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ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY, ATTITUDE, ENGAGEMENT AND ANXIETY ON ACHIEVEMENT OF MALAYSIAN LEARNERS OF MANDARIN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

SUO YAN JU



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ACHIEVEMENT OF MALAYSIAN LEARNERS OF MANDARIN AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE

SUO YANJU

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY
2023



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Alhamdulillah, with His permission, this dissertation is finally completed. First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr Muhammed Yusuf, for the constant support and guidance throughout this dissertation. I would also like to acknowledge the Mandarin foreign language instructors and students from Malaysian public universities for their participation and engagement. I want to thank my friends and colleagues for providing valuable suggestions that helped guide this dissertation. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my loving father, and sister, Dr Suo Yan Mei for their spiritual support throughout my postgraduate study journey.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to investigate the relationships between engagement, attitudes, anxiety, and Mandarin achievement among Malaysian learners of Mandarin as a foreign language (MFL). It also aims to examine the role of self-efficacy in mediating between determinants of MFL achievement. A quantitative study was selected to answer five research questions. Four sets of instruments adapted from the previous study were used to measure Self-efficacy, Engagement, Attitude and Anxiety. The Psychometric properties of the instruments were evaluated via experts' comments, while the internal consistencies were examined through Cronbach's alpha. The values of Cronbach's alpha ranged from .746 to .915, indicating the instruments' appropriateness and suitability. 614 MFL learners from Malaysian public universities were chosen as a sample through cluster sampling. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmative Factor Analysis (CFA), Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), and MANOVA were used to analyse the data. The results of EFA and CFA suggested that the engagement, attitudes, anxiety, and self-efficacy were loaded according to the predetermined theory, which indicated strong construct validity. The SEM result showed that engagement and self-efficacy were directly and positively related to MFL achievement. At the same time, anxiety was negatively but statistically associated with achievement. There were significant differences between learning engagement across gender, self-efficacy across ages and proficiency levels. However, anxiety and attitudes are statistically insignificant across gender, age, and proficiency levels. The results of the present study suggested that language learning engagement and self-efficacy are significant determinants of MFL achievement. In contrast, language anxiety contributes negatively to MFL achievement. The implication of this study suggested engagement, self-efficacy, and language anxiety should be given importance since they affect the success of learning MFL.



PERANAN KEBERKESANAN DIRI, SIKAP, PENGLIBATAN DAN KEBIMBANGAN TERHADAP PENCAPAIAN PELAJAR MALAYSIA MANDARIN SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING.

ABSTRAK

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat hubungan antara penglibatan, sikap, kebimbangan, dan pencapaian bahasa Mandarin di kalangan pelajar Malaysia bahasa Mandarin sebagai bahasa asing (MFL). Ia juga bertujuan untuk mengkaji peranan efikasi sendiri dalam pengantaraan antara penentu pencapaian MFL. Kajian kuantitatif telah dipilih untuk menjawab lima persoalan kajian. Empat set instrumen yang diadaptasi daripada kajian lepas digunakan untuk mengukur Efikasi Kendiri, Penglibatan, Sikap dan Kebimbangan. Sifat psikometrik instrumen dinilai melalui ulasan pakar, manakala ketekalan dalaman diperiksa melalui alfa Cronbach. Nilai alfa Cronbach berjulat dari .746 hingga .915, menunjukkan kesesuaian dan kesesuaian instrumen. 614 pelajar MFL dari universiti awam Malaysia telah dipilih sebagai sampel dengan menggunakan persampelan kelompok. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmative Factor Analysis (CFA), Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), dan MANOVA digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Keputusan EFA dan CFA mencadangkan bahawa penglibatan, sikap, kebimbangan, dan efikasi sendiri dimuatkan mengikut teori yang telah ditetapkan, yang menunjukkan kesahan konstruk yang kuat. Keputusan SEM menunjukkan bahawa penglibatan dan efikasi sendiri mempunyai kaitan secara langsung dan positif dengan pencapaian MFL. Terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara penglibatan pembelajaran merentas jantina, efikasi sendiri merentas umur dan tahap kecekapan. Walau bagaimanapun, kebimbangan dan sikap menjadi tidak signifikan secara statistik merentas jantina, umur dan tahap kecekapan. Pada masa yang sama, kebimbangan secara negatif tetapi dikaitkan secara statistik dengan pencapaian. Keputusan kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa penglibatan pembelajaran bahasa dan efikasi sendiri adalah penentu penting pencapaian MFL. Sebaliknya, kebimbangan bahasa menyumbang secara negatif kepada pencapaian MFL. Implikasi kajian ini mencadangkan penglibatan, efikasi sendiri, dan kebimbangan bahasa harus diberi kepentingan kerana ia mempengaruhi kejayaan pembelajaran MFL.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CFL	Chinese Foreign Language
CICT	Correction Item Total Correlation
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
FSI	Foreign Service of the Institution
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index
GLS	Generalized Least Squares
GPA	Grade Point Average
HSK	Chinese Proficiency Test
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
L2	Second language
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
MFAS	Mandarin Foreign Language Anxiety Scale
MFATS	Mandarin Foreign Language Attitude Scale
MFECS	Mandarin Foreign Language Engagement Scale
MFL	Mandarin as a foreign language
MFSES	Mandarin Foreign Language Self-Efficacy Scale
MLAA	Modern Language Association of American



MLE	Maximum Likelihood Estimates
ML	Maximum Likelihood
NFI	Normed Fit Index
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TCSOL	Teaching Mandarin Chinese to speakers of another language
TL	Target language
TLI	Tucker Lewis Index
WLS	Weighted Least Squares



APPENDIX LIST

- A Survey Questionnaire
- B Content Validity Expert Review



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

In this introductory chapter, the researcher highlighted the background information of the study, including psychological variables such as self-efficacy, engagement, attitude, and anxiety related to learning Mandarin as a foreign language. The problems of the statement, research questions and objectives, theoretical and conceptual framework were also presented. The chapter also offered the definitions of terms and the rationale of the study.

