The Anxiety and Attitude of Malaysian Secondary Students towards Learning English Language

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Abstract. English has become a lingua franca of the world that holds the role of international language among people with different native languages. The purpose of this study sought to investigate the level of anxiety of the students in English Language and their attitude towards learning the language. This study will show an insight of English language anxiety among the upper secondary students as it deals with the attitudes, negative effects, causes and solutions of English language anxiety. It is hoped that increasing and extensive knowledge of second language anxiety will help both teachers and students to deflate it and make the learning process smooth, successful and effective. This study surveyed and analyzed 120 upper secondary students from a national school in Malaysia. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS and the data presented in percentage. The results indicated that anxiety has negative impact on attitude among the upper secondary students in learning English as a second language regardless of their gender and language proficiency. This shows that some students tend to have high level of anxiety when their conscious mind realised that they will be facing certain language task. The findings of this study can help to clarify the leaners’ attitude and the level of anxiety in learning English Language.

Keywords: Lingua franca, native language, language anxiety, anxious, attitudes

1 Introduction
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Throughout the world and in developing countries no one can deny the spread and success of English Language. English has become a lingua franca of the world that holds the role of natural language among people with different native languages (Cruz-Ferreira & Abraham, 2006). English is placed as the second language in Malaysia (Gill, 2002) and in line with the education policy; English is taught as a compulsory second language in all schools.

1.1 Purpose of the study

It is really worth while thinking about the causes of language anxiety and at the same time the ways to minimize the harmful effect so that the teaching and learning can be more effective and fruitful especially for those anxious students. There is a significant relationship between the students’ anxiety and the attitudes towards their success level. Thus, my study sought to investigate the level of anxiety of the Form 4 students in English Language and their attitude towards learning the language.

1.2 Objective of the study

This study will show an insight of English language anxiety among the Form 4 students as it deals with the attitudes, negative effects, causes and solutions of English language anxiety. It is hoped that increasing and extensive knowledge of second language anxiety will help both teachers and students to deflate it and make the learning process smooth, successful and effective.

1.3 Research Questions

The present study was designed to answer the following research questions:
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1. What is the anxiety level of the upper secondary school students in English language classroom?

2. What is the language learning attitude of the upper secondary students towards learning of English?

3. What is the relationship between language attitudes and language anxiety?

2 Literature Review

The English Language has travelled fast and became the most spoken language in the world. English is considered a second language in Malaysia apart from Bahasa Malaysia, as it is taught as a compulsory language in schools. It is used mostly in the private sector, media and private education. However, despite learning English at school, many Malaysian are not able to use English fluently in real life situations.

2.1 Definition of Language Anxiety

Anxiety in language is defined as the feelings of tension and apprehension during reading, speaking, learning, listening and writing English language. According to researchers, there is trait anxiety, state anxiety, situation-specific anxiety, and facilitating and test anxiety.

2.2 Definition of Attitude

Attitude is regarded as one of the key factors that contribute to L2 learning achievement (Spolsky, 1969). In addition, the extent to which students continue to actively participate in the language learning process is also determined by their attitudes. There are two types of attitude change towards language learning; positive and negative.
2.3 Secondary Research

Gajalakshmi, (2013) in her study, (High school students’ attitude towards English language learning) revealed that there is a significant difference based on the gender, locality of the school, type of school, type of management. A standardized questionnaire was administered in the form of normative survey to 600 IX standard students (selected randomly from various high and higher secondary schools in Puducherry region) to collect their attitude towards learning English language. The collected data was statistically analyzed by SPSS ver-16. Hence, it was concluded that more classroom activities in the study of English enhance pupils’ attitude to learn English.

In his great work Brown (1994) added “attitudes, like all aspects of the development of cognition and affect in human beings, develop early in childhood and are the result of parents’ and peers’ attitudes, contact with people who are different in any number of ways, and interacting affective factors in the human experience”. It seems obvious that there are many stimulants that lead to a positive or negative attitude. Attitude concept can be viewed from three dimensions regarding aspects of it. Each one of these dimensions has different features to bring out language attitude results, i.e. behavioral, cognitive, and affective. These three attitudinal aspects are based on the three theoretical approaches of behaviorism, cognitivism, and humanism, respectively.

We can see that anxiety and attitude are related to each other. It cannot be said as individual influencing factor, because if one has the anxiety, but not a positive attitude, the individual may have problems learning a language. A positive attitude leads to positive language learning together with other social factors.
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3 Methodology

This chapter will provide detailed information about the instrument, research questions, participants and procedure of the study.

3.1 Participants

A sample of convenience was applied to select the sample school for conducting this study because of the time constraint and easy access. In order to conduct the survey, 120 Form 4 students were selected.

