

Willingness to Communicate in English and Motivation Level among Chinese Secondary Students in Northern Malaysia

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Abstract—Willingness to communicate (WTC) is one of the affective factors influencing success in second and foreign language learning. This present study explores the possible relationship between WTC and English language learning motivation of secondary school students from National Secondary Schools (NSS) and Chinese Independent Schools (CIS) in Malaysia. Cluster sampling method was used. A questionnaire containing Gardner’s Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) [1] and McCroskey and Richmond’s WTC scale [2] was distributed to 100 students in NSS and 170 students in CIS located in northern region of Malaysia. The findings indicated a significant relationship between WTC and motivation. There was no significant relationship between students from national and Chinese independent schools in terms of WTC but a significant relationship between students in both schools with regard to motivation was observed. To conclude, stakeholders and teachers can consider employing new or modifying old methods to ensure the teaching of English to secondary Malaysian Chinese students can be made more effective.

Keywords—Willingness to communicate (WTC); motivation; Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (AMTB); Chinese secondary school students; Generation Y or Z.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE success of English language learning is not simply defined by the results shown in students’ report cards or the activities incorporated in the classroom. To stand out in an increasingly competitive and globalized society, English in daily usage is a stepping-stone for students to “communicate to the rest of the world” as what has been stated in the preface of *Preliminary Report of Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025* [3]. In the midst of this overwhelming mass call for a reformation of education in English teaching and learning by the Malaysian government and the public, students from Chinese educational background in Malaysia as part of the system, are always labeled as a muted group in the public occasions as they cannot speak out in fluent English. They are L2 learners but not L2 speakers [4] even they have gone through a normal education system in Malaysia whereby they are exposed to a multi-lingual scenario and attending classes of English language for approximately 14 years, from their early

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childhood education to the year completing their secondary schooling. In light of their reluctance in using English language, this study aims explore the relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and English language learning motivation of secondary school students studying in National Secondary Schools (NSS) and Chinese Independent Schools (CIS). It is an investigation of the attitudinal behavior of L2 learners who have been taken as the centre of learning, particularly, learners who are labeled as generation Y or Z, the group of students who might perceive the world differently from their past generations although they have been given a much favorable environment, a society rich in language differences due to its diversified ethnicity. The research questions are therefore set as follows:

- Is there any significant relationship between willingness to communicate and motivation?
- Is there any significant difference in terms of willingness to communicate between students studying at NSS and CIS?
- Is there any significant difference in terms of motivation between students studying at NSS and CIS?

Finding out the relationship between WTC and motivation among students from these two educational systems could highlight the underlying issues of students’ refusal to speak English. These results could affect teachers’ behavior and classroom routines, ultimately, student learning. Classroom procedures and pedagogical implications can therefore be adjusted accordingly to address the problem. This study complements other research focusing on determining linguistic achievement outcomes and can provide an overview of factors related to language learning among Malaysian Chinese students at the secondary level.

Prior to discussing the method used and results of this study, background of this study focusing on Malaysian Chinese, past studies on WTC and language learning motivation are reviewed.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A. School types for Malaysian Chinese

The school system in Malaysia is diversified because of its historical and political uniqueness. To simply put, there are

two types of schools at the primary level i.e.: a) national schools and; b) national-typed schools, made up of Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools which adopt their respective mother tongues. In Chinese vernacular schools, English is one of the subjects in the school syllabus from Primary One to Six with 120-minute learning time per week. At the secondary level, most of them enroll to the National Secondary Schools (NSS) where Malay language is their medium of instructions (MOI) or they can opt to go to Chinese Independent Schools (CIS) where Chinese language is the medium of instruction. These schools are not endorsed by MOE but are still legitimate [5] as United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia officially monitors them. However, both types of school provide quite similar learning hours per week in English language.

B. Malaysian Chinese students

Malaysian Chinese students in this study is defined as the group of students who have gone through their primary education in Chinese vernacular schools and continue their secondary education in either National Secondary schools (NSS) or Chinese Independent schools (CIS). They are the group of Malaysian students who preferred Mandarin as the language to be used within and outside school compound [6]. Most of them claim to feel awkward when they are required to speak English [7]. Compared to Indian Malaysian students, they have lower self-efficacy level like their other counterpart, the Malay students [8&9]. According to Ting [10], English was found to be the last best spoken language of all her respondents made up of 1554 Malaysian Chinese youth.

