

THE INFLUENCE OF FEAR AND MOTIVATION TOWARDS THE LEARNING OF MANDARIN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Mandarin learners' views on how anxiety and motivation affect language acquisition and answers three research questions: i. What is the perception of learners regarding their fear of acquiring proficiency in a foreign language? ii. How do learners perceive their level of motivation to acquire proficiency in a foreign language? iii. Does a correlation exist between the fear of acquiring knowledge and the level of motivation to acquire proficiency in a foreign language? This quantitative study used purposive sampling to survey 141 UiTM Mandarin students. The 5-point Likert scale used in the survey is based on Gardner (2001) and Horwitz et al. (1986). The survey has three parts. Section A covers demographics. Section B covers motivation. Section C covers anxiety about learning a foreign language. Research shows language acquisition issues and negative evaluations contribute to student learning anxiety. Mandarin exams may cause learning anxiety, but they don't affect language acquisition. Students learn Chinese independently for three main reasons: Mandarin's popularity, job prospects, and the desire to travel and experience Chinese culture. Another factor is student enjoyment of classroom activities. However, current empirical research cannot definitively link Mandarin language anxiety and language learning motivation.

Keywords: Anxiety, Language Learning, Mandarin Language, Motivation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Acquiring proficiency in a different language provides you with a competitive advantage. China's ascent has elevated Mandarin to a highly sought-after language to acquire. The Belt and Road Initiatives have sparked the curiosity of Mandarin learners. Over the past decade, ASEAN nations that have strong connections with China have witnessed the tangible manifestation of the "Chinese boom" since the inception of the Belt and Road Initiative. The increase in demand for technical professionals proficient in Mandarin is the reason behind this shift, as they are required to implement the initiative in various sectors. Furthermore, several Middle Eastern and African countries have implemented Chinese

language programs, in addition to ASEAN. The number of individuals learning and speaking Mandarin is experiencing a significant and rapid increase.

Nevertheless, acquiring proficiency in Mandarin is widely regarded as challenging. The intricacy of language, distinct characters, and subtle inflections pose challenges for individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. These factors contribute to the emotional and cognitive difficulties that children encounter in their education. Fear and motivation play a vital role in the achievement and well-being of Mandarin language learners within this context.

It is imperative for individuals studying Mandarin, educators, developers of educational programs, and decision-makers to comprehend the correlation between fear and motivation. Studying the impact of fear and motivation on learning can enhance Malaysian learning strategies and support systems. Consequently, this can equip individuals with the aptitude and self-assurance to rapidly and fervently acquire Mandarin language proficiency.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The demand for Mandarin among non-Chinese learners has experienced significant growth over the past decade. Mandarin exhibits distinctions in comparison to Malay and English. The distinctive phonetics and ideographic script of Mandarin can pose challenges for learners and elicit apprehension or unease in non-Chinese students studying the language. The extent to which students can conquer fear and anxiety is contingent upon their level of motivation. To alleviate anxiety and enhance motivation in foreign language learning, researchers need to analyse the pattern of students' learning anxiety and develop a comprehensive model of motivation.

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), it is important to differentiate foreign language learning anxiety from other forms of anxiety. Horwitz classifies foreign language learning anxiety into three categories: comprehension apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. In addition, Horwitz and Cope (1986) created the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a widely utilised tool in studies and research on foreign language anxiety. Ting et al. (2016) employed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to evaluate the level of anxiety related to the Mandarin language among non-Chinese undergraduates at UiTM. Ting reported that the students exhibited moderate levels of anxiety, primarily stemming from communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

According to numerous studies, motivation plays a crucial role in achieving success in language learning. Gardner's motivation theory has significantly influenced the motivation of individuals learning second and foreign languages for many years. According to Gardner (2001), "motivation" can be defined as active engagement in language learning, driven by the desire to accomplish a specific objective and experiencing positive emotions as a result. Gardner and his colleagues introduced integrative and instrumental orientations as factors that influence motivation. According to Gardner (1985), an integrative orientation refers to a favourable perception of the second language community and a strong aspiration to become a part of it. Instrumental orientation, in contrast to integrative orientation, entails acquiring a second language for pragmatic purposes such as enhancing employment prospects or increasing income.

