

Exploring How Social Support Affects Online Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Online learning has become important in higher education due to its flexibility and accessibility. However, students may struggle to remain motivated when faced with limited interaction and difficult content. Social support from instructors and classmates may help students feel more connected, confident, and willing to continue learning. Nevertheless, its relationship with students' expectancy for success and perceived value of online learning remains underexplored. This study aimed to explore how social support relates to online learning motivation through the dimensions of expectancy and value. A quantitative survey was conducted using a convenience sample of 200 students from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. The questionnaire comprised four sections covering respondents' demographic profiles, expectancy, value, and social support, with 37 items adapted from Fowler's Motivation to Learn Online Questionnaire. The findings show that students received strong instructor support, enjoyed interacting with classmates, and valued clear guidance, relevant materials, and regular feedback. Students who experienced stronger social support also tended to feel more confident about succeeding and viewed online learning as more meaningful and useful. The study highlights the need for online learning environments that combine effective course delivery with accessible instructors, meaningful social interaction, and timely academic support to sustain students' motivation and participation.

Keywords: Motivation; Online Learning; Social Support; Expectancy; Value

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

As of today, online learning continues to expand due to its accessibility and flexibility in higher education. At a global level, according to UNESCO (2026), the number of students enrolled in higher education worldwide has more than doubled over the past two decades, from about 100 million in 2000 to 269 million in 2024. Today, an average of 43% of the higher education-age population participate in tertiary education, the highest number ever recorded. Nationally, Malaysia's higher education enrolment rate increased from 48% in 2014 to 59% by 2024, while the government aims to increase it to 70% by 2035. The Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint 2026-2035 identifies millions of new enrolments in tertiary education in 2025, including places associated with TVET, higher learning institutions, and online learning (Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint 2026-2035).

Despite the rising numbers of digital learners in the future, sustaining learners' motivation in digital environments remains a significant challenge. Motivational scholars define motivation, highlighting the emphasis on directing individual behaviours by intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Other definitions include goal-directed activities with persistence, energy, and engagement (Ryan &

Deci, 2000; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Ormrod, 2011; Reeve, 2018 & Brophy, 2010). Thus, motivation is a process through which goal-directed activity is initiated and persisted in the context of online learning environments.

Therefore, in the context of online learning motivation, Brophy (2010) conceptualises motivation to learn as students' inclination to perceive academic activities as meaningful and valuable while actively engaging in these activities to obtain the intended learning benefits. In addition, Fowler (2018) defines online learning motivation as the psychological processes that influence students' willingness to initiate, engage in, and persist in learning activities within an online learning environment, including their intrinsic and extrinsic goals, beliefs about their learning capability, perceived value of learning tasks, and social engagement. Hence, this shows that motivation to learn is the key driver of individual effectiveness in learning, either through face-to-face or online learning.

Thus, within the context of teaching and learning online effectiveness, it is important to ensure the learners' motivation to cope with the challenges that influence their willingness, learning capabilities, engagement, and persistence. Consequently, this highlights the importance of having stronger social support to keep the learners motivated in order to sustain the pressures of the online learning environment.

Problem Statement

The post-COVID-19 era has forced rapid change to flexible and distance learning. This has affected the university students' learning as well as their motivational and psychological well-being. For example, a study done by Kaparounaki et al. (2020) has shown that rates of depression among students increased, and Adnan and Anwar (2020) showed that students' quality of life and emotional well-being decreased, affected negatively by the conditions for online learning processes. Hence, it is important to examine the psychological behaviour of learners' motivation in online learning. In addition, many current studies have examined the motivation for online learning among university students (i.e., intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, self-determination, engagement, self-efficacy, and motivational factors in online or hybrid learning) (Ferrer et al. (2022); Howard et al. (2021); Höner et al. (2021); Mendoza, Yan & King (2022) & Levine et al. (2022)).

Due to the challenges of online learning towards students' motivation, it is important to study how important the social support influence is to motivation to learn online. Previous studies have found a positive relationship between social support and engaging motivation in online learning (Yusop et al., 2022; Izni et al., 2024; Rosly et al., 2025; & Ahmad et al., 2026). Indeed, other studies have found the importance of social support in students' motivation in online learning, mainly in the context of expectancy towards success, perceived values, and social support (Abdul Talib et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2026; Izni et al., 2024; Rosly et al., 2025 & Yusop et al., 2022). However, there are limited investigations studying to what extent components of social support affect the online motivation among the learners of higher education in Malaysia. Studies have proven that social support may enhance online learning motivation by strengthening students' expectations of success and their perceived value of online learning. Thus, it is significant to determine the extent to which social support's dimensions influence the online learning motivation among learners. Hence, the aim of the study is to investigate the extent to which social support's dimensions would influence motivation among the higher tertiary online learners at the Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore how social support influences online learning motivation. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions:

- How does social support influence online learning?
- How does expectancy influence online learning?
- How does value influence online learning?

