

Is There a Relationship between Motivation and Fear of Learning a Foreign Language?

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Abstract

Studies have shown that learners confront both positive and negative influences when learning a foreign language. On one hand, motivation is one of the conditions for learning a foreign language. A student who succeeds but lacks drive will almost certainly not obtain the required results. On the other hand, fear may be an impediment to students' success in the learning process. This study investigates the link between motivation and fear when learning a foreign language, as well as how motivation and fear impact foreign language acquisition. The quantitative technique was used in this study. As for the instrument, a survey was employed. Students were given a questionnaire with five sections: demographic profile, motivation to learn, communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The questionnaire was filled out by 188 students from three disciplines at a Malaysian public institution. The findings indicate that students did experience fear when learning a foreign language. Yet, the desire to study motivated students to exert some efforts to overcome the unfavourable influences. Result also shows that there was a relationship between motivation and fear of learning a foreign language. The research suggests effective teaching demands a thorough approach that considers the educator's beliefs and principles, student motivation, self-confidence, and the learning surroundings in which these elements interact.

Keywords: Motivation, Fear, Foreign Language Learning

Introduction

Background of Study

Motivation is concerned with the fundamental question of why people behave as they do, that is, the choosing of a certain activity, the persistence with it, and the effort invested on it

(Dornyei, 2014). As most foreign language teachers can attest, a student's degree of motivation plays a critical influence in their foreign or second language learning and acquisition. Although no scientific data exists to indicate that motivation leads to a successful conclusion, it is widely acknowledged that motivation is one of the most important determinants of success in acquiring a second or foreign language (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015; Nicholson, 2013). The rapid pace of globalisation has compelled many people to study other languages (Ramirez, 2014). This is also true for Malaysian setting. Foreign language classes have been included as part of language programmes in schools and colleges. However, learning a foreign language with numerous distinct linguistic features from one's own language will provide learners with new challenges. The students will be venturing into unknown area, which causes worry. They may perhaps be anxious about communication challenges since their opportunities to speak foreign languages outside of the classroom might be restricted. In addition, students might be concerned about receiving negative criticism from others for fear of losing face. As a result, students are worried of what others think of them and fear criticism and negative feedback. Therefore, it is vital to have a better understanding through investigating Malaysian students' motivation and fear to learn foreign languages.

Statement of Problem

The latest research in the field of motivation and fear of learning foreign languages suggests that creating a supportive learning environment, promoting a growth mindset, and providing opportunities for social interaction are key factors in helping students overcome their fear of learning a foreign language and enhance their motivation to learn. Creating a supportive learning environment involves fostering a sense of belonging, respect, and safety amongst students, which can be achieved through activities that promote collaboration, positive feedback, and encouragement. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013), this approach creates a positive emotional climate that enhances learners' willingness to take risks and participate in learning activities. Promoting a growth mindset involves instilling in students the belief that their abilities and skills can be developed through effort and practice. Research shows that individuals with a growth mindset are more likely to embrace challenges and persist in the face of setbacks (Dweck, 2006). In the context of learning a foreign language, promoting a growth mindset can help students develop a more positive attitude towards the learning process and overcome their fear of making mistakes. Finally, providing opportunities for social interaction can help students feel more connected to their peers and develop a sense of community within the classroom. Research shows that social interaction plays a critical role in language learning, as it provides learners with opportunities to practice speaking and listening skills in an authentic context (Gass & Mackey, 2015). Moreover, social interaction can foster a sense of motivation and engagement, as learners support each other's efforts and celebrate their achievements. Concisely, creating a supportive learning environment, promoting a growth mindset, and providing opportunities for social interaction are key factors in helping students overcome their fear of learning a foreign language and enhance their motivation to learn.

Foreign language learners face various challenges that can make it difficult for them to experience a supportive learning environment, a growth mindset, and social interaction, which can impact their motivation to learn. Amongst these challenges, fear and anxiety are commonly cited as significant barriers to language learning. Fear and anxiety can be caused by a range of factors, including fear of failure, negative past experiences with language

learning, self-doubt, and social anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Fear of failure can be particularly detrimental, as it can create a self-fulfilling prophecy where learners avoid challenging tasks and give up easily, which can negatively affect their motivation and confidence (Dörnyei, 2005). Moreover, fear and anxiety can affect learners' ability to interact with their peers and create a supportive learning environment. For example, learners who experience social anxiety may be hesitant to participate in group activities or speak in front of others, which can limit their opportunities for language practice and social interaction (Horwitz et al., 1986). Other challenges that can impact language learners' experience include lack of access to resources and support, limited exposure to the target language and culture, and a lack of relevance or interest in the language being learned (Mori, 2008). In summary, fear and anxiety are significant challenges that can make it difficult for foreign language learners to experience a supportive learning environment, a growth mindset, and social interaction, which can impact their motivation to learn.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore the relationship between motivation and fear of learning a foreign language. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- To investigate the way in which motivation influences the learning of a foreign language.
- To investigate the way in which fear influences the learning of a foreign language.
- To discover the relationship between motivation and fear of learning a foreign language.

In other words, this study is done to answer the following questions:

- How does motivation influence the learning of a foreign language?
- How does fear influence the learning of a foreign language?

Is there a relationship between motivation and fear of learning a foreign language?

