

Motivation in Learning Oral Arabic among Students with Different Prior Experiences and Gender

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated students' motivation level in learning oral Arabic at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Malaysia. Motivation consists of three main components, namely value, expectancy and affect. This study was aimed at investigating motivation differences (1) between students with different prior experiences, namely students with prior experience (SWE) and students without prior experience (SNE), (2) between students of different genders, and (3) between students with interactions of different genders and different prior experiences. This study used a questionnaire that was adapted from *The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire* (MSLQ) involving 182 students which were selected based on the disproportionate stratified random sampling. The study revealed that (1) SWE scores significantly higher than SNE in intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, task value and self-efficacy and significantly lower in test anxiety; (2) Females scored significantly higher than males in extrinsic motivation, task value, control of learning beliefs and self efficacy; and (3) there are no statistically significant differences in all components with the interaction of prior experience and gender. This study suggests that UiTM students have to be categorized according to their prior experiences. Otherwise, some additional Arabic classes need to be carried out for inexperienced students before registering for the actual Arabic classrooms. Learning activities also need to involve students of mixed gender in order to create a collaborative environment and also bridge the motivation gaps between them.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-regulated learning strategies (SRL) refers to a learners' self-directive process which transforms their mental abilities into academic performance (Baumfield, 2004; Brophy, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Zimmerman, 2008). SRL was originally developed from Bandura's Social-Cognitive Learning Theory, Piaget's Theory of Regulation and Effort Theory of Vygotsky (Hsu, 1997). It has two main components, namely, motivation and learning strategies. Previous studies proved that SRL is one of the main factors in learning success (see Olausen & Braten, 1999; Ray, Garavalia, & Murdock, 2003). Previous studies also found that students who use SRL develop their own initiatives while learning (Olausen & Braten, 1999) and perform better in their academic life (Bail, Zhang, & Tachiyama, 2008; Ray, *et al.*, 2003).

One of the SRL instruments is the *Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire* (MSLQ) developed by Pintrich, Smith, Garcia and McKeachie (1991). MSLQ has been used in many studies (Duncan & McKeachie, 2005) including in language research (Huang, 2008). According to MSLQ, SRL is divided into motivation and learning strategies. This study used the motivation component which comprises of three subscales, namely, value, expectancy and affect. This particular component focuses on the reasons why students enrol in the course and how they engage in the learning process.

The value component comprises of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation

and task value with first focuses on learning and mastery (Hsu, 1997; Lynch, 2006; Pintrich *et al.*, 1991), and the second part is related to grades achievement and recognition from others (Hsu, 1997; Lynch, 2006; Pintrich, *et al.*, 1991), while the third part refers to students' judgements of how useful and important the content of the course is to them (Hsu, 1997; Lynch, 2006; Pintrich *et al.*, 1991). The expectancy component refers to students' beliefs in organising and accomplishing the learning based on their learning objectives (Bandura, 1986; Hsu, 1997; Lynch, 2006; Pintrich *et al.*, 1991). It has two sub-components which are the control of learning beliefs and the perceptions towards self-efficacy for learning (Lynch, 2006; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). The affect component refers to test anxiety which concerns with students' anxiety while taking examinations. Previous research have found that test anxiety has a negative correlation with students' performance (Malpass, O'Neil, & Hocesvar, 1999; Pintrich *et al.*, 1991). However, a previous study on test anxiety among UiTM students (Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Parilah, 2010a) showed that test anxiety has no statistically significant correlation with intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

The Arabic course at UiTM is an elective offered to first degree students. It is a basic Arabic course focusing on preparing students with communicative competent for their future professional careers. However, the students' learning background is different in terms of their

prior experiences in learning Arabic. Some of them have five year experience of learning Arabic in secondary school while some others do not have any experience at all. As for the second group, learning Arabic at UiTM is their first experience. According to the Causal Attribution Theory, individual factors such as prior experience and knowledge are expected to influence the level of self-efficacy for learning and students perceptions to succeed in their learning (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

During the formal teaching which consists of about 25 students per class, all these students are put in the same classroom consisting of mixed ability learners. The mixture of the classes has some negative effects towards inexperienced students, as proven in some previous studies (Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Parilah, 2010b; Ghazali Yusri & Nik Mohd Rahimi, 2009). Besides different prior experiences and ability, gender difference has also been found to have influenced the level of motivation among students (Bembentuty, 2007; Lundeberg & Mohan, 2008; Ray *et al.*, 2003).