1.1 Background study

Psychology is very important in people's daily lives. People's daily success and failure are dependent on their everyday psychological state. As a result, people may suffer



from certain psychological issues, which can sometimes interfere with their daily work. The primary causes of these difficulties are mental variables such as efficacy, stress, anxiety, sadness, motivation deficiency, loneliness, impudence, and phobia. Those psychological disorders can cause students to fail in their academic performance, anxiety during assessment periods, low self-confidence, little concerns, and dread or discomfort, which could interfere with their ability to perform academically (Nguyen et al., 2013)

Language learning is a complex psychological, physiological, and even social process (Lenahan, 2015). This process involves many factors, such as motivation, the learner's native language, learning environment, age, gender, teaching strategies, and learners' factors. (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Patsy Lightbown, 2000; Ellis, 2015; Richards, 2021)



In recent years, many language researchers and second or foreign language instructors have paid more attention to affective factors in language learning. The research and explorations from different perspectives and angles are expected to guide second or foreign language learning from the psychological perspective of learners so that second or foreign language learners can obtain some psychological support to ease the language learning process. (Lonin, 2017, cited in Wang & Wu, 2020).

Factors such as the learning environment, native language, age, and gender, play a role in language learning. However, psychological factors such as self-efficacy, attitudes towards learning, learning engagement, and anxiety also can influence second or foreign language learning. (Ni, 2012; Wang & Wu, 2020; Bao & Liu, 2021). Learning a new language, especially a language different from the learners' native





language, can be very stressful and challenging. It may also be a source of devastation and anxiety. So, learners showed a negative attitude towards language learning and did not engage in the classroom and learning process. In return, it impacted their language performance. Learners gain bad experiences with language learning and lower their self-efficacy. Thus, this study attempted to explore the role of self-efficacy, attitudes toward learning a foreign language, learning engagement and anxiety in learning Mandarin as a foreign language among Malaysian non-native speakers. The study attempted to test the proposed model and verify whether the model holds across the learners.

Bandura's (1986,1997) Social cognitive theory explained that people have a self-belief system that can control their behaviour, emotions, actions, and thoughts, where Bandura mentioned that “what people think, believe, and feel affect how they behave.” (Bandura,1986. p. 25)

Bandura's self-efficacy (1986,1997) was one of the topics studied in psychology and education that refers to “the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations”(p3). Bandura and other researchers demonstrated that self-efficacy could have an impact on a variety of factors, from behaviour to motivation. It is the most significant mediator of self-regulation and self-reflection. It also is the predictor of one's language performance compared to their actual ability. (Bandura, 1977; Schunk, 1991). As a crucial part of human agency, self-efficacy mediates between learning ability, previous accomplishments, and future achievements (Bandura, 2006). Additionally, Self-efficacy plays a prior role. Prior studies (Chun& Zimmerman, 1994; Yokoyama, 2019; Said & Jamal, 2020) found a positive relationship between self-efficacy and learners' Academic performance. These studies also discovered that learners' academic





performance could be improved if they are well-trained in their self-efficacy. Pajares & Miller (1994) also reported a strong correspondence between self-efficacy and performance. Learners with high self-efficacy would like to be involved in more challenging tasks with extra effort and show excellent academic performance compared to those with low self-efficacy.

Moreover, the social cognitive theory of Bandura (1988) perceives self-efficacy in managing potential threats as essential in exciting anxiety. Self-efficacy is linked positively to the learner's performance, whereas anxiety has little or no relation to performance. In turn, poor self-efficacy raises the worry of the student and reduces their academic performance.

Another variable related to a learner's academic performance is engagement. Astin's student involvement theory (1984, 1999) refers to the physical and psychological energy devoted to the educational experience by the student. Highly engaged learners spend more time and energy on their studies, actively participate in activities, and interact with their peers and faculty members. The cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement strongly and positively affected learning processes in general and foreign language learning in particular. The theory emphasized active participation in the learning process. It significantly contributes to learners' academic performance and causes them to withdraw from their studies. Researchers discovered a relationship between self-efficacy, anxiety, and engagement. Sökmen (2019) discovered that self-efficacy is a positive predictor for all aspects of learners' engagement. Abu-Hilal and al-Abed (2019) found that self-efficacy significantly predicted engagement, but self-efficacy and engagement are not able to predict anxiety among Math learners.





Social psychologists have suggested that attitudes may directly affect the individual's conduct. The mindset of the person might affect the overall pattern reaction. Having attitudes to language acquisition can therefore impact the result of learning. Brown (1980) claimed that students tend to acquire a language when they have a good attitude concerning the language they learn. The study of Gardner and Lambert (as referred to in Khalid, 2016) found that attitude and motivation are two elements directly related to language achievement.