1.3 Objective of the Study and Research Questions

Anxiety is a contributing factor in the process of acquiring a second language. When engaging in the acquisition of the Chinese language, students inevitably experience a certain level of anxiety associated with learning a foreign language. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of learners regarding their fear and motivation in the context of

foreign language acquisition. This study is conducted to address the following research inquiries:

- How do learners perceive their fear of learning a foreign language?
- How do learners perceive their motivation to learn a foreign language?
- Is there a relationship between fear of learning and motivation to learn a foreign language?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Fear of Learning a Foreign Language

In the process of learning Mandarin, non-Chinese learners may experience a certain level of foreign language fear or anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) conducted research on foreign language learning anxiety as an independent phenomenon distinct from other forms of anxiety in the language learning process. During their study, Horwitz and her colleagues discovered that many students considered learning a foreign language to be more anxiety-inducing than any other subject. They directed people's attention to classroom anxiety and, based on their research and the situational anxiety theory, developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Subsequently, these researchers began to recognize the impact of fear factors on the learning of Chinese as a foreign language, leading to empirical studies on learning anxiety and achieving some results.

2.2 Motivation to Learn a Foreign Language

Motivation plays a pivotal role in the process of learning a foreign language. It is often related as one of the primary driving forces behind an individual's success in acquiring proficiency in a new language. Motivation in the context of foreign language learning encompasses a complex interplay of cognitive, affective, and social factors that influence an individual's willingness to engage in the language learning process.

Motivation is not a one-size-fits-all concept, and its manifestation can vary across cultures and contexts. Kim's research (2001) on Korean learners of English, for example, found that integrative motivation was more pronounced among learners who admired Western culture, while instrumental motivation was linked to career goals. Recent studies continue to explore motivation, considering evolving factors such as technology and globalization. Warschauer and Meskill (2000) examined the impact of computer-assisted language learning on motivation, suggesting that technology can enhance motivation by providing interactive and engaging language learning experiences.

Past research on motivation in foreign language learning has enriched our understanding of the multifaceted nature of motivation. While early theories provided a foundation, contemporary studies have explored the interplay of diverse factors, including attitudes, classroom dynamics, cultural influences, and emerging technologies. These insights not only inform language educators but also contribute to the development of effective language learning strategies and policies that aim to promote motivation and proficiency in foreign language acquisition.

2.3 Past Studies on Fear of Learning a Foreign Language

Anxiety is a psychological and physical response to threat, a self-concept characterized by subjective, consciously perceived feelings of tension (Spielberger, 1983). Chinese scholars Wang and Wan (2001) argued that anxiety is an emotional state characterized by prolonged inability to achieve goals or overcome obstacles, resulting in a threat to one's self-esteem and

self-confidence, as well as an increase in feelings of failure and guilt. In short, anxiety induced by fear is an emotional variable and a psychological abnormality.

There have been many past studies on the fear of learning a Foreign Language. Zheng (2006) surveyed the influencing factors of international students' Chinese communicative behaviours. The study found that the interaction of gender and cultural background affected communicative fear and frequency of communication.

Li Ning (2013) used the Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale to conduct questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations with Southeast Asian international students in Guangxi colleges and universities to investigate the learners' Chinese language learning anxiety and the status of individual differences. His research results showed that the Chinese language learning anxiety of international students was moderate. Learners' differences (e.g., learning experience, subjective evaluation of Chinese language proficiency) affect international students' Chinese learning anxiety.

Ting et al. (2016) researched to investigate Mandarin language anxiety level and its associated factors among non-Chinese learners and found that most of the non-Chinese learners experienced a moderate level of anxiety while learning Mandarin. The main factor that contributed to their language anxiety was communication apprehension, followed by fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

Rahmat (2020) has many studies on foreign language learning. She states that anxiety about foreign language learning affects other performance and achievement in other language-related areas, creating a cycle of fear. Findings reveal that the communication apprehension that students portray, can lead to a fear of tests, negative evaluations, and even foreign language classes.

Rahmat et al. (2021) continued to further explore this the following year as well. Their study investigated the fear of foreign language learning among undergraduates, examining factors related to learners, instructors, and planned activities. The findings of this study revealed that fear of foreign language learning can manifest in the classroom through direct learning.

Abdullah et al. (2022) explored factors influencing students' lecture attendance and their potential reasons for discontinuing. Results of the survey revealed that students encounter fear and anxiety during lectures, but their desire to learn encourages them to overcome these challenges.

After reviewing the aforementioned studies, researchers have found that learning motivation plays a pivotal role in overcoming challenges such as fear and anxiety.