There are some studies previously carried out on students' motivations in learning foreign languages in Malaysia whether at the higher education level (Ainol Madziah & Isarji, 2009; Kaseh, Nik Farakh, & Zeti Akhtar, 2010) or at the school level (Kamarul Shukri, Mohd Amin, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Zamri, 2009a). At UiTM level, previous research (Norhayuza, Naimah, Sahabudin, & Ibrahim, 2004; Sahabudin, 2003) has generally concluded that UiTM students are still weak in oral Arabic.

There are also many factors which have been identified to contribute to this situation. One of them is the use of SRL among the students. In order to investigate the use of SRL among students, there are some studies investigating UiTM students' attitude in oral Arabic context (Ghazali Yusri *et al.*, 2010b). However, this study was entirely based on qualitative data and did not mean to generalize the findings to UiTM's overall population. There are also other studies carried out on the components of SRL among UiTM students in oral Arabic such as motivation and test anxiety (Ghazali Yusri *et al.*, 2010a), test anxiety (Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd Rahimi, Parilah, & Wan Haslina, 2011b), control of learning belief (Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd Rahimi, Parilah, & Wan Haslina, 2011a), self-efficacy (Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd Rahimi, Parilah, Wan Haslina, & Ahmed Thalal, 2011c) and the effects of different courses on the use of self-regulated learning strategies (Ghazali Yusri & Nik Mohd Rahimi, 2010). However, there is no previous study comparing students' motivation level in terms of different prior experiences and gender in learning oral Arabic at UiTM.

Therefore, this study was carried out to investigate the motivation differences between two groups of students with different prior experiences and genders to distinguish the importance of the use different approaches in the teaching and learning of oral Arabic. This study has provided some classroom implications that can be taken into consideration to improve the Arabic language instructional practices at UiTM and other higher institutions.

Research Questions

This study was based on the following research questions:

1. Are there significant differences in motivation level between students with different prior experiences?
2. Are there significant differences in motivation level between students of different genders?
3. Are there significant differences in motivation between students with the interaction of different prior experiences and different genders?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Participants

This study is a cross sectional study aimed to investigate the students' motivation level in learning oral Arabic at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Malaysia. This type of research was chosen to generalize the findings to the student population of UiTM. The participants of the study were 182 students from all the faculties at UiTM and they were selected based on the disproportionate stratified random sampling.

The students were divided into two groups according to their prior experiences of Arabic learning. One group consisted of 88 students with five year experience of learning Arabic at secondary school (abbreviated by SWE) and another group consisted of 94 students with no experience of learning Arabic (abbreviated by SNE). Of the 182 samples, 73 were males and 109 were females. The number of the samples within groups was controlled to be

not exceeding the ratio of 1:1.5, which is crucial to compare means between groups (Coakes & Steed, 2001; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006).

There are three levels of the Arabic course taken in three semesters. Each level has 2 credits and 2 hours of meeting in a week. At the end of the course, students will have a total 84 hours of meetings for the three semesters. The samples were chosen from the third level of the Arabic course (BAB501) which is the highest level in UiTM. They were also considered as the final product of the Arabic curriculum in UiTM.

Instruments

The students responded to a seven-point Likert scale from 'not at all true of me' to 'very true of me' of a self-report questionnaire - *The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire* (MSLQ) - developed by Pintrich *et al.* (1991). Overall, MSLQ contained 81 items but in this study, only 31 items were used to assess the motivational beliefs, namely, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, task value, control of learning beliefs, self-efficacy for learning and performance and test anxiety.

Permission was officially sought from the authors before distributing the questionnaire to the students. The questionnaire was then translated into Malay language because all the students are Malays. All the items were also modified according to the research objectives which were to measure the oral Arabic skills. A pilot study was carried out to determine

the internal consistency between the items. Table 1 illustrates the alpha values which vary between .65 to .93, and are accepted by scholars (Sekaran, 2003).

TABLE 1
The Coefficient Alphas of MSLQ Scales in This Study

No.	Subscales	α
1	Motivation – value (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and task value)	.82
2	Motivation – expectancy (control of learning beliefs and self efficacy)	.93
3	Motivation – affect (test anxiety)	.65

Data Analysis

Initially, the two-way MANOVA was used to analyse the differences between the students with different prior experiences and genders. The preliminary assumption testing was also conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and multicollinearity, with no violations noted, except for the low correlation between test anxiety and other components. In this case, a separate univariate analysis of variance can be

considered (Pallant, 2005). Therefore, for the test anxiety component, the two-way ANOVA was carried out instead of using the two-way MANOVA.