Studies discovered a positive relationship between language performance and attitudes toward second or foreign language learning (Gardner, Lambert & Burstall (1987, cited in Gertie, 2020c; Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Wright (1987) believed that "value is the basis of our attitude" (p. 21). Attitudes are derived from value, and individuals' positive or negative attitudes are based on value. According to Wright (1987), if learners believe in the necessity and capacity of acquiring a second or foreign language, it demonstrates that they value language learning and have a positive attitude toward it. In other words, if learners do not believe in their capability in the master a language, they will show a negative attitude towards language learning. So, it can be concluded from Wright (1987) that an individual's self-efficacy predicts a foreign language learning attitude. Attitude is the most powerful determinant of behaviour. A negative attitude and lack of motivation can influence language acquisition.

Some scholars reported that there exists a negative relationship between anxiety and foreign-language performance. (Zheng & Cheng, 2018; Subekti, 2018; Andualem Desta, 2019) Others (Jin et al., 2015; Zhang, 2019) found that there is a strong correlation between anxiety and specific foreign-language listening and speaking skills but a weak correlation with reading skills or no significant correlation



between anxiety and foreign-language performance. According to Young (1990), anxiety influences lower-level language proficiency learners. However, the previous studies did not provide precise, rather than conflict results in a correlation between anxiety and foreign-language performance.

1.2 Problem Statement

Non-cognitive factors or affective variables play a pivotal role in general and in learning a second or foreign language. Sauvignon (2010) emphasized that affective factors play a crucial role in language learning success. During the 1960s, the importance of human cognitive and affective factors was highlighted. Since then, many researchers have focused on the factors that determine different language learning (Arnold & Brown, 1999). For instance, many researchers (Clément et al., 1994; Valdivia et al., 2011; Samaneh, 2014) focused on the importance of affective factors in language learning.

Mandarin, China's official language, has the most speakers globally, both as a heritage language and as a second or foreign language in and outside China. Since China has the world's second-largest economy and strong ties with other countries, the number of non-native learners is increasing. By 2020, more than 0.2 billion people would have learnt Mandarin outside of China. (2020, Xinhua). However, those students face a number of challenges, including natural difficulties in the target language, loss of confidence, genuine complexity in the target language that makes the students nervous, a lack of motivation, psychological barriers, attitude problems, and a loss of interest in learning the language.

The problem that exists in the current study could also be seen through the current Mandarin teaching status in Malaysian public institutions and the insufficient number of studies in the area under investigation.

Many studies (Rosli et al., 2012; Abdullahi et al., 2018; Siew Fen et al., 2021) conducted in Malaysian public institutions show that students lack confidence in their learning ability. Students' attitudes and motivation influence their foreign language performance significantly. According to researchers (Chua et al., 2015; Cheong et al., 2019; Abdul Aziz et al., 2021), learners found it very difficult to learn Mandarin, particularly its pronunciation and writing and they were concerned that they would struggle in class. The students were anxious and demotivated, and they gradually lost interest in class activities and were not engaged in learning. Many students eventually withdrew from studying the higher level of Mandarin.

On the other hand, some Mandarin instructors in Malaysia believe that the target language's implicit difficulty demotivates students. Therefore, students perform poorly in the language. In this regard, Chastain (1988) argued that apart from linguistic aptitude, "affective factors play larger roles in developing language skills" because "the emotional control will activate or shut down the cognitive function" (p.122).

According to the Foreign Service Institution (FSI) of America's language difficulty ranking, Mandarin categories are the fifth less commonly taught language, which is an exceptional difficulty for an English language native speaker. It is related to learning Mandarin as a foreign language, the nature of difficulties of language due to pronunciation (five different tones), and the language's non-alphabetic writing system could affect learners' performance. On the other hand, other variables



concerning individual differences could also affect learners' learning outcomes. (Brown, 2007; Gardner, 2001).

Although many students enrolled in Mandarin as a foreign language course every year at higher educational institutions in Malaysia, based on the observation and study conducted (MLAA, 2019), there was a difference in enrolments from the lower level to higher levels. At Islamic Science University Malaysia (USIM), more than 100 students from various faculty take Mandarin level one every semester. Still, less than half of learners continue learning at level two, and less than 10% continue learning at level three. The Modern Language Association of America (MLAA) surveyed Mandarin foreign language learning enrolment at various levels and discovered that there was a significant difference in Mandarin foreign language enrollment from lower to higher levels. Only 22% of students continued to study Mandarin at the intermediate and advanced levels. (MLAA, 2019) Gardner, Moorcroft and MacIntyre (1987) discovered a link between high dropout rates in language learning and language anxiety.

Ersanlı (2015) argued that it has always been a concern for foreign language instructors why some students are more interested and driven to learn a foreign language. Still, others simply lose their interest in the same learning environment and the same cognitive capacity. There is no single and proper answer for this, but it is claimed that many internal or external factors determine the success of learning a foreign language.

With the influence of Western ideas of second language learning, in the 1980s, Mandarin foreign language researchers started to move more toward education and learning. Mandarin as a foreign language is taught in high education, focusing on linguistic error analysis, inter-linguist research, language acquisition, and linguistic





skills rather than communicative development. The researchers primarily focused on attitudes, analysis of errors, and pedagogy of the students (Tan & Hoe, 2007). The psychological aspects, such as motivation, were addressed and investigated (Tan, 2010). It is an essential step in examining psychological variables which play a role among Mandarin foreign language learners. However, the study did not profoundly explore the link between motivation and learners' performance.

