

The Influence of Instructor Support in Online Classes

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the widespread adoption of virtual learning environments has fundamentally transformed teaching and learning practices in higher education. However, many students continue to struggle with a lack of motivation, engagement and a profound sense of isolation in virtual classrooms. This quantitative survey study investigated the relationship between instructor support and university students' motivation to learn online, specifically examining the dimensions of expectancy, value and social support. Data were collected using a four-section questionnaire adapted from Fowler (2018) and distributed to a convenience sample of 182 undergraduate respondents in Malaysia. The findings revealed that while students highly valued the task content, they were heavily driven by grade-oriented extrinsic goals, and their academic self-efficacy dropped significantly when facing complex online materials. Independent samples t-test results showed a significant difference in online learning motivation across gender, with male students scoring higher than females ($p = .034$), but no significant difference across academic clusters ($p = .057$). Crucially, Pearson correlation analyses demonstrated strong, positive and statistically significant relationships between instructor support and all motivational variables: expectancy ($r = .529$), value ($r = .574$) and social support ($r = .510$, all $p < .001$). In terms of teaching, these results show that online classes need to move away from heavy exam-centric structures. Instead, instructors should focus on breaking down complex content into smaller steps and using real-world, practical assessments. To fill the remaining gaps in the literature, future studies should consider using mixed-methods approaches and looking closer at how a teacher's presence works in highly interactive, specialized digital environments.

Keywords: Online learning, instructor support, student motivation, task value

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

In recent years, the rapid development of digital technology and online learning platforms has transformed teaching and learning practices in higher education. Universities and colleges increasingly use online learning environments to provide students with flexible and accessible learning opportunities. The importance of online learning became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many educational institutions shifted from traditional face-to-face instruction to virtual classrooms. Since then, online learning has remained an important component of higher education because of its accessibility, convenience and flexibility, allowing students to participate in learning activities across different locations and schedules.

Despite these advantages, online learning may also present challenges related to student motivation, engagement, communication and participation. Students may experience difficulties maintaining attention, interacting with instructors and peers, and managing the greater degree of self-directed learning required in virtual environments. Motivation is therefore an important dimension of students' online learning experiences. Ryan and Deci (2020) describe motivation as involving the factors that initiate, direct and sustain behaviour. In an online learning environment, students' motivation may be reflected in their expectations of success, perceptions of the value of learning tasks, and experiences of social connection and support.

One factor that has received considerable attention in online learning is instructor support. Instructor support refers to the guidance, communication, feedback, encouragement and academic assistance provided by instructors during the learning process. In online classes, such support may include providing clear explanations, responding to students' enquiries, offering constructive feedback and facilitating interaction. Previous research has reported positive relationships between instructor presence, interaction, student participation, satisfaction and learning experiences in online environments (Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Borup, Graham, & Drysdale, 2014; Kuo, Walker, Belland, & Schroder, 2014). However, the nature and strength of these relationships may vary according to educational contexts, teaching approaches and students' learning needs.

Understanding the relationship between instructor support and student motivation is particularly relevant in online learning because students may rely more heavily on communication and guidance when face-to-face interaction is limited. Factors such as irregular internet connections, limited communication, reduced self-discipline and insufficient interaction may also shape students' experiences and motivation in virtual classrooms. Therefore, examining the relationship between instructor support and different dimensions of student motivation can provide a clearer understanding of students' perceptions of online learning.

Accordingly, this study examines the relationship between instructor support and students' motivation to learn online. In particular, the study focuses on three motivational dimensions: expectancy, value and social support. By examining these relationships, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence regarding how students' perceptions of instructor support are associated with their motivational experiences in online learning environments.

Statement of Problem

The increasing use of online learning in higher education has created a need to better understand the factors associated with students' learning experiences and motivation. Although online classes offer flexibility and accessibility, students may encounter difficulties such as feelings of isolation, reduced interaction, limited communication and challenges in maintaining motivation. These issues may become more noticeable when students have fewer opportunities for direct face-to-face interaction with instructors and peers.

Instructor support has been identified in previous studies as an important aspect of online learning. Communication, guidance, feedback and instructor presence have been associated with students' participation, satisfaction and learning experiences (Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Borup, Graham, & Drysdale, 2014; Kuo et al., 2014). Nevertheless, existing research does not necessarily establish a consistent pattern across all online learning contexts. Differences in educational settings, instructional approaches, course characteristics and students' learning needs may contribute to variations in the observed relationships between instructor support and student outcomes.

Furthermore, while previous research has examined instructor support and online learning experiences, there remains a need to examine its relationship with specific dimensions of student motivation. In the present study, these dimensions are represented by expectancy, value and social support. Examining these dimensions

separately allows the study to identify whether students who report higher levels of instructor support also tend to report different levels of motivational perceptions.

Therefore, this study focuses on the relationship between instructor support and students' motivation in online classes. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design is used to examine students' perceptions and the statistical associations among the variables. The study does not seek to establish causal relationships; rather, it aims to identify whether statistically significant relationships exist between instructor support and the selected motivational dimensions.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between instructor support and students' motivation in online learning. Specifically, the study examines students' perceptions of instructor support, expectancy, value and social support, as well as the relationships between instructor support and these motivational dimensions.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: Is there any significant association for online learning across gender?

Ho1: There is no significant association for online learning across gender

- RQ2: Is there any significant association for online learning across clusters?

Ho2: There is no significant association for online learning across clusters

- RQ3: How do learners perceive instructor support in online learning?
- RQ4: How do learners perceive expectancy in online learning?
- RQ5: How do learners perceive value in online learning?
- RQ6: How do learners perceive social engagement support in online learning?
- RQ7: Is there a significant relationship between instructor support and expectancy?

