



BALANCING NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE FACTORS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING



Mohd Hassan

Awang Boon^{1*}

Nur Anisah Tan

Abdullah²

Noor Hanim

Rahmat³

Normah Ahmad⁴

Sarinah Sharif⁵

Choong Pow Yean⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

¹ Email: mohd218@uitm.edu.my Tel: +6012-2720416

² Email: anistan@uitm.edu.my Tel: +6012-6600365

³ Email: noorh763@uitm.edu.my Tel: +6016-2155797

⁴ Email: normah698@uitm.edu.my Tel: +6012-2396466

⁵ Email: sarinah@uitm.edu.my Tel: +6012-2258419

⁶ Email: choon322@uitm.edu.my Tel: +6012-2915506



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

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The reasons why people study foreign languages vary tremendously. Some are intrinsically, while others depended on extrinsic reward to begin their study. Past studies have shown that foreign language learners have display different types of fear throughout the learning process. Nevertheless, sometimes, the negative factors that cause their fear can sometimes be overcome by the positive factors that made them stayed on to the classes. This study is done to investigate the balance between the negative and positive factors that learners faced throughout their learning of foreign languages. 199 respondents who signed up for different types of foreign language courses in a public university in Malaysia. They responded to a survey with 49 items using 5 Likert scales. Findings revealed that the negative factors that hinder their learning are often offset by their positive factors and that made them stayed on. Findings feared most “negative evaluation” and “test”. However, findings also showed their intrinsic positive motivation made them stay on.

Contribution/ Originality: This study aims to understand the balance that learners fear of learning foreign languages can be balanced off by their positive motives. Instructors of foreign languages can use this understanding to focus more on the positive factors to help retain learners’ interest.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Foreign language is a language not widely used or spoken by the people of a community. It is a language which is different from one’s mother tongue. People who learn a foreign language will be able to use the language to get to know the customs and culture of another community or country. Acquiring foreign language is an added value for a person as it may support their academic achievement and can guarantee the future upon graduation. This enables them to be more marketable when seeking a job. A person who masters foreign languages will have a wider access to information resources.

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) does happen to some learners (Fakieh-Alrabai, 2014). This anxiety will make the learner feel ashamed to speak and lack self-confidence when using the language. They are also afraid of making mistakes. Afraid of making mistakes when speaking in public. This may cause learners to be not fluent and incompetence in using the language. The anxiety may influence the achievement and performance of the learners too. Reading, writing & speaking are said to be the most common fear in learners of foreign language (Rahmat, 2019).

1.2. Statement of Problem

1.2.1. Motives

Shykyrynska (2021) mentioned that communication formally or informally is one of the motives for people learning a foreign language. Benefits of being able to communicate with foreigners in conferences, discussion of current issues and searching for new knowledge.

Karelina and Smirnova (2020) stated that most of the first and fourth year students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Studies of the Lomonosov Region Moscow State University said their motives for learning English are to enable them to communicate freely with people from different cultural backgrounds, making their travelling easier when visit a foreign countries, help them in their career growth, get more opportunity to work abroad and become a highly educated, cultured person with a broad outlook

1.2.2. Fear

Marina (2016) said that foreign language anxiety or fear do occur. Such anxiety or fear exists when students communicate with teachers, peers and native speakers. The anxiety also occurs during tests and speaking in class and question & answer sessions with teachers too.

Rahmat (2020), anxiety about foreign language learning causes other problems for learners. These problems may affect the performance and achievements in other language areas.

Hence, this study is conducted to explore why people fear foreign language learning and how to overcome the fear. This study is carried out to answer the following questions

- i. How do the negative factors influence foreign language learning?
- ii. How do the positive factors influence foreign language learning?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Benefits of Learning Foreign Language

Learning a foreign language brings various benefits to learners. One of the benefits is human cognitive ability. Research indicates that cognitive development happens faster among children who learn a second language than those who do not. In the theory of bilingualism, it is stated that people who acquired a second language in their adulthood may prevent cognitive decline in later life by approximately 4.5 years (Bialystok, Craik, & Freedman, 2007). In their later study, on the basis of measures of cognitive function and brain structure, Bialystok et al. (2007) show that bilingualism can delay cognitive decline. Klimova (2018) concludes that the learning of a foreign language may generate a lot of benefits for older individuals, such as enhancement of cognitive functioning, their self-esteem, increased opportunities of socializing, or reduction of costs.

Learning foreign language also offers insights into other cultures and ways of relating to the world which no other area of the curriculum can offer, Fernandez (2007). By learning a new language, learners identify and start to learn about their own cultural perspective, its norms, values and boundaries, together with those of the new language they are learning. This will broaden their knowledge and understanding towards other cultures.