Literature Review

Motivation for Learning a Foreign Language

Motivation is a key factor in determining success in foreign language learning (Tseng, 2021). According to Gardner (2001), motivation is a fundamental element that affects both the learning process and the outcome of language acquisition. Gardner's socio-educational model suggests that motivation is related to a range of factors, including the learner's attitudes towards the target language, the learning environment, and the learner's own sense of self. Research has shown that learners who are highly motivated tend to achieve better results in their language learning (Dörnyei, 2005). In the Malaysian context, motivation has been identified as a critical factor in language learning success. In a study by Lee and Lim (2015), Malaysian students' motivation to learn English was found to be strongly influenced by their perceptions of the usefulness of the language in achieving their academic and career goals. The study also identified the importance of external factors, such as the role of parents, teachers, and peers in motivating learners to engage in language learning activities. In other words, motivation is a crucial factor that influences the success of foreign language learning. Gardner's socio-educational model highlights the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in language learning. In Malaysia, learners' motivation to learn a foreign language is influenced by several factors, including their perceived usefulness of the language, external support, and cultural background. Therefore, further research is necessary to explore the

effectiveness of different motivational strategies in promoting foreign language learning in various situations.

Fear of Learning a Foreign Language

Learning a foreign language can be a daunting task for many people, and fear of language learning has been the subject of research in various contexts. Horwitz and Cope (1986) define foreign language anxiety (FLA) as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." Their study found that FLA is a significant factor in language learning success and can have a negative impact on motivation, self-esteem, and achievement. Their work has been widely cited and has become a foundational study in the field of language learning anxiety. Foreign language learning in Malaysia is an essential aspect of education due to the country's multicultural population and the need for a common language. However, research has shown that Malaysian students experience elevated levels of anxiety when learning a foreign language (Mamat & Yunus, 2015). Mamat and Yunus found that the most common sources of anxiety were fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of speaking in front of others. Their study highlights the need for language educators to address and mitigate these anxieties to promote successful language learning amongst Malaysian students. In conclusion, the fear of learning a foreign language is a significant issue that can impact language learning success. The work of Horwitz and Cope (1986) has provided a foundation for understanding foreign language anxiety, and subsequent studies, such as that conducted by Mamat and Yunus (2015) in the Malaysian context, have highlighted the need for language educators to address this anxiety. By acknowledging and addressing FLA, language educators can promote a positive learning environment that encourages language learning success.

Past Studies on Motivation to Learn a Foreign Language.

There have been many studies on foreign language learning. Based on literature, a quite number of studies were done by looking at motivation as one of the most important factors when it comes to learning a foreign language. Researchers who have investigated motivation in relation to learning a foreign language includes Rethinasamy et al (2021) who studied Malaysian students learning a foreign language. The research included 150 undergraduates from a Malaysian university. They discovered that students found listening and speaking skills to be more difficult than reading and writing and were unsure about their communication abilities in foreign language. They also learned that motivation for learning a foreign language was a combination of integrative and motivational factors. De Burgh-Hirabe's (2019) study aims to understand the motivation types and learning experiences of foreign language learners in New Zealand, where foreign language learning is neither required nor widely valued. The research used both qualitative (open-ended questionnaires) and quantitative (second language motivation survey) methods. The study found that while students were initially motivated by integratedness, positive learning experiences sustained their motivation and helped them build ideal second language selves. Another study on motivation in learning a foreign language was conducted by (Ramirez, 2014). The goal of the research was to uncover different motivational tactics to boost student motivation as well as the factors that influence motivation and success in foreign language acquisition. Twenty students from the intermediate trade course who had poor interest for learning a foreign language and low proficiency in the target language were chosen for this study. Before distributing questionnaires to the students, the researcher attended the classes and observed the

students' learning process. The teacher's teaching techniques that the researcher saw throughout the observation were the primary cause of the pupils' demotivation. The instructor had the tendency to stick with the old-fashioned approach and seemed to shun technological aids.

Conceptual Framework

The framework of this study (refer to Figure 1) is rooted from (Gardner, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986). According to Gardner (2001) motivation includes three elements; effort made by the learner to learn, desire (the learner wants to achieve a goal) and positive feedback (they enjoy the task of learning). Learners' motivations come from how they feel towards the learning activity; besides what they will get out of the task. These motives can either be primary or secondary (Rahmat, 2022). Primary motives include the psychological needs of the learners while secondary needs would be the benefits that the learner would get by being successful in the learning. In the context of this study, learning motivations can affect if or how the learners fear learning a foreign language. According to Horwitz & Cope (1986), communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. The more confident the learner is about the progress of the learning, the less they will have communication apprehension. Next, foreign language learners will have less fear of negative evaluation if they learn in a supportive and positive learning environment. Finally, the more prepared the learner is, the less test anxiety they will have.