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between instructor support and other expectancy

- RQ8: Is there a significant relationship between instructor support and value?

Ho4: There is no significant relationship between instructor support and value

- RQ9: Is there a significant relationship between instructor support and social engagement?

Ho5: There is no significant relationship between instructor support and social engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of the Study

- Types of Presence in Online Learning

Online learning environments differ from traditional face-to-face classrooms because interactions between instructors and learners mainly occur through digital platforms. Although online learning offers flexibility and accessibility, students may experience feelings of isolation, reduced participation and limited interaction during virtual classes. In response to these challenges, the concept of presence has become an important theoretical foundation in understanding effective online learning experiences. The Community of Inquiry Framework developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999) explains that successful online learning environments are supported by three interrelated elements, namely teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence. Teaching presence refers to the instructor's ability to design, organise, facilitate, and guide the learning process through clear communication, meaningful interaction and timely feedback. Recent studies have reported positive associations between teaching presence and students' engagement, motivation and overall online learning experiences (Li & Wang, 2024; Kangwa et al., 2024). In addition, teaching presence also contributes to the development of social presence, which refers to learners' ability to interact confidently and develop a sense of connection with instructors and peers in online learning environments (Shen et al., 2024). Cognitive presence, on the other hand, reflects learners' ability to construct meaning, engage in critical thinking, and participate actively in learning activities through continuous reflection and discussion. Previous studies further indicate that effective instructor presence and support can enhance students' satisfaction, participation and perceived learning experiences in virtual classrooms (Park & Kim, 2020). Therefore, the concept of presence provides an important theoretical perspective for understanding how instructor support may influence students' motivation and engagement in online learning environments.

Online Motivation

The motivational landscape for university students beginning Mandarin online is best understood through Susan Fowler's (2018) Spectrum of Motivation, which shifts the focus from the quantity of motivation to its quality. In an online setting, students oscillate between suboptimal outlooks—such as "External" motivation (learning for credits) or "Imposed" motivation (pressure to succeed in a difficult subject)—and optimal outlooks like "Aligned" or "Inherent" motivation, where the student finds personal value or genuine joy in the language. For beginners, the digital environment can either stifle or stimulate these outlooks depending on how well the platform addresses the three core psychological needs: Autonomy (having a say in their learning path), Relatedness (feeling connected to a community despite the screen) and Competence (mastering the daunting hurdles of tones and characters).

Furthermore, integrating Fowler's framework with related concepts like Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System highlights the importance of the "Ideal L2 Self" in sustaining long-term effort. For a beginner, the high cognitive load of Mandarin—exacerbated by the isolation of online learning—requires a strong sense of self-efficacy and digital Relatedness to prevent the "Competence" gap from turning into frustration. When online tools provide immediate, positive feedback and foster a sense of progress, students move toward an Integrated Outlook, where learning Mandarin is no longer just a university requirement but a meaningful component of their burgeoning global identity.

Past Studies

Past Studies on Instructor Support in Online Teaching

Various studies have been conducted to study the correlation between instructor support and students' motivation in online learning environment. Existing research has generally focused on the role of instructor behaviours, such as guidance, communication, feedback, and emotional support, in influencing students' academic achievement, satisfaction, and engagement during virtual learning. Despite the worldwide development of online education, the role of instructor support in students' motivation is still one of the important issues in educational research.

Martin Hartnett (2016) studied the factors affecting students' motivation in online learning; the focus was on instructor support and interaction. The research sample is university students who took full online courses in a university. Qualitative research was employed. The primary methods of data collection were interviews and observations. The results indicated that students were more motivated when the instructors showed continual interaction, encouragement, explicit explanation and timely feedback during the course. Students reported that communication from instructors was constant in the online learning environment and that students felt more connected and less isolated. The importance of the teacher's presence has been proved by the research in terms of students' motivation and engagement preservation. The idea was that instructors should engage more with students through constant feedback and communication so that student engagement increases and disengagement decreases.

John M. Keller (2009) employed the ARCS Motivation Model (Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction) to investigate the motivational strategies in technology-based learning environments. The participants of this study were students of higher education attending online and blended learning courses. The data was mainly obtained through questionnaires. Results indicated that instructor support had a significant effect on all four components of ARCS. The most effective instructors in motivating students were those who could attract their attention with interesting content, provide relevant learning material, guide students to build their confidence and give constructive feedback to increase their satisfaction. The study highlighted the importance of intentionally integrating motivational strategies into instructional design to maintain learner engagement and interest in online learning environments.

Related to this study, the study of Albelbisi and Yusop (2019) studied the motivation and satisfaction of university students in higher education institutions on online distance learning. The main data collection instrument was survey questionnaires which were administered to undergraduate students. The research was quantitative in nature. The results showed that the motivation of the students to participate in online learning activities was facilitated by instructor support, flexible learning environments and technological support. Specifically, students reported increased motivation when instructors were responsive, provided clear directions and offered academic guidance throughout the course. The study found that instructors have a vital role to play in creating supportive online learning environments to promote students' active participation and persistence in learning tasks.

Furthermore, Yükseltürk Yıldız and Bulut (2007) investigated the relationship between academic achievement, instructor support and motivation in online courses. The participants were undergraduate students enrolled in online degree programs. Student performance was measured using academic records, and motivation and instructor support were measured using questionnaires. Results indicated that students perceiving high instructor support were more motivated, participated more actively in online discussions, and achieved better academic outcomes than students perceiving little support. The study highlighted supportive instructor behaviour as an important predictor of student success in online learning environments.