3.2 Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to the 120 upper secondary students during their normal class session where they were given clear instructions and explanation on filling up the questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected upon completion.

3.3 Research Design

Survey method was selected to investigate as it is considered the best in obtaining personal and social facts, beliefs, motivations, approach and concerns (Kerlinger, 1986). This study employed a questionnaire survey to collect data. The procedure was carried out in a secondary school in Kuala Lumpur. This school was established in 1987 and used Bahasa Malaysia (BM) as its medium of instruction. For this investigation, the survey questionnaire was adapted from Gardner’s (1985) ‘Attitude Motivation Test Battery’ (AMTB). The AMTB explores language learning in three major sections; attitudes, motivations and classroom anxiety; motivational intensity; and teacher and curriculum (Gardner, 1985). The second questionnaire is adapted from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986).
3.4 Data Analysis

In this study, the questionnaires were the main data collection instruments. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS and the data presented in percentage. This analysis was used to present all the related and required data. SPSS was found the most appropriate for this study as it requires details systematically. The findings from the questionnaires were presented in table form and they were divided into two main topics; background information, anxiety and attitude.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research which was done in Kuala Lumpur. The findings of the survey are shown in the light of the research questions with the usage of descriptive statistics.

4.1 Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics of the items were taken by using SPSS 16 in order to answer the research questions. Anxiety and Attitude of the students towards learning the language were examined under the same scale which was adapted AMTB (by Gardner 2004) by the researcher. Classroom anxiety and language use anxiety are the two headings under the adapted FLCAS (by Horwitz, 1986). The descriptive statistics of the two scales were taken and the descriptive statistics of each item was evaluated on the basis of school level and gender.

4.2 Demographics

There are 120 participants in this study where the participants’ are categorized by the following demographics: 60% male, 40% female of upper secondary ranging from form 4 and form 5 students. The students were placed into three proficiency levels (lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper- intermediate) based on their English scores of the PT3 Examination.
4.3 Research Question 1, 2 & 3

4.3.1 What is the anxiety level of secondary school students in English language classroom?

The first research question examined the anxiety level of the students. In FLCAS, students filled the items which were related with English class anxiety. Mean scores of the results were evaluated according to the scores which were determined by the researcher beforehand.

As it is shown in Table 1, mean score of the students’ class anxiety level (m=3.13). It can be concluded that, according to the pre-determined evaluation scores, the students have moderate level of anxiety since their mean scores are between 2.50 and 3.49.

Table 1. The level of Anxiety among upper secondary students towards English language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.1314</td>
<td>.67889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.1314</td>
<td>.67889</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.2 What is the language learning attitude of the students towards learning of English?

First of all, three categories of the language proficiency of students were determined on the basis of school level and gender. Mean scores of the results were evaluated according to the scores which were determined by the researcher beforehand.
The results revealed that, upper intermediate students have positive attitudes towards learning the language with the mean score is 3.55. Intermediate students also have positive attitudes towards learning English with the mean score is 3.60 whereas the lower intermediate students with the score of 3.45 shows neither negative nor positive. As a result, we can conclude that all level students have positive attitudes towards learning English. The average attitude level of upper secondary students towards English language is 3.1320, with a standard deviation of about 0.70130.

### 4.3.3 What is the relationship between language attitudes and language anxiety?

Pearson correlation coefficients analysis was carried out to examine the relationships between anxiety and attitude among the upper secondary students in learning English as a second language with regards to their gender and language proficiency. The overall total score correlation analysis indicated that there was a significant and negative correlation between anxiety and attitude among the upper secondary students in learning English as a second language. The Pearson r statistic was \( r = -0.676, p=0.000 \), means the increasing of the level of anxiety have negative impact on the attitude of English learning among the upper secondary students. Overall, the finding indicated that there is a significant relationship between anxiety and attitude of

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.1320</td>
<td>.70130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Table 2.** The level of Attitude among upper secondary students towards English language
learning English as a second language among upper secondary students.

5 Implications and Conclusion

5.1 IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

From the findings, it can be concluded that anxiety has negative impact on attitude among the upper secondary students in learning English as a second language with regards to gender and language proficiency. The results from this study indicated that the increasing level of anxiety will also create negative attitude and decrease the level of motivation of the students regardless of their gender and also language proficiency.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The findings from this study shed light on the existence of facilitative anxiety among the upper secondary students in learning English as a second language. Nevertheless, it is hoped that a study of anxiety and attitude of upper secondary students in learning English as a second language at the secondary level will provide valuable input to the Ministry of Higher Education. Specifically this study will be able to highlight which factors contribute most to the study of English and what steps can be taken to address these contributing factors from the early stage of education in Institute of Higher Learning. Furthermore, the study will be able to provide recommendations as to how we can improve level of students’ proficiency while they are still studying at the school institution.

References

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