2.4 Past Studies on Motivation to Learn a Foreign Language

The study of motivation in foreign language learning has been a subject of extensive research for several decades. Scholars and researchers have delved into various aspects of motivation, seeking to understand its impact on language acquisition and the factors that influence learners' motivation. Many Studies have been done to investigate the learning of a foreign language, especially in terms of issues like how to recognize and reduce anxiety and how motivation takes place in the process of learning a foreign language.

The investigation conducted by Du Suyi (2010) delved into the intricate interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors on the motivation of Malaysian university students as they embark on the journey of acquiring proficiency in Mandarin. The author meticulously references pertinent reports that provide an insightful overview of the landscape of Mandarin language acquisition within the Malaysian context. The empirical findings illuminate that Malaysian university students, on average, exhibit a general moderation in their level of

motivation when it comes to the pursuit of Mandarin proficiency. Notably, self-efficacy, valence, and intrinsic interest emerge as potent catalysts directly impacting the motivational behaviours of learners. In contrast, learning objectives, attitude, self-efficacy, and learning apprehension exert their influence indirectly on motivational behaviour. It is noteworthy that learning apprehension and self-efficacy stand out as factors casting a negative shadow on motivation, while the remaining factors contribute positively to the motivational landscape. Of paramount significance, valence assumes the mantle of the most influential factor in this intricate motivational tapestry, followed closely in significance by attitude, learning objectives, intrinsic interest, learning apprehension, and self-efficacy.

Furthermore, this comprehensive study underscores the pivotal realization that Malaysian university students, each traversing their unique trajectory of Mandarin language motivation, draw sustenance from divergent wellsprings of inspiration. For those whose Mandarin learning motivation appears more subdued, their incentives predominantly hinge on the affability they experience with their Mandarin instructors. Conversely, students with a more moderate inclination toward Mandarin learning pinpoint their motivation primarily to their positive disposition toward the Mandarin courses they engage in. In stark contrast, learners with an elevated zeal for Mandarin mastery primarily derive their impetus from the didactic materials encapsulated within their Mandarin textbooks. This illuminating inquiry reaffirms the notion that second language learners, irrespective of their geographic origins, navigate their linguistic journeys with distinct motivations. Within the specific milieu of Malaysian academia, instrumental motivation emerges as the predominant driving force propelling university students towards Mandarin proficiency.

Zubairi and Sarudin (2009) investigated the factors that drive Malaysian students to acquire proficiency in foreign languages. The survey was participated by more than 500 students from UKM and UiTM. The results indicated that both internal and external factors influenced the acquisition of foreign language proficiency in students from both educational institutions. However, t-tests demonstrated noteworthy disparities in motivation levels between the two universities. UKM students exhibited a higher degree of extrinsic motivation in acquiring a foreign language compared to UiTM students. The disparity could potentially be attributed to UKM's policy of not mandating foreign language courses for graduation, in contrast to UiTM. According to this study, enforcing compulsory foreign language requirements could enhance students' language proficiency and motivation. Proficiency in foreign languages can provide graduates with not only the ability to utilise modern technology and access information but also with additional advantages. Additionally, it can provide them with a competitive advantage in an evolving professional environment.

When a learner is motivated, they are more likely to engage with the language, practice regularly, and persist even in the face of difficulties, which can lead to successful language acquisition and improved language proficiency (Seven, 2020). It can also affect the quality of learning, as motivated learners tend to be more focused, attentive, and proactive in seeking out learning opportunities (Steinmayr et al., 2019). They may also be more willing to take risks and experiment with the language, which can help them to develop greater fluency and accuracy.

Both motivation and fear can significantly impact a person's ability to learn a foreign language. Understanding how these factors influence language learning can help educators and learners alike to create effective strategies for language acquisition. Therefore, there is a need to study the influence of motivation and fear in the learning of foreign languages in the context of Malaysian students.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Fig. 1 below. This study explores the influence of fear of learning on motivation to learn a foreign language. According to Rahmat

(2020), the cycle of fear in learners can paralyse their motivation to learn a foreign language. According to Horwitz et al. (1986) learners' fear can be caused by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. If this fear is not checked by learners, they can lose motivation to learn. Gardner (2001) states motivation to learn a foreign language is portrayed in how positive the learners are towards the learning activities.