Earlier studies have shown that support from the instructor is very important for the motivation of students in online learning environments. Most researchers agree that timely feedback, emotional encouragement, meaningful interaction and effective communication by instructors greatly improve students' academic performance and engagement. However, this research area is growing but more analysis is needed because the online learning environments are constantly changing to meet the changing student needs and technological development. Therefore, the aim of the study is to investigate the effect of the instructor support on the students' motivation to learn online through a questionnaire. This will lead to a better understanding of the student's experiences and perceptions in online learning environments.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

In online learning environments, learner engagement remains a major concern. A lack of engagement can lead

to reduced motivation, as learners may experience feelings of isolation during online lessons (Rahmat, 2025). Fowler (2018) argues that motivation in online learning is shaped by three key factors: expectancy, value and social support. Expectancy refers to learners' beliefs in their ability to succeed through effort, while value encourages learners to remain goal-oriented. Social support plays a particularly crucial role in online learning, as it fosters connection and sustained engagement among learners. Garrison, et.al (1999) mention that in online teaching, teaching presence is still relevant. Teaching presence is the professional, instructional relationship instructors have with their students. Whether the course is online or on-campus, instructors serve a fundamental leadership role in facilitating and managing the course. As such with reference to Figure 1, this study is done to explore the relationship between instructor support with all factors in online learning by Fowler (2018).

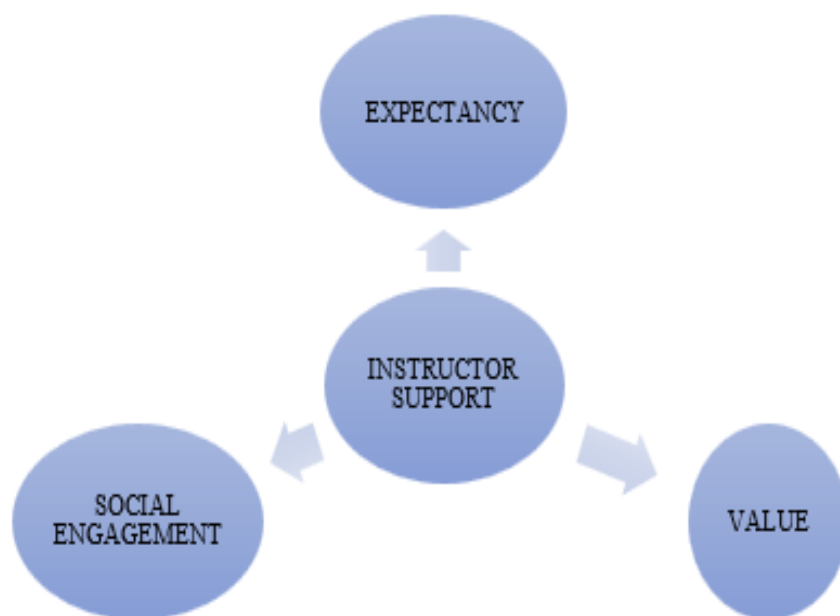


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study

The Influence of Instructor Support in Online Learning

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study examined the influence of instructor support on online learning. A convenience sample of 182 participants responded to the survey. The instrument utilized a 5-point Likert scale adapted from Fowler (2018) to measure the targeted variables across the sections. As detailed in Table 1, the response options for the survey items were anchored from 1 to 5, representing Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often and Almost Always, respectively. This same 5-point scaling was maintained across Section B (Expectancy), Section C (Value) and Section D (Social Support) to capture the frequency of the participants' experiences.

Table 1: Likert Scale Use

1	Never
2	Seldom
3	Sometimes
4	Often
5	Almost Always

Table 2: Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	VARIABLE MOTIVATION	CONSTRUCT	NO OF ITEMS	
B	EXPECTANCY	Self-Efficacy	7	11 (.894)
		Control of Learning Beliefs	4	
C	VALUE	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	14 (.890)
		Extrinsic Goal Orientation	4	
		Task Value	6	
D	SOCIAL SUPPORT	Social Engagement	5	12(.860)
		Instructor Support	7	
				37(.942)

Table 2 shows the distribution of items in the survey. Section B has 11 items on Expectancy. Section C has 14 items on Value and Section D has 12 items on Social Support.

Table 3: Reliability Levels, Cronbach's Alpha Ranges and Their Interpretations

Reliability Level	Cronbach's Alpha range	Interpretation
Excellent	0.9 and above	Indicates very high internal consistency
Good	0.80-0.89	Reflects strong internal consistency
Acceptable	0.70-0.79	Indicates acceptable internal consistency
Questionable	0.60-0.69	Reflects questionable internal consistency
Poor	Below 0.6	Indicates poor internal consistency

In order to determine the internal reliability of the instrument, reliability analysis is conducted. . Table 3 above shows the distribution and interpretation of Cronbach Alpha range. According to Ahmad,et.al. (2024), Cronbach Alpha scores between 0.7 to 0.9 is considered acceptable to excellent.

Table 2 also shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .894 for Expectancy, .890 for value and .860 for social support. The overall Cronbach alpha for all 37 items is .942; thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Analysis

According to Zienefuss, et.al (2021), researches report demographic data in percentages to establish sample representatives, and allow for generalizability to a larger population. The reporting also provides an overview of participants' characteristics. Percentages offer a clear and understandable picture of the sample makeup.

