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**USING VROOM'S THEORY TO UNDERSTAND THE
MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AMONG
UNDERGRADUATES**

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Abstract

Much has been said about the decline of English competency among graduates in Malaysia for the past several years. Though English is the second language for most people here, there are still many people who are not good at it. It is said that the younger generation is not able to communicate well in English which led to employers not being interested to hire them. As a result, younger generations have a much harder time securing job. A noticeable decline of English competency has been found among younger people as compared to the level of English competency among the older generation. Therefore, the objective of this study was to investigate the university students' motivation in learning English using Vroom's theory). It explores the motives behind learners learning English in a public university in Malaysia. This theory presents three components which are expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. The quantitative method was used by distributing an online questionnaire to 100 students in a public university in Malaysia. The instrument from the questionnaire consisted of three sections, a) affective components, b) expectancy components, and c) value components with a total of 24 items. The findings revealed that students do face anxiety while learning English and students' motivation to learn English came from how much value the students placed on the language. In conclusion, this study can help educators to understand the students' motivation in learning English better and thus create a safe environment where the students would feel less comfortable learning English.

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1. Introduction

In 2022, Malaysia ranked in the top three Asian countries with the most proficiency in English behind Singapore and Philippines (English Proficiency Index, 2022). Though this might seem an impressive achievement, the reality is that the English language is not good enough for Malaysians to use this language to secure jobs during their job interview and later in the working world (Krishnan et al., 2012). Many companies have been complaining that the young people who are applying for jobs are not able to communicate well in the English language. Some people argue that since Bahasa Malaysia was made as the medium of instruction in schools in 1983, the level of English competency has been in decline. As English is no longer important in education, students have less motivation to learn this language competently as they can perform well in academic just by focusing only on their mother tongue which is Bahasa Malaysia. As a result, this causes English language competency to be in decline for the past forty years.

Nonetheless, the government has tried to launch many programs to improve the level of English competency in Malaysia. According to Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025, only 28% of students achieved a minimum credit in the 2011 SPM English paper against Cambridge 1119 standards. This is worrying as poor English proficiency has major implications for Malaysian society, education, and the economy. Therefore, in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 - 2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023), improving the level of English proficiency among students has consistently been one of the primary initiatives. For example, in 2014 to 2015, the initiative was on improving the level of English for teachers while starting 2016 to 2022 the focus was on improving the level of English for the teachers and students as well. This paper aims to find out the motivation for learning the English language through Vroom's theory among undergraduate students in one of the public universities in Malaysia.

2. Problem Statement

The arrival of the fourth industrial revolution has made English language proficiency imperative for most countries in the world especially developing countries such as Malaysia. A study among 252 undergraduates and 12 human resource personnel agreed that English is an essential skill to gain employment (Zainuddin et al., 2019). In addition, employers also agree that English is among the top five skills needed (Kaur, 2021). This means that the importance of mastering English is a well-known topic amongst students who are employees to be and employers. A study by Krishnan et al. (2012) done on 115 employees of government-linked companies (GLCs) and private agencies found that the language skills and overall English proficiency of new graduates were found to be inadequate. Moreover, it is also found that undergraduates in Malaysia do have English language speaking anxiety to a certain level (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018). Several studies found that language learners are motivated by their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Fandino et al., 2019; Rahmat, 2019). In addition to that, Seven (2020) describes motivation in learning as either primary or secondary motives. The primary motive in learning is the basic need to communicate while the secondary motive includes being able to be proficient in the language. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the students' problems and help them to learn English better. Hence, this

study is done to investigate how learners' motivation to learn English is portrayed through Vroom's theory.