Additionally, numerous studies showed that self-efficacy, engagement attitude, and anxiety are influential variables that might predict English language performance; While little study has been conducted to investigate these variables related to Mandarin foreign language achievement of Malaysian higher institutional institution learners. However, few studies have been conducted in USA and China to investigate these non-cognitive variables. Conversely, the variables are unexplored in the Malaysian Mandarin foreign language (MFL) context, where many non-native speakers are increasingly learning Mandarin as a foreign or second language. Despite the significance of the study's constructs, as highlighted above, less attention was paid especially relating to teaching and learning Mandarin as a foreign language in Malaysia. Furthermore, although teaching the Mandarin language as a foreign language started in Malaysia as early as 1960, rigorous empirical studies to holistically investigate non-cognitive variables contributing to the success and failure of learning Mandarin as a foreign language among Malaysian non-native speakers were not thoroughly studied.

Hence, this study aimed to investigate the role of self-efficacy, attitudes toward language learning, engagement, and anxiety in Mandarin as a foreign language achievement of selected public university students in Malaysia.



1.3 Objective of study

This study attempted to examine the role of the predetermined determinants of Mandarin learning achievement among Malaysian non-native speakers. In other words, the study examined the role of language learning engagement, attitudes toward foreign language learning, and language learning anxiety in Mandarin language achievement among selected public university learners in Malaysia. It also investigated the role of self-efficacy as a mediator variable to mediate between exogenous variables (language learning engagement, attitudes toward foreign language learning, and language learning anxiety) and endogenous variable (Mandarin learning achievement). Thus, the objectives of the current study are as follow:

- 1) To test psychometric properties of self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety scales.
- 2) To investigate the direct relationship between self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, anxiety, and learners' Mandarin Foreign Language achievement.
- 3) To explore the role of self-efficacy in mediating between attitude, engagement, anxiety, and Mandarin foreign language learners' achievement.
- 4) To examine the magnitude of self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety in Mandarin foreign language learners' achievement.
- 5) To examine if there are any differences in Mandarin foreign language learners' self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety according to their demographic variables (such as gender, age, and proficiency level).

1.4 Research questions

The present study examined the relationship between self-efficacy, anxiety, and attitude engagement regarding Mandarin achievement. Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the psychometric properties of self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety scales employed, and how can they be psychometrically examined?
- 2) Is there a significant relationship between self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety among Mandarin foreign language learners?
- 3) Does self-efficacy mediate the relationships between attitude, engagement, anxiety, and Mandarin foreign language learners' achievement?
- 4) What is the magnitude of self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety in Mandarin foreign language learners' achievement?
- 5) Are there any differences in Mandarin foreign language learners' self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety according to their demographic variables such as gender, age, and proficiency level?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: The self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety scales do not meet the psychometric properties and do not psychometrically fit.

H₀₂: There is no significant direct relationship between self-efficacy, attitudes, engagement, anxiety, and Mandarin foreign language learners' achievement.

H₀₃: self-efficacy does not mediate the relationships between attitude, engagement, anxiety, and Mandarin foreign language learners' achievement.

H₀₄: self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety have no direct effect on Mandarin foreign language learners' achievement.

H₀₅: There are no differences in Mandarin foreign language learners' self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety according to their demographic variables such as gender, age, and proficiency level.

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi 1.5 Theoretical framework of the study

Students are the core of all educational institutions. Students' performance (academic achievement) plays a key role in producing the best quality of graduates who will be the human resources and leaders responsible for the economic and social development of the country. (Ali et al., 2009). Students' performance has attracted great attention among educators and researchers. Studies discovered that many factors, such as social, psychological, economic, environmental, and personal factors, can affect students' performance. These factors can be internal factors, such as psychological and personal factors, and external factors, such as social, economic, and environmental factors. The set of variables which can positively affect students' learning outcomes are student learning characteristics such as social, self-efficacy, anxiety, behavioural, motivational, affective, cognitive, and metacognitive.



1.5.1 Social cognitive theory

Self-efficacy

Self-belief is a fundamental component in many human motivation and behavioural theories. One good example of the self-belief theory is Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986). Self-efficacy theory emphasizes the core of observational learning and social experience in personal development. It refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a particular behaviour successfully. Bandura (1977) regards self-efficacy belief in human functioning as "people's level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true" (p. 2). According to Bandura, the individual's belief in their capabilities can predict their behaviour rather than their ability to accomplish the given tasks. It determines how individuals feel, think, motivate, behave, and do with their knowledge and skills. It helps explain why individuals behave differently from others even if they have similar knowledge and skills.

Bandura (1977,1986,1997) stated that people develop their self-efficacy beliefs by interpreting the information from four primary sources: performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasions, and physical and emotional states. The most important source of information on self-efficacy beliefs is the interpreted results of experience and skills. However, when there are no external influences or effort deficiencies during the early stage of learning, numerous failures may diminish one's perception of self-efficacy toward the task or skills.

The second source of information on self-efficacy beliefs through observing others to complete the task. People who have a positive belief in self-capacity to





complete tasks can influence others' self-efficacy beliefs. When individuals have limited experience in judging their capabilities of doing something, it is extremely useful to observe others' self-efficacy.

Verbal persuasion that one receives from others also can influence one's personal beliefs. When people receive positive verbal feedback while completing a tough task, they are convinced that they possess the necessary talents and abilities to succeed. Encouragement and discouragement can have an impact on one's self-efficacy of performance.