- Is there a significant relationship between social support and expectancy for online learning?

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between social support and expectancy for online learning

- Is there a significant relationship between social support and value for online learning?

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between social support and value for online learning

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986)

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Bandura (1986) explains that human behaviour is a result of reciprocal interaction among personal, behavioural, and environmental factors. From this perspective, humans are not passive recipients of instruction. Instead, humans actively shape their behaviour through their beliefs, actions, and responses to the environment. Within this triadic reciprocal model, self-efficacy is situated primarily as a personal cognitive factor that interacts continuously with behaviour and environment (Bandura, 1997). Over time, numerous studies have been conducted applying this theory to traditional educational settings in addressing motivation to learn. The theory has been foundational in explaining this reciprocal interaction, confirming that students with high self-efficacy are more motivated to participate and learn effectively. At the same time, students' learning behaviours can influence their learning environment, which may subsequently strengthen or weaken their self-efficacy (Altermatt, 2019; Huang & Wang, 2023; McMahon et al., 2009). Following the shift in the educational landscape from a traditional classroom setting to an online learning environment, the interest in understanding the phenomenon increases. Moreover, students have less direct interaction with physical social supports, including a conducive classroom, supportive teachers, and peers, which significantly influence their academic performance. As a result, they have to rely on their own motivation and self-regulation. Therefore, the growth of online learning requires these relationships to be examined in the digital context. While Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory captures the influence of self-efficacy and environmental influences on students' learning behavior, self-efficacy alone may not fully explain their motivation to participate in online learning. In a digital learning context, students' expectations of success and the subjective value they assign to a learning task are also important predictors of motivation. (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Based on this, the present study integrates Expectancy-Value Theory with Social Cognitive Theory to investigate how students' expectations of success and perceived task value influence their motivation in online learning settings.

Value-Expectancy theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000)

The Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) of achievement motivation, developed by Allan Wigfield and Jacquelynne S. Eccles (2000), highlights how people's beliefs about their abilities and the value of a task influence an individual's choices, persistence, and performance. Motivation in the EVT is driven by two main elements: expectancies for success (can I do this?) and subjective task values (why do I want to do this?). Expectancies for success reflect beliefs about an individual's abilities. At the same time, the individual's judgement of their abilities in the specific field reflects their belief in their outcome on forthcoming tasks. These elements of expectancies for success have an impact, as these beliefs are the main predictors of performance and grades in terms of actual academic outcomes. Under the element of subjective task value, it reflects the value related to attainment, as the individual cares to do well on the task given because it reflects their identity. On the other hand, subjective task value also reflects intrinsic value, where the individual enjoys the task and sees it as beneficial for future goals, such as career goals. Despite this, it can also lead to psychological pressure. Hence, subjective task value acts as the main predictor of academic selection and enrollment intentions. Based on the paper by Wigfield and Eccles (2000), these motivational factors change over time. For example, an individual's competence belief tends to decline as they get older and due to differentiation. With differentiation, individuals may change their perception of what they are good at, which eventually changes the value they place on it. The last reason motivational factors change is

gender stereotypes. Based on this paper, these two elements play a crucial role in the individual's academic options and outcomes, as expectations of success and subjective value shape learning-task decisions.

Past Studies on Social Support and Online Motivation

A few empirical studies have investigated the influence of social support and motivation among online learners in higher education. The findings of the studies have shown similar results. Most of these studies were mainly carried out to examine the relationship between social support and motivation, intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, self-determination, engagement, self-efficacy, and motivational factors in online/hybrid learning. A recent study by Ahmad et al. (2026) investigated the influence of social support on learners' motivation to learn online, alongside the roles of expectancy and value. A quantitative survey design was employed, involving 255 respondents from two Malaysian public universities representing the Science and Technology and Social Sciences and Humanities clusters. The instrument consisted of 37 items adapted from Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) and Fowler's Motivation to Learn Online Questionnaire (2018). Findings show that learners perceived high levels of instructor support, strong task value, and strong control of learning beliefs, although their self-efficacy and social engagement varied depending on task complexity and online interaction. Correlation analyses revealed strong positive relationships among expectancy, students' reported high instructor support, strong task value, and strong control-of-learning beliefs. The study highlights the importance of emotional, instructional, and peer-based support in fostering a more engaging and motivating online learning experience.