2.2. Fear of learning Foreign Language

When learning a new language, language learners frequently express fear, anxiety, apprehension, and nervousness. Language anxiety can be a result of the learners' own sense of "self," their self-related cognitions, language learning difficulties, cultural differences between learners and target language cultures, social status differences between speakers and interlocutors, or the fear of losing self-identity. This anxiety has a positive or negative effect on students' learning processes, which in turn has an effect on their performance and achievement.

According to Hashemi (2011) language anxiety can be described in two ways: (1) Language anxiety is a subset of anxiety, which is a fundamental human emotion that can be triggered by a wide variety of situational factors (MacIntyre, 1995; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). For instance, (a) a shy student may experience anxiety when asked to deliver a brief speech in front of the entire class; (b) Language anxiety is a synthesis of other anxieties that results in a unique form of anxiety associated with language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). According to the latter perspective, there is something unique about the language learning experience that makes some individuals nervous. When this nervousness or anxiety is limited to situations involving language learning, it is classified as specific anxiety. Psychologists use the term "specific anxiety reaction" to distinguish between individuals who are anxious in general and in a variety of situations and those who are anxious only in certain situations.

Horwitz et al. (1986) proposes three components of foreign language anxiety: (1). fear of communication, (2). test anxiety, and (3.) fear of negative evaluation. Apprehension about communication is defined as the fear of communicating with others, speaking in public, and speaking in groups. While communication apprehension results in communication fear, it also results in fear of being unable to understand the other person's speech. Test anxiety is motivated by a fear of failing to perform well. This can be explained by the high bar that learners set for themselves in order to achieve perfect mastery of the foreign language. Fear of negative evaluation is defined as a learner's expectation of being negatively evaluated by others in any situation.

2.3. Past Studies

There are several studies done to show why people are motivated to learn foreign languages. Ko-Yin (2013) did a study on 130 US fourth to ninth graders enrolled in Chinese as a foreign language classroom. The purpose of this study was to test the L2 Dörnyei Self -Motivation System and the seven motivational constructs that had been identified in his previous study. This study found that there are four motivations constructs, i.e., instrument-dominant, attitudes toward L2 / community-dominant speakers, student perceptions of their parents' proficiency in Chinese, and environment.

The following study was participated by 267 undergraduate students from a science and technology university in New Taipei City, Taiwan. This study was done by Hsuan-Yau (2013). It investigated the students' English learning orientation from the perspective of various important L2 motivation concepts. It also compares and contrasts both day and night school students' motivation for studying English. The study shows that the majority of the participants studied English for travel, instrumental and integrative orientations, as well as intrinsic motivation and the ideal L2 self. There were no significant differences in the day or night students' motivation in learning English.

People are afraid to learn Foreign languages due to some reasons. There have been several studies done on foreign language anxiety. The study by Fakhieh-Alrabai. (2014) carried out a large -scale study of Foreign Language Anxiety involving 1389 EFL students for more than three years. Students reported the level of anxiety they experienced throughout the English class. Students also noted possible causes of their feelings of anxiety. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used to assess student anxiety. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standards deviation, used to assess student anxiety levels, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) conducted to identify sources of student anxiety in classroom-based language learning. Students involved in this

study were reported to have moderate to high levels of anxiety. Communication is the major cause of student language anxiety. The findings of the study are very consistent, and the researchers successfully proposed a context-based FLA model in the context of Saudi EFL.

In another study, Rahmat (2020) collected data from 902 students who were taking foreign language classes for a semester. A survey was conducted the quantitative study uses a survey adapted from Horwitz who developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. Data is collected from google form and analysed using SPSS version 26. This study showed that communication apprehension affects learners' anxiety of taking tests and getting negative evaluation. This causes learners anxiety to attend foreign language classes.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below presents the theoretical framework of the study is rooted from Gardner (2001) and Horwitz et al. (1986) to observe the balancing of the negative and positive factors in foreign language learning.