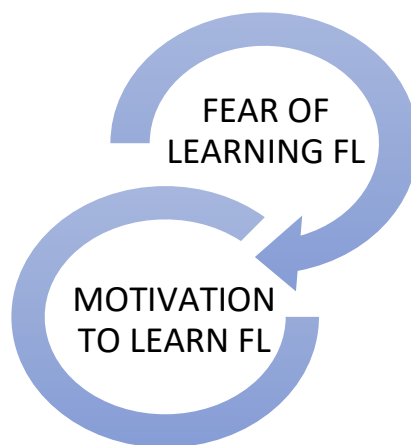


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study-Influence of Fear on Motivation to Learn a Foreign Language

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning a foreign language among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 141 participants who took the Mandarin course (code: TMC401, TMC451 & TMC501) at the University of Technology Mara responded to the survey, and they were given a week to complete the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted in Gardner (2001) and Horwitz et al. (1986) to reveal the variables in Table 1 below. The survey has 3 sections. Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 16 items on motivation. Section C has 33 items on the fear of learning a foreign language.

Table 1. Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	VARIABLE	SUB-CATEGORY	NO OF TERMS	
B	MOTIVATION TO LEARN (Gardner, 2001)			16
C	FEAR OF LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (Horwitz et al. 1986)	COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION	11	
		FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION	7	
		TEST ANXIETY	15	
				33
				49

Table 2- Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.873	49

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .873, 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 Fear of Learning Mandarin

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive their fear of learning the Mandarin language? According to Horwitz et al. (1986), fear of learning a foreign language can be categorised into three and they are (i) comprehension apprehension, (ii) fear of negative evaluation, and (iii) test anxiety.

(i) COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

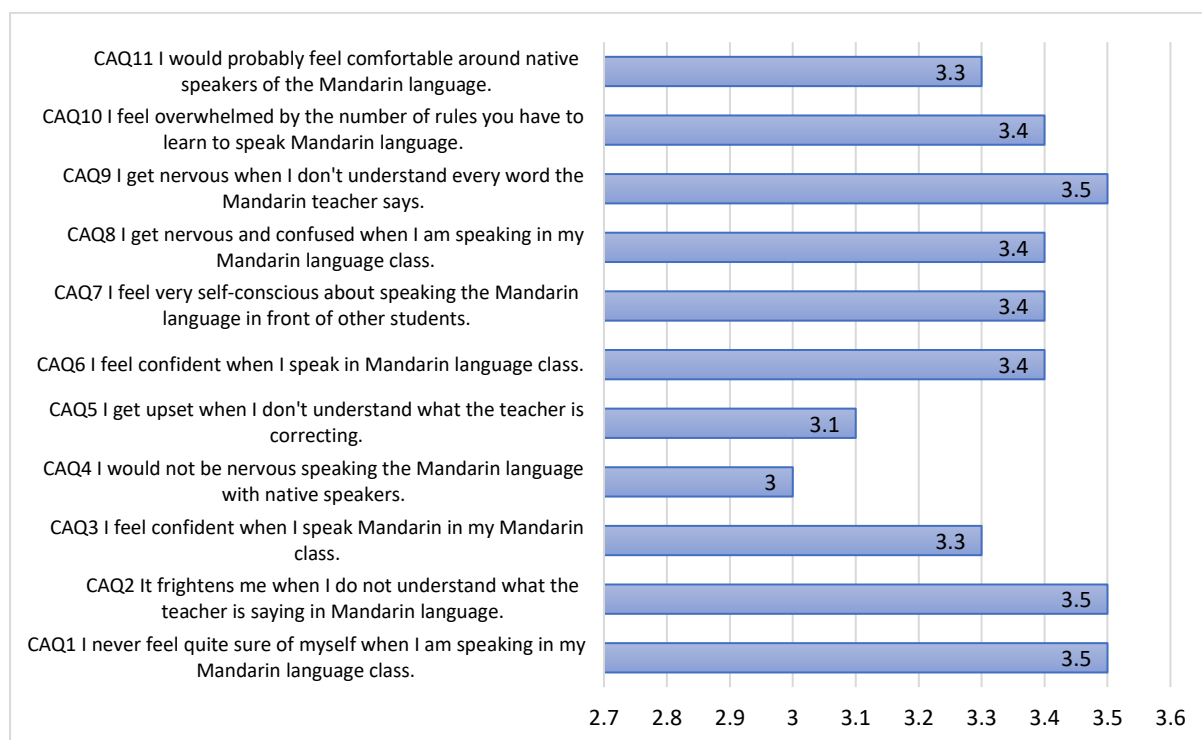


Fig. 6. Mean for Communication Apprehension

According to information in Fig. 6 above, the mean value of all questions exceeded 3, but not over 3.5, which showed that students experienced a moderate level of communication apprehension while learning and communicating in Mandarin. The highest mean score (3.5) for CA was present in three questions below: "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my Mandarin language class", "It frightens me when I do not understand what the

