

## DEMOTIVATION IN MANDARIN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AMONG MALAYSIAN TERTIARY STUDENTS

\*Rokiah Pae, Lam Kai Chee, Kuan Wee Ling & Najwa Hanani Kopli

Faculty of Education, Language, and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,  
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

\*Corresponding author: [prokiah@unimas.my](mailto:prokiah@unimas.my)

Received: 18.03.2024

Accepted: 20.06.2024

### ABSTRACT

**Background and Purpose:** Demotivation has been acknowledged as a significant factor in the decrease of student enrolment and the increase in student attrition rates within the domain of Mandarin as a foreign language (MFL) learning. This study seeks to identify the causes of demotivation among learners of MFL at a public tertiary institution in Malaysia.

**Methodology:** The study's sample consisted of 72 undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory-level MFL elective course. Data were collected using online questionnaires at the end of the academic semester. The online questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first focused on the demographic information of the participants, and the second contained open-ended questions. Participants were asked to characterize the learning experience that (1) negatively impacted their motivation and (2) caused them to feel frustrated or want to quit their MFL studies. The data was subjected to thematic analysis, and the themes from the responses were identified and categorized.

**Findings:** The factors that contribute to demotivation can be classified into two categories: internal and external. Internal categories include psychological states such as anxiety and boredom. In contrast, external categories include test performance, course content, workload, and significant others (teachers and peers). External factors, particularly test performance, course content, and workload, have a greater impact on the demotivation of MFL learners compared to internal factors. The most frequently cited factor is test performance, primarily due to the difficulty of learning course content, particularly Chinese characters. One-third of the students in this study spent more than three hours per week on MFL learning

outside of class. However, many students struggle to manage their Mandarin study time due to other academic or extracurricular obligations.

**Contributions:** The current research offers additional insights into the nature and characteristics of demotivation in foreign language learning, specifically among non-native Mandarin learners with little or no prior knowledge, in the context of MFL as an elective course.

**Keywords:** Demotivation, LOTE, Mandarin as a foreign language, Malaysian tertiary institution, elective.

**Cite as:** Pae, R., Lam, K. C, Kuan, W. L, & Kopli, N. H. (2024). Demotivation in Mandarin as a foreign language among Malaysian tertiary students. *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, 9(2), 40-56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol9iss2pp40-56>

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The increasing global interest in Mandarin language acquisition presents a compelling opportunity for scholarly exploration and inquiry (Lam & Kuan, 2019; Ma et al., 2017; Zheng et al., 2023). One of the issues that elicits attention among second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) researchers is demotivation (Albalawi & Al-Hoorie, 2021). Demotivation is the progressive loss of motivation over an extended period, such as weeks, months, or semesters, as opposed to a single lesson (Albalawi & Al-Hoorie, 2021). Dörnyei (2001) defined demotivation as “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action” (p. 143). However, scholars have not reached a consensus about demotivation being determined solely by external forces. Several scholars have extended Dörnyei's initial framework by incorporating both external and internal elements, usually referred to as demotivators (e.g., Chong et al., 2019; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Ren & Abhakorn, 2022; Shoeib, 2022). According to Kikuchi (2015), demotivation is a negative phenomenon that impedes learners' advancement and diminishes their motivation, incorporating various internal and external factors. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) proposed an extended understanding of demotivation, suggesting it involves a negative progression in an individual's behavioral motivation, covering both intention and ongoing behaviors. This definition emphasizes individuals' subjective experience of demotivation rather than focusing primarily on the external causes.

Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) identified six demotivating factors based on an analysis of prior research on Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) students: (a) Teachers, (b) Characteristics of Classes, (c) Experience of Failure, (d) Classroom Environment, (e) Class Materials, and (f) Lack of Interest. In contrast, Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) study of 656 Japanese high school EFL students revealed five demotivators: (a) Learning Contents and Materials, (b) Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles, (c) Inadequate School Facilities, (d) Lack of Intrinsic Motivation, and (e) Test Scores. Compared to previous studies, the findings of this study indicate that the teacher factor is not the most demotivating factor. Moreover, the least motivated EFL students were demotivated predominantly due to inadequate learning content and materials and poor test performance.