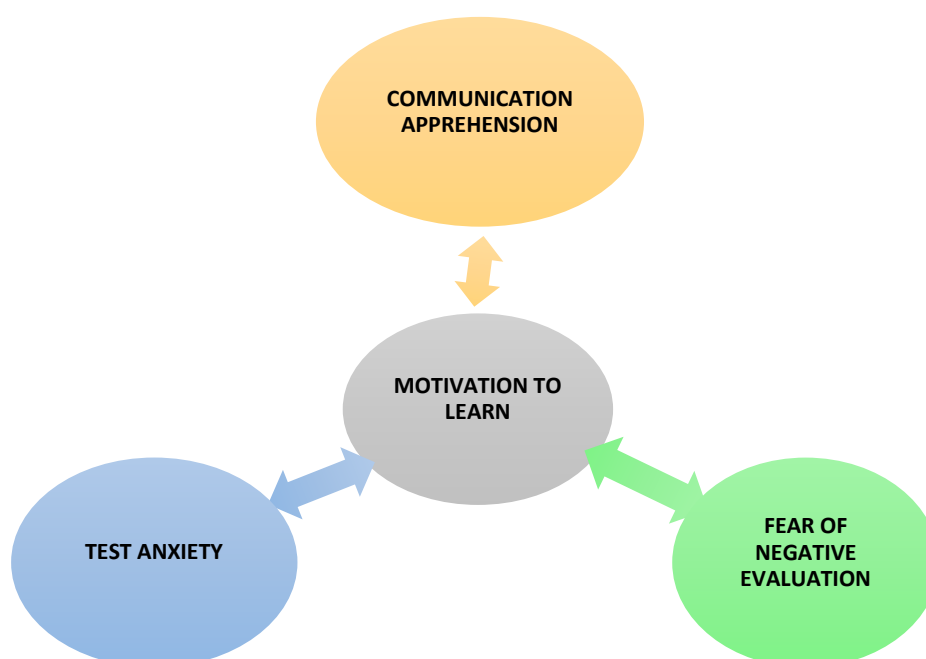


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-Relationship between Motivation to learn and fear of oral communication.

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning amongst undergraduates. A purposive sample of 188 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey. The instrument is adapted from (Gardner, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986). The distribution of items is presented in table 1 below. The survey has

43sections. 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.

Table 1

Distribution of Items in the Survey

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

Table 2

Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.913	44

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .913, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1 Gender

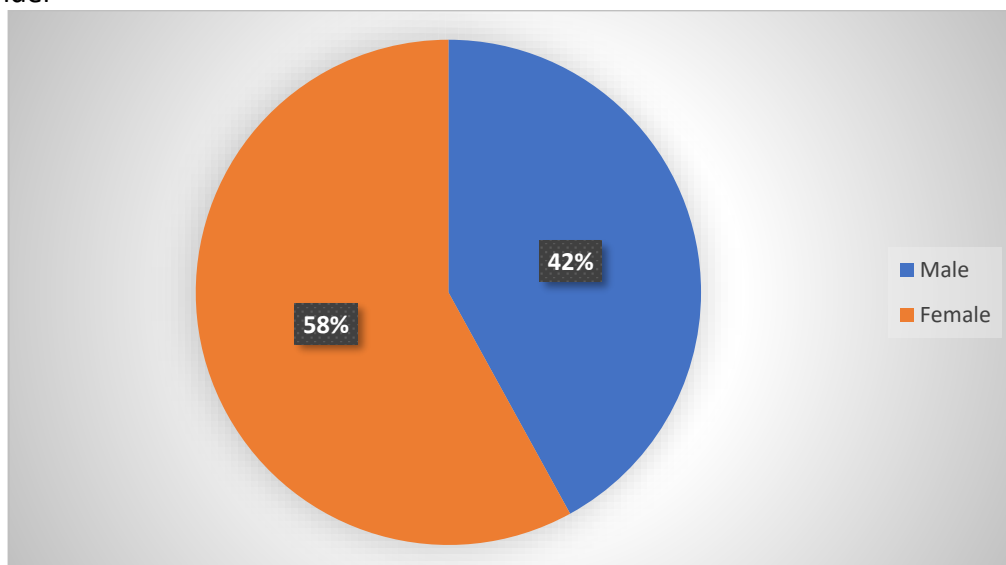


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 indicates the percentage of respondents according to gender. It shows that more female students participated in the study compared to male students.

Q2 Age range

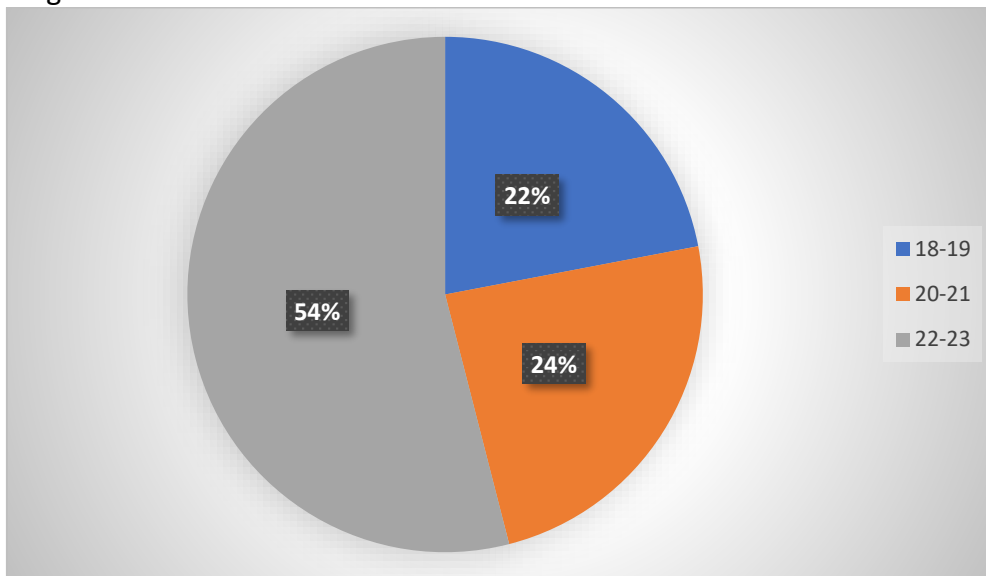


Figure 3- Percentage for Age range

Figure 3 demonstrates the percentage of respondents according to age range. Those aged 22 to 23 account for the greatest number of respondents which is 54% of the total number of respondents.