A similar finding was also found in a study by Abdul Talib et al. (2024) and Izni et al. (2024), which had explored university learners' perceptions of social support, expectancy, and value with online learning motivation. Both studies adopted quantitative surveys that were distributed in public universities in Malaysia. The instrument for both of the studies was adapted from Fowler (2018). Both of the findings revealed a strong relationship between social support, expectancy, and value in influencing online learning motivation. In addition, significant relationships were found among expectancy, value, and social support in relation to learning motivation.

Lastly, a study conducted by Rosli et al. (2025) examined the undergraduate students' motivation towards online learning in the context of expectancy for success, perceived value towards online learning, and social support. A quantitative research design was employed involving 113 diploma and bachelor's degree social sciences students at a Malaysian university. Findings have shown a comparable pattern to the earlier-mentioned studies: high motivation to learn online among the students in the context of expectancy for success, perceived value, and social support. However, unlike the other two earlier studies, results show there is no significant variation in expectancy, value, and social support between the diploma and bachelor's degree students. The results underscore the need for institutions to strengthen motivational support in online learning through pedagogical innovation, structured guidance, and enhanced social interaction. Implications for policy and practice highlight the importance of targeted interventions to optimise student engagement and learning outcomes.

In a nutshell, across these studies, social support is consistently associated with online learning motivation. This suggests that students' motivation is influenced not only by their individual characteristics but also by the social environment surrounding online learning. These research studies establish social support as a motivational element in an online learning environment for university students.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

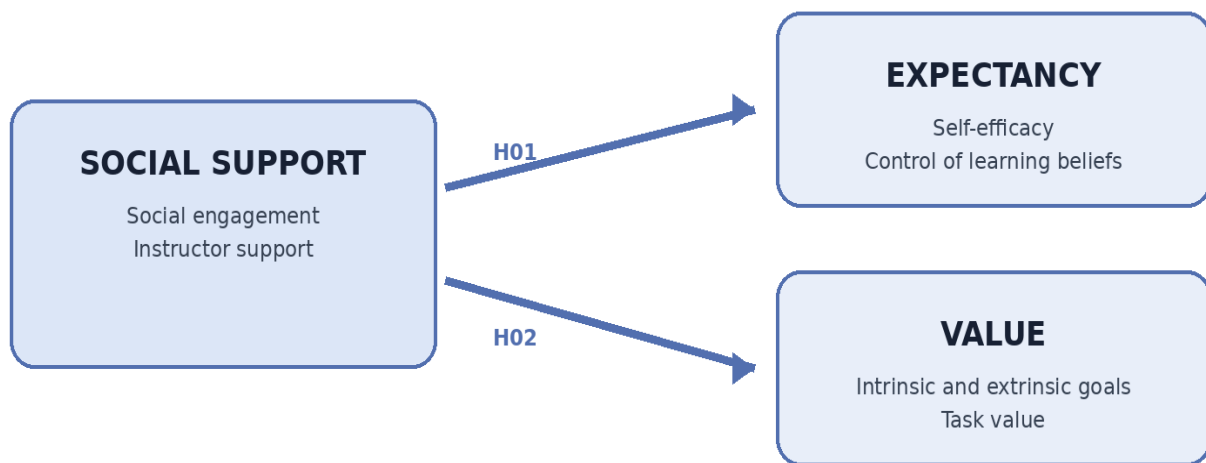
This study examines how social support influences online motivation among learners through the dimensions of expectancy and value, as illustrated in the conceptual framework. The framework is grounded in social cognitive theory proposed by Albert Bandura (1986), which emphasises that learning is shaped by the reciprocal interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors. In online learning environments, social support from instructors, peers, and family members serves as an important environmental factor that encourages participation, provides guidance, and strengthens learners' confidence. Through positive interactions, feedback, and encouragement, learners are more likely to feel supported in

their academic pursuits, leading to increased engagement and motivation. Rahmat et al. (2021) further noted that learners are motivated when they receive attention and support during the learning process, as such interactions foster a sense of involvement and encourage sustained participation in online learning activities.