Table 4 : Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	22%
		Female	78%
2	Cluster	Science & Technology	54%
		Social Sciences , Humanities & Business	46%

The demographic profile of the participants, summarized in Table 4, provides an overview of the sample characteristics necessary to establish representation for potential generalizability. Gender distribution was predominantly female, with this group accounting for 78% of the respondents, while male participants constituted 22%. In terms of academic clusters, the sample was more balanced: 54% of participants belonged to the Science & Technology cluster and 46% represented the Social Sciences, Humanities and Business cluster. This distribution offers a clear breakdown of the sample makeup, serving as a baseline for the subsequent inferential analysis regarding gender and cluster-based differences in online motivation.

Inferential Statistics (significant difference)

According to Shah (2023), there are three main functions of a T-test. Firstly, T-tests are done to compare means. This test is also done to determine if the average scores (mean) or values of two groups, or one group against a known value, are different enough to be considered statistically meaningful and are not just due to random chance. Secondly, T-test is done to test hypotheses. Researchers use t-tests to test hypotheses about means, such as whether a new treatment significantly impacts a variable or if there's a difference in performance between two distinct groups. Lastly, T-test is done to identify significant differences. The output of a t-test provides a p-value (significance value). If this p-value is below a pre-determined threshold (often 0.05), it indicates a statistically significant difference, allowing researchers to draw conclusions about the populations from which their samples were drawn.

Findings for Gender

This section presents data to answer research question 1: Is there any significant association for online learning across gender?

H₀₁: There is no significant association for online learning across gender

Table 5: T-Test for Gender

Group Statistics											
	Q1gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean						
ONLINE_LERANING	MALE	40	4.1601	.43163	.06825						
	FEMALE	142	3.9912	.44481	.03733						

Independent Samples Test											
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances						t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance One-Sided p	Significance Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
										Lower	Upper
ONLINE_LERANING	Equal variances assumed	.062	.803	2.135	180	.017	.034	.16889	.07912	.01278	.32501
	Equal variances not assumed			2.171	64.234	.017	.034	.16889	.07779	.01350	.32428

A two-sample t-test was done to investigate the relationship of online learning across gender. There was a significant difference in online motivation across gender ($p=.034$). This means null hypothesis is rejected for H_{01} .

Findings for Clusters

This section presents data to answer research question 2: Is there any significant association for online learning across clusters?

H_{02} : There is no significant association for online learning across clusters

Table 6: T-Test for Clusters

Group Statistics					
	Q3CLUSTER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ONLINE_LERANING	S&T	99	4.0868	.40887	.04109
	SS,H & B	83	3.9586	.48045	.05274

Independent Samples Test										
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper
ONLINE_LERANING	Equal variances assumed	.533	.466	1.944	180	.027	.053	.12817	.06592	-.00190 .25824
	Equal variances not assumed			1.917	161.874	.028	.057	.12817	.06686	-.00385 .26019

A two-sample t-test was done to investigate the relationship of online learning across clusters. There was no significant difference in online motivation across clusters ($p=.057$). This means null hypothesis is accepted for H_{02} .

Descriptive Statistics (mean)

Why is there a need to report the mean and standard deviation? According to Vetter (2017), Mean (M) represents the average, or centre of a data set. Standard deviation (SD) indicates the typical distance of individual observations from the mean which shows the data's variability or spread. A low SD means the data points are clustered close to the mean whole a high. SD indicates they are more spread out. It is good to have a high SD.

Findings for Instructor Support

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How do learners perceive instructor support in online learning?

Table 7: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Instructor Support (SIS)

Statement	M	SD
SISQ1I feel like I can freely communicate with the instructor in this class.	4.00	0.79
SISQ2The instructor responds to questions, clearly, completely, and in a timely manner.	4.33	0.67

SISQ3The instructor's expectations for me in this class are clear.	4.25	0.72
SISQ4The instructor provides the guidance I need to be successful in this class.	4.42	0.67
SISQ5The instructor presents the material in a way that makes it relevant to me.	4.44	0.63
SISQ6In this course, I have the freedom to guide my own learning	4.20	0.72
SISQ7The instructor provides regular feedback that helps me gauge my performance in this class.	4.36	0.71

Table 7 presents the Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) values for Instructor Support (SIS). The findings indicate that students generally have a highly positive perception of instructor support in the class, with all mean scores above 4.00. The highest mean score was recorded for SISQ5 (M = 4.44, SD = 0.63), indicating that students strongly agree that the instructor presents the material in a way that is relevant to them. This was followed closely by SISQ4 (M = 4.42, SD = 0.67), which reflects that the instructor provides the guidance needed for students to succeed in the class. In addition, respondents agreed that the instructor provides regular feedback that helps them gauge their performance (SISQ7: M = 4.36, SD = 0.71) and responds to questions clearly, completely, and in a timely manner (SISQ2: M = 4.33, SD = 0.67). Students also perceived the instructor's expectations as clear (SISQ3: M = 4.25, SD = 0.72) and felt they had the freedom to guide their own learning (SISQ6: M = 4.20, SD = 0.72). Furthermore, SISQ1 (M = 4.00, SD = 0.79) indicates that students feel comfortable communicating freely with the instructor in class. Overall, the results demonstrate a strong level of instructor support that positively contributes to students' learning experiences.

Findings for Expectancy

This section presents data to answer research question 4: How do learners perceive expectancy in online learning? In the context of this study, this is measured by (i) self-efficacy and (ii) control of learning beliefs.