Q3 Current level of Study

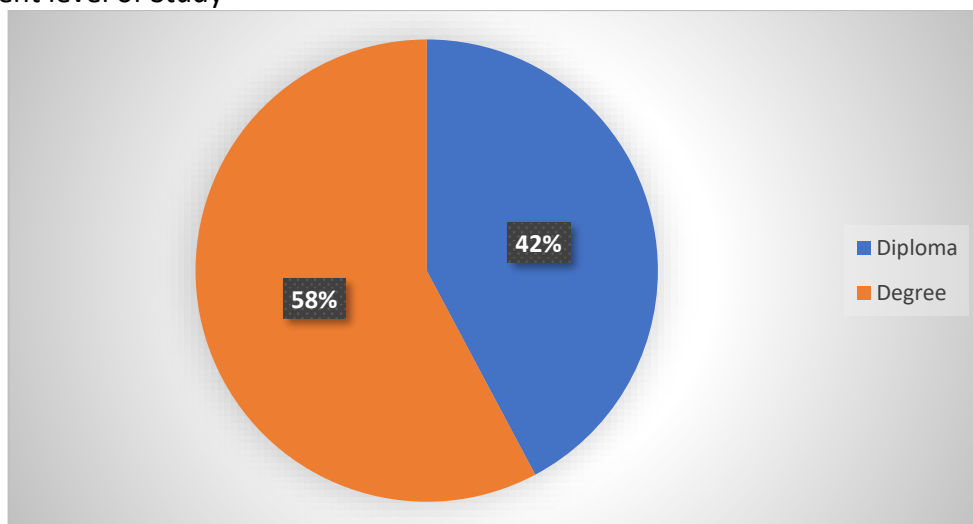


Figure 4- Percentage for Current level of Study

Figure 4 presents the percentage of respondents' current level of study. 52% of the respondents were degree students while 38% were students of diploma level.

Q4 Cluster

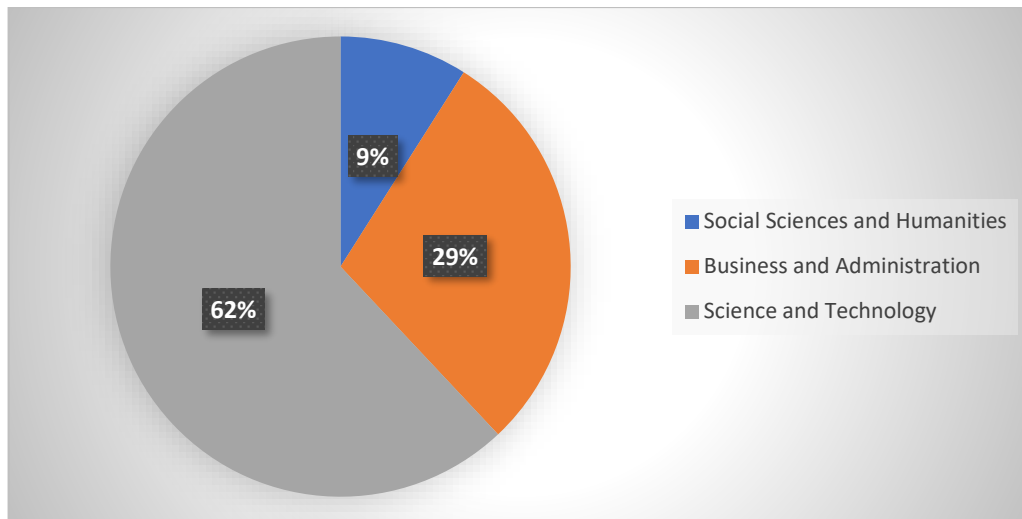


Figure 5- Percentage for Cluster

Figure 5 shows the percentage of respondents according to their study disciplines. It reveals that respondents who participated in this research were from three (3) disciplines, namely (in the order of highest to lowest percentage): Science and Technology, Business and Administration and, Arts and Humanities.

Findings for Motivation

This section presents findings to answer research question 1- How does motivation influence the learning of a foreign language?