The framework presented in Figure 1 below is further supported by the Expectancy-Value Theory developed by Allan Wigfield and Jacquelynne Eccles (2000), which posits that learners' motivation is influenced by their expectations of success and the value they attach to a learning task. Expectancy refers to learners' beliefs about their ability to successfully complete learning activities, while value refers to the perceived importance, usefulness, and enjoyment of those activities. According to the theory, students are more motivated to engage in learning when they believe they can succeed and when they perceive the learning experience as meaningful and beneficial. In online learning contexts, social support can enhance expectancy by increasing learners' confidence and reducing uncertainty, while simultaneously strengthening value by helping learners recognise the relevance and benefits of online learning tasks.

The proposed framework integrates these theoretical perspectives with the online motivation instrument developed by Fowler (2018), which identifies expectancy, value, and social support as key factors influencing online motivation. The interrelated gears depicted in the framework symbolise the dynamic relationship among these constructs, where social support contributes to learners' expectancy for success and perceptions of value, thereby enhancing overall online motivation. Drawing on Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory and Wigfield and Eccles' (2000) Expectancy-Value Theory, the framework proposes that learners who receive adequate social support are more likely to develop positive expectations of success and perceive greater value in their learning experiences. These factors work together to foster higher levels of motivation, engagement, and persistence in online learning environments.

Conceptual Framework of Online Learning Motivation



Social support is examined in relation to two motivational dimensions

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Exploring How Social Support Relates to Online Motivation

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study explored how social support is related to online learning motivation. A convenience sample of 200 students responded to a five-point Likert-scale survey adapted from Fowler (2018). Table 1 presents the response categories, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Almost Always), while Table 2 summarises the constructs and items included in the instrument.

Table 1- Likert Scale Used

1	Never
2	Seldom
3	Sometimes
4	Often
5	Almost Always

Table 2- Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	VARIABLE	CONSTRUCT	NO OF ITEMS/ INDICATOR	Cronbach's Alpha
B	EXPECTANCY	Self-Efficacy	7	11(.898)
		Control of Learning Beliefs	4	
C	VALUE	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	14(.911)
		Extrinsic Goal Orientation	4	
		Task Value	6	
D	SOCIAL SUPPORT	Social Engagement	5	12(.889)
		Instructor Support	7	
				37(.952)

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

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Table 3 presents the commonly used interpretation ranges. Ahmad et al. (2024) indicate that alpha coefficients from .70 to .90 reflect acceptable to excellent internal consistency.

Table 2 also reports the reliability coefficients for the three constructs. Cronbach's alpha was .898 for Expectancy, .911 for Value and .889 for Social Support. The overall coefficient for all 37 items was .952, indicating excellent internal consistency. Subsequent analyses were conducted using SPSS to address the research questions.

FINDINGS

Demographic Analysis

Demographic characteristics are reported to describe the composition of the sample and clarify the

population to which the findings may reasonably apply (Ziegenfuss et al., 2021). Percentages provide a concise overview of the respondents' characteristics.

Table 4- Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	18%
		Female	82%
2	Cluster	Science & Technology	6%
		Social Sciences, Humanities & Business	94%
3	Education Background	Diploma	16%
		Bachelor's Degree	84%
4	Mode of Class Preferred	Full-time	95%
		Part-time	5%

The demographic profile indicates that the majority of respondents were female, representing 82% of the total sample, while male respondents accounted for 18%. In terms of academic cluster, most respondents were from the Social Sciences, Humanities and Business cluster, comprising 94%, while the remaining respondents were from the Science and Technology cluster.

For level of study, the majority of respondents were Bachelor's degree students at 84%, whereas Diploma students represented 16% of the total respondents. In addition, only 5% of the respondents were part-time students, indicating that the sample was predominantly made up of full-time students.

Descriptive Statistics

The mean (M) represents the average score, while the standard deviation (SD) indicates the extent to which responses vary around that average (Vetter, 2017). A smaller SD reflects more consistent responses, whereas a larger SD indicates greater variability. Neither a high nor a low SD is inherently desirable; its meaning depends on the construct and distribution being examined.

Findings for Social Support

This section presents the findings for Research Question 1: How does social support influence online learning? Social support was measured through (i) social engagement and (ii) instructor support.