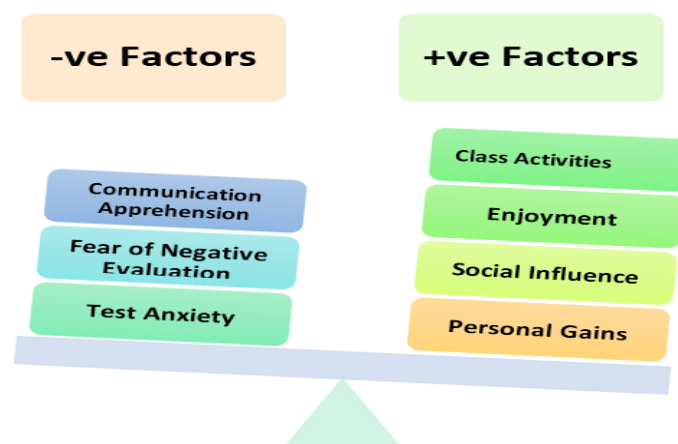


Figure-1. Balancing Negative and Positive Factors in FLL.
Source: Gardner (2001) and Horwitz et al. (1986).

2.4.1. Negative Factors

Fear of learning anything new is unavoidable. According to Fear in Foreign Language learning Horwitz et al. (1986) can be categorized into three types. The first type is (a) communication anxiety and this refers to the level of anxiety triggered by the real or anticipated communication activities. The next type is fear of negative evaluation and this refers to the fear of being evaluated by others when they communicate using the target language. The last type is (c) test anxiety and it is a form of performance anxiety that is characterized by fear, worry, tension, and even feelings of physical illness in the face of taking an exam. Many people experience stress or anxiety before an exam.

2.4.2. Positive Factors

Nevertheless, sometimes in order to overcome fear, some have compensatory affective strategies. When learners use affective strategies, they would manage their emotions, both negative and positive. One way is by have good motives for learning the language. Gardner (2001) presented three motivations for foreign language learning. Motivation includes three elements—effort (the effort to learn the language), desire (wanting to achieve a goal) and positive affect (enjoy the task of learning the language).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This quantitative study is done to explore the balancing factors that cause negative and positive perception in foreign language learning. 199 respondents were purposely chosen from students who attended foreign language

courses in a public university in Malaysia. The instrument used is adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986) and Gardner (2001) and the distribution of items are presented below in Table 1.

Table-1. Distribution of items in instrument.

Constructs	Variables	No. Of Items
Negative Factors For Foreign Language Learning Horwitz et al. (1986)	Communication Apprehension	11
	Fear of Negative Evaluation	7
	Test Anxiety	15
Positive Factors For Foreign Language Learning Gardner (2001)	Classroom Activities	4
	Enjoyment	5
	Social Influence	5
	Personal Gains	4

Table-2. Reliability statistics of instrument.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.875	49

SPSS analysis (refer to Table 2 above) revealed a Cronbach score of .875 thus showing good reliability. The data collected via goggle form is analysed using SPSS version 26 to reveal the frequency of responses. The findings are presented in percentage form for the demographic profile and mean for the variable and presented in the form of pie charts and bar charts respectively.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This section presents the findings by answering the research questions presented above. The presentation of findings begins with the analysis of demographic profile.

4.2. Findings for Demographic Profile

Section A-Demographic Profile

Instruction: Please read each statement carefully and tick your answer.

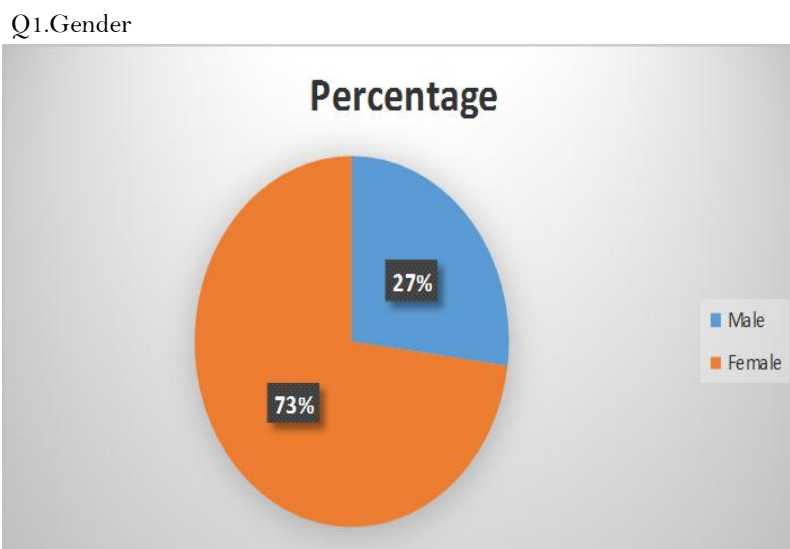


Figure-2. Percentage for gender.

Figure 2 above shows the percentage of respondents by gender. Female respondents made up 72.9% of the sample, while male respondents 27.1%.