teacher is saying in the Mandarin language”, and also “I get nervous when I don't understand every word the Mandarin teacher says.” This shows that students feel frightened when they find difficulties understanding what the teacher is saying in Mandarin language. Students also have no confidence in Mandarin speaking during the language class. The mean scores for “I would not be nervous speaking the Mandarin language with native speakers” are slightly lower (3.0), which shows that students are quite stressed when speaking with Mandarin native speakers. This might prevent students from performing well in Mandarin speaking and communicating.

(ii) FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION

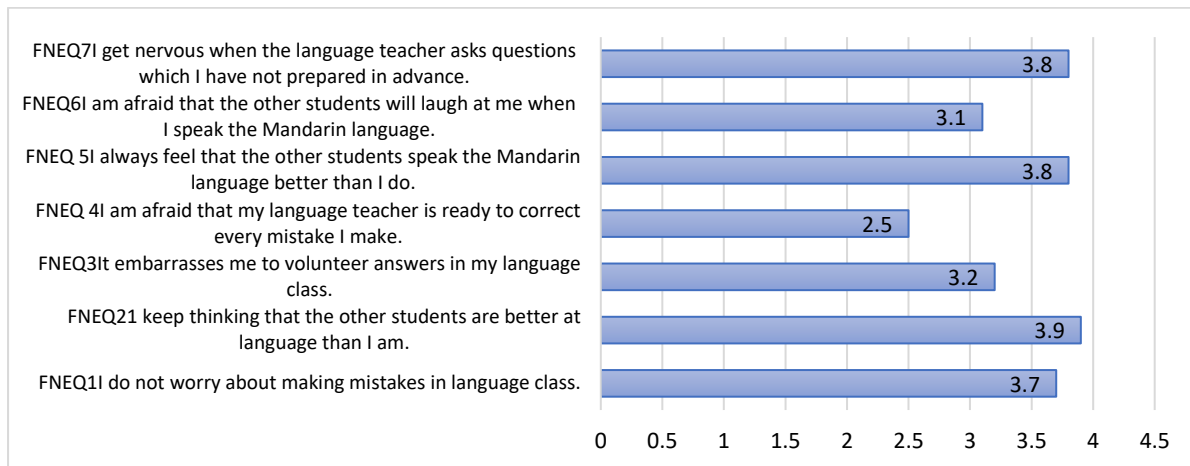


Fig. 7. Mean for Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) is widely recognised as a fundamental characteristic of social anxiety disorder. Cognitive theories posit that fear arises due to individuals' tendency to engage in biased information processing, particularly when anticipating events that elicit fear, (Clark & McManus, 2002). The phenomenon of fear of negative evaluation in the context of Mandarin Language learning encompasses three distinct aspects. These include individuals experiencing apprehension towards evaluations made by others, experiencing frustration because of receiving negative evaluations and holding the belief that others will perceive them unfavourably.

According to the findings presented in Fig. 7, the statement " I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am " received the highest score of 3.9. Additionally, the statement "I always feel that the other students speak the Mandarin language better than I do." obtained a mean score of 3.8. There is a widely held belief that the presence of competitiveness and ambition among students, to surpass their peers in the educational journey, can evoke sentiments of disgust upon recognising their own perceived shortcomings. Consequently, this can result in the occurrence of anxiety. The presence of self-esteem in students leads to feelings of anxiety when language teachers pose questions that have not been prepared in advance. This anxiety stems from the fear of making mistakes in written or spoken language during class discussions. That is also the reason they are afraid that the other students will laugh at them when they speak Mandarin language. (3.1) These lead them to experience feelings of embarrassment when volunteering to answer in their language class.