Table 5- Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Social Engagement (SSE)

Statement	M	SD
SSEQ1 I feel "disconnected" from my teacher and fellow students in classes.	2.86	1.13
SSEQ2 I pay attention in classes.	3.90	0.82
SSEQ3 I enjoy class discussions.	4.00	0.89
SSEQ4 I feel like I can freely communicate with other students in classes.	3.92	0.92
SSEQ5 I have strong relationships with fellow students in this course.	3.81	0.98

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for students' social engagement in the classroom. The findings indicate that the highest mean score was recorded for the statement, "I enjoy the class discussions," with a mean (M) of 4.00 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.89, suggesting a high level of enjoyment in classroom discussions among the respondents. This was followed by the statement, "I feel that I can communicate

freely with other students during class," which obtained a mean of 3.92 (SD = 0.92), indicating that students generally perceived the classroom environment as supportive of peer communication. In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for the statement, "I feel disconnected from my teacher and fellow students in class," with a mean of 2.86 and a standard deviation of 1.13. This relatively lower score suggests that, overall, students did not strongly perceive feelings of disconnection from their teachers and classmates.

Table 6 – Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Instructor Support (SIS)

Statement	M	SD
SISQ1 I feel like I can freely communicate with the instructor in this class.	3.87	0.90
SISQ2 The instructor responds to questions clearly, completely and in a timely manner.	4.22	0.79
SISQ3 The instructor's expectations for me in this class are clear.	4.04	0.78
SISQ4 The instructor provides the guidance I need to be successful in this class.	4.25	0.76
SISQ5 The instructor presents the material in a way that makes it relevant to me.	4.29	0.72
SISQ6 In this course, I have the freedom to guide my own learning.	4.23	0.71
SISQ7 The instructor provides regular feedback that helps me gauge my performance in this class.	4.19	0.80

Table 6 above shows the overall descriptive statistics on the instructors' support in the classroom. The majority of items scored a mean score of 4.00 or above. The results show that the highest mean score for instructor support is for the statement "The instructor presents the material in a way that makes it relevant to me", with a mean (M) = 4.29 and a standard deviation (SD) = 0.72, followed by the statement on the instructor providing the guidance I need to be successful in this class, with a mean (M) = 4.25 and SD = 0.76. While the lowest mean score is for the item, "I feel like I can freely communicate with the instructors in this class", with a mean (M) of 3.87 and standard deviation (SD) = 0.90.

Findings for Expectancy

This section presents the findings for Research Question 2: How does expectancy influence online learning? Expectancy was measured through (i) self-efficacy and (ii) control of learning beliefs.

Table 7- 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.	3.77	0.78
ESEQ2 I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings.	3.52	0.83
ESEQ3 I'm confident I can learn the basic concepts that are being taught.	3.83	0.81
ESEQ4 I'm confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor online.	3.45	0.91
ESEQ5 I'm confident I can do an excellent job on assessments online	3.96	0.77
ESEQ6 I'm certain I can master the skills being taught online.	3.55	0.91
ESEQ7 Although online classes can be challenging, I think I can do well.	3.93	0.90

Table 7 shows that the respondents generally had positive self-efficacy in online learning. They were most confident in their ability to perform well in online assessments (M = 3.96, SD = 0.77) and believed they could succeed even when online classes were challenging (M = 3.93, SD = 0.90). They were also confident in learning basic concepts and obtaining excellent grades. However, their confidence was slightly lower when dealing with complex materials presented online (M = 3.45, SD = 0.91), difficult reading materials (M

= 3.52, SD = 0.83), and mastering skills taught online (M = 3.55, SD = 0.91). This suggests that although the respondents felt capable of completing assessments and managing online learning in general, some were less certain about handling more difficult content. Therefore, additional guidance and clearer explanations may help students feel more confident when learning complex materials online.

Table 8- Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Control of Learning Beliefs (ECB)

Statement	M	SD
ECBQ1 If I study in appropriate ways, then I'll be able to learn the material.	3.97	0.74
ECBQ2 It's my own fault if I don't learn the material taught.	4.17	0.78
ECBQ3 If I try hard enough, then I'll understand the material presented.	4.15	0.68
ECBQ4 If I don't understand the material presented, it's because I didn't try hard enough.	3.95	0.88

Table 8 shows that the respondents generally had strong control-of-learning beliefs, as they believed that their learning outcomes depended largely on their own effort and study approach. The highest mean was recorded for the belief that not learning the material was their own responsibility (M = 4.17, SD = 0.78), followed closely by the belief that trying hard would help them understand the material presented (M = 4.15, SD = 0.68). They also believed that using appropriate study methods would help them learn effectively (M = 3.97, SD = 0.74). Although the lowest mean was recorded for the statement that a lack of understanding was due to insufficient effort (M = 3.95, SD = 0.88), the score remained relatively high. Overall, the findings suggest that the respondents recognised the importance of personal effort, responsibility and suitable study strategies in helping them succeed in online learning.