A person's emotional, physical, and psychological well-being might impact how they perceive their capabilities in each situation. According to Bandura (1977,1986,1997), stress and tension are normally considered indicators of a strong tendency to fail, and one's emotions can also significantly impact self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, optimism, positivity, or control over one's mood can enhance self-efficacy beliefs, and depression and negative mood can undermine self-efficacy. Information gathered from these four sources does not directly alter self-efficacy; it depends on how this information is cognitively assessed (Bandura, 1986). The convictions for self-efficiency that people hold affect their decisions, the level of work they put into them, their resilience towards adversity they confront, their persistence with difficulties, their anxiety, and their eventual level of achievement.





1.5.2 Astin's Students' engagement theory

Engagement is important in learning, retention, and performance (Gunus & Kuz, 2015). Students' engagement first appeared in Astin's involvement theory and was later renamed the students' engagement theory (1984). It refers to the physical and psychological time and energy students devote to their education. According to Astin (1984), student engagement involves teaching practice and content and individual student behaviour. Astin's students' engagement included three elements: 1) students' input, which refers to students' background and experiences; 2) student's environment, which refers to all of the experiences students go through during college; and 3) students' outcome, which refers to students' characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and value, which students obtain after they graduate from college. Astin argued that students' engagement requires students to invest their physical and psychological energy continuously, and students' engagement is directly related to their performance (1984).

Harper and Quaye (2014) argued that student engagement requires learners' involvement and feeling of belongings to the given task. Students' engagement is to study how they participate, are prepared and willing to participate in their academic activities and communicate and interact with their teachers and peers in school and the classroom.

Linnenbrink and Pintrich's (2003) proposed a new framework for self-efficacy on students' engagement and learning and discovered that self-efficacy impacts students' engagement and performance. Students with high self-efficacy can lead to more engagement, understanding, and better performance. The more students engage in the subject, the more they will learn and the higher they will achieve;



subsequently, their self-efficacy increases. Reynolds and Walberg (1992) argued that the psychological characteristics of an individual student and their psychological environment influence educational learning outcomes. Bandura (1988) also argued that individuals are more likely to engage in healthy conduct if they feel confident in their capabilities and can conduct the behaviours successfully. Mart van Dinther (2011, as cited in Lopez-Garrido 2020) and his colleagues examined the relationship between education and self-efficacy. They concluded that self-efficacy links to elements such as techniques, goals, and learners' academic success. Higher levels of self-efficacy are connected to student behaviour. It indicates that individuals with a high level of self-efficacy can perform better in the subject and organise schoolwork well.

1.5.3 Theories of Attitude

Myers (2021) defined attitude as “an assessment of anything, or something favourable or unfavourable demonstrated in one's views, feelings, or actions” (p36). It is a social orientation and a fundamental tendency to respond positively or negatively to something. There are three components of attitude: 1) cognitive attitude, which refers to one's beliefs, thoughts, and ideas about something; 2) arousal of affective feelings or emotions; and 3) behavioural aptitude or willingness to act in certain ways towards something. No specific theory can provide detailed insight into how attitude formation changes. Katz's functional theory (1960, cited in Myers, 2021) of attitude looked at attitude as determined by the functions they serve. According to Katz (1960, cited in Myers, 2021), individuals have certain attitudes because they can help them achieve their fundamental aims. Attitude meets four psychological functions: a) individual develops a certain attitude towards something that regards us; b) attitudes provide us with a meaningful environment and knowledge; c) Individuals cultivate attitudes that



can bring our core values of us; d) attitude works as a mechanism to defend ourselves. (Katz, 1960, cited in Myers, 2021).

Katz (1960, as cited in Myers 2021) explained that certain attitudes could change if the attitude towards something is no longer serves a function or the individual feels blocked or frustrated. The social learning theory (Bandura &Walter 1963, cited in Myers 2021) also asserted that individuals learn certain attitudes through classical and instrumental conditioning by observing and imitating others. Individuals can learn a certain attitude from previous experience within the environment. Individuals change their attitude if they lack direct knowledge of internal stimuli to the learner, then they will depend on external stimuli for reward and punishment of the attitude.

Festinger's Cognitive dissonance theory (1957, as cited in Myers 2021) also addressed an individual's attitude change. The theory claims that if one's behaviour is inconsistent with his or her views and beliefs, such will create psychological tension. This underlying tension encourages an individual to change his or her attitude, resulting in consistency between thoughts and behaviours. In other words, cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant psychological condition that occurs when new information contradicts one's previous beliefs one has held. To reduce the dissonance, one can change the existing beliefs and add new beliefs or reduce the important beliefs.

1.5.4 Theory of Anxiety

Anxiety is key to the psychoanalytic theory of effects (feelings). It has been recognized as essential to comprehending mental conflict since the beginning of psychoanalytic philosophy. Anxiety can be defined as the psychological and emotional state or





reaction which consists of unpleasant feelings of tension, nervousness, and worry that can lead to other mental or physical conditions such as depression, social isolation, and stress.

In his theory, Freud (1926, as cited in Freeman & Freeman, 2012) claimed that repression caused anxiety. In the early stage, Freud's views on anxiety evolved as he created his theory of repression, which describes how concepts associated with sexual impulses are pushed out of awareness when they clash with 'civilized' societal standards. In other words, Freud claimed that the process of becoming a social creature necessitates the sacrifice of some of one's sexual desires. Later, Freud introduced a new and very different theory of anxiety and distinguished two forms of anxiety: automatic anxiety and signal anxiety.



