intrinsic value conclude that

students are more interested in understanding the content of their studies and learning difficult tasks.

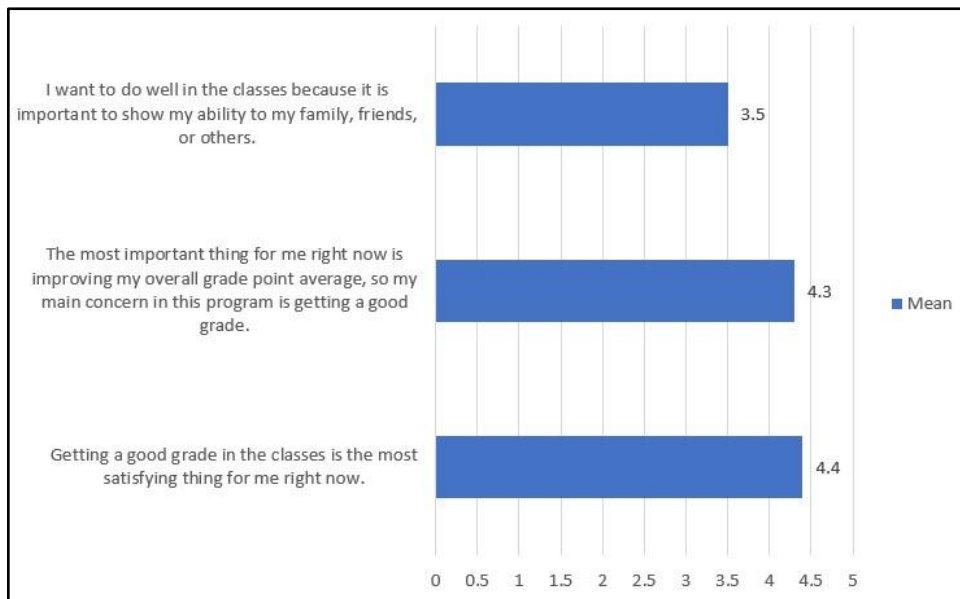
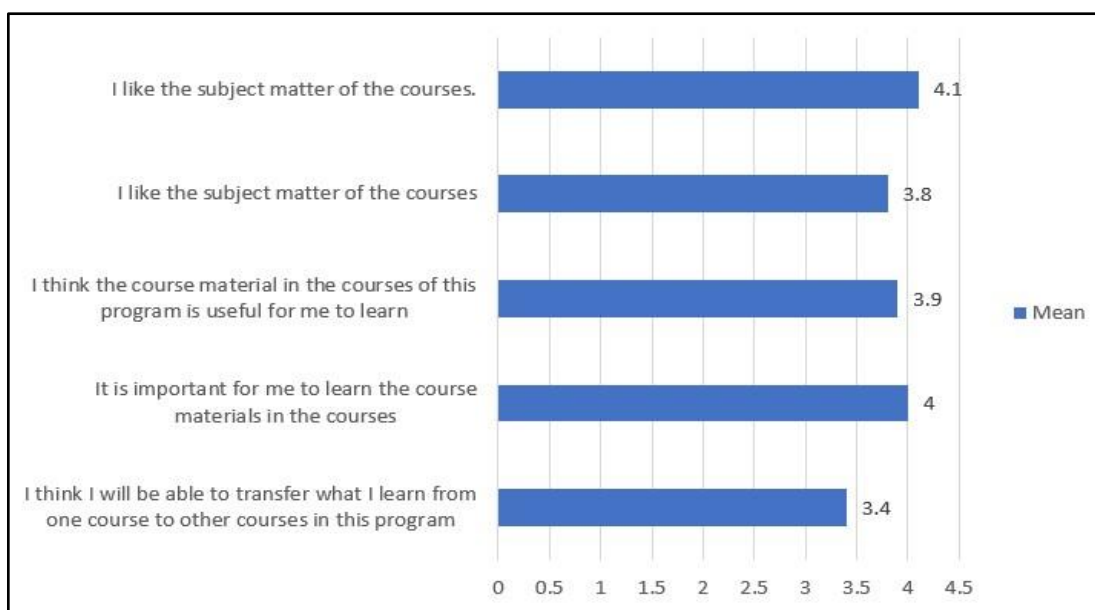