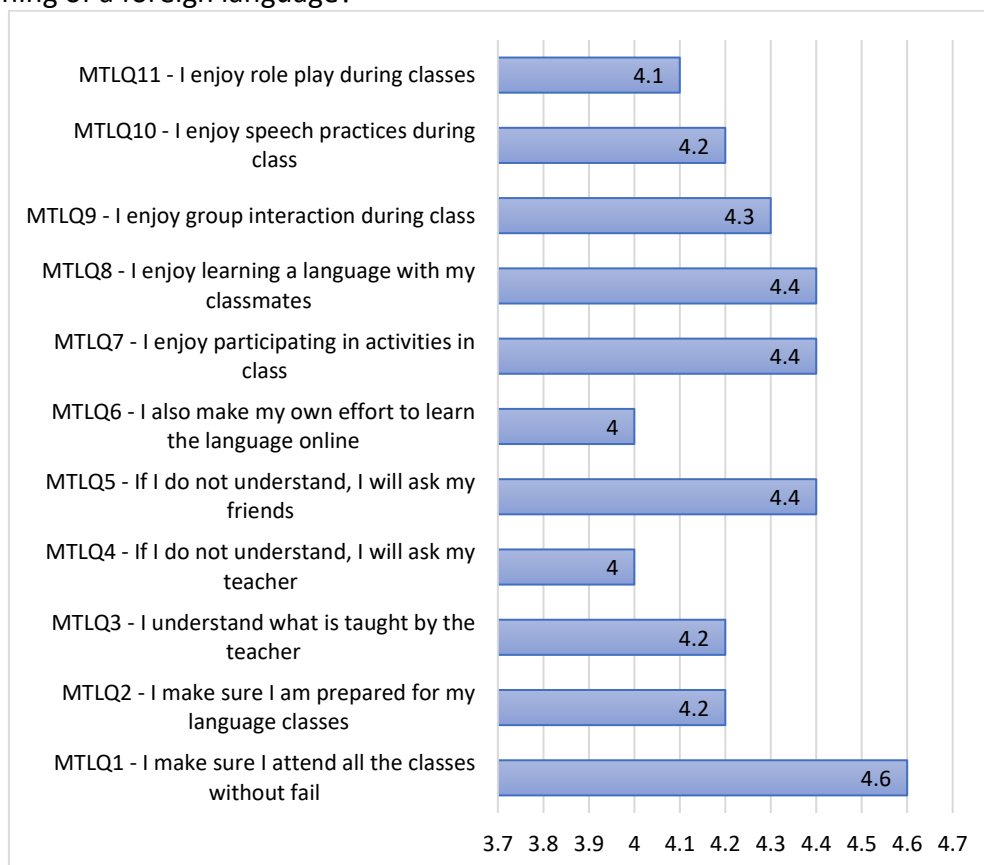


Figure 6: Mean for Motivation

Figure 6 shows the mean value for motivation. The highest mean value is 4.6 which belongs to the statement “I make sure I attend all the classes without fail” (item MTLQ1). The lowest mean value is 4 which belongs to the statements “If I do not understand, I will ask my teacher” (item MTLQ4) and “I also make my own effort to learn the language online” (item MTLQ6).

Findings for Fear of Learning a Foreign Language

This section presents findings to answer research question 2- How does fear influence the learning of a foreign language? In the context of this study, fear is measured by (i) communication apprehension, (ii) fear of negative evaluation and (iii) test anxiety.

(i) Communication Apprehension

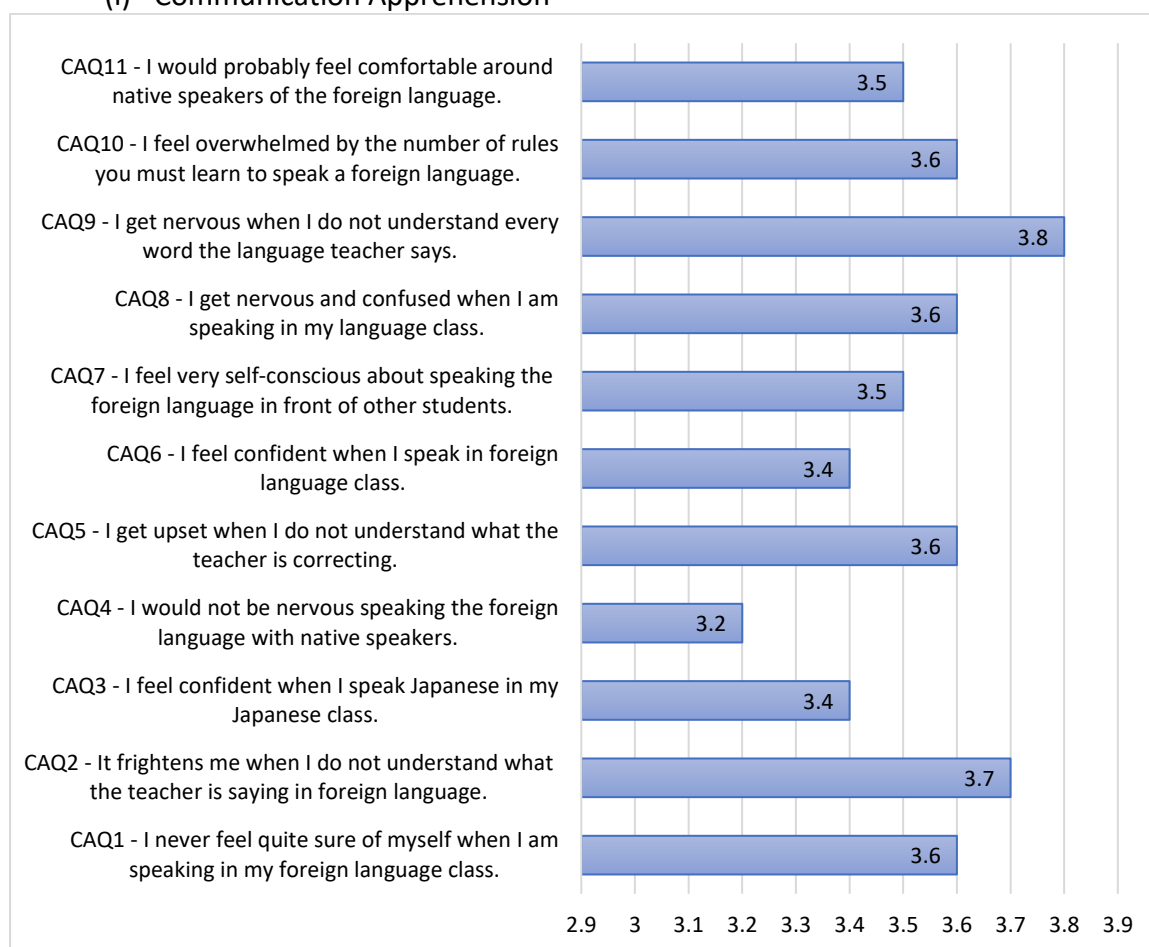


Figure 7: Mean for Communication Apprehension

Figure 7 displays the mean of each item for communication apprehension in learning foreign languages. Most of the students responded that they were nervous when they did not understand every word the language teacher said (item CAQ9), as they obtained the highest mean value of 3.8. Besides, item CAQ2 indicates that the students were frightened when they did not understand what the teacher was saying in foreign language, with the second highest mean value of 3.7. In addition, there are other four items (CAQ1, CAQ5, CAQ8 and CAQ10) under the categories ‘negative feelings’ (quite sure of myself, upset, nervous and confused, overwhelmed) which obtained the same mean value with 3.6. The data clearly reveals that the students gave higher score for the items used to measure ‘negative feelings’ as compared to ‘positive feelings’ items.