RESULTS

The analysis shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the students with different prior experiences on the combined dependent variables (Table 2): $F(5, 174)=7.45, p=.000, \text{Wilks' Lambda}=.824, \text{partial eta squared}=.176$. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, the differences to reach statistical significance (Table 3), using a new Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.01, were (1) intrinsic motivation: $F(1, 180)=16.263, p=.000, \text{partial eta squared}=.084$, (2) extrinsic motivation: $F(1, 180)=7.517, p=.007, \text{partial eta squared}=.041$, (3) task value: $F(1, 180)=12.161, p=.001, \text{partial eta squared}=.064$ and (4) self-efficacy: $F(1, 180)=35.57, p=.000, \text{partial eta squared}=.167$.

Meanwhile, an inspection of the mean scores (Table 4) indicates that SWE has higher level of (1) intrinsic motivation ($M=5.41, SD=.882$) than SNE ($M=4.87, SD=.950$), (2) extrinsic motivation ($M=6.11,$

TABLE 2
Multivariate test of the effects of prior experiences and gender (N=182)

Effects	Wilks' Lambda (λ)	F value	df1	df2	Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Prior experience	.824	7.45	5	174	.000*	.176
Gender	.907	3.569	5	174	.004*	.093
Prior experience*gender	.987	.456	5	174	.808	.013

*significant at $p < 0.05$

TABLE 3
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects: prior experience and gender (N=182)

Effects	Dependent Variables	F value	df1	df2	Sig*	Partial Eta Squared
Prior experience	Intrinsic motivation	16.263	1	180	.000*	.084
	Extrinsic motivation	7.517	1	180	.007*	.041
	Task value	12.161	1	180	.001*	.064
	Self-efficacy	35.57	1	180	.000*	.167
	Control of learning beliefs	2.605	1	180	.108	.014
Gender	Intrinsic motivation	6.151	1	180	.014	.033
	Extrinsic motivation	11.517	1	180	.001*	.061
	Task value	9.810	1	180	.002*	.052
	Self-efficacy	9.517	1	180	.002*	.051
	Control of learning beliefs	10.030	1	180	.002*	.053

*significant at $p < 0.01$, using a new Bonferroni adjusted alpha level: $.05/5$

TABLE 4
Descriptive analysis of effects: Prior experience and gender (N=182)

Effects	Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	M	SD
Prior experience	Intrinsic motivation	SNE	4.87	.950
		SWE	5.41	.882
	Extrinsic motivation	SNE	5.82	.812
		SWE	6.11	.692
	Task value	SNE	5.12	.792
		SWE	5.50	.717
	Self-efficacy	SNE	4.73	.889
		SWE	5.42	.722
Gender	Extrinsic motivation	Male	5.73	.752
		Female	6.11	.746
	Task value	Male	5.10	.755
		Female	5.44	.767
	Self-efficacy	Male	4.84	.838
		Female	5.21	.883
	Control of learning beliefs	Male	5.55	.756
		Female	5.92	.795

SD=.693) than SNE (M=5.82, SD=.812), (3) task value (M=5.50, SD=.717) than SNE (M=5.12, SD=.792), and (4) self-efficacy (M=5.42, SD=.722) than SNE (M=4.73, SD=.889).

There is a statistically significant difference between the students with different gender on the combined dependent variables (Table 2): $F(5, 174)=3.57, p=.004, \text{Wilks' Lambda}=.907, \text{partial eta squared}=.093$. When the results for the dependent variables are considered separately, the differences to reach statistical significance (Table 3), using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.01 are (1) extrinsic motivation: $F(1, 180)=11.517, p=.001, \text{partial eta squared}=.061$, (2) task value: $F(1, 180)=9.81, p=.002, \text{partial eta squared}=.052$, (3) control of learning beliefs: $F(1, 180)=10.03, p=.002, \text{partial eta squared}=.053$ and (4) self-efficacy: $F(1, 180)=9.517, p=.002, \text{partial eta squared}=.051$.