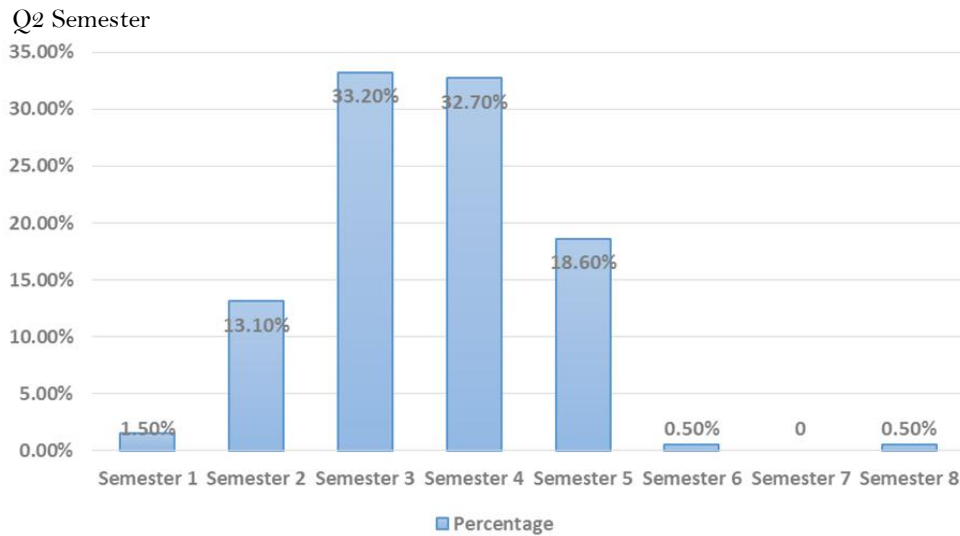


Figure-3. Percentage for Semester.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents by semester. The largest number of respondents are semester 3 students which is 33.2%, followed by semester 4 students (32.7%) and semester 5 students (18.6%). Semester 2 students represented 13.1%, semester 1 (1.5%), semester 6 & 8 (0.5%) respectively and semester 7 students (0%).

4.3. Findings for Negative Factors

4.3.1. How Do the Negative Factors Influence Foreign Language Learning?

Whatever language one chooses to learn, there will always be some form of fear. Fear of foreign language learning can stem from (a) communication apprehension, (b) fear of negative evaluation, and (c) test anxiety.

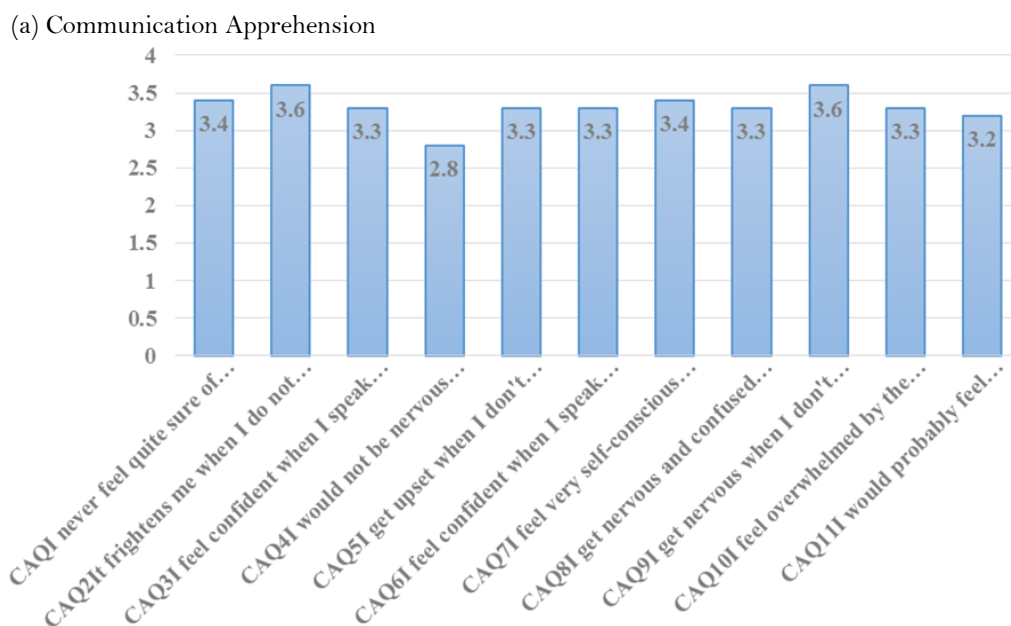


Figure-4. Mean for communication apprehension.