3. Research Questions

Three research questions have been identified in this study:

- i. How does instrumentality affect undergraduates' motivation to learn English?
- ii. How does expectancy influence undergraduates' motivation to learn English?
- iii. How does valence affect undergraduates' motivation to learn English?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study is done to investigate the factors that influence motivation in English language learning for undergraduate students. The purpose of this quantitative study is to explore the students' motivation in learning English at the tertiary education level by using Vroom's motivation theory which focuses on instrumentality, expectancy, and valence.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Research Design

Figure 1 presents Vroom's (1964) motivation theory. Vroom (1964) presented three components in his theory. The three components in Vroom's motivation theory are expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Firstly, expectancy is the learners' belief that his/her effort leads to the intended performance goals. Secondly, instrumentality refers to the learners' belief that he/she will receive a desired outcome if the performance expectation is met. Thirdly, valence refers to the value that the learners place on the outcome. In the context of language learning, the expectancy component refers to the learners' belief that they would be able to do well in the subject if they study well, and instrumentality refers to the performance or the result that the learners are aiming for in the language class. Another component is valence refers to the learners' expectation of what they would get out of learning the language.

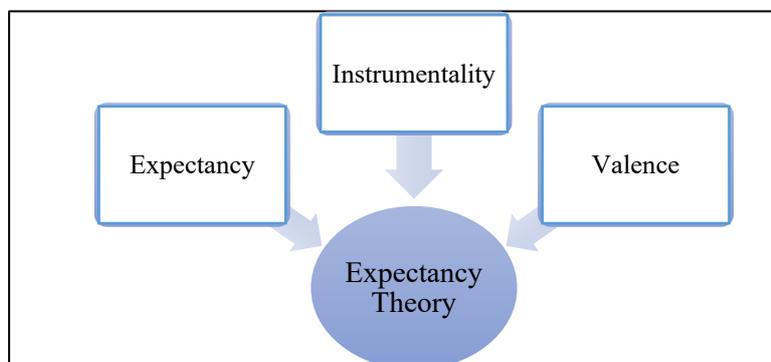


Figure 1. Vroom's Motivation Theory

The conceptual framework is rooted in Vroom's (1964) motivation theory and motivation for learning by Pintrich and De Groot (1990). Specifically, Vroom's (1964) three factors (a) expectancy, (b) instrumentality, and (c) valence are scaffolded onto three characteristics by Pintrich and De Groot (1990) and presented in Figure 2 below. Firstly, learners need to have the expectancy to feel motivated to learn English. This means that the learners need to feel that they can learn the topics in the course well. Apart from feeling motivated and believing that they can learn the content well, the students also need to feel that they can do well in the subject. Next, instrumentality is the learners' belief that they can achieve a good outcome or good grades in the subject. This can be reflected through expectancy motivation and depends on the learners' self-efficacy and control beliefs. Finally, valence can be defined as 'affective orientations toward particular outcomes' (Vroom, 1964, p. 15). Therefore, valence is the condition where learners would be more motivated to learn the subject better if they put high value on their learning,

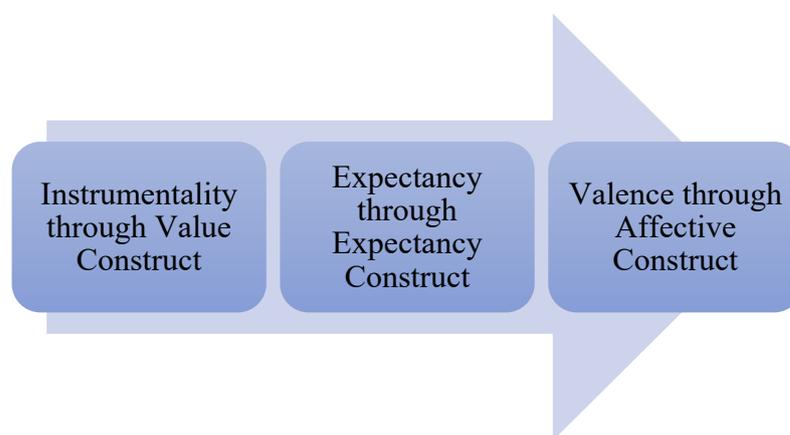


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

This quantitative study explores the learners' motivation to learn English using Vroom's theory. One hundred respondents from a public university responded to the questionnaire. The instrument (Table 1) is a survey adapted from Pintrich and De Groot (1990). There are 24 items in total. Section A is the demographic profile. Section B is about value components with 12 items, section C is about expectancy components with 7 items while section 4 is an about affective component with 5 items.