Figure 6 - Mean for Extrinsic Value

Next value component is extrinsic goal orientation which is divided into three items as in Figure 6. The highest mean is 4.4 for “getting a good grade in the classes is the most satisfying thing right now”. The intermediate mean is 4.3, for “the most important thing for me right now is improving my overall grade point average, so my main concern in this program is getting a good grade”. The lowest mean goes to “I want to do well in the classes because it is important to show my ability to my family, friends, or others.”



Figure

7 - Mean for Task Value Beliefs

Figure 7 shows mean for task beliefs which list 5 items. The highest mean 4.1 regarding “Understanding the subject matter of the courses is very important to me”. Second mean is 4.0



which is “It is important for me to learn the course materials in the courses”. Third mean of 3.9, mention “I think the course material in the courses of this program is useful for me to learn”. The fourth mean is 3.8, “I like the subject matter of the courses” and the lowest is “I think I will be able to transfer what I learn from one course to other courses in this program” with mean 3.4.

### 4.3 Findings for Individual Interest

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners’ individual interest influence their learning motivation? In the context of this study, individual interest is measured by 2 expectancy components which are (i) student’s perception of self-efficacy, and (ii) control beliefs for learning) and also affective components.

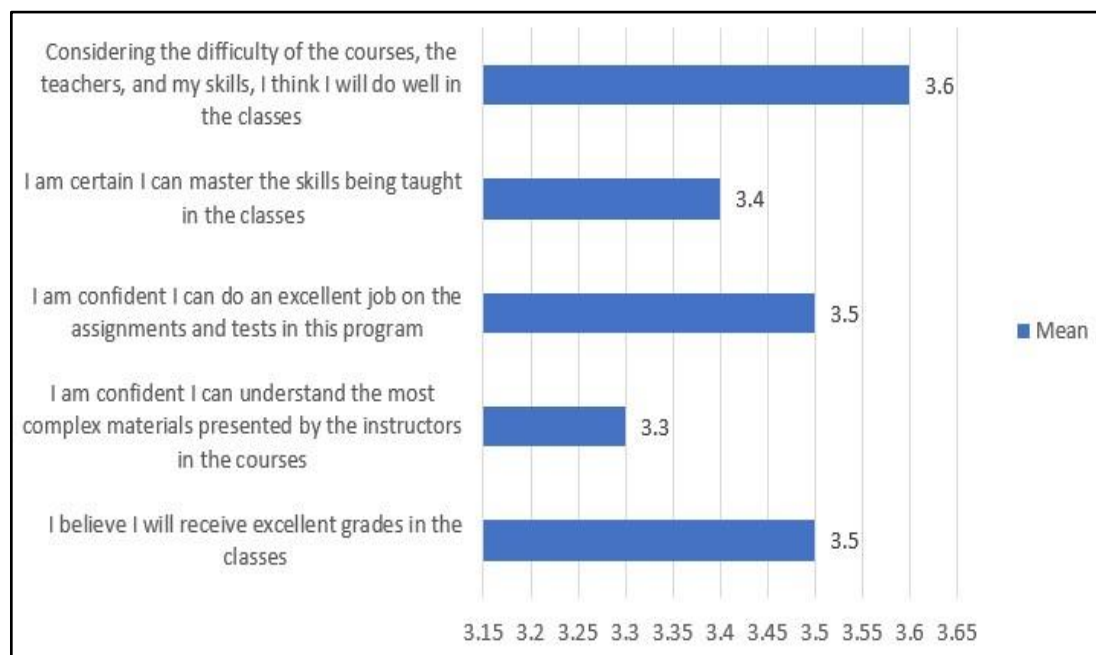


Figure 8 – Mean for Students’ Perception of Self-Efficacy

Based on Figure 8, the mean score ranges from 3.3 to 3.6. It was found that the highest attribute ranked by respondents was “Considering the difficulty of the courses, the teachers, and my skills, I think I will do well in the classes”. Meanwhile, the attribute with the lowest rating was “I am confident I can understand the most complex materials presented by the instructors in the courses”. Therefore, the overall mean score for students’ perception of self-efficacy was 3.46 on the 5-point Likert scale. It can be summarized that most students showed that on average (sometimes) on their self-efficacy towards motivation learning.

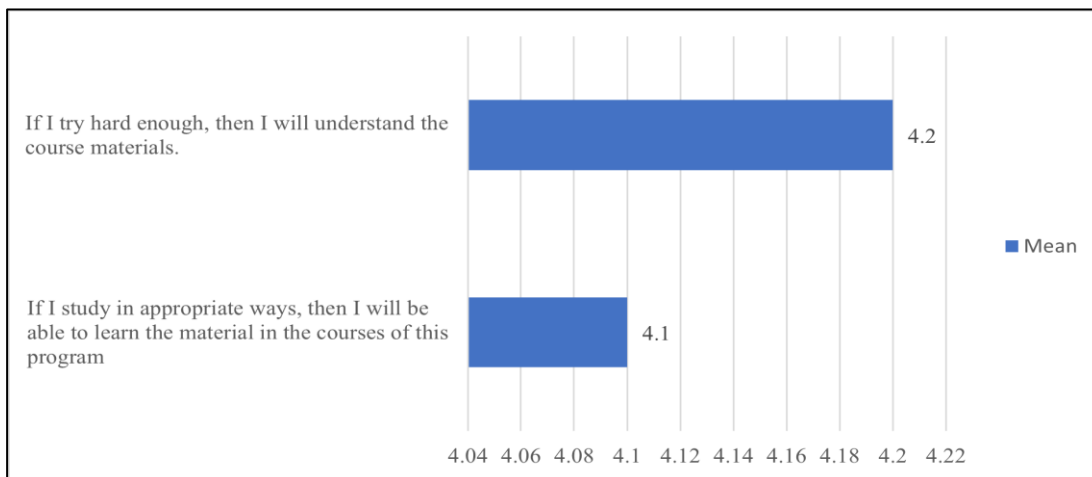


Figure 9 - Mean for Control Beliefs for Learning

Figure 9 shows the mean values for responses for questions on control beliefs for learning. There are only two questions in this section. The responses for question “If I try hard enough, then I will understand the course materials” has the higher mean value which is 4.2, while the question “If I study in appropriate ways, then I will be able to learn the material in the courses of this program” has slightly lower mean value at 4.1.