Findings for Value

This section presents the findings for Research Question 3: How does value influence online learning? Value was measured through (i) intrinsic goal orientation, (ii) extrinsic goal orientation and (iii) task value.

Table 9- Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Intrinsic Goal Orientation (VI)

Statement	M	SD
VIQ1 I prefer online material that really challenges me, so I can learn new things.	3.62	0.88
VIQ2 I prefer online material that arouses my curiosity, even if it's difficult to learn.	3.70	0.92
VIQ3 The most satisfying thing for me is trying to understand the online content as thoroughly as possible.	3.80	0.85
VIQ4 I choose assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade.	3.40	0.84

Table 9 presents the descriptive statistics for intrinsic goal orientation. The highest mean was recorded for the statement, "The most satisfying thing for me is trying to understand the online content as thoroughly as possible" (M = 3.80, SD = 0.85). This was followed by a preference for online material that arouses curiosity even when it is difficult to learn (M = 3.70, SD = 0.92). The lowest mean was recorded for choosing assignments that provide learning opportunities without guaranteeing a good grade (M = 3.40, SD = 0.84). The pattern suggests that respondents valued understanding and curiosity, but were less inclined towards tasks that might place grades at risk.

Table 10- Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Extrinsic Goal Orientation(VE)

Statement	M	SD
VEQ1 Getting a good grade is the most satisfying thing for me.	4.59	0.64
VEQ2 I want to do well in my classes so that I can get awards and recognition.	4.40	0.75

VEQ3 I want to get better grades than most of the other students in my classes.	4.35	0.74
VEQ4 I want to do well in my classes because it's important to show my ability to my family, friends, employer, or others.	4.47	0.74

Table 10 presents the descriptive statistics for extrinsic goal orientation. The highest mean was recorded for the statement, “Getting a good grade is the most satisfying thing for me” ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.64$). This was followed by the desire to demonstrate ability to family, friends, employers or others ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.74$). The lowest mean concerned obtaining better grades than other students ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.74$). These findings suggest that achievement and recognition were important sources of motivation, although respondents appeared to place slightly less emphasis on outperforming their peers.

Task Value (VT)

Table 11 – Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Task Value

Statement	M	SD
VTQ1 I think I will be able to use what I learn in this course in other courses.	4.18	0.67
VTQ2 It is important for me to learn the course material in this class.	4.26	0.68
VTQ3 I am very interested in the content area of this course.	4.13	0.71
VTQ4 I think the course material in this class is useful for me to learn.	4.14	0.73
VTQ5 I like the subject matter of this course.	4.12	0.76
VTQ6 Understanding the subject matter of this course is very important to me.	4.29	0.70

Table 11 presents the descriptive statistics for task value. The highest mean was recorded for the statement, “Understanding the subject matter of this course is very important to me” ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.70$), followed by the importance of learning the course material ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.68$). The lowest mean was recorded for liking the subject matter of the course ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.76$). Overall, the respondents regarded the course content as important, useful and relevant.

Inferential Statistics

Correlation analysis indicates the strength and direction of an association between variables without establishing causation (He, 2024). As a general guide, positive coefficients from .10 to .29 may be described as weak, .30 to .49 as moderate and .50 or above as strong. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted in SPSS to examine the associations between social support and the two online motivational constructs. The results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12- Correlation between social support and online motivational constructs

Correlations				
		SOCIAL SUPPORT	EXPECTANCY	VALUE
SOCIAL SUPPORT	Pearson Correlation	1	.624**	.709**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	200	200	200
EXPECTANCY	Pearson Correlation	.624**	1	.683**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001

	N	200	200	200
VALUE	Pearson Correlation	.709**	.683**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	200	200	200
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Relationship between Social Support and Expectancy for Online Learning

This section presents the findings for Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between social support and expectancy for online learning?

H01: There is no significant relationship between social support and expectancy for online learning.

Table 12 shows a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between social support and expectancy ($r = .624$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H01 was rejected. The squared correlation ($r^2 = .389$) indicates that social support and expectancy shared approximately 38.9% of their variance. This is an unadjusted effect-size estimate and should not be interpreted as evidence that social support causes or independently predicts expectancy.

Relationship between Social Support and Value for Online Learning

This section presents the findings for Research Question 5: Is there a significant relationship between social support and value for online learning?

H02: There is no significant relationship between social support and value for online learning.