Based on an analysis of 44 pieces of literature related to demotivation across multiple countries from 1992 to 2020, Ranjha et al. (2021) identified 32 factors contributing to demotivation in English as a second language (ESL) or EFL. While there is variation in the number of factors identified by various studies, the most frequently cited demotivators pertain to teachers, course content and materials, learners' lack of self-confidence, negative attitudes towards learning, the learning environment, subject matter, evaluation, peer pressure, limited exposure to the language, and learning difficulties. Among these factors, those related to teachers were ranked highest in terms of their demotivating impact, with teaching materials following closely behind. Instructional materials utilized for language education are often tedious, lacking in engagement, or not adequately suited to the learners' proficiency level, leading to decreased motivation. Among these factors, the pedagogical approach and instructional techniques employed by the teacher are the most discouraging elements in the acquisition of an L2.

Several studies have focused on demotivation among MFL learners in different contexts, such as studies conducted in Ireland (Zhang, 2020), Ghana (Nkrumah, 2021), and Zimbabwe (Pretty, 2019). Nkrumah (2021) administered a structured questionnaire survey to 200 Chinese language students at the University of Ghana. The study identified several factors contributing to these students' lack of motivation, including the competence and teaching style of the teacher, the quality of the course contents, the crowded nature of the classroom, the intense competition for scholarships to study in China, the limited opportunities to receive the Chinese Ambassador Scholarship Award, and the lack of self-confidence and failure experience among students. On the other hand, Pretty (2019) investigates the factors contributing to the demotivation of Chinese language learners at the University of Zimbabwe, as perceived by the learners and their instructors. In this study, Pretty (2019) asked 20 students out of 46 second-year students

enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts general course learning Chinese to write a brief essay describing their language learning experiences and detailing the factors that they believe cause them to dislike or lose interest in learning Chinese. These students were identified as demotivated by their instructors. In addition, two native Chinese instructors from the University of Zimbabwe's Confucius Institute who teach second-year students were interviewed to obtain their perspectives on the issue of student demotivation. The study revealed that students' and teachers' perceptions of demotivating factors do not align. Students' demotivation factors were divided into two categories: instructor-related factors (the instructor's poor teaching methods, the instructor's conduct) and student-related factors (the students' consistent exam failure, the difficulty of the language itself, and the students' work overload). From the instructor's perspective, students are lazy, demotivated, using inappropriate learning strategies, unwilling to learn, possess a negative attitude toward learning, and lack the need for more communication between instructors and students.

While Nkrumah (2021) and Pretty (2019) investigated Chinese language major students, Zhang (2020) conducted a survey on 228 undergraduate and postgraduate students from four Irish universities and third-level institutions whose Chinese proficiency ranged from CEFR A1 to above CEFR C2. More than 70 per cent of participants studied Chinese as a minor subject, while the remainder majored in it. Three internal demotivators (reduced self-confidence, negative ideal L2 self, negative ought-to L2 self) and three external demotivators (teacher, course design, influence of another language) were identified. The most frequently perceived and most severe demotivating factor was reduced self-confidence. However, positive and negative correlations were found between the primary demotivation factors in which internally and externally oriented factors could interact. The demotivating effect of one factor could be amplified, diminished, or concealed by another. Therefore, Zhang (2020) concluded that students' demotivation results from the interaction between these factors. The only exception was the demotivating influence of another language, which appeared to be more independent. Furthermore, learners were more aware of the factors associated with immediate demotivating factors (i.e., reduced self-confidence, teacher, course design) and less aware of the influence of their future perceptions (negative ideal L2 self and negative ought-to L2 selves) and the embedded sociocultural context (influence of another language). The impact of demotivation on learners is also dynamic, as the influence of different demotivating factors fluctuates throughout the learning process. This difference was significantly more correlated with the length of learning experiences than Chinese language proficiency. In addition, students who majored in Chinese were more aware of the demotivating effects of the teacher-centred

teaching strategy. In contrast, those who minored in Chinese were more dissatisfied with the emphasis on precision in language courses and the necessity of non-language courses.