C. Generation Y or Z

As this is a research on young Malaysian ESL learners' behaviour, it is relevant to look into some prominent characteristics they have in common as they share similar socio-economic or cultural background in terms of age. Taking a Malaysian perspective, generation labelling should be re-defined more to the demographic reality in Malaysia [11] and the age group of respondents in this research could be labelled as Generation Y. However, from a more general view this group of learners could also be labelled as Generation Z who are grouped from 14 to 18 years old and has been identified as the first tribe of digital natives who were born very dependent on mobile gadgets and the Internet communication [12]. As they are more used to deal with the Internet communication through social media such as facebook, twitter, or WhatsApp, they lack of interpersonal skills and their way of connecting people is more in the virtual world due to their heavy reliance on technology [13].

III. WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE (WTC) AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is a parameter measuring language learners' readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2 [14]. It could also be an assessment to the success of ESL

teaching and learning whereby the end result of L2 learning eventually would turn a L2 learner into a L2 speaker.

Many studies have been carried out to identify factors that influence L2 learners' willingness to speak English in language classrooms. Hashimoto [15] examined the affective variables as predictors of reported second language (L2) use in classrooms of Japanese ESL (English as a Second Language) students. The results showed that perceived competence and second language anxiety were found to be causes of WTC, which led to more second language usage, and anxiety was found to negatively influence perceived competence. In another study, Pattapong [16] pointed out four main categories, namely, cultural context, social and individual context, classroom context, and social and psychological context that contribute to Thai as EFL learners' WTC. Each category was reported to be made up of various sub-categories.

Through semi-structured interview with Iranian EFL learners, Mohammad Javad Riasati [17] identified seven factors: task type, topic of discussion, interlocutor, teacher, class atmosphere, personality and self-perceived speaking ability, which contribute to WTC. Aiming to explore the possible relationship between WTC and its components and success in foreign language learning, Purya Baghaei and Ali Dourakhshan [18] used Willingness to Communicate in a Foreign Language Scale (WTC-FLS) to measure a group of English undergraduates readiness to initiate communication under different circumstances, different contexts and with different people. Results showed that two out of the three subscales of WTC, namely, willingness to communicate in the school context and willingness to communicate with native speakers of English, were moderately correlated with success in learning English as foreign language. The other subscale of WTC, i.e., willingness to communicate with nonnative speakers of English was not correlated with success in foreign language learning.

IV. LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION

With regard to second language or foreign language learning, motivation is defined by Gardner [19] as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of L2 learning plus favourable attitudes towards learning the language. When the desire to achieve the goal and favourable attitudes towards the goal are linked with the effort or the drive, then we have a motivated organism." There are two main theoretical approaches to motivation namely Social Psychological Approach made up of instrumental and integrative motivations and Cognitive Approach encompassed of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Although to a certain extent, both pairs of terms are similar, this study will adopt the latter.

It is widely claimed that intrinsic motivation produces more successful second language learners than those who are only motivated extrinsically. According to a study carried out by Lucas, Pulido, Midnaflones, Ignacio, Tacay & Lao [20], it was stated that learners would be intrinsically motivated only when that particular activity seems interesting to them. Another

intrinsic factor that pushes learners to learn a target language is the feeling of accomplishment that comes with gaining a proficiency in that language [21]. The need for the feeling of accomplishment is linked to ego-boosting where students will have a sense of accomplishment by being able to write, read, listen and speak the target language. Finally, learners should not be forced to perform a task outstandingly unless they are willing to do so with strong enthusiasm. Carreira [21] confirmed it by stating learners will have the motivation to conduct an activity for the pleasure of gaining knowledge and new ideas.

However, the effectiveness of extrinsic motivation in leading to second language learning success cannot be denied. Ainol Madziah Zubairi and Isarji Hj Sarudin [22] examined the motivation of Malaysian students to learn a foreign language and the results showed that they were extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to learn a foreign language. In addition, they reported that the respondents learned a foreign language for extrinsic reasons such as for their future career, to make them a more knowledgeable person or to fulfill the graduation requirement. A study by Mastoor Al Kaboody [23] that looked into the major theories of motivation on the influence of teachers on learners' motivation proposed that teachers have a huge responsibility to initiate learners' motivation and keep it alive throughout the learning process.