Figure 4 presents the finding for communication apprehension. Communication apprehension is defined as fear or anxiety in communicating with people, manifested in oral communication anxiety within a group or in public, or

difficulty in listening to a spoken message (Djafri & Wimbari, 2018). Finding shows that the highest mean score is 3.6 for the two statements 'It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in foreign language and I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.' (CAQ2 and CAQ9). Meanwhile the lower mean score is 2.8 for the statement 'I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers' (CAQ4).

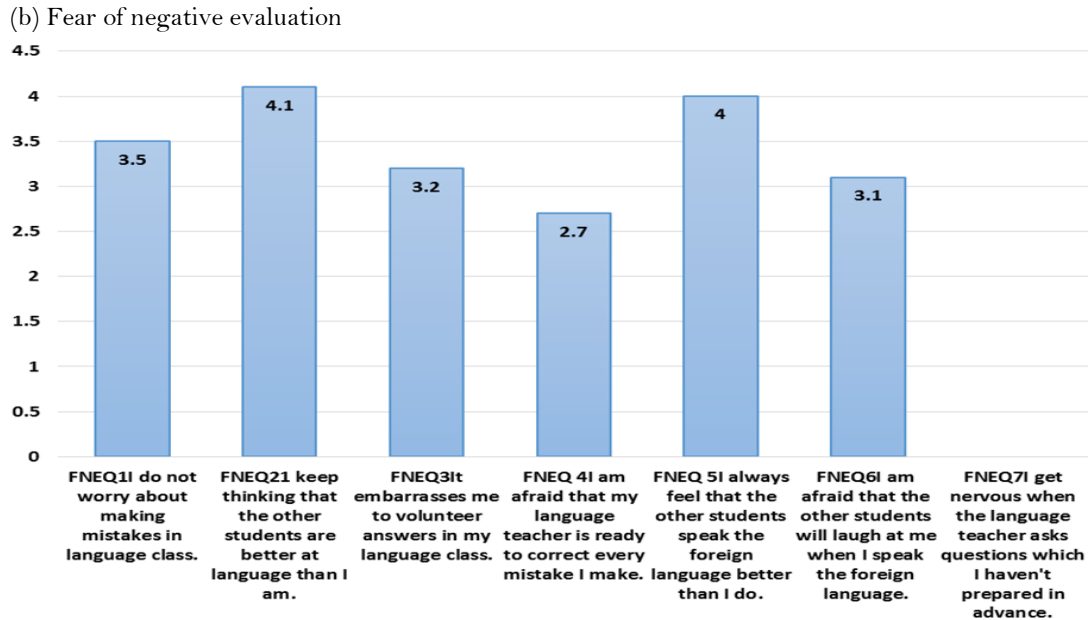


Figure-5. Mean for fear of negative evaluation.

Figure 5 presents the finding for fear of negative evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation is apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate one negatively (Djafri & Wimbari, 2018). Findings show that the highest mean score is 4.1 for the statement 'I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am.' (FNEQ21). Meanwhile, the statement 'I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make' (FNEQ4) shows the lowest mean score with 2.7.

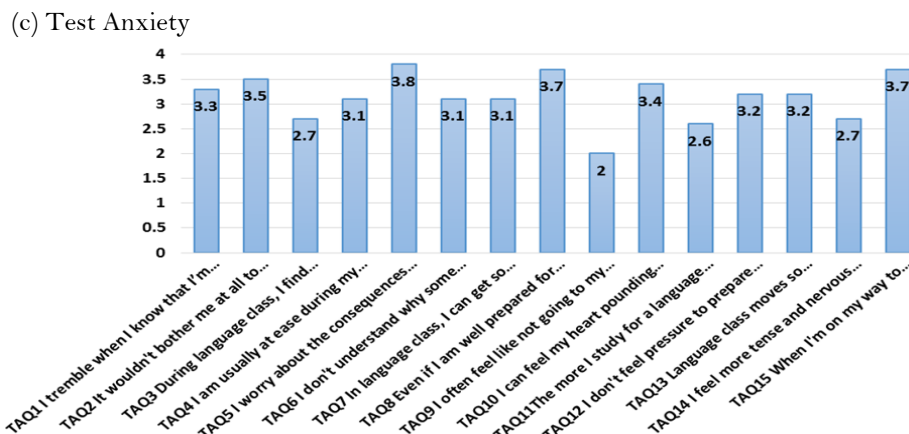


Figure-6. Mean for test anxiety.