Table 12 shows a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between social support and value ($r = .709$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H02 was rejected. The squared correlation ($r^2 = .503$) indicates that social support and value shared approximately 50.3% of their variance. This is an unadjusted effect-size estimate and should not be interpreted as evidence that social support causes or independently predicts value.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussion

This study explored how social support is related to students' motivation to learn online through expectancy and value. Overall, the findings show that students' online learning motivation is related not only to their own confidence and effort but also to the support they receive from instructors and classmates. For social support, the students generally had positive social engagement during online learning. They enjoyed class discussions, communicated well with their classmates and did not strongly feel disconnected from others. The students also received good support from their instructors. They particularly valued instructors who presented relevant course materials, provided clear guidance and gave regular feedback. However, communication with instructors can still be improved. This finding is consistent with Rahmat et al. (2021), Yusop et al. (2022) and Ahmad et al. (2026), who highlighted the importance of social and instructional support in maintaining students' participation and motivation.

For expectancy, the students generally had positive self-efficacy. They were confident in performing well in online assessments and believed they could succeed even when online classes were challenging. However, they were less confident when dealing with complex materials, difficult readings and skills taught online. This suggests that although the students were confident in completing their assessments, some may still require additional guidance when learning difficult content.

The students also had strong control-of-learning beliefs. They believed that their learning outcomes depended on their own effort, responsibility and study approach. They recognised that studying in

appropriate ways and trying hard could help them understand the course materials. This finding supports Wigfield and Eccles' (2000) Expectancy-Value Theory, which explains that students' beliefs about their ability to succeed can influence their effort and willingness to continue learning.

For value, the students showed both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They were interested in understanding online content and learning materials that encouraged their curiosity. However, they were less interested in assignments that did not guarantee good grades. The students were mainly motivated by good grades, recognition and the opportunity to show their ability to family members, friends, employers and others. At the same time, they also considered their course materials important, useful and relevant. This suggests that although academic achievement was an important motivation, the students also valued learning that was meaningful and useful. This finding is in line with Brophy (2010) and Fowler (2018), who explained that students are more motivated when they understand the importance and value of their learning activities.

The findings also show that students who received stronger social support tended to have greater confidence in their ability to succeed in online learning. They were also more likely to recognise the importance and usefulness of their learning. Support from instructors and classmates can help students manage learning challenges and feel more confident about their abilities. When instructors provide clear guidance, relevant materials and opportunities for interaction, students are more likely to view online learning as useful and worthwhile.

In summary, the findings are consistent with Abdul Talib et al. (2024), Izni et al. (2024), Rosli et al. (2025), Yusop et al. (2022) and Ahmad et al. (2026), which identified social support, expectancy and value as important elements of online learning motivation. Nevertheless, the present bivariate correlations establish association only. They do not demonstrate temporal order, causation or the unique predictive contribution of social support after other student and course characteristics are controlled.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The findings are consistent with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which explains that learning is influenced by personal, behavioural and environmental factors. In this study, support from instructors and classmates represents the learning environment, while students' confidence, effort and learning beliefs represent personal factors. The findings show that these factors are closely related to students' participation and motivation in online learning.

The findings also support Wigfield and Eccles' (2000) Expectancy-Value Theory. Students' self-efficacy and control-of-learning beliefs represent their expectations of success. Meanwhile, their intrinsic goals, extrinsic goals and task value represent the value they place on learning. Therefore, the findings support the conceptual framework of this study by showing that social support is related to students' confidence in succeeding and the value they place on online learning.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that effective online learning should provide both academic and social support. Instructors should present course materials in clear and relevant ways, provide sufficient guidance and give regular feedback. Students should also be given more opportunities to communicate with their instructors and classmates through discussions, group activities, peer feedback and consultation sessions.

Additional support should be provided when students are required to understand complex materials or master difficult skills. Instructors can divide difficult content into smaller sections, provide clear examples and use short assessments to check students' understanding. These approaches can help students become more confident in managing challenging online learning tasks.

Although grades and recognition are important sources of motivation, online learning activities should also encourage curiosity, interest and a deeper understanding of the subject. Instructors can relate assignments to real-life situations and provide activities that allow students to apply their knowledge. This can help students appreciate the learning process beyond obtaining good grades.

Limitations of the Study

The findings should be interpreted within the composition of the convenience sample. Respondents were predominantly female (82%), from the Social Sciences, Humanities and Business cluster (94%), full-time students (95%) and Bachelor's degree students (84%), and all were recruited from one university. The results therefore reflect the experiences of these groups more strongly than those of male students, Science and Technology students, part-time learners, Diploma students or learners in other institutions. The sample imbalance and non-probability recruitment limit the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the wider population of Malaysian higher education students.