(ii) Fear of Negative Evaluation

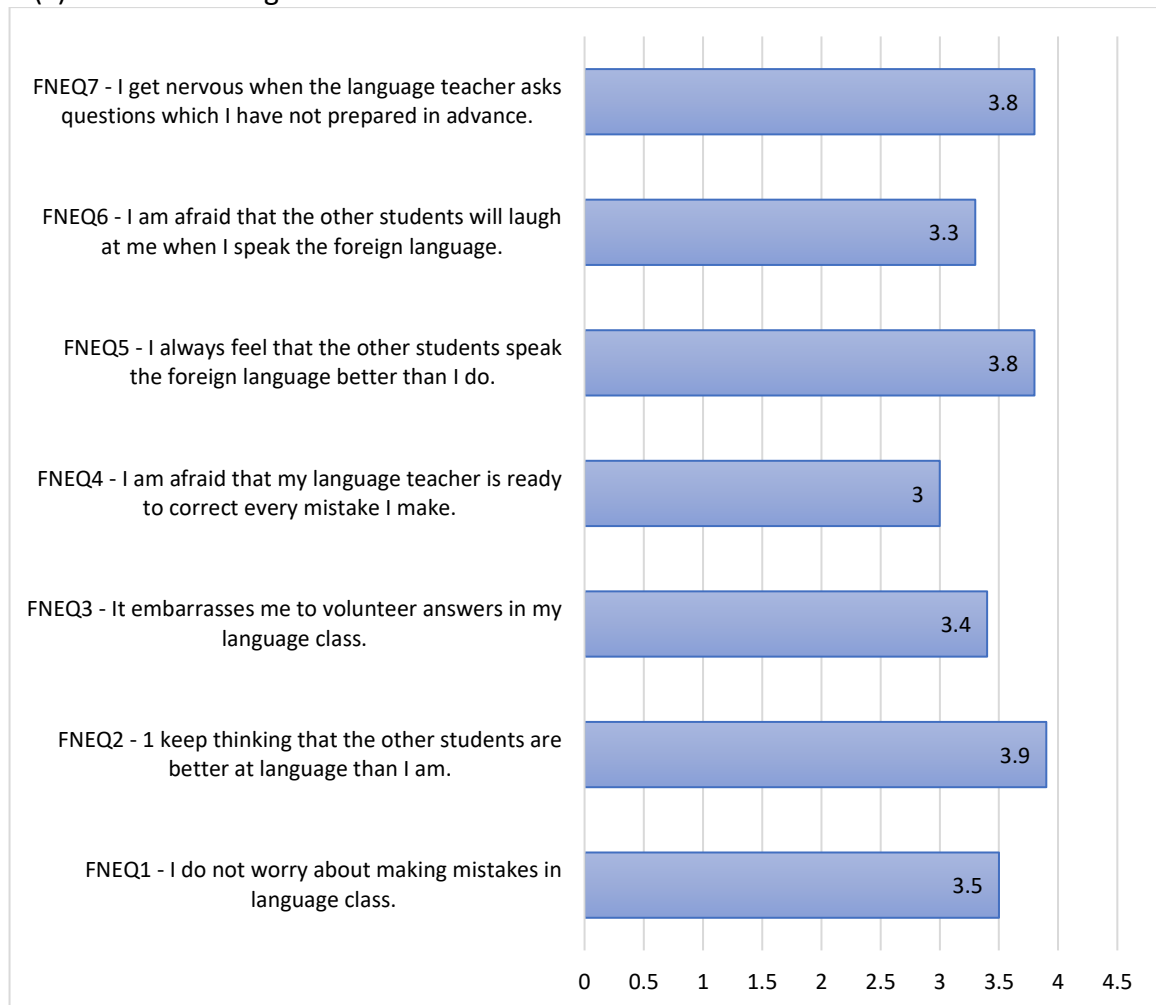


Figure 8: Mean for Fear of Negative Evaluation

Based on Figure 8, item FNEQ2 shows that many students thought that other students were better than them in terms of language, as they obtained the highest score of 3.9. In addition, item FNEQ5 also indicates that the students felt that other students were better in speaking foreign languages compared to themselves, with a score of 3.8. The students also felt nervous when asked a question by the language teacher when they are not prepared. This can be seen through item FNEQ7, where the score obtained is also 3.8. Meanwhile, the lowest score obtained is 3.0 through item FNEQ4. The students were afraid because the language teacher was always ready to correct any mistakes made by the students.