Table 1. Distribution of items in the instrument (Source Pintrich & De Groot, 1990)

Sect	Construct		Variable	No of items	Total items
A	Value components	(a)	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	12
		(b)	Extrinsic Goal Orientation	3	
		(c)	Task Value Beliefs	5	
B	Expectancy components	(a)	Students' Perception of Self-Efficacy	5	7
		(b)	Control Beliefs for Learning	2	
C	Affective components				5
	Total no of items				24

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.895	.904	24

SPSS analysis (Table 2) revealed a Cronbach’s Alpha of .895 for the 24 items which showed a good internal reliability for the instrument used. Google Form was used to collect the data. Data is then presented in terms of percentages for the demographic profile and mean score for sections B to D to answer the research questions.

6. Findings

6.1. Introduction

This section presents the findings of the data analysed by answering the demographic profile.

6.2. Findings for Demographic Profile

6.2.1. Q1: Gender

Table 3. Percentage for Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	48	48.0	48.0	48.0
	Female	52	52.0	52.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Q1. Gender. (1) Male, (2) Female

Based on Table 3, the analysis on gender shows 52% of respondents are female and 48% are male.

6.2.2. Q2: Semester

Table 4. Percentage for semester

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	One	40	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Two	28	28.0	28.0	68.0
	Three	32	32.0	32.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Q2. Semester. (1) One, (2) Two, (3) Three

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents were from semester 1 (40%) followed by respondents in their third semester (32%) while the rest was from semester two (28%).

6.2.3. Q3 : Faculty

Table 5. Percentage for faculty

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences	50	50.0	50.0	50.0

Faculty of Plantation and Agrotechnology	50	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Q3. Faculty. (1) Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, (2) Faculty of Plantation and Agrotechnology

Table 5 shows the distribution by faculty. Half of the respondents were from the Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences while the other half of the respondents were from the Faculty of Plantation and Agrotechnology.

6.3. Findings for Instrumentality

Instrumentality can be analysed by looking at three aspects which are intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, and task value beliefs. This section answers Research Question 1: How does instrumentality affect undergraduates' motivation to learn English?

6.3.1. Intrinsic Goal Orientation

Table 6. Mean for Value- Intrinsic Goal Orientation

1	MSVCQ1 In this program, I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things.	3.37
2	MSVCQ2 In the courses of a program like this, I prefer course materials that arouse my curiosity, even if they are difficult to learn.	3.46
3	MSVCQ 3 The most satisfying thing for me in this program is trying to understand the content of the courses	3.91
4	MSVCQ 4 When I have the opportunity in this class, I choose course assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade.	3.35

Table 6 summarizes the findings for intrinsic goal orientation. The statement 'The most satisfying thing for me in this program is trying to understand the content of the courses' has the highest mean score of 3.91 followed by 'In the courses of a program like this, I prefer course materials that arouse my curiosity, even if they are difficult to learn' with a mean score of 3.46. The second lowest mean score is found in 'In this program, I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things.' at a mean value of 3.36 while the lowest mean score is found in 'When I have the opportunity in this class, I choose course assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade' at 3.4. In conclusion, the respondents put high value in trying to understand the subject as it is the most satisfying thing for them.