The cross-sectional self-report design and reliance on bivariate correlations create further limitations. Common-method bias and unmeasured factors may influence the observed relationships, while correlation does not establish temporal order or causation. Because participant-level data were not available for the present revision, multiple regression or path modelling could not be conducted responsibly. Accordingly, the reported r^2 values represent shared variance only and not adjusted predictive effects.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies should recruit respondents from multiple institutions and use stratified or probability-based sampling to obtain stronger representation across gender, academic cluster, level of study and mode of learning. Such designs would provide a more defensible basis for generalising findings across Malaysian higher education contexts.

Future research can also examine how students' motivation changes over time. Longitudinal or experimental studies may be conducted to determine whether specific forms of social support, such as peer mentoring, regular instructor feedback and structured online discussions, can improve students' motivation. Interviews or focus-group discussions may also help researchers understand why some students feel less confident when dealing with difficult online materials.

Future studies should also test whether expectancy and value explain the relationship between social support and overall online learning motivation. With participant-level data and a sufficiently powered sample, researchers may use multiple regression or structural equation modelling to estimate standardised path coefficients, explained variance, confidence intervals and model-fit indices while controlling for relevant demographic and learning-context variables. Other factors, such as digital self-efficacy, emotional well-being, learning autonomy, course design and internet accessibility, may also be included.

In conclusion, students are more likely to remain motivated when they feel confident, recognise the value of their learning and receive sufficient support from instructors and classmates. Therefore, effective online learning requires not only suitable technology and course materials but also a supportive environment that provides clear guidance, meaningful interaction and appropriate learning assistance.

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APPENDIX

Instrument for Online Motivation

This instrument is adopted from Fowler (2018)

SECTION	VARIABLE MOTIVATION	CONSTRUCT	NO OF ITEMS/ INDICATOR	
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 B – Expectancy(E)

Self- Efficacy (Ese)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	ESEQ 1 I believe I'll receive excellent grades in my classes.					
2	ESEQ2 I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings.					
3	ESEQ3 I'm confident I can learn the basic concepts that are being taught.					
4	ESEQ4 I'm confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor online.					
5	ESEQ5 I'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.					

Control Of Learning Beliefs (Ecb)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	ECBQ1 If I study in appropriate ways, then I'll be able to learn the material.					

2	ECBQ2 It's my own fault if I don't learn the material taught.					
3	ECBQ3 If I try hard enough, then I'll understand the material presented.					
4	ECBQ4 If I don't understand the material presented, it's because I didn't try hard enough.					

Section C – Value (V)

Intrinsic Goal Orientation (VI)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	VIQ1 I prefer online material that really challenges me, so I can learn new things.					
2	VIQ2 I prefer online material that arouses my curiosity, even if it's difficult to learn.					
3	VIQ3 The most satisfying thing for me is trying to understand the online content as thoroughly as possible.					
4	VIQ4 I choose assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade.					

Extrinsic Goal Orientation(VE)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	VEQ1 Getting 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	VEQ3 I want to get better grades than most of the other students in my classes.					
4	VEQ4 I want to do well in my classes because it's important to show my ability to my family, friends, employer, or others.					

Task Value (VT)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	VTQ1 I think I will be able to use what I learn in this course in other courses.					
2	VTQ2 It is important for me to learn the course material in this class.					
3	VTQ3 I am very interested in the content area of this course.					
4	VTQ4 I think the course material in this class is useful for me to learn.					

5	VTQ5 I like the subject matter of this course.					
6	VTQ6 Understanding the subject matter of this course is very important to me.					

Section D – Social Support (S)

Social Engagement (SSE)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	SSEQ1 I feel “disconnected” from my teacher and fellow students in classes.					
2	SSEQ2 I pay attention in classes.					
3	SSEQ3 I enjoy class discussions.					
4	SSEQ4 I feel like I can freely communicate with other students in classes.					
5	SSEQ5 I have strong relationships with fellow students in this course.					

(i) Instructor Support (SIS)

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	SISQ1 I feel like I can freely communicate with the instructor in this class.					
2	SISQ2 The instructor responds to questions clearly, completely and in a timely manner.					
3	SISQ3 The instructor’s expectations for me in this class are clear.					
4	SISQ4 The instructor provides the guidance I need to be successful in this class.					
5	SISQ5 The instructor presents the material in a way that makes it relevant to me.					
6	SISQ6 In this course, I have the freedom to guide my own learning					
7	SISQ7 The instructor provides regular feedback that helps me gauge my performance in this class.					