(iii) TEST ANXIETY

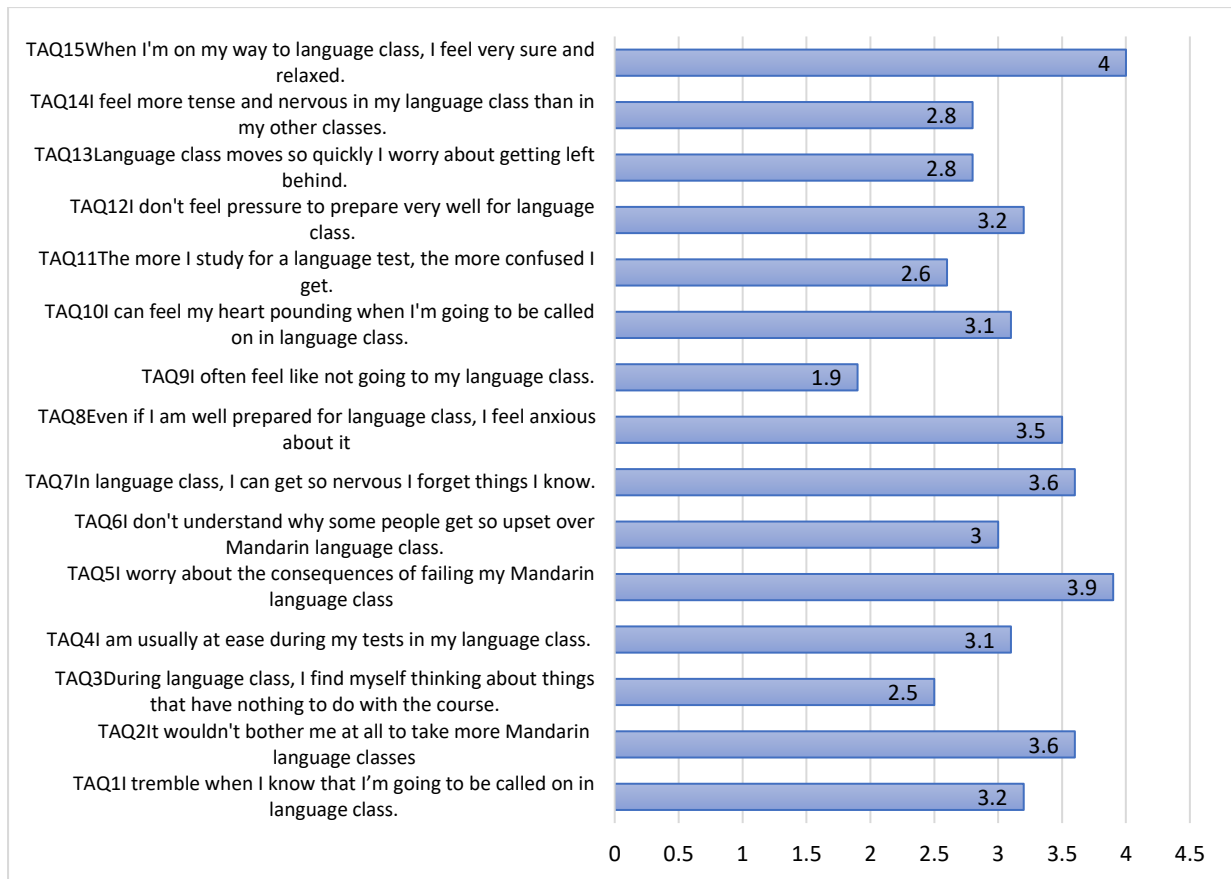


Fig. 8. Mean for Fear of Test Anxiety

Students have self-doubt and are demotivated when they perceive not doing well in the exam (Ismail et al., 2023). In some ways, testing of any kind tends to create a certain amount of anxiety for students (Li & Liu 2008). According to Fig. 8, students “worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class” (3.9). Because students are concerned about their scores, “Even if I am well prepared for a language class, I feel anxious about it” (3.5), leading to “I can get so nervous I forget things I know” (3.6). When students are called upon, they experience “trembling” (3.2) and “can feel my heart pounding” (3.1). The mean value of all these questions exceeded 3, indicating the students' anxiety. Emotionality is associated with emotional facets that trigger an uncontrolled nervous system in producing physical reactions; nausea, and sweaty palms (Daud et al., 2022). The findings in this section support this argument.