According to Fear in Foreign Language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986) test anxiety can be caused by fear, worry, tension, and even feelings of physical illness in the face of taking an exam. As shown in Figure 6, respondents were asked to evaluate by giving a scale from 1) Never 2) Rarely 3) Sometimes 4) Very often 5) Always to 15 questions. These factors are indeed important in understanding what has caused the anxiety during FLL. The highest mean score is 3.8 for the statement 'I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class'.

Most of the respondents do not want to fail the language subject as it will affect their CGPA directly. From the second highest mean score (3.7), we can infer that respondents feel anxious about their FLL even if they are well prepared for language class. However, the worries do not affect their mental state in attending the language class which are shown in the second highest mean score, 3.7 for the statement ‘When I’m on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed’. Respondents feel confident and relaxed for attending the foreign language class. Mean scores 3.5 for TAQ2 reflects that foreign language learning does not burden them. Nevertheless, respondents often feel slightly nervous when they are going to be called on during the class (TAQ1 and TAQ10). The statements with the lowest mean (Mean 2.7, 2.6 and 2.0) have shown that respondents think attending classes and studying is sufficient to help them cope with the demands of FLL. Apart from that, most of the respondents are willing to attend their foreign language class, and they do not feel more tense and nervous in their language class than in other classes. Mean scores 2.7 for TAQ3 shown the respondents are quite focused during their FLL class. The remainder from statements TAQ4, TAQ6 and TAQ7 shows that the respondents do not feel particularly anxious and take on a relatively indifferent stance (Mean 3.1).

4.3. Findings for Positive Factors

Research Question 2-How do the positive factors influence foreign language learning? Some learners cope with their fear by having compensatory affective strategies. This is done by constantly falling back on what motivated them to begin the learning in the first place. Some motivational factors are (a) Class activities, (b) enjoyment, (c) social influence and (d) personal gains.

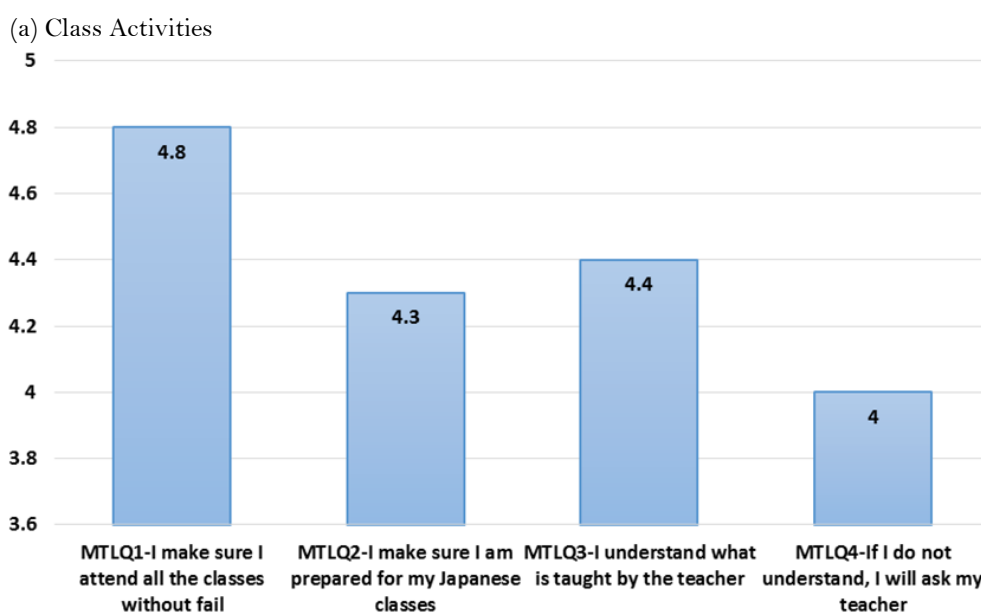


Figure-7. Mean for Class activities.

As shown in Figure 7, the highest mean is 4.8 out of 5 in regard to the statement “I make sure I attend all the classes without fail”, and this shows that the respondents feel like the classes arranged are worth attending. The second highest mean is 4.4 for the statement “I understand what is taught by the teacher”, which shows that the contents of the lessons are prepared at an easy level to understand. The statement “I make sure I am prepared for my Japanese classes” has a mean of 4.3. We can infer that the classes are engaging enough to motivate the students to come to lessons prepared in order to learn better. The lowest mean from the figure is 4, attributed to the statement “if I do not understand, I will ask my teacher”. This shows the classes are interactive enough and provide opportunities for students to vocalize their thoughts and questions.