An inspection of the mean scores (Table 4) indicated that female students had a higher level of (1) extrinsic motivation (M=6.11, SD=.746) than the males (M=5.73, SD=.752), (2) task value (M=5.44, SD=.767) than the males (M=5.10, SD=.755), (3) control of learning beliefs (M=5.92, SD=.795) than

the males (M=5.55, SD=.756), and (4) self-efficacy (M=5.21, SD=.883) than the males (M=4.84, SD=.838).

However, there was no statistically significant difference found between the interaction of both the independent variables, which were different prior experience and different gender, on the combined dependent variables (Table 2): $F(5, 174)=.456, p=.808, \text{Wilks' Lambda}=.987, \text{partial eta squared}=.013$.

As mentioned earlier, with a low correlation value between test anxiety and other components, it is suggested that a separate univariate analysis of variance be applied to that particular component (Pallant, 2005). Therefore, a two way between groups analysis of variance (two-way ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of prior knowledge and gender on students' motivation level.

Meanwhile, there was a statistically significant main effect for prior experience (Table 5): $F(1, 180) = 38.08, p=.000, \text{partial eta square}=.176$. The main effect for gender: $F(1, 180) = .363, p=.547$ and the interaction effect: $F(2, 180) = .336, p=.563$ did not reach statistical significance. An inspection of the mean scores (Table 6)

TABLE 5
two-way ANOVA - Tests of Between-Subjects Effects (N=182)

Effects	Dependent Variable	F value	df1	df2	Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Prior experience	Test anxiety	38.079	1	180	.000*	.176
Gender	Test anxiety	.363	1	180	.547	.002
Prior experience*gender	Test anxiety	.336	1	180	.563	.002

*significant at $p < 0.05$

indicated that SWE had a lower level of test anxiety ($M=4.57$, $SD=.856$) than SNE ($M=5.38$, $SD=.837$).

TABLE 6
Descriptive analysis of effects (prior experience and gender) for test anxiety (N=182)

Effect	Dependent Variables		M	SD
Prior experience	Test anxiety	SNE	5.38	.837
		SWE	4.57	.856

DISCUSSION

Experienced students were found to score significantly higher than the inexperienced ones in all the value components which comprised of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and task value, showing that the earlier group had more positive value towards oral Arabic learning than the latter students. Learning experience has contributed in nurturing experienced students' value towards learning Arabic. From this study, it can be concluded that the longer the experience of a student in learning Arabic, the more positive value would a student possess towards learning the language, a finding that is similar to some previous studies (*see* Magnan & Back, 2007; Morris, 2005).

The importance of having high value towards learning has been discussed by some scholars. For example, intrinsic motivation has been proven to be the most important type of motivation to ensure students' perseverance and resilience in learning as compared to extrinsic motivation (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Intrinsic motivation also

stimulates the use of high cognitive learning strategies among students as compared to extrinsic motivation (Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd. Rahimi, Parilah, & Wan Haslina, 2011d; Morris, 2005).

Pintrich *et al.* (1991) also stressed on having high task value which increases students' participation in learning activities. Thus, while teaching a class comprising of students with mixed prior experiences at UiTM, the students are expected to react differently towards the learning process according to their different value levels. In particular, the students with higher values are expected to participate more actively in the learning process than the others.

As for the expectancy component, experienced students were found to have scored significantly higher in self-efficacy, indicating that they are more confident in achieving their learning objectives than inexperienced ones. On the other hand, both the groups have similar level of control of learning beliefs, showing that these groups have similar level of beliefs in that they are the main contributors to a successful learning. This finding is reflected by the nature of Arabic learning at UiTM, in which students rely on themselves to learn, as formal meetings with lecturers are only scheduled once a week.

This finding also proves that the experienced students have higher positive level of self-efficacy to perform and to achieve their academic goals compared to the others. The importance of having high level of self-efficacy has been stressed by many scholars (*see* Brophy, 1998; Crandall,

Katkovsky, & Preston, 1962; Ghazali Yusri *et al.*, 2011c; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996), especially in the process of task selection and students' participation. Students will get involved in learning activities that they expect they are able to complete them, and thus influence their achievement in learning (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Therefore, experienced students are also expected to show higher participations in the learning activities and choose more challenging activities compared to inexperienced ones, as suggested by Morris (2005).

Prior experience is also found to influence the level of students' test anxiety. Inexperienced students exhibited a higher level of test anxiety compared to experienced students, indicating that experience plays significant roles in reducing test anxiety level. Experienced students are more likely to have experience in facing exams cognitively and physically. Therefore, they know how to control their anxiety much better than the inexperienced students. Similarly, lack of experience also probably affects inexperienced students' achievement, as suggested by some previous research findings which have proven that test anxiety has a negative correlation with academic achievement (Malpass *et al.*, 1999; Pintrich *et al.*, 1991). According to Pintrich and Schunk (1996), many research carried out on test anxiety consistently showed negative correlation with the achievement.