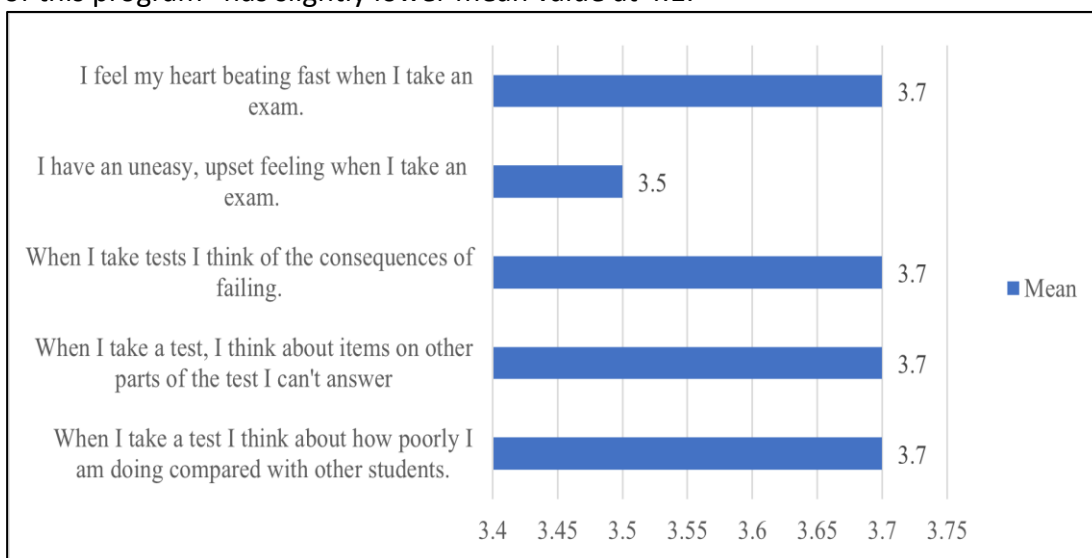


Figure 10 - Mean for Affective Component

The mean values for responses under the affective component are presented in Figure 10. There are five questions asked in total, where four of them recorded the same mean value at 3.7. These four questions are “When I take a test I think about how poorly I am doing compared with other students”, “When I take a test, I think about items on other parts of the test I can't answer”, “When I take tests I think of the consequences of failing” and “I feel my heart beating fast when I take an exam”. In comparison, the question “I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take an exam” has a lower mean score which is 3.6.

#### 4.4 Findings for Relationship between Individual and Situational Interests

This section presents data to answer research question 2- Is there a relationship between individual and situational interest for learning motivation?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between individual and situational interest, data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3, 4, 5 and 6 below.

Table 3 - Relationship between Individual and Situational Interest

		INDIVIDUAL	SITUATIONAL
INDIVIDUAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.693 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	181	181
SITUATIONAL	Pearson Correlation	.693 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	181	181

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

Table 3 shows there is an association between individual and situation interest. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between individual and situation interest ( $r=.693^{**}$ ) 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 individual and situation interest.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION 5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussions

The intention of this case study is to answer three research questions focusing on balancing individual and situational interest among learners. The first objective of this study is to see the influence of learners' situational interest on their learning motivation which is measured by 3 value components. For intrinsic goal orientation students think that understanding the content of the courses as the most satisfying thing while learning with mean value of 3.9. Then their ability to obtain good grades in the class is most satisfying for extrinsic goal orientation with mean value of 4.4. Lastly, for task value beliefs, students think that understanding the subject matter is very important with mean value of 4.1. How do learners' individual interest influence their learning motivation is the second research question. Under the expectancy components, with mean value of 3.6, students believe that other than their own skill, their performance in class will depend on the difficulty of the courses and also the teachers as the students' perception of self-efficacy. With a mean score of 4.2, students also believe that they will be able to understand the course materials if they try really hard as their control beliefs for learning. Then for the affective component, 4 items scored the same mean of 3.7. The majority of students are feeling nervous, thinking of the consequences of failing. They also think they didn't do well on the exam and keep on thinking of the parts of the test that they can't answer. As for the last research question, it can be concluded that there is a strong

positive relationship between individual and situation interest based on the correlation analysis done.

## 5.2 Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the summary, to get the best outcome in balancing the individual and situational interest, educators may have to create learning activities that can support the development of learners' expertise by considering different interests as this will greatly affect their learning ability. When designing learning activities, it is important to be flexible to match with learners' different interests (Ainley, 2006) and also to incorporate their personal goals. Considering different perspectives is also critical when designing learning activities (Dym et al., 2005). Future research can focus on how to merge different personal interests into a collective interest so that individual and situational interest meet to increase collective engagement, therefore students' motivation to learn becomes better. Thus more work needs to be done on exploring how different interests and ideas can be negotiated and synthesized during collaboration.

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