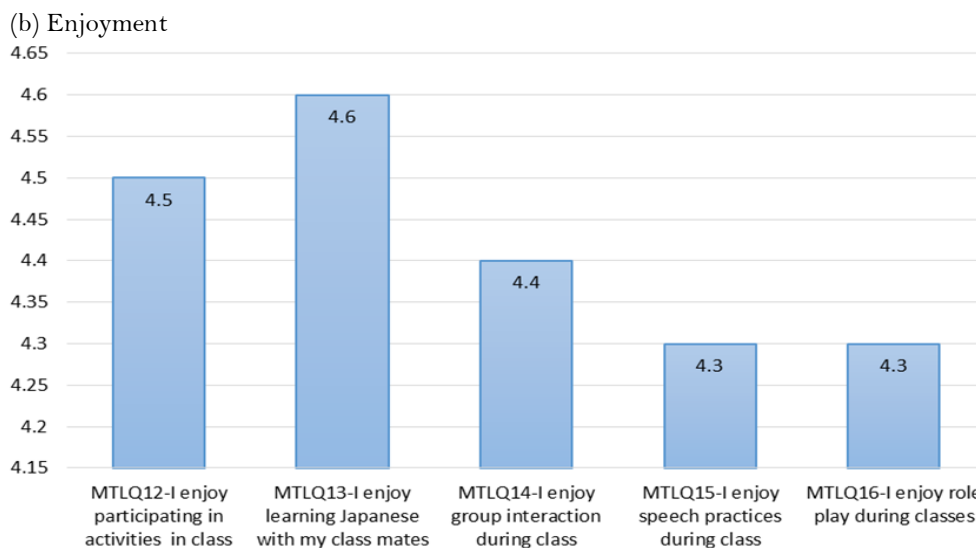


Figure-8. Mean for enjoyment.

As shown in Figure 8, the highest mean is 4.8 out of 5 regarding the statement “enjoy learning Japanese with my classmates”, and this indicates that respondents enjoy learning with their friends. The second highest mean is 4.5 for the statement “enjoy participating in activities in class”, and this shows that respondents are happy to participate in activities in class. The statement “enjoy group interaction during class” has a mean of 4.4. It can be concluded that students prefer to follow class activities with friends, as well as being able to interact among them. The lowest mean from the figure is 4.3, is for two statements, namely, "enjoy speech practices during class" and "enjoy role play during classes". Even though these two are the lowest, the two statements are still considered as high. This proves that the respondents love to do speech exercises and enjoy doing roleplay that were conducted in class.

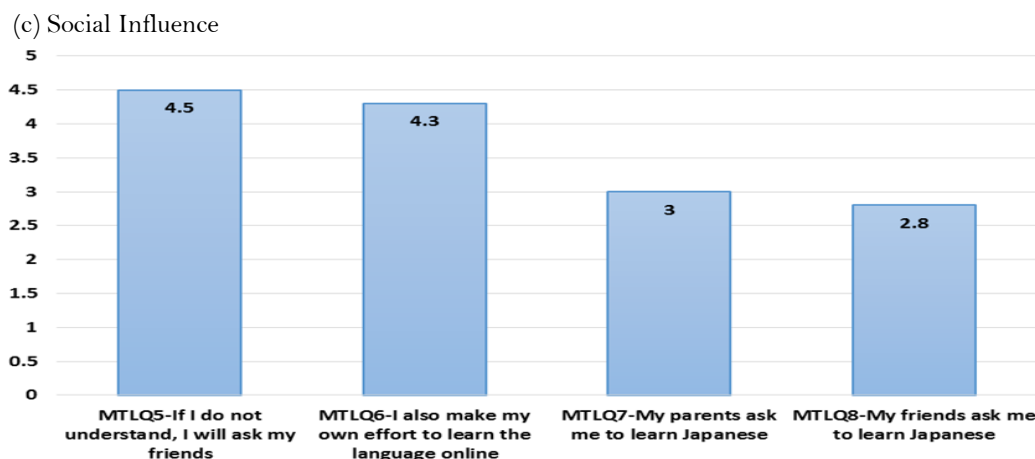


Figure-9. Mean for social factors.

With reference to Figure 9, most respondents, that is 4.5 of the mean, would ask their friends if they do not understand the lesson. This is followed by a number of students who will make the effort to learn the language online. Some students learn a foreign language due to the encouragement by their parents and also friends.

Figure 10 presents the mean score for Personal Gains. The highest mean score (4.5) is for MTLQ10 “I am interested to learn Japanese so I can travel to Japan”. There is also a high mean score for MTLQ11 “I am interested to learn Japanese so I can work in a Japanese company”. Meanwhile MTLQ9 “I am interested to learn Japanese because it is a popular language” shows a lower mean score (3.7).