The influence of demotivation has been acknowledged as a significant contributor to the decrease in student enrolment and the increase in student attrition rates in the domain of MFL learning (Zhang & Wang, 2018; Zhang, 2020). Nevertheless, most studies investigating demotivation have focused mainly on the English language, as evidenced by the previous research conducted by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) and Ranjha et al. (2021). Although some studies focused on MFL learners (Nkrumah, 2021; Zhang, 2020; Pretty, 2019), these studies focused on those pursuing MFL as their major or minor field. Further empirical evidence is necessary for students learning MFL as an elective course at the beginner level. Acquiring a comprehensive comprehension of the factors that contribute to demotivation is advantageous for exploring efficacious strategies to enhance and sustain students' motivation in MFL learning. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the research gap by examining the perspectives of introductory elective MFL learners on demotivation at a Malaysian public tertiary institution.

## **2.0 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study is descriptive study with a survey approach to investigate the factors that causes demotivation among introductory MFL learners at a public tertiary institution in Malaysia.

### **2.1 Setting and Participants**

The participants in this study are 72 undergraduates (70 female and two male) from various academic disciplines enrolled in an Introductory Level MFL course at a public Malaysian university. Mandarin is an elective course carrying three credits at this university. The three-hour-per-week, 14-week course concentrates on four language skills and teaches fundamental communication skills. To evaluate students' performance, there are three continuous assessments worth 60% and a final reading and writing assessment worth 40%. To take the final examination, students must have attended 80% of classes. The students represent a range of academic levels, from freshman to senior. The second-year students comprise the largest category, with 53 students, or 74% of the total participants. There are 11 third-year students, five first-year students, and three fourth-year students.

Malay is the first language for most students (71% of the population). This is followed by Iban (12.5%), English (7%), and other languages such as Bidayuh, Kayan, Melanau, Dusun, and Thai, collectively accounting for 9.5% of the student population. Twenty per cent of the students have prior exposure to Mandarin, ranging from a few days to over a year. Three

students acquired their proficiency in Mandarin through formal education, while one did so in kindergarten. The remaining sixteen students autonomously gained the language by engaging in activities like viewing movies and conversing with friends and acquaintances.

Additionally, among the participants, 28 students (39%) reported prior exposure to studying a foreign language other than Mandarin. These languages include Arabic, French, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, and Indonesian. Thirty (41.7%) of the total sample size of 72 students devoted 1-2 hours per week to independent Mandarin language study. Furthermore, 15 students (20.9%) were found to devote more than four hours per week to this activity. Similarly, 14 students (19.4%) reported devoting 2-3 hours per week to Mandarin language study, while 10 (13.8%) reported devoting 3-4 hours per week. In contrast, three students (4.2%) reported studying Mandarin for less than one hour per week.

## **2.2 Instrument**

The present investigation collected data from MFL students via an online survey. The online questionnaire comprised two sections: the first focused on the participants' demographic information, and the second contained closed- and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions enable participants to express their opinions and provide elaborate explanations without being limited by predetermined response categories, thereby facilitating comprehensive data generation (Cohen et al., 2018). For the purposes of this study, only the data collected from the demographic section and the responses to two open-ended questions, which were adapted from Tsang (2012), are used to identify the factors contributing to MFL demotivation. Participants were asked to characterize the learning experience that (1) negatively impacted their motivation and (2) caused them to feel frustrated or want to quit MFL study. Frustration has been observed to have a long-lasting negative impact, as it can diminish an individual's motivation (Fang et al., 2020). In addition, students were instructed to write NONE if they had never encountered such situations.

## **2.3 Data Collection**

Before their involvement in this study, permission was acquired from the Mandarin language instructors. The data was gathered during the scheduled class session in the twelfth week of the academic semester. By this point, the students had already completed assessments one and two, and perhaps experienced changes in their motivation. Therefore, investigating within this timeframe is appropriate. The study's objectives and procedures were verbally explained to the participants, and the link to the online questionnaire was disseminated via the WhatsApp

application. The study's objective and informed consent were also displayed on the front page of the online survey. Participants were explicitly notified that their information would be handled with utmost confidentiality, and their involvement or decision to withdraw would not impact their academic success. This measure was implemented to mitigate the effects of undue pressure on their decision-making process.

## **2.4 Data Analysis**

A total of 117 MFL students initially completed the online survey. However, some students wrote NONE or left the answer section vacant without providing additional information on the two open-ended questions posed in this research study. Consequently, these responses were omitted from the analysis, leaving 72 participants in the final sample. A few students answered the queries in Malay, with the majority responding in English. The data was subjected to a thematic analysis. The first author employed the seven-stage model suggested by Wellington (2015) to classify the data, during which several coding rounds were carried out to enhance the consistency of coding by the same coder (Revész, 2012). Furthermore, member checking was done to increase the credibility of the data (Stahl & King, 2020). Responses in Malay were translated into English to augment readers' comprehension, and responses in English were presented with their grammar corrected.

## **3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Sources of Demotivation**

Table 1 displays the results of the two open-ended queries regarding the demotivation of MFL students. 50% of the students (36 out of 72) responded to the first open question regarding negative learning experiences that decrease motivation. One student contributed two factors, bringing the total number of occurrences to 37. 58 out of 72 students (80%) responded to the second open-ended question regarding situations that left them frustrated or compelled to quit. However, for the second open-ended question, some students answered "Yes" with no further explanation, while others provided longer responses that were unrelated to demotivating factors, such as "Yes, I will proceed" or "I have. However, it was resolved". Therefore, only the responses of 44 (61%) participants were coded for question two. Three students out of 44 provided two factors, bringing the total number of responses to 47.

Table 1: Demotivators and their frequency

	<b>Negative</b> <b>n=37</b>	<b>Frustrated/Give up</b> <b>n=47</b>
<b>Internal</b>	Anxiety (2)	Boredom (1)
<b>External</b>	Test Performance (7)	Test Performance (21)
	Workload (13)	Course Content (15)
	Course Content (11)	Workload (9)
	Teacher (1)	Peer (1)
	Peer (3)	

The factors that contribute to demotivation can be classified into two categories: internal and external. Internal categories include psychological states such as anxiety and boredom. In contrast, external categories include four distinct characteristics: test performance, course content, workload, and significant others such as teachers and peers. Based on the observed frequency of occurrence, it can be deduced that the three most notable factors contributing to demotivation are external factors which include test performance, which occurred 28 times; course content, which occurred 26 times; and workload, which occurred 22 times. There are five instances of significant others (one involving a teacher and another four involving peers), two instances of anxiety, and one instance of boredom. The following section provides some responses from the open-ended questions for each factor.

### 3.1.1 Test Performance

Most students are concerned with their academic performance, particularly their test performance, because they impact their final grades. When a learner's performance manifests itself in a tangible manner, such as a less-than-desirable test result, the learner becomes less motivated and frustrated. The following are students' responses.

*My carry marks do not achieve my target.*

*I feel frustrated with my assessment. It is the first time I got a low mark.*

As evidenced by the following responses, test performance also induces failure anxiety in students, particularly those in their final year or semester.



*My carry marks are not good, and I'm in the final year, and I'm scared of failing.*

These responses indicate that MFL students are concerned about their academic performance, and that failure to achieve a desired result causes anxiety and frustration, which may lead to demotivation among students.

### **3.1.2 Course Content**

Chinese characters have emerged as the most frequently cited challenges in learning Mandarin. In addition to difficulties writing Chinese characters, students frequently struggle to recognize and differentiate between characters, which frequently leads to confusion regarding their intended meaning and pronunciation. For example, the students wrote:

*The process of writing Chinese characters can be challenging due to the need for consistent practice and effort.*

*Unable to identify the majority of the characters.*

*I always mess up the characters and their meaning. At the same time, not being able to pronounce words.*

In addition to the difficulties associated with learning Chinese characters, some students find it challenging to comprehend the course content from the first session. Furthermore, Mandarin is complex, and it is impossible to achieve proficiency in a brief period, especially for those new to the language and requiring additional time to comprehend its complexities. For example, the students wrote:

*The first time I went to Mandarin class, I feel like giving up because I cannot learn this language faster and cannot remember all the things the lecturer is teaching.*

*This language is difficult and impossible to master in just a few months. Besides, the class is only 3 hours per week, which makes it harder for me to reach the instructor.*

*Yes, because Mandarin is a complex language, and for me to adapt to it, it would take some time as my fluency is near zero.*

Moreover, there are respondents who, despite their best efforts, are unable to follow the course content, are losing interest in learning, and have so little self-confidence as shown in the following responses:

*Yes, because I have already tried my best to learn it, but I still cannot understand even the characters.*

*Interest...It's hard to continue when I feel like I've lost interest in learning about it...At one moment, I have a serious thought to drop the course because I thought I could not follow the syllabus. I really had a hard time remembering the character, and I thought I wasn't fit enough to take this course when I could not push myself to make a greater effort.*

The responses above suggest some students had difficulty meeting the course's learning requirements. Due to their inability to retain information from prior classes, these students risked falling into a negative cycle as they missed more course material. When they did not experience improvement or became aware of their incompetence in Mandarin, they may have concluded that they lacked the aptitude to learn the language and that further effort would be futile. Consequently, they may feel demotivated and question whether they should persist.

### **3.1.3 Workload**

To master the course content, some students spent more time than anticipated revising, which frustrated them because they had to exert extra effort; some believe they exert more effort in elective classes than in other courses, as shown below.

*I spent more time than expected revising.*

*I have to put more effort into elective classes.*

*I felt frustrated because I had to put in extra effort to memorize and understand.*

In addition, some students struggle to balance their Mandarin courses with their other academic and extracurricular responsibilities. Some students are overburdened by their primary coursework, leaving them with little time and energy to devote to Mandarin class. For example, the students wrote:

*There are too many things to do at once with many other courses. I cannot focus on learning a new language while other courses have so many assignments too.*

*I felt really overwhelmed with my current schedule, as this semester's assignments are full of field work that makes me really busy and tired, and I do not really have time to study and revise for this language.*

*I am too active in my college activities, causing me to be too tired and spending less time studying Mandarin.*

The responses above suggest that students are dedicating additional time beyond the classroom setting to enhance their understanding of the course content and engage in Mandarin-related exercises. However, this increased workload poses a challenge for students as they are also enrolled in multiple academic courses, limiting their ability to concentrate solely on Mandarin. In addition, students engage in other co-curricular activities, which might contribute to fatigue and limit their ability to provide sufficient time for Mandarin language study.

#### **3.1.4 Significant Others**

This factor consists of both peers and teachers. There were four responses for peers whereas just one involving a teacher was documented. However, no additional details or elaboration were offered regarding the teacher's factor. The comparison of academic performance and abilities with those of their peers can lead certain students to encounter feelings of worry and tension. For example, the students wrote:

*I feel down when I see my own carry mark as being lower than my friends.*

*My friend always compares my carry mark with theirs; they make me stressed.*

*When seeing my friends able to speak fluently*

#### **3.1.5 Anxiety**

Some students have trouble remembering what they have learned and are concerned that they will forget it, as evidenced by the following responses:

*I'm worried that I will not remember. I felt frustrated because I had to put in extra effort to memorize and understand.*

*When I felt nervous, I started to forget the things that I had learned.*

### 3.1.6 Boredom

One student mentioned that the three-hour class is too lengthy and induces boredom and suggested conducting one-hour sessions three times per week instead so that students have more opportunities to practice Mandarin and better retain the material.

*I felt like it was too boring to have 3 hours of class, and I have too much on my plate. I would love it if the class was conducted for 1 hour, three times a week, so that I would be able to study it every day.*

### 3.2 Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the factors that demotivate Malaysian students who are beginner learners of Mandarin as an elective course at a public tertiary institution in Malaysia. The analysis of the responses to the two open-ended questions reveals six factors contributing to demotivation. These factors include test performance, course content, workload, significant others (peers and teachers), anxiety, and boredom. The six demotivators can be further classified into two categories: internal factors, which include anxiety and boredom, and external factors, which encompass test performance, course content, workload, and significant others. In contrast to internal factors, external factors, specifically test performance, course content, and workload, exert a greater influence on demotivation among MFL learners. Moreover, a significant majority (80%) of the student population reported experiencing feelings of frustration, leading some of them to contemplate giving up this course.

Achieving excellent grades in university is of utmost importance for most students as it reflects their academic abilities and serves as a gateway to numerous scholarships, internships, and research opportunities that can enhance their career prospects. To graduate from this university, students must complete nine credit hours in university electives and adhere to their study plan, which stipulates that they must take electives during the specified semester to maintain a manageable burden. Therefore, test performance is a significant demotivator because it remains a crucial requirement for graduation. Achieving excellent results helps maintain their overall CGPA and acts as a catalyst to increase their motivation in the learning process. The findings regarding test performance are also reflected in numerous studies, as evidenced by the experience of failure reported by Pretty (2019) and Nkrumah (2021), the test scores observed in Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) study, and the negative L2 selves in Zhang's (2020) study. In contrast to previous research, test performance emerged as the most demotivating factor in this study.

To obtain proficiency in Mandarin, the most difficult aspects to master are tonality, character complexity, and the absence of rigorous grammatical regulations (e.g., Pang, 2023; Ting & Lam, 2021). Chinese characters are regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of MFL (e.g., Chai & Bao, 2022; Lam et al., 2018; Zhang & Wang, 2018). Sung and Wu (2011) identified three obstacles MFL learners may encounter when acquiring Chinese characters: the large number of characters that must be mastered before achieving literacy, the lack of a direct correlation between a character and its pronunciation, and the existence of multiple characters with distinct meanings that share the same sound. Moreover, when writing Chinese characters, MFL students frequently make mistakes such as stroke number, stroke direction, and stroke relation (Kuan, 2021). In this study, there were 26 instances involving course content, with the majority of students citing Chinese characters as the cause of their negative experience. This is because Chinese word production is similar to phrase or sentence construction in which syntactic structures and words share a selective restriction relationship (Chai & Bao, 2022). Consequently, character, vocabulary, and grammatical characteristics frequently influence each other, requiring MFL learners to simultaneously learn Chinese characters, vocabulary, and grammar (Chai & Bao, 2022). The inability to recognize the characters resulted in their inability to comprehend and pronounce, which impacted the students' comprehension and acquisition of the course content, further reflecting in their academic performance. The dissimilarity between Mandarin and other alphabetical languages, such as Malay and English, makes it difficult for non-native Chinese speakers to learn Mandarin (Chai & Bao, 2022; Ting & Lam, 2021).

In this introductory course, the number of characters introduced is 143. Due to the challenges inherent in acquiring these characters, one-third of the students in this study invested more than three hours per week in MFL learning outside the classroom. Nevertheless, many students find this task challenging due to their academic backgrounds. The core courses in their respective majors need more concentration and entail more assignments than the elective Mandarin course, which is typically expected to be less demanding. In conjunction with the academic demands of their other courses, certain students are concurrently engaged in extracurricular pursuits, hence encountering difficulties in effectively managing their time allocation for Mandarin. As stated by Pretty (2019), the difficulties related to attaining competence in the Chinese language can be ascribed to its inherent linguistic features and the considerable amount of commitment and effort demanded from learners. The time distribution necessary for acquiring language skills can pose challenges, causing some students to struggle to manage their various obligations alongside their academic undertakings effectively. As a

result, this issue frequently acts as a discouraging factor for individuals interested in pursuing language study.

In contrast to the findings of earlier studies conducted by Ranjha et al. (2021), Nkrumah (2021), and Pretty (2019), the results of this study suggest that the teacher factor is the least influential element in terms of demotivation. These findings are consistent with the observations made by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) and Zhang (2020), who argue that the teacher factor may not necessarily be the primary contributor to demotivation. This could be attributed to the fact that the instructors who teach Mandarin at this institution are Malaysian Chinese native speakers with over a decade of teaching experience. Additionally, they both possess postgraduate diplomas in teaching and learning.

### **3.3 Limitation and Suggestion for Future Research**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study that need to be taken into consideration. The study suffers from limitations related to its sample size, which consisted of just 72 participants. Furthermore, there is an imbalance in the gender distribution, with 70 female participants and only two male participants. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to the entire population of MFL learners, as gender has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on research findings. In addition, the samples consisted exclusively of students enrolled in an introductory MFL course; consequently, these findings do not apply to students enrolled in intermediate or advanced courses. Nonetheless, the study fills a research void in the area of demotivation among introductory MFL students. Through our investigation, we have successfully identified the factors that substantially contribute to MFL demotivation. Future research may be conducted in a variety of educational settings, with a larger sample size, a balanced number of male and female participants, and utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Moreover, it is essential to recognize that learners from diverse contexts, with varying needs and unique personalities, may exhibit varied demotivating characteristics (Hennebry-Leung & Xiao, 2020).

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The current research offers additional insights into the nature and characteristics of demotivation in FL learning, specifically among non-native Mandarin learners with little or no prior knowledge, in the context of MFL as an elective course. Moreover, the limited amount of research on MFL as an elective course necessitated a discussion of the findings based on research conducted on EFL learners and learners who major or minor in Mandarin. While

Chinese characters provide a significant difficulty and act as a source of demotivation in learning MFL, they do not serve as the primary cause for learners' decisions to discontinue their FL study (Zhang & Wang, 2018). Furthermore, excluding Chinese characters within Mandarin classes may impede students' capacity to actively participate in language learning (Ch'ng et al., 2018). Hence, completely eradicating all factors discouraging MFL students in the learning environment poses a significant challenge. Given the circumstances above, it is more advantageous to enhance the cognitive resilience of individual language learners instead of attempting to eradicate all adverse elements associated with learning an FL. This approach would enable learners to tackle their language acquisition challenges successfully and proactively. According to Ruan et al. (2015), for beginning learners, it may be more crucial to motivate language learners to persist in their language learning and encourage active engagement rather than solely focusing on enhancing their linguistic accuracy and fluency.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is funded by the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Grant No. F09/SpMYRA/1671/2018).

## REFERENCES

- Albalawi, F. H., & Al-Hoorie, A. H. (2021). From demotivation to remotivation: A mixed-methods investigation. *SAGE Open*, 11(3), 1-14.
- Chai, X., & Bao, J. (2022). Linguistic distances between native languages and Chinese influence acquisition of Chinese character, vocabulary, and grammar. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1083574.
- Ch'ng, L. C., Ting, H. L., & Chuah, K. M. (2018). Common stroke mistakes in Chinese character writing among business administrative students. *Academic Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 2, 1-10.
- Chong, M. Y. C., Renandya, W. A., & Ng, Q. R. (2019). Demotivation in L2 classrooms: Teacher and learner factors. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 12(2), 64-75.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research method in education*. Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Teaching and researching motivation*. Pearson Education.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2021). *Teaching and researching motivation* (3rd ed). Routledge.
- Falout, J., & Maruyama, M. (2004). A comparative study of proficiency and learner demotivation. *The Language Teacher*, 28, 3-9.

- Fang, H., Wan, X., Zheng, S., & Meng, L. (2020). The spillover effect of autonomy frustration on human motivation and its electrophysiological representation. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 14, Article 134.
- Hennebry-Leung, M., & Xiao, H. A. (2020). Examining the role of the learner and the teacher in language learning motivation. *Language Teaching Research*, 27(1), 30-56.
- Kikuchi, K. (2015). *Demotivation in second language acquisition: Insights from Japan*. Multilingual Matters.
- Kuan, W. L. (2021). An error analysis of orthographic representation in written Chinese characters. *Journal of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development*, 7(2), 1-10.
- Lam, K. C., & Kuan, W. L. (2019). Vocabulary learning strategies: The case of Mandarin learners in Sarawak. *Human Behavior, Development and Society*, 20(3), 62–72.
- Lam, K. C., Ang, L. H., Kuan, W. L., & Hoe, F. T. (2018). Character recognition through wild association: An alternative in learning Chinese script for beginners. *Issues in Language Studies*, 7(1), 1-11.
- Ma, X., Gong, Y., Gao, X., & Xiang, Y. (2017). The teaching of Chinese as a second or foreign language: A systematic review of the literature 2005–2015. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 39(9), 815-830.
- Nkrumah, B. (2021). Demotivating factors of learning second foreign language: The case of Chinese language learners in Ghana. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, 6(2), 111-125.
- Pang, Z. (2023). Designing Chinese as a foreign language for speaking using multimodal teaching. *Application of soft computing*, 27, 14305–14319.
- Pretty, T. (2019). Demotivation in a Chinese language classroom a case of UZCI students. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Educational Research*, 1(6), 1-10.
- Ranjha, M. (2021). Demotivating factors in the foreign language learning: An analysis of the past studies. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 5(3), 325–338.
- Ren, X., & Abhakorn, J. (2022). The psychological and cognitive factors causing college students' demotivation to learn English in China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 890459.
- Revész, A. (2012). Coding second language data validly and reliably. In A. Mackey & S.M. Gass (Eds.), *Research methods in second language acquisition: A practical guide* (pp. 203-221). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ruan, Y., Duan, X., Du, & X. Y. (2015). Tasks and learner motivation in learning Chinese as a foreign language. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 28(2), 170-190.



- Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal Of Developmental Education*, 44(1), 26-28.
- Sakai, H., & Kikuchi, K. (2009). An analysis of demotivators in the EFL classroom. *System*, 37(1), 57-69.
- Shoeib, A. F. (2022). Exploration of EFL male and female university students' stand points on demotivation: A case study of Albaha University, KSA. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 11(1), 24-46.
- Sung, K., & Wu, H. (2011). Factors influencing the learning of Chinese characters. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(6), 683-700.
- Ting, H. L., & Lam, K. C. (2021). Educational card game for Chinese character learning. *Voice of Academia*, 17(2), 177-185.
- Wellington, J. (2015). *Educational research: Contemporary issues and practical approaches*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Zhang, C. (2020). *Demotivation in learning Chinese as an additional language: Insights of Irish Chinese learners* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. Trinity College Dublin.
- Zhang, C., & Wang, H. (2018). The development of Chinese language education in Ireland: Issues and prospects. *The Irish Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 25, 34-51.
- Zheng, Y., Lu, Y., & Li, J. (2023). Motivating and demotivating factors for Chinese as a foreign language learner in a British CLIL program. *Foreign Language Annals*, 56(3), 720-739.