Freud defined reality-oriented "automatic" anxiety in which the ego system was overwhelmed. 'Neurotic' anxiety in which recurrences of these experiences were expected, setting defensive mechanisms in action. 'Automatic anxiety' was a dynamic response to powerlessness following a stressful encounter. The ego mediated the second type of anxiety, which originated inside the psychical system. This 'signal anxiety' foreshadowed the appearance of a new "dangerous situation," which would be a re-enactment of one of many previous "traumatic states." According to Freud (1926 cited in Freeman & Freeman, 2012), the ego causes and experiences anxiety and initiates defensive mechanisms in this schema. These 'dangerous situations' tend to revolve around dangers arising from the thought of being powerless and at the mercy of others: threats of losing a loved one, losing another's love or being assaulted.

Foreign language anxiety is one of the critical factors in Krashen's (1982) second language acquisition theory's affective filter that affects learners at every stage





of learning: input, processing, and performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, as cited in Chen & Chang, 2017). According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1989, cited in Chen & Chang, 2017) that anxiety may bring disadvantages in learning and performance. Anxiety is also closely related to self-efficacy. In the social cognitive theory, self-efficacy plays a significant role in anxiety arousal. (Bandura. 1986,1997). Individuals only experience anxiety when they believe they cannot manage or learn the knowledge and skills. According to Bandura, learners' efficacy beliefs positively relate to their academic achievement. In social cognitive theory, anxiety has been viewed as a function of confidence individuals encounter with activities and tasks. When learners have a lower sense of efficacy toward the specific academic subject, they become anxious about engaging in academic tasks and do not show a positive attitude toward the subjects. As a result, the poor sense of efficacy increases anxiety, and demotivated learners are less engaged in academic tasks and do not put much effort into the subject. In return, that reduces academic performance. In comparison, anxiety has minimal or no relationship with learners' academic success.