6.3.2. Extrinsic Goal Orientation

Table 7. Mean for Extrinsic Goal Orientation

1	MSEGQ1 Getting a good grade in the classes is the most satisfying thing for me right now.	4.44
2	MSEGQ 2 The most important thing for me right now is improving my overall grade point average, so my main concern in this program is getting a good grade.	4.39
3	MSEGQ 3 I want to do well in the classes because it is important to show my ability to my family, friends, or others.	4.25

Table 7 summarizes the findings for extrinsic goal orientation. The statement ‘Getting a good grade in the classes is the most satisfying thing for me right now’ has the highest mean score of 4.44 followed by ‘The most important thing for me right now is improving my overall grade point average, so my main concern in this program is getting a good grade.’ with a mean score of 4.39. The lowest mean score is found in ‘I want to do well in the classes because it is important to show my ability to my family, friends, or others’ at 4.25. In conclusion, most of the respondents feel that being able to get a good grade in the subject is the most satisfying thing for them.

6.3.3. Task Value Beliefs

Table 8. Mean for Task Values Beliefs

1	MSTVQ1 I think I will be able to transfer what I learn from one course to other courses in this program.	3.55
2	MSTVQ2 It is important for me to learn the course materials in the courses.	3.94
3	MSTVQ3 I think the course material in the courses of this program is useful for me to learn	4.03
4	MSTVQ4 I like the subject matter of the courses.	3.77
5	MSTVQ5 Understanding the subject matter of the courses is very important to me.	4.09

Table 8 summarizes the findings for task value beliefs. The statement ‘Understanding the subject matter of the courses is very important to me’ has the highest mean score of 4.09 followed by ‘I think the course material in the courses of this program is useful for me to learn’ with a mean score of 4.03. ‘It is important for me to learn the course materials in the course’ statement has a mean of 3.94 followed by ‘I like the subject matter of the courses’ at 3.77 while the lowest mean value of 3.55 is recorded for the statement ‘I think I will be able to transfer what I learn from one course to other courses in this program’ In conclusion, the respondents believe that understanding the topics taught in English class is very important to them.

6.4. Findings for Expectancy

Expectancy in motivation can be measured through two components which are students’ perceptions of self-efficacy and control beliefs for learning. This section presents data to answer Research Question 2: How does expectancy influence undergraduates’ motivation to learn English?

6.4.1. Students ‘Perception Of Self-Efficacy

Table 9. Mean for Expectancy-Students’ Perception

	Item	Mean
1	ECSEQ1 I believe I will receive excellent grades in the classes.	3.75
2	ECSEQ2 I’m confident I can understand the most complex materials presented by the instructors in the courses.	3.38
3	ECSEQ3 I’m confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in this program.	3.55
4	ECSEQ4 I’m certain I can master the skills being taught in the classes.	3.48
5	ECSEQ5 Considering the difficulty of the courses, the teachers, and my skills, I think I will do well in the classes.	3.61

Table 9 shows the mean for expectance components which focuses on students' perception. Most of the respondents agreed with the statement 'I believe I will receive excellent grades in the classes' as it recorded the highest mean value of 3.75. This is followed by the statement 'Considering the difficulty of the courses, the teachers, and my skills, I think I will do well in the classes' with a mean value of 3.61. Next, the statement 'I'm confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in this program.' recorded a mean value at 3.55 while 'I'm certain I can master the skills being taught in the classes' with a mean value of 3.57. Lastly, 'I'm confident I can understand the most complex materials presented by the instructors in the courses.' recorded the lowest mean value at 3.38. In conclusion, the respondents strongly feel that they will be able to receive excellent grades in English subject.

6.4.2. Control Beliefs For Learning

Table 10. Mean for Expectancy-Control Beliefs

	Item	Mean
1	ECCBQ1 If I study in appropriate ways, then I will be able to learn the material in the courses of this program	3.96
2	ECCBQ 2 If I try hard enough, then I will understand the course materials.	4.28

Table 10 shows the mean for expectancy components which focused on control beliefs. The statement 'If I try hard enough, then I will understand the course materials' received the highest mean which is 4.28 while the statement 'If I study in appropriate ways, then I will be able to learn the material in the courses of this program' has a mean of 3.96. In conclusion, the respondents strongly feel that they will understand the subject better if they put more effort to understand the learning materials.