Gender has been proven to have a significant influence towards learning (Bembenutty, 2007; Lundeberg & Mohan, 2008; Ray *et al.*, 2003). This study found

that there is a statistically significant difference between students with different gender in terms of their extrinsic motivation, task value, control of learning beliefs and self-efficacy. In particular, female students exhibited significantly higher than their male counterparts in all the components, except for intrinsic motivation and test anxiety. These findings show that female students have higher value towards learning than the males, such as the intention to get more external rewards, high marks and recognition from outsiders. Female students also value the oral Arabic learning higher than the males.

However, in terms of learning for mastery, both genders are at the same level. It is probably due to the status of the Arabic language itself, which is the official language of Islam. All the students involved in this study are Muslims, regardless of their gender. Islam as one of the most influential motivation in learning Arabic in Malaysia, as discussed by many scholars (Kaseh *et al.*, 2010) and it has also become one of the most effective strategies used by the students in learning Arabic (Kamarul Shukri, Mohd Amin, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Zamri, 2009b).

For the expectancy component which comprises of control of learning beliefs and self-efficacy, female students yielded statistically different and higher levels than the males, showing that the earlier group possess stronger belief in themselves, which serves as the main contributor of their success in learning oral Arabic. They also have more confidence in achieving the course objectives. Both the male and female students, however, showed no difference

in the test anxiety, and this means that they share the same anxiety level towards examinations. This is probably due to the same nature faced by the students learning oral Arabic learning at UiTM, and thus contributes to the no significant difference between them.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has some classroom implications. Experienced students have higher positive value and expectancy towards Arabic learning. In addition, they also have lower level of test anxiety as compared to the other gender. Therefore, teachers are expected to face different participations and reactions towards learning from their students (Brophy, 1998; Dornyei, 2001; Morris, 2005; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 2004).

Most probably, teachers will also find different levels of achievement among their students, depending on their prior experiences, due to the finding that prior experience has contributed to the different levels of motivation. Some previous studies have also shown that different levels of motivation will contribute to different levels of achievement (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Therefore, this study suggests that students need to be placed separately in different classes according to their prior experience. Meanwhile, a survey has to be carried out at the beginning of the class to determine students' level of experiences. It is also easier for teachers to manage a class of

students whose levels of motivation are not the same.

Otherwise, preparatory classes can be provided for inexperienced students before they register in the actual classes. These additional classes are expected to bridge the motivational gaps between these two groups of students. Besides, it is also important for teachers to teach students with different experiences and achievement using different stimulus (Cajkler & Addelman, 2000) and different supports (Dabbagh, 2003).

Teachers also need to seriously take gender factor into consideration. Female students are expected to perform better than their male counterpart because their motivation level is statistically significant and higher, as it was found in this study, except for intrinsic motivation and test anxiety. Therefore, this study further recommends that any activities in the classroom have to include the participation of mixed genders. In other words, collaborative grouping activities between the male and female students need to be implemented to nurture a positive motivation towards learning (Brophy, 1998; Cajkler & Addelman, 2000; Dornyei, 2001; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

Another suggestion is to separate male and female students into different classes. However, in terms of practicality, the separation of students based on their gender is difficult to be implemented at UiTM because the number of males is much smaller than the females. It is also difficult to set up a class to solely consist of male students. This is because they come from various programmes, which makes it difficult to fix them into the same timetable.

Therefore, this study strongly suggests that gender gaps have to be treated by having collaborative activities involving male and female students together.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study is limited to comparing the motivation level of students with different prior experiences and genders based on quantitative data. Hence, it is recommended that further studies be carried out using qualitative data that include methods such as interviews and observations in order to obtain more insightful and in-depth explanations of the situation.

Further studies can also be carried out to compare students' motivations across the different faculties and different UiTM campuses. As the biggest university in Malaysia, UiTM has more than 23 faculties, which can be further divided into different clusters based on their nature of learning. The various faculties which students belong to may also influence students' motivations, as mentioned by Feather (1988) who found that students' enrolment in Humanities, Science Social and Science faculties is related to their expectancy and task value towards Science and Mathematics.

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