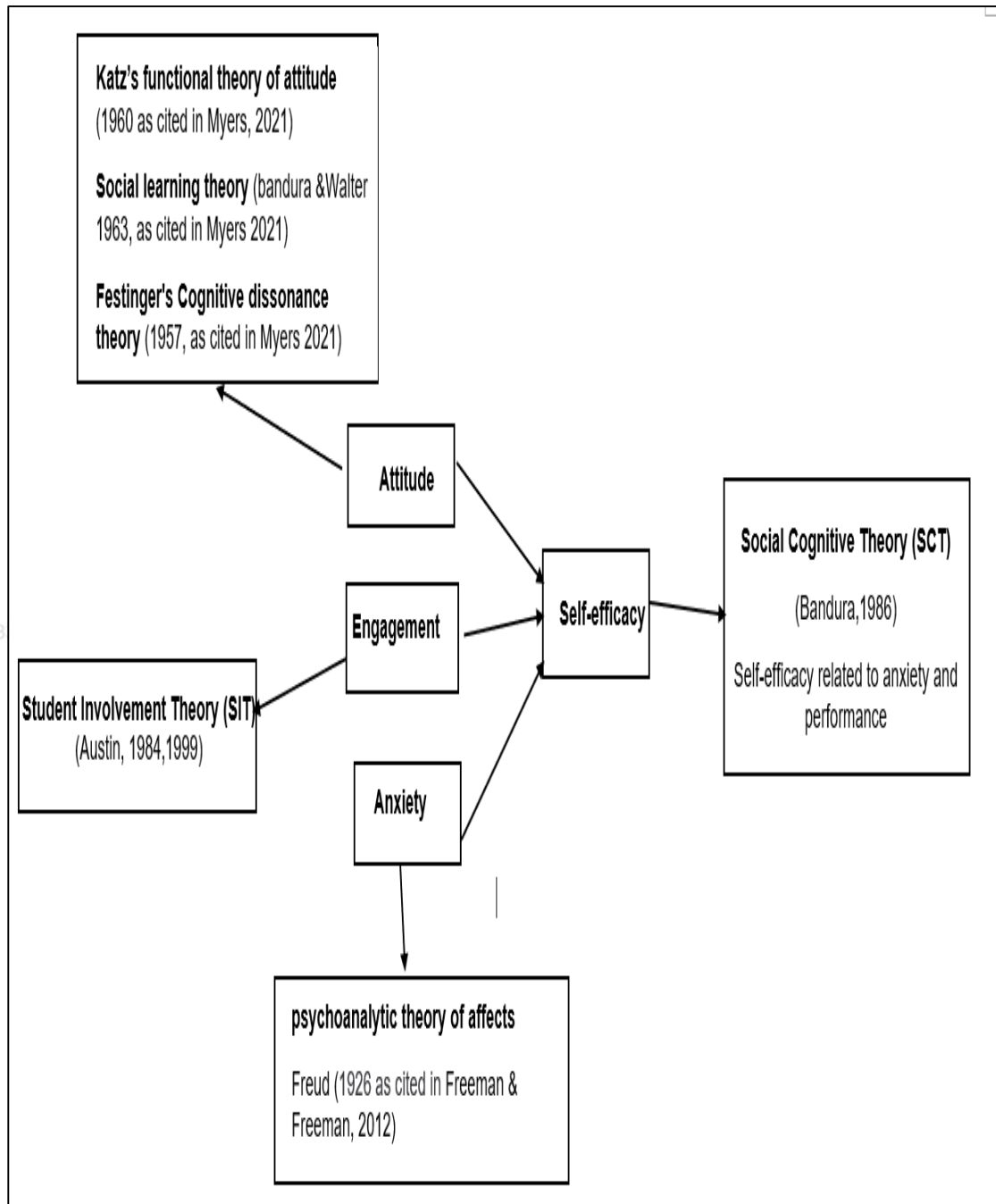


Figure 1.1. Theoretical framework

1.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study

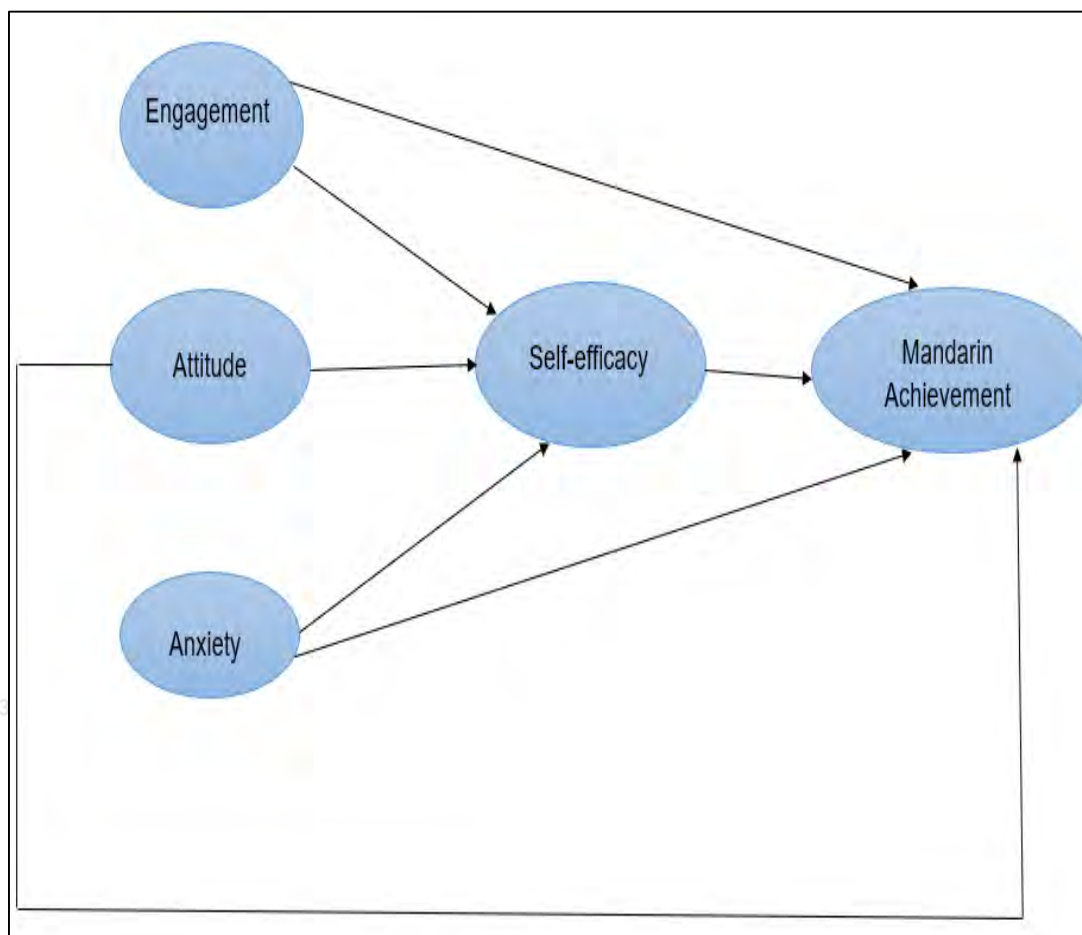


Figure 1.2. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1.2) hypothesises that self-efficacy influences learners' Mandarin achievement but mediates the Mandarin foreign language anxiety, engagement, and attitude.

It was also hypothesized that engagement, attitude towards Mandarin, and language anxiety are connected to learners' achievement. Characteristics of learners such as age, gender and proficiency level are factors in learning Mandarin as a foreign

language, which can be shown via their self-efficacy, anxiety, and engagement in learning it.

1.7 Operational Definitions

The following are the key terms used in this research and their definitions.

1.7.1 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to one's belief in his/her capabilities to complete the task.

Bandura defined self-efficacy as “ the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (1995, p.2).

In this study, self-efficacy refers to Malaysian learners' belief in their ability to learn Mandarin as a foreign language.

1.7.2 Engagement

Engagement relates to the interest of students and participants in the schools, community, classrooms, and learning activities (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Skinner and Pitzer (2012) defined engagement as “constructive, enthusiastic, willing, emotionally positive and cognitively focused participation with learning activities in school” (p. 22). Engagement in this study relates to the involvement and readiness of non-speakers to study Mandarin as a foreign language.

1.7.3 Attitude toward language

Gardner (1985, cited in Getie, 2020) defined attitude as a complex attribute that can influence learners' motivation and successful language learning in school. It adopted learner interest, persistence, attention, action, and enjoyment. In this study, an attitude refers to students' attitudes towards learning Mandarin as a foreign language.

1.7.4 Language Anxiety

Anxiety generally refers to a person reacting to stressful, harmful, or unknown events in mind and body. Young (1998) defined language anxiety as "worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language or foreign language" (p.27). Language anxiety in this study refers to learning anxiety about Mandarin as a foreign language among Malaysian learners.

1.7.5 Foreign Language

A foreign language refers to a language that is not widely used in learners' daily communication or spoken and used in their community or society. People are learning a foreign language for other purposes, such as entertainment, reading, and communicating with native speakers in the workplace.

The term 'foreign language' in this study refers to Malay learners learning a language other than the Malay language as their native language and English as their second language in Malaysia. Mandarin in this study is a foreign language. Other

foreign languages taught in schools or universities in Malaysia are French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Turkish.