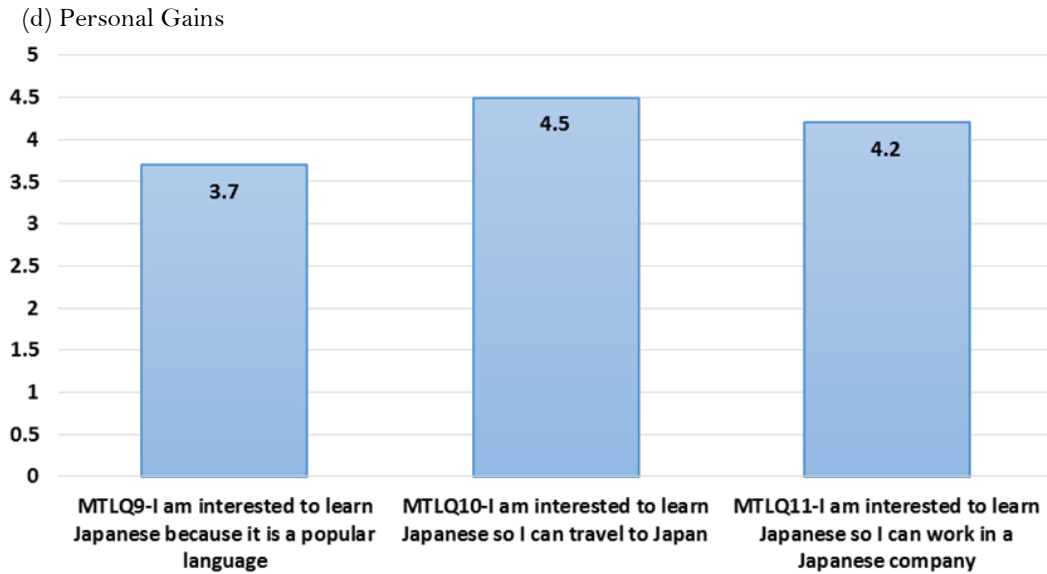


Figure-10. Mean for personal gains.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Findings and Discussions

Table-3. Total means for Negative factors.

Negative Factors	Total Means
Communication Apprehension	3.3
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.5
Text Anxiety	3.1

Table 3 above reveals the comparison of total mean score for all the three negative factors. The highest mean score is for “fear of negative evaluation” (3.5) and the lowest is “text anxiety” (3.1). The study by [Fakieh-Alrabai \(2014\)](#) found that communication apprehension is a negative feeling foreign learners also felt. Nevertheless, the study by [Rahmat \(2020\)](#) showed similar findings that learners feared negative evaluation the most.

Table-4. Total means for positive factors.

Positive Factors	Total Means
Class Activities	4.4
Enjoyment	4.4
Social Influence	3.7
Personal Gains	4.1

Next, Table 4 shows the comparison of total mean scores for all four positive factors. Findings in this current study revealed the highest positive factors as “class activities” and “enjoyment”-both having a mean of 4.4 . The highest mean for this study seemed to be intrinsic unlike the findings in the studies by [Ko-Yin \(2013\)](#) and [Hsuan-Yau \(2013\)](#) who found that intrinsic factors are what motivates learners to embark on their foreign language journey.

5.2. Pedagogical Implications

The study recommends that teachers strive to create a low-stress, friendly, and supportive learning environment; and that students take a proactive role in fostering a sense of community. Solidarity and support; awareness of students' fears and insecurities and assistance in confronting them; Use gentle or non-threatening

methods of error correction and encouragement; make sparing use of purposeful group work or collaborative activities; select relevant and interesting topics for class discussions and exercises; Consider reducing the amount of new material covered in a single semester; consider layering and reinforcing the material to aid in acquisition and retention; provide written directions for assigned work; Slow down your speech or consider using foreign language to clarify important points or provide specific directions; attend to the students' learning styles or preferences; and to hear and value students' perspectives, ideas, and suggestions.

5.3. Suggestions for Future Research

The data for this study is collected during Online Distance Learning, which means the results may have been influenced by the digital medium of lessons and materials. Hence, the outcome of this study cannot be generalised to all FLL, as the difficulties may have stemmed from the difficulties within the new medium, as opposed to the content of the lessons itself. Future studies can look into challenges faced by instructors and students, with attention being given to the specific areas that they are struggling with in order to determine ways to enhance the effectiveness of FLL.

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