(iii) TEST ANXIETY

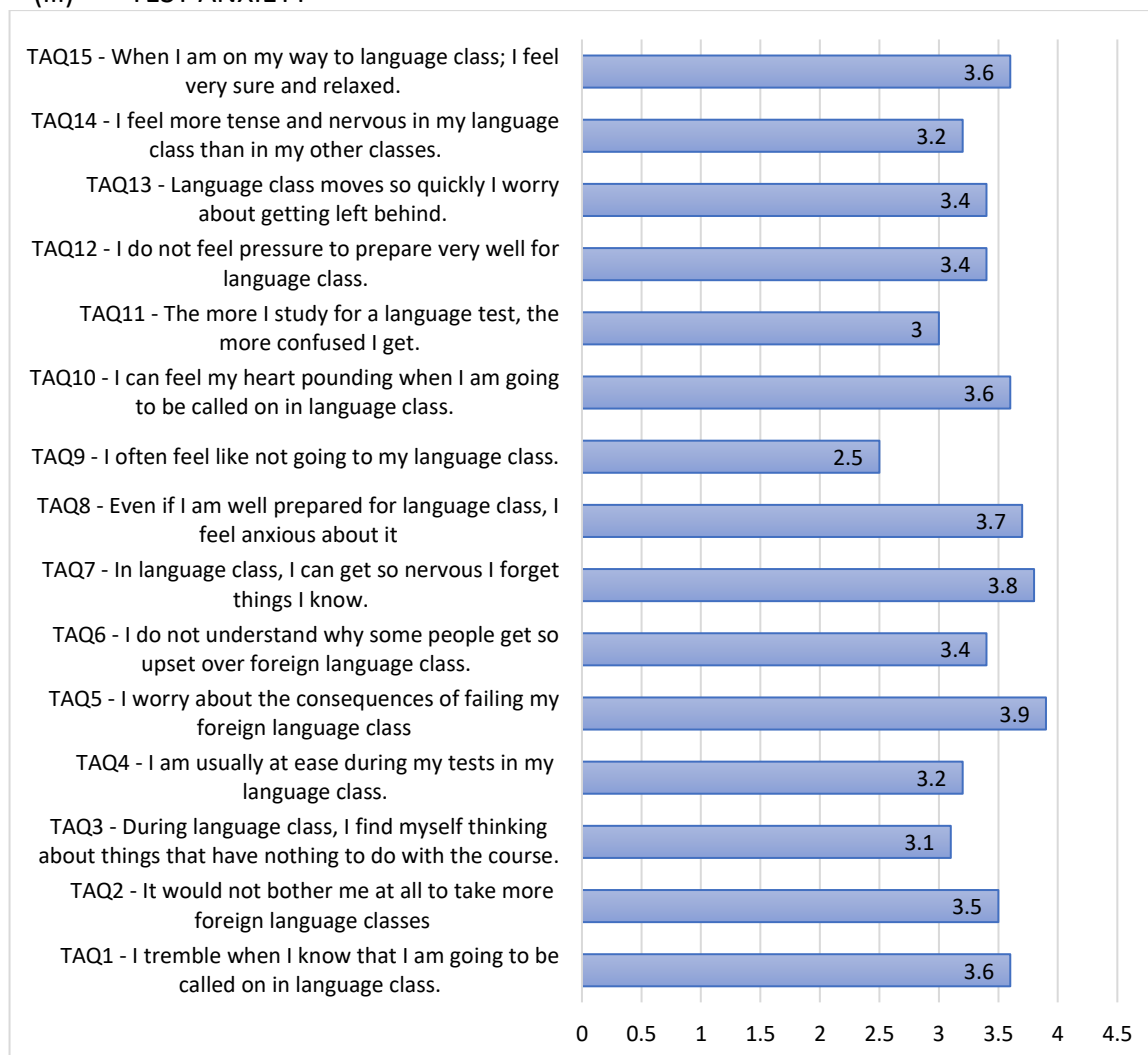


Figure 9: Mean for Test Anxiety

Figure 9 displays the questionnaire results for mean for test anxiety. Item TAQ6 holds the highest mean value at 3.9 in which students claimed that they were always worried about the consequences of failing their foreign language class. As for the lowest mean value, the score is at 3 for item TAQ11, the statement of which indicates that students got more confused as they prepared themselves for language test.

Findings for Relationship between Motivation and Fear of Learning a Foreign Language

This section presents findings to answer research question 3- Is there a relationship between motivation and fear of learning a foreign language?

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

Table 3

Correlation between Motivation and Communication Apprehension

Correlations

		TOTALMEAN MOTIVATION	TOTALMEAN COMMAPPRE HENSION
TOTALMEANMOTIVATIO N	Pearson Correlation	1	.423**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	188	188
TOTALMEANCOMMAPPRR EHENSION	Pearson Correlation	.423**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	188	188

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

Correlations

		TOTALMEAN MOTIVATION	TOTALMEAN COMMAPPRE HENSION
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	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	188	188

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

Table 3 shows there is an association between motivation and communication apprehension. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between motivation and communication apprehension ($r=.423^{**}$) 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 communication apprehension.

Table 4

Correlation between Communication Apprehension and Fear of Negative Evaluation

Correlations

		TOTALMEAN COMMAPPRE HENSION	TOTALMEAN FEARNEGATI VE
TOTALMEANCOMMAPPRR EHENSION	Pearson Correlation	1	.440**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	188	188
TOTALMEANFEARNEGA TIVE	Pearson Correlation	.440**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	188	188

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

Table 4 shows there is an association between communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation ($r=.440^{**}$) 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 communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation.