1.7.6 Mandarin

The English term 'Mandarin' refers to "Putonghua" or "Guoyu." It is the standardized official Chinese language used for administration and education in the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. It refers to the Standard Chinese dialect based on the Beijing dialect, which is in addition to "seven other dialect groups" (Northern, Wu, Yue/Cantonese, Min, Kejia, Xiang, and Gan dialects) (Yan 2006 cited in Liang 2014, p. 76). It is called "Huayu" in Malaysia and Singapore. It is a media language among Malaysian Chinese who speak different Chinese dialects.

In the study, Mandarin refers to the Standard Chinese language or "Huayu", an official language in China and Taiwan and is taught in Malaysian Chinese schools as a second language and in national schools and universities as an international or third or foreign language.

1.7.7 Teaching Mandarin as a foreign language (MFL)

Mandarin as a foreign language (MFL) refers to learners learning Mandarin Chinese in a country where the language is not an official language. In the People's Republic of China (PRC), it is defined as teaching Mandarin Chinese to speakers of other languages (such as Uyghur and Tibetan language). However, in the majority of Malaysian higher educational institutions, MFL is defined as "Teaching Mandarin as a



foreign language”, which teaches language to non-Chinese speakers and emphasises more on Pinyin (phonological system) and pays less attention to Chinese characters. This study refers to Teaching Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language that emphasises both phonological systems (Pinyin) and logographical writing systems (Chinese characters).

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1.7.8. Achievement

Gajda et al. (2017) defined achievement as “the outcome of learning, which is typically measured by classroom grades, classroom assessments and external achievement tests” (p. 271). In this study, achievement refers to Mandarin foreign language learners who achieved a grade in the subject at the end of the semester.





1.8. Study's Limitations

This study selected four public universities in Malaysia as the research site and intended to identify and examine the self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and level of language anxiety towards the achievement of Malay learners of Mandarin as a foreign language. The four public universities were selected to make studies easy to manage (Creswell, 2012).

The focus of the study samples was on the need for more Mandarin foreign language instructors' guidance due to the lack of opportunities for up-to-date knowledge and guideline on the effect of self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and language anxiety on course achievement among Malay university learners. The selection of Malaysian public university Malay undergraduate Mandarin foreign language learners was considered an essential contribution of this study to local Mandarin foreign language teaching and learning. It helps encourage the acquisition of new knowledge in self-efficacy, attitude engagement, and language anxiety, affecting learners' course achievement of Mandarin as a foreign language teaching and learning.

A total of 614 undergraduate Mandarin foreign language learners representing Malaysian public universities were selected as study participants. However, the interpretation of the finding of this study was based on the sample involving only a short time. The researchers' second language acquisition theory and educational psychology knowledge are not solid enough, and the information provided in this study is limited to generalized to the whole of Mandarin as a foreign language teaching and learning. The researcher's bias should be considered as well in this study.





Furthermore, the study focused entirely on Malay students at public universities who are learning Mandarin variations of Chinese Pinyin, and only a few Chinese characters were introduced. As such, the findings of this study could apply to learners who are learning Mandarin as a foreign language, more with Chinese characters in other universities or institutions. In addition, the validity and reliability of the generalization of the finding to the different ethnic groups of Mandarin foreign language learners in other institutions and nations must also be considered.

1.9 Importance of Research

This study contributed to both practical and theoretical implications in Mandarin as a foreign language learning and teaching. The findings will help clarify the role of self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety on learners' course achievement among Mandarin foreign language learners. Mandarin is perceived as one of the most difficult foreign languages for other speakers. Still, the specific challenges of different factors: self-efficacy, attitude towards language learning, learners' engagement, and anxiety on achievement of learning Mandarin foreign language are unclear. This study used a set of adapted language anxiety, self-efficacy, attitude, and engagement scales. It assesses how students deal with ambiguity, process the language tasks' overall meaning, follow the sequential and spatial relationships involved in Mandarin writing and reading, and communicate with others in Mandarin. It investigated whether language engagement, anxiety, self-efficacy, and attitude contribute to learners' course achievement.

The findings of this study wish to provide clear, empirical, explanatory insights into Malay learners' anxiety, self-efficacy, attitude, and engagement toward learning





Mandarin as a foreign language. The study will help Mandarin foreign language educators know that psychological factors such as self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety will affect Malay university learners' course achievement. The study hopes to help educators improve Mandarin foreign language classroom learning and teaching in the Malaysian context.

This study was the first to provide empirical evidence of how self-efficacy, attitude, engagement, and anxiety affect Malay university learners' Mandarin foreign language (MFL) learning achievement in the Malaysian context. The findings also informed MFL educators about the psychological factors and strategies for helping learners to overcome their problems when learning MFL in an easier and more relaxed way.



The findings aimed to help MFL educators develop a programme that can meet the needs of MFL learners. The study employed quantitative research investigating how psychological factors affect MFL learners' achievement.

1.10 Summary

Language learning, especially a foreign language, is a lifelong learning process. China's essential global economic role makes the Mandarin language particularly popular. The unpleasant personal learning experience of severe anxiety, self-efficacy, attitudes toward foreign language learning, and engagement in a foreign language affect academic, cognitive, social, and individual people. A person with lower language anxiety, high self-efficacy, positive attitudes towards foreign languages, and high engagement in the foreign language learning process will be more relaxed and perform





better in their academics. Research needs to move on to identify the four variables that affect language learning and explain why these effects occur and the correlation of these four variables on language learners' performance in the following chapter.