6.5. Findings for Valence

Valence is measured through the affective component. This section presents data to answer Research Question 3: How does valence affect undergraduates' motivation to learn English?

6.5.1. Affective Component

Table 11. Mean for affective component

	Item	Mean
1	ACQ1 When I take a test I think about how poorly I am doing compared with other students.	3.71
2	ACQ2 When I take a test, I think about items on other parts of the test I can't answer	3.59
3	ACQ3 When I take tests I think of the consequences of failing.	3.57
4	ACQ4I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take an exam.	3.38
5	ACQ5 I feel my heart beating fast when I take an exam.	3.7

Table 11 shows the mean for affective components. Most of the respondents agreed with the statement 'When I take a test I think about how poorly I am doing compared with other students' as it recorded the highest mean value of 3.71. This is closely followed by the statement 'I feel my heart beating fast when I take an exam.' with a mean value of 3.7. Next, the statement 'When I take a test, I think about items on other parts of the test I can't answer' recorded a mean value at 3.59 while 'When I

take tests I think of the consequences of failing' with a mean value of 3.57. Lastly, 'I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take an exam' recorded the lowest mean value at 3.38. In conclusion, most of the respondents feel that they are not performing as well as their friends in the English subject.

7. Conclusion

Firstly, the influence of instrumentality on learners' motivation in English language learning was assessed through three aspects which were intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, and task value beliefs. The results show that the respondents are motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically. However, the results indicated that students' extrinsic motivation is higher than their intrinsic motivation. This means that most students prioritise getting a good grade for the English class as their motivation to do well in this class. This finding is in tandem with Yunos et al. (2021) and Amali et al. (2023) which found that students' desire to get a good grade becomes their strongest motivation to do well in class.

Secondly, the influence of the expectancy component on learners' motivation in learning the English language was measured using two aspects which were students' perception of self-efficacy and control beliefs for learning. The results demonstrate that the learners highly believe that they will be able to achieve a good result in the English subject and they also believe that they could master the course materials if they put enough effort into the class. This finding is consistent with Amali et al. (2023) study which found that students who are learning a foreign language also depict similar beliefs that they are motivated to learn the language and would be able to master the foreign language by giving more effort. Moreover, this finding is also supported by a study by Moosa and Aloka (2023) which found that students believed that hard work and dedication will produce better academic results.

Secondly, the influence of instrumentality on learners' motivation in English language learning were assessed through three aspects which were intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, and task value beliefs. The results show that the respondents are motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically. However, the results indicated that students' extrinsic motivation is higher than their intrinsic motivation. This means that most students prioritise getting a good grade for the English class as their motivation to do well in this class.

Thirdly, the influence of valence on learners' motivation in English language learning is measured through the affective component. The results suggest that students often compare their achievement in the class to their friends' achievements. Students do feel inadequate in the subject as compared to their peers and also feel their heartbeat going fast while taking an exam. Therefore, this means that the learners are feeling anxious about their capability in the English language. Consequently, this could affect their motivation and performance in class. Nevertheless, this anxiety can be turned into motivating factor if the learners are rewarded with good grades. Despite feeling anxious about learning English, data from this study also showed that respondents feel that they can understand the subject better if they put more effort into studying the subject. Moreover, they also believe that they can receive an excellent grade in the subject. This finding is in tandem with Rahmat (2022) who stated that the learners' motive to learn a foreign language is influenced by their expectation of what they would receive from the subject. This means that though the respondents are feeling anxious and doubtful of their English competency, they believe that they can do well in the subject if they put more effort into their learning.

Therefore, it is important for the educators need to make sure that that all the three aspects of students' motivation which are their expectancy, instrumentality, and valence are kept at a high level to ensure that students are at the optimum level to learn the English language. Future research should look at the students' online motivation level to learn English as more English classes are being conducted online. In conclusion, the respondents are feeling motivated to learn English and it is up to the educators to give support and encourage them so that students would be able to perform better in the language.

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