V. METHODOLOGY

This study focused on the fundamental of quantitative methodology where questionnaire was the main instrument used. Cluster sampling method was used to recruit students

from national and Chinese Independent schools in northern Malaysia. Prior to that, principals from the schools obtained informed consent.

A. Instrument

A questionnaire made up of three sections: (i) demographic background (ii) 116 item Gardner's Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) [1] (iii) 20 item McCroskey & Richmond's [2] WTC scale was used. Students were asked to respond to the questionnaire using a Likert type scale of 1 to 6 for AMTB and Likert type scale of 1 to 7. The psychometric soundness for both instruments is good because according to McCroskey and Richmond, the face validity is strong and results of extensive past research indicate the predictive validity and alpha reliability is ranging from .85 to .90. As for AMTB, The Attitude/Motivation Index (AMI), representing as it does the total of the attitudinal/motivational factors, provides the most comprehensive assessment. Thus, it should be more stable over other criteria even though in the case of certain criteria, one of the more specific composite indices might produce higher representing as it does. The total of the predictive validity is strong and results of the extensive research indicate the predictive validity and alpha reliability is ranging from .85 to .90 [1].

B. Participants

A total of 271 participants from 2 secondary schools participated in this research. 100 questionnaires were distributed to participants from National Secondary School and 171 questionnaires were distributed to participants from Chinese Independent School located in northern Malaysia. Tabulation of demographic data is reflected in TABLE I.

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTIC FOR PARTICIPANT GENDER, EDUCATION LEVEL AND SCHOOL CATEGORIES

Gender	n (%)	Education Level (Primary Education)	n (%)	Education Level (Secondary Education)	n (%)
Male	127 (46.5%)	National Primary	16 (5.9%)	National Secondary School	100 (36.6%)
Female	146 (53.5%)	National Type Primary	246 (90.1%)	Chinese Independent School	173 (63.4%)
		International	3 (1.1%)		
		Abroad	1 (0.4%)		
		Others	6 (2.2%)		

VI. RESULTS

The result of *Pearson Correlation* showed that there was a significant relationship between Willingness to Communicate ($M=53.46$, $SD=13.14$) and motivation ($M=123.16$, $SD=12.98$), $r(269)=0.19$, $p=0.002$.

The result of *T-Test Independent Sample of Means* showed that there was no significant difference between National Secondary School ($M=55.36$, $SD=11.40$) and Chinese Independent School ($M=52.40$, $SD=13.98$) in willingness to communicate, $t(269)=1.78$, $p=0.77$.

TABLE 2: CORRELATION BETWEEN MOTIVATION LEVEL AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

Correlation Coefficient, r	df
+0.189	0.002($df=271$)

Note: df = degree of freedom

TABLE 3: DIFFERENCES IN WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE BETWEEN NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL AND CHINESE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Types of School			1.78	269	0.77
National Secondary Schools	55.36	11.40			
Chinese Independent School	52.40	13.98			

The result of *T-Test Independent Sample of Means* showed that there was a significant difference between National Secondary School ($M=126.11$, $SD=10.99$) and Chinese Independent School ($M=121.44$, $SD=13.76$) in motivation, $t(269)=0.57$, $p=0.04$.

TABLE 4: DIFFERENCES IN MOTIVATION LEVEL BETWEEN NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL AND CHINESE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Types of School			0.57	269	0.04*
National Secondary Schools	126.11	10.99			
Chinese Independent School	121.44	13.76			

Note: Significant level at $*p < .05$

VII. DISCUSSION

Due to different educational settings between National Secondary Schools (NSS) and Chinese Independent schools (CIS) in Malaysia, motivation level and willingness to communicate in English among students from these schools could be different.

Firstly, the results show that there is a positive correlation between motivation and willingness to communicate in English. These results are similar to other studies [15, 24, 25], which have indicated an important connection between motivation and willingness. Learners with higher motivation also have more willingness to communicate in different situations.

Secondly, NSS students have higher motivation to learn English than those in CIS. However, in terms of willingness to communicate in English, the findings have confirmed that there is no significant difference among students in both types of school. It could be due to the different environments between NSS and CIS where most students in CIS are Chinese as compared to those in NSS. Students in CIS therefore do not feel the need to communicate in English. Students in NSS on the contrary need to communicate with teachers and

classmates of other ethnicities, such as Malays and Indians. They need to communicate in languages other than Chinese as almost all the subjects in schools are taught in Malay. Therefore, they are more motivated to learn English. They may regard learning of English as a tool for