In addition, “I often feel like not going to my language class.” (1.9) and “During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course” (2.5) are the two lowest-scoring factors in test anxiety. “I am usually at ease during my tests in my language class.” (3.1), indicating a positive attitude towards language classes. “The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.” (2.6). Reviewing homework helps students face exams. “Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind” (2.8), and “I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes” (2.8) both have meant less than 3. For the more positive questions, good feedback was received from students. “I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.” (3.2), “When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed” (4.0), and “It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.” (3.6). This suggests that students do not resist taking

Mandarin classes. Thus, the pressure and anxiety of Mandarin exams do not affect the motivation of non-Chinese students to learn Mandarin.

4.2 Findings for Motivation to Learn

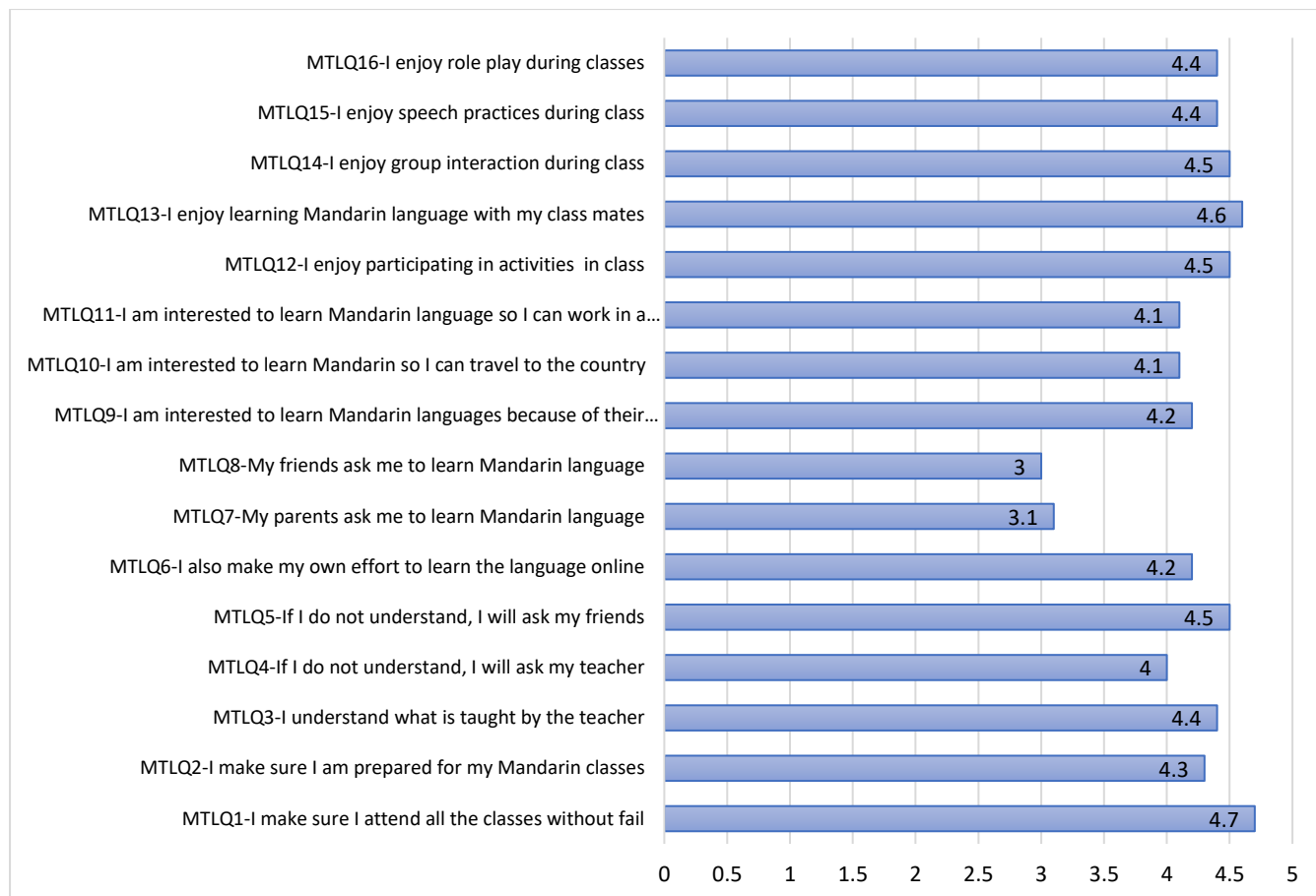


Fig 9. Mean for Motivation to learn a language

This section of the report focuses on presenting data and insights gathered to address Research Question 2, which delves into learners' perspectives on their motivation to acquire proficiency in the Mandarin language.