Table 5

Correlation between Communication Apprehension and Test Anxiety

		TOTALMEAN COMMAPPRE HENSION	TOTALMEAN TESTANXIET Y
TOTALMEANCOMMAPPRE HENSION	Pearson Correlation	1	.569**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	188	188
TOTALMEANTESTANXIE TY	Pearson Correlation	.569**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	188	188

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

Table 4 shows there is an association between communication apprehension and test anxiety. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between communication apprehension and test anxiety ($r=.569^{**}$) 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 communication apprehension and test anxiety.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The emphasis of Gardner's (2001) theory is on the outcomes and contexts of acquiring a second language. Numerous studies have demonstrated that favourable factors can overcome unfavourable factors during the second or foreign language learning process. In summary, this study uncovered intriguing insights on students' motivation and fear of learning a foreign language. First and foremost, motivation is a key factor in learning a foreign languages because it may lead students to achieve their goal or not. Lack of motivation leads to lack of effort and ultimately lack of success. Findings revealed that students' desire to learn is voluntary and instrumental. For example, they made sure that they attended all classes and if they had difficulty in understanding what was taught, they made efforts to ask their friends. Anderson (2018) showed that positive classroom experience is a vital factor in motivating students to learn a foreign language. Next, findings also revealed that foreign language learners needed social support. When it comes to fear of learning the language, they feared

not understanding what was taught by the teachers. They also had low self-esteem amongst their peers. In addition, they feared the consequences of failing. Alamer and Almulhim (2021) reported in their study that students can face many diverse types of fear such as study fear, fear of failing, fear of communicating, and fear of negative evaluation. Furthermore, the findings also proved that there is positive correlation between motivation and fear of learning a foreign language learning. To be specific, motivation is correlated with communication apprehension and comprehension apprehension is positively related to fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. This result is in line with the finding from Luo, Subramaniam, and O'Steen (2020) where they found that there is a significant and positive correlation between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning.

(Pedagogical) Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The impact of teachers' views and values on their teaching practices cannot be overstated, as stated by (Lamb, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers possess the necessary skills to motivate their students effectively. One way to achieve this is by utilising rewards as an incentive for students to learn. However, a truly learner-centred classroom must also consider the emotional needs of the students, which can be facilitated by creating a pleasant and non-threatening learning environment that fosters students' learning motivation. Indeed, instructors play a critical role in stimulating and maintaining students' motivation to learn a foreign language. One approach is to help students develop their own sense of self-efficacy, which refers to their belief in their ability to succeed in a particular task. This is crucial because self-efficacy has been found to be the most important factor affecting students' performance. When students have an elevated level of self-efficacy, they are more likely to take on challenging tasks and persist in their efforts even when faced with obstacles. To assist students in developing their self-efficacy, instructors can employ various external elements, such as instructional materials, learning activities, and course design, to enhance students' confidence in their ability to learn. Moreover, instructors should emphasise the importance of aptitude and hard work in achieving one's goals, as this can encourage students to put in the necessary effort to succeed. Overall, effective teaching requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the instructors' views and values, learner motivation, and self-efficacy, and the learning environment in which these factors interact.

For further research, there is a need to examine the link between fear and motivation learning a foreign language in various cultural contexts. This investigation could provide insight into how fear and motivation interact in different societies, and what factors may contribute to these experiences. Firstly, exploring the root causes of fear in different cultures could help to shed light on how fear impacts motivation. Fear can manifest in diverse ways and be influenced by a range of factors, including social, economic, and political conditions. Therefore, an investigation into the causes of fear in different contexts could reveal important insights into the motivational factors that are affected by it. Secondly, examining the contributory factors of motivation could also aid in understanding the relationship between fear and motivation. Factors such as personality traits, self-efficacy, and goal setting can have a significant impact on an individual's motivation to learn. By examining these factors across diverse cultures, researchers can gain a better understanding of how fear interacts with motivation to affect learning outcomes. Finally, investigating the connection between fear and motivation for enhanced learning outcomes could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of the learning process. Understanding how fear and motivation interact and impact

the learning experience can help educators design more effective learning environments that promote student success.

In conclusion, exploring the correlation between fear and motivation in diverse cultural contexts is an important avenue for further research. Investigating the causes of fear, contributory factors of motivation, and the connection between fear and motivation for enhanced learning outcomes can provide valuable insights into how these factors interact and can help to inform the development of more effective learning environments.

Theoretical and Contextual Contributions of Current Study

The theoretical contribution of this research is that it provides further evidence of the link between motivation and fear in foreign language learning. Previous research has found that motivation and fear are both important factors in foreign language learning (e.g., (Dornyei, 2001; Oxford, 1990). Motivation is the drive to learn a foreign language, while fear is the anxiety or apprehension that students may experience when learning a foreign language. This research found that students who were more motivated to learn a foreign language were also less likely to experience fear. This suggests that motivation can help to buffer against the negative effects of fear.

For example, Dornyei (2001) found that motivation was a significant predictor of foreign language achievement, even after controlling for other factors such as aptitude and anxiety. Oxford (1990) also found that motivation was a key factor in successful foreign language learning. She found that students who were more motivated were more likely to persist in their studies, even when they encountered difficulties.

This research builds on this previous research by providing further evidence of the link between motivation and fear in foreign language learning. The research findings suggest that motivation can help to buffer against the negative effects of fear, and that teachers should focus on building students' motivation in order to help them overcome their fears.

The contextual contribution of this research is that it provides insights into the experiences of Malaysian students learning a foreign language. The research found that Malaysian students experienced a range of fears when learning a foreign language, including the fear of having no clear understanding of their lessons, the fear of being ridiculed, and the fear of failing to learn the language. The research also found that students who were more motivated to learn a foreign language were more likely to overcome these fears. For example, the research found that there is a moderate positive relationship between motivation and communication apprehension, between communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation, and a strong positive relationship between communication apprehension and test anxiety. The research also found that students who were more motivated to learn a foreign language were less likely to experience these fears.

This research provides valuable insights into the experiences of Malaysian students learning a foreign language. The research findings suggest that teachers should be aware of the spectrum of apprehension that Malaysian students may experience when learning a foreign language, and that they should take steps to help students overcome these fears.

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