Table 8: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for SELF- EFFICACY (ESE)

Statement	M	SD
ESEQ 1 I believe I'll receive excellent grades in my classes.	3.86	0.73
ESEQ2I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings.	3.54	0.84
ESEQ3I'm confident I can learn the basic concepts that are being taught.	4.08	0.69
ESEQ4I'm confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor online.	3.56	0.92
ESEQ5I'm confident I can do an excellent job on assessments online	3.87	0.85
ESEQ6 I'm certain I can master the skills being taught online.	3.67	0.87
ESEQ7 Although online classes can be challenging, I think I can do well.	3.90	0.84

Table 8 presents the Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) values for Self-Efficacy (ESE) in online learning. Overall, the findings indicate that learners demonstrated a moderate to high level of self-efficacy in online

learning environments, with most mean scores approaching 4.00. The highest mean score was recorded for ESEQ3 ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.69$), indicating that learners were generally confident in learning the basic concepts taught in online classes. This was followed by ESEQ7 ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.84$), which suggests that learners believed they could perform well despite the challenges of online learning. Respondents also showed confidence in performing well in online assessments (ESEQ5: $M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.85$) and receiving excellent grades in their classes (ESEQ1: $M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.73$). However, lower mean scores were observed for ESEQ2 ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.84$) and ESEQ4 ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.92$), indicating that learners were comparatively less confident in understanding difficult reading materials and complex content presented by instructors online. In addition, ESEQ6 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.87$) suggests that learners were moderately confident in mastering the skills taught online. Overall, the findings suggest that although learners generally possessed positive self-efficacy in online learning, they experienced greater challenges when dealing with more difficult and complex learning materials.

Table 9: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for CONTROL OF LEARNING BELIEFS (ECB)

Statement	M	SD
ECBQ1If I study in appropriate ways, then I'll be able to learn the material.	4.13	0.70
ECBQ2It's my own fault if I don't learn the material taught.	4.12	0.79
ECBQ3If I try hard enough, then I'll understand the material presented.	4.29	0.66
ECBQ4If I don't understand the material presented, it's because I didn't try hard enough.	3.82	0.89

Table 9 presents the Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) values for Control of Learning Beliefs (ECB) in online learning. Overall, the findings indicate that learners demonstrated positive control of learning beliefs, as all mean scores were above 3.80. The highest mean score was recorded for ECBQ3 ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.66$), indicating that learners strongly believed that they would understand the learning material if they put in sufficient effort. This was followed closely by ECBQ1 ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.70$), which suggests that learners believed appropriate study methods would help them learn the material effectively. In addition, ECBQ2 ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.79$) shows that learners generally accepted personal responsibility when they failed to understand the material taught. However, the lowest mean score was observed for ECBQ4 ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.89$), indicating that some learners were less likely to attribute difficulties in understanding the material solely to insufficient effort. Overall, the findings suggest that learners generally believed that their own effort and study strategies played an important role in determining their success in online learning environments.

Findings for Value

This section presents data to answer research question 5: How do learners perceive value in online learning? In the context of this study, this is measured by (i) intrinsic goal orientation, (ii) extrinsic goal orientation and (iii) task value.

Table 10: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Intrinsic Goal Orientation (VI)

Statement	M	SD
VIQ1I prefer online material that really challenges me, so I can learn new things.	3.50	0.87
VIQ2I prefer online material that arouses my curiosity, even if it's difficult to learn.	3.67	0.91

VIQ3The most satisfying thing for me is trying to understand the online content as thoroughly as possible.	3.89	0.79
VIQ4I choose assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade.	3.54	0.92

The data in Table 10 reveals that university beginners are primarily driven by a "mastery mindset," as the highest mean and lowest consensus ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.79$) show a unanimous desire for a deep, thorough understanding of Mandarin. While students are highly motivated by curiosity and are willing to face the language's inherent difficulties ($M=3.67$), they show the most internal disagreement ($SD=0.92$) when it comes to prioritizing learning over grades.

This indicates that while the cohort is intellectually ambitious and eager to master complex online material, the pressure of academic performance creates a divide in how much risk they are willing to take. Ultimately, the results suggest that for these students, the most effective online materials are those that provide intellectual depth and satisfy their curiosity rather than just offering a path to an easy grade.

Table 11: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Extrinsic Goal Orientation (VE)

Statement	M	SD
VEQ1Getting a good grade is the most satisfying thing for me.	4.70	0.56
VEQ2 I want to do well in my classes so that I can get awards and recognition.	4.40	0.76
VEQ3I want to get better grades than most of the other students in my classes.	4.19	0.88
VEQ4I want to do well in my classes because it's important to show my ability to my family, friends, employer, or others.	4.47	0.88

The data in Table 11 reveals that beginner university students learning Mandarin online are primarily driven by a strong **performance-orientation**, where the highest mean ($M=4.70$) and lowest standard deviation ($SD=0.56$) for **VEQ1** indicate a near-universal consensus that high grades are their primary source of satisfaction.

While they are also significantly motivated by the social prestige of the language and external validation from family or employers ($M=4.47$), there is more individual variation in these areas ($SD=0.88$), suggesting that social pressure impacts students differently in an isolated online environment. Conversely, direct peer competition (**VEQ3**) ranks as the lowest motivator ($M=4.19$), implying that while these learners are highly ambitious regarding their own results and status, they are less concerned with outperforming their classmates than they are with achieving personal academic validation.

Table 12: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Task Value (VT)

Statement	M	SD
VTQ1I think I will be able to use what I learn in this course in other courses.	4.10	0.76
VTQ2It is important for me to learn the course material in this class.	4.36	0.64
VTQ3I am very interested in the content area of this course.	4.30	0.64
VTQ4I think the course material in this class is useful for me to learn.	4.24	0.70

VTQ5I like the subject matter of this course.	4.29	0.67
VTQ6Understanding the subject matter of this course is very important to me.	4.36	0.66

Table 12 shows that the findings for task value indicate a high level of appreciation among learners for the utility and importance of the course content. The highest mean scores were recorded for both VTQ2 and VTQ6 ($M=4.36$, $SD=0.64$ and $M=4.36$, $SD=0.66$ respectively), indicating that students place the greatest emphasis on the overall importance of learning the course material and understanding the subject matter. This is followed by the second highest mean score of 4.30 ($SD=0.64$) for VTQ3, which reflects a strong interest in the specific content area of the course. The lowest mean in this section was observed for VTQ1 ($M=4.10$, $SD=0.76$), suggesting that while students value the current course, they are slightly less certain about the transferability of this knowledge to other courses.

Findings for Social Engagement

This section presents data to answer research question 6: How do learners perceive social engagement support in online learning?

Table 13: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Social Engagement (SSE)

Statement	M	SD
SSEQ1 feel "disconnected" from my teacher and fellow students in classes.	2.39	1.16
SSEQ2I pay attention in classes.	4.11	0.72
SSEQ3I enjoy class discussions.	4.18	0.77
SSEQ4I feel like I can freely communicate with other students in classes.	3.75	0.89
SSEQ5I have strong relationships with fellow students in this course.	3.71	0.91

Table 13 presents the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values for the Social Engagement (SSE) construct. Overall, the findings indicate that respondents demonstrated a relatively high level of social engagement in their learning environment. Among the items, SSEQ3 ("I enjoy class discussions") recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.77$), suggesting that most respondents positively perceived classroom discussions and actively enjoyed participating in them. Similarly, SSEQ2 ("I pay attention in classes") also showed a high mean score ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.72$), indicating that respondents were generally attentive during classes. On the other hand, SSEQ1 ("I feel 'disconnected' from my teacher and fellow students in classes") recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.16$). Since this item reflects a negative statement, the lower mean indicates that respondents generally disagreed with feeling disconnected, implying a satisfactory sense of connectedness with teachers and classmates. However, the relatively higher standard deviation suggests greater variation in respondents' perceptions for this item compared to the others. Overall, the results suggest that students experienced positive social engagement in the classroom, particularly in terms of classroom participation, attentiveness and peer interaction.

Exploratory Statistics (correlation)

According to He (2024), correlation is a statistical technique that shows how strongly two variables are related to each other or the degree of association between the two. It's a common tool for describing simple relationships without making a statement about cause and effect.

According to He (2024), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This section presents data to answer research question on correlation.

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between all components in online learning (instructor support, expectancy, value and social support), data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Correlation between all components in online learning

Correlations					
		INSTRUCTOR_SUPPORT	EXPECTANCY	VALUE	SOCIAL_SUPPORT
INSTRUCTOR_SUPPORT	Pearson Correlation	1	.529**	.574**	.510**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	182	182	182	182
EXPECTANCY	Pearson Correlation	.529**	1	.693**	.509**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	182	182	182	182
VALUE	Pearson Correlation	.574**	.693**	1	.475**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	182	182	182	182
SOCIAL_SUPPORT	Pearson Correlation	.510**	.509**	.475**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	182	182	182	182
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Findings for the Relationship between Instructor Support and Expectancy

This section presents data to answer research question 7: Is there a significant relationship between instructor support and expectancy?

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between instructor support and expectancy

The correlation analysis in Table 13 above reveals that there is strong, positive relationship between instructor support and expectancy ($r=.529^{**}$) and ($p<.001$). Null hypothesis is rejected for H₀₃.

Findings for the relationship between instructor support and value

This section presents data to answer research question 8: Is there a significant relationship between instructor

support and value?

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between instructor support and **H₀₄:** There is no significant relationship between instructor support and value

The correlation analysis reveals (Table 13) that there is strong, positive relationship between instructor support and value ($r=.574^{**}$) and ($p<.001$). Null hypothesis is rejected for **H₀₄**

Findings for relationship between instructor support and social engagement

This section presents data to answer research question 9: Is there a significant relationship between instructor support and social support?

H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between instructor support and social support

The correlation analysis reveals (Table 13) that there is strong, positive relationship between instructor support and social support ($r=.510^{**}$) and ($p<.001$). Null hypothesis is rejected for **H₀₅**

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussions

This section provides a clear summary of the study's findings, organized to directly answer the nine research questions guiding this investigation. By connecting our empirical data with established educational literature, this discussion explains how instructor support practically shapes and influences student motivation within online learning environments.

Demographic Variations in Online Learning Motivation

The first two research questions examined whether student motivation in online learning environments differs based on demographic characteristics. Regarding gender (RQ1), the independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in online motivation. Male students displayed higher baseline motivation scores than female students, leading to the rejection of the first null hypothesis (**H₀₁**). This demonstrates that digital learning environments can result in different motivational experiences for men and women. In contrast, academic disciplines (RQ2) showed a different pattern. The analysis indicated no significant difference in online motivation between students from the Science & Technology cluster and those from the Social Sciences, Humanities and Business cluster ($p = .057$). Thus, the second null hypothesis (**H₀₂**) was accepted, proving that a student's major does not inherently dictate their drive online; rather, the digital platform sets a uniform baseline for all fields.

Descriptive Insights into Learner Perceptions

Research questions three and four focused on how learners perceive instructor support and their own academic expectancy. Students generally held highly positive views of instructor support (RQ3), giving the highest ratings to how instructors make course materials relevant to them and provide the necessary guidance for success. Conversely, the lowest relative agreement was found in students' comfort with communicating completely freely with their instructors. This strong appreciation for pedagogical relevance directly echoes the findings of Kuo et al. (2014) regarding positive online experiences, as well as Martin and Bolliger (2018) on the vital importance of interaction. Meanwhile, the construct of expectancy (RQ4) measured self-efficacy and control of learning beliefs. In terms of self-efficacy, students felt most confident mastering basic introductory concepts but felt least confident when dealing with complex online content and difficult reading materials. For learning beliefs, they strongly believed personal effort leads to success, while they rarely blamed a lack of effort alone

for failure. This shows that while students take personal responsibility, their confidence is vulnerable to cognitive overload, aligning with Fowler's (2018) framework which states that digital hurdles can easily turn a "Competence" gap into frustration.

Research questions five and six evaluated how learners perceive course value and social engagement in virtual classrooms. The data revealed a clear split in student values (RQ5), where under extrinsic goal orientation, there was a near-universal consensus that getting high grades is the absolute highest source of satisfaction. Similarly, within task value, students placed the highest emphasis on the overall importance of learning the material. In contrast, the lowest scores were recorded for the transferability of this knowledge to other courses and a willingness to pick challenging assignments that might risk their grades. This mirrors Fowler's (2018) Spectrum of Motivation, showing how academic pressure forces students to oscillate between genuine interest and a suboptimal, grade-driven performance mindset. Regarding social engagement support (RQ6), students reported the highest engagement when paying attention and actively enjoying synchronous classroom discussions. Meanwhile, the lowest score was observed for negative feelings of disconnection. Because this item was inversely phrased, the lower score proves that students generally felt a healthy sense of digital connectedness. This active social presence is in accordance with the study by Shen et al. (2024), which emphasizes that interactive virtual spaces help overcome the isolation of the "screen dilemma".

Correlational Syntheses: The Role of Instructor Support

The final block of research questions examined the statistical relationships between instructor support and other core motivational dimensions. For RQ7, a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship was found between instructor support and expectancy ($r = .529$, $p < .001$), rejecting the third null hypothesis (H03). This finding indicates a significant positive association between instructor support and students' expectancy. The result is consistent with Keller's (2009) ARCS Model, which highlights the importance of instructional strategies in supporting learner confidence. However, the present correlational design does not allow a causal conclusion that instructor support directly increases students' self-belief. Similarly, the analysis for RQ8 revealed a strong, positive, and significant link between instructor support and task value ($r = .574$, $p < .001$), rejecting the fourth null hypothesis (H_04). This finding indicates a strong positive association between instructor support and students' perceived value of the course. This finding is in complete accordance with Albelbisi and Yusop (2019), who found that online motivation is heavily facilitated by responsive academic guidance.

Finally, answering RQ9, a strong, positive and significant correlation was confirmed between instructor support and social support/engagement ($r = .510$, $p < .001$), rejecting the final null hypothesis (H_05). This finding indicates a strong positive association between instructor support and students' social engagement. The finding is consistent with the Community of Inquiry Framework, which conceptualizes teaching presence and social presence as interconnected dimensions of online learning. This finding aligns seamlessly with the Community of Inquiry Framework by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (1999), where a robust "teaching presence" serves as the structural backbone that allows "social presence" to flourish. It also supports the work of Yükseltürk, Yıldız, and Bulut (2007), who identified supportive instructor behavior as a vital predictor of active student participation and success in online environments.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The empirical findings of this study provide key theoretical insights by connecting the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework with Fowler's (2018) Spectrum of Motivation.

First, the strong positive correlations between instructor support and the motivational constructs of expectancy ($r = .529$), value ($r = .574$) and social support ($r = .510$) The findings indicate significant positive associations

between instructor support and the motivational constructs of expectancy, value, and social support. These findings suggest that students who perceive higher levels of instructor support also tend to report more positive perceptions of these motivational dimensions. However, because this study employed a cross-sectional correlational design, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that instructor support causes changes in student motivation. When instructors provide clear guidance and relevant materials, The findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives suggesting that clear guidance, relevant materials, and opportunities for communication may be associated with students' perceptions of competence and autonomy. However, these psychological processes were not directly measured in the present study.

Second, the study highlights critical nuances in student expectancy and value within digital settings. While students maintained an internal control of learning, their self-efficacy dropped significantly when facing complex online content. This supports Fowler's (2018) warning that high digital cognitive load can easily turn a competence gap into student frustration without immediate instructor feedback. Furthermore, the universal focus on grade-driven satisfaction (extrinsic orientation) over knowledge transferability enriches Fowler's motivation spectrum by showing how academic pressures force students into suboptimal, performance-driven mindsets.

Finally, the strong link between instructor support and social engagement proves that virtual connectedness does not happen organically. It confirms the CoI premise that a strong teaching presence serves as the structural backbone allowing social presence to flourish, effectively minimizing student isolation and overcoming the

"screen dilemma" in higher education.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that online teaching practices may benefit from greater emphasis on active and structurally supported pedagogy. Since instructor support is strongly correlated with learner expectancy ($r = .529$) and task value ($r = .574$), educators cannot assume that posting slides or recorded lectures is sufficient. Instead, teaching methods must change by intentionally embedding explicit guidance and proactive communication into the course design to sustain student motivation.

To begin with, addressing the finding that students' self-efficacy drops significantly when facing complex online delivery and difficult reading materials requires instructors to restructure how cognitive content is presented. Rather than overwhelming learners with dense, asynchronous reading tasks, teachers should may consider breaking complex concepts into smaller, digestible modules accompanied by step-by-step scaffolds. Furthermore, synchronous sessions should be transformed into interactive workshops where instructors provide immediate clarification and timely feedback, directly building students' confidence to handle advanced digital course content.

Crucially, the finding that students are almost universally driven by grades (extrinsic orientation) rather than knowledge transferability requires a fundamental change in assessment strategies. To steer students away from a suboptimal, exam-centric mindset, instructors should implement formative and authentic assessments, such as project-based learning and real-world case studies. By designing assignments that mirror industry practices and explicitly emphasizing how the current course connects to other disciplines, teachers can help students internalize the true task value of the subject matter, shifting their focus from merely surviving the grading system to genuinely mastering transferable skills.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the correlation between instructor support and online learning motivation, several avenues remain open for future investigation based on the identified research gaps.

To begin with, in accordance with the recommendations by Martin, Sunley and Turner (2020), future researchers should further explore how instructor support contributes to students' academic experiences in specific higher education courses that rely heavily on continuous virtual interaction, such as online foreign language learning or highly specialized technical disciplines. Since this study utilized a convenience sample, replicating the research across a broader, more diverse institutional student body would significantly enhance the generalizability of these findings.

In addition, given the inconsistent findings in existing literature noted by Dixon (2015) regarding the extent to which instructor support influences learning outcomes, future studies should investigate how this relationship varies across different teaching approaches and students' specific learning needs.

Ultimately, since this study relied entirely on a quantitative survey design, incorporating a mixed-methods approach—combining questionnaires with qualitative interviews or classroom observations—would allow future researchers to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding instructor presence in virtual learning environments.

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APPENDIX

Motivation To Learn Online Questionnaire

(this instrument is adopted from Fowler ,2018)

SECTION	VARIABLE MOTIVATION	CONSTRUCT	NO OF ITEMS	
B	EXPECTANCY	Self-Efficacy	7	11
		Control of Learning Beliefs	4	
C	VALUE	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	14
		Extrinsic Goal Orientation	4	
		Task Value	6	
D	SOCIAL SUPPORT	Social Engagement	5	12
		Instructor Support	7	
				37

Section A-Demographic Profile

Instruction: Please read each statement carefully and tick your answer

Q1.Gender

1	Male	
2	Female	

Likert Scale to Be Used

1	Never
2	Seldom
3	Sometimes
4	Often
5	Almost Always

SECTION B – EXPECTANCY(E)

(i) SELF- EFFICACY (ESE)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	ESEQ 1 I believe I'll receive excellent grades in my classes.					
2	ESEQ2I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings.					
3	ESEQ3I'm confident I can learn the basic concepts that are being taught.					
4	ESEQ4I'm confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor online.					
5	ESEQ5I'm confident I can do an excellent job on assessments online					
6	ESEQ6 I'm certain I can master the skills being taught online.					
7	ESEQ7 Although online classes can be challenging, I think I can do well.					

ii) CONTROL OF LEARNING BELIEFS (ECB)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	ECBQ1If I study in appropriate ways, then I'll be able to learn the material.					
2	ECBQ2It's my own fault if I don't learn the material taught.					
3	ECBQ3If I try hard enough, then I'll understand the material presented.					
4	ECBQ4If I don't understand the material presented, it's because I didn't try hard enough.					

SECTION C – VALUE (V)

(i) Intrinsic Goal Orientation (VI)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	VIQ1I prefer online material that really challenges me, so I can learn new things.					
2	VIQ2I prefer online material that arouses my curiosity, even if it's difficult to learn.					
3	VIQ3The most satisfying thing for me is trying to understand the online content as thoroughly as possible.					
4	VIQ4I choose assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade.					

(ii) Extrinsic Goal Orientation(VE)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	VEQ1Getting a good grade is the most satisfying thing for me.					
2	VEQ2 I want to do well in my classes so that I can get awards and recognition.					
3	VEQ3I want to get better grades than most of the other students in my classes.					
4	VEQ4I want to do well in my classes because it's important to show my ability to my family, friends, employer, or others.					

(iii) Task Value (VT)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	VTQ1I think I will be able to use what I learn in this course in other courses.					
2	VTQ2It is important for me to learn the course material in this class.					
3	VTQ3I am very interested in the content area of this course.					
4	VTQ4I think the course material in this class is useful for me to learn.					
5	VTQ5I like the subject matter of this course.					
6	VTQ6Understanding the subject matter of this course is very important to me.					

SECTION D – SOCIAL SUPPORT (S)

(i) Social Engagemnt (SSE)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	ISSEQ1 feel "disconnected" from my teacher and fellow students					

	in classes.					
2	SSEQ2I pay attention in classes.					
3	SSEQ3I enjoy class discussions.					
4	SSEQ4I feel like I can freely communicate with other students in classes.					
5	SSEQ5I have strong relationships with fellow students in this course.					

(ii) Instructor Support (SIS)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	SISQ1I feel like I can freely communicate with the instructor in this class.					
2	SISQ2The instructor responds to questions, clearly, completely, and in a timely manner.					
3	SISQ3The instructor's expectations for me in this class are clear.					
4	SISQ4The instructor provides the guidance I need to be successful in this class.					
5	SISQ5The instructor presents the material in a way that makes it relevant to me.					
6	SISQ6In this course, I have the freedom to guide my own learning					
7	SISQ7The instructor provides regular feedback that helps me gauge my performance in this class.					