The findings suggest that learners' motivation to learn Mandarin language is influenced by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. According to Fig. 9, students show intrinsic motivation as they “make sure to attend all the classes without fail.” (4.7), “make sure I am prepared for Mandarin classes.” (4.3), and if they don’t understand, they will take the initiative to ask their teacher (4.0) or friends (4.5). “I also make my effort to learn the language online.” (4.2), the mean value of all these questions exceeded 4, meaning students are showing highly motivated by personal interest and passion in Mandarin language learning. The mean findings of students being told to learn the Mandarin language are low, either by parents (3.1) or by friends (3.0) showing that students' motives of learning are genuinely driven by personal interest, self-improvement, and passion for the Mandarin language. The findings prove what we discussed earlier in section “2.4 Past Studies on Motivation to Learn a foreign language”, when a learner is motivated, they are more likely to engage with the language, practice regularly, and persist even in the face of difficulties, which can lead to successful language acquisition and improved language proficiency (Seven, 2020).

Some learners were motivated by external factors, including academic requirements, career opportunities, and travel prospects associated with language proficiency. These practical benefits and social connections also significantly contributed to sustained motivation. “I am interested in learning Mandarin language because of their popularity.” (4.2), “I am interested to learn Mandarin so I can travel to the country.” (4.1), Recognizing and addressing challenges, setting realistic goals, and employing adaptive learning strategies emerged as effective methods to enhance motivation and facilitate more effective language acquisition. Peer and societal influence played a substantial role in motivating learners, with the mean in findings “I enjoy learning Mandarin language with my classmates.” (4.6), “I enjoy participating in activities in class.” (4.5), “I enjoy group interaction during class.” (4.5), “I enjoy speech practices during class.” (4.4) and lastly “I enjoy role play during classes.” (4.4) showing influential figures and connections of participants demonstrated a willingness to adapt their learning methods based on what proved most effective for them.

4.3 Findings for Relationship between motivation to learn and fear of learning a foreign language

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

To ascertain the presence of a statistically significant relationship in the average scores among metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social, and affective strategies, the data is subjected to analysis utilising SPSS software to compute correlations. The findings are displayed distinctly in Table 3 provided below.

Table 3. Correlation between Fear of Learning a Language and Motivation

		FEARLL	MOTIVATION
FEARLL	Pearson Correlation	1	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.193
	N	141	141
MOTIVATION	Pearson Correlation	.110	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.193	
	N	141	141

The findings presented in Table 5 indicate a lack of significant correlation between the fear of language acquisition and motivation.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to investigate the perspectives of 141 UiTM students regarding language anxiety and language learning motivation. According to existing research, it has been observed that learners commonly experience anxiety as a result of the uncertainty they encounter and their inability to completely attain mastery of the language during the learning process. Consequently, this feeling of being at a disadvantage in language acquisition arises. Furthermore, the adverse assessment of one's inability to surpass others in language proficiency and the failure to achieve advanced language mastery have a detrimental impact on the learner's self-esteem and give rise to feelings of anxiety. The findings align with the outcomes reported in the studies conducted by Ting (2016) and Rahmat (2016). Nevertheless, although the present study has ascertained that examinations do elicit anxiety among students, it has also established that anxiety in this domain does not substantively contribute to the impediment of learning. This aspect was not addressed in the previous study.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has a reference that is significant to foreign language learning and teaching in Malaysia. The findings allow language educators to detect the barriers in language learning, which effectively helps students overcome their language learning difficulties. This study employed solely the quantitative research methodology. Future research endeavours could derive advantages from the utilisation of a mixed methods framework, which combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This would facilitate researchers in conducting a more comprehensive and efficient analysis of the participants' responses.

The scope of this study is limited to the demographic of students who are currently enrolled in Mandarin language courses at UiTM. The upcoming study shall expand its scope by including students who are currently enrolled in Mandarin language courses at other universities. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that this study did not include variables such as gender and cultural background in its research design. Subsequent inquiry may be undertaken in the future to examine this specific facet.

CO-AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. All authors had carried out the fieldwork and interpretation of the findings. Author 2 had overlooked the write-up of the whole article, including writing the objectives, methodology, and conclusion of the study. Authors 3 and 4 prepared the literature review. Author 1 carried out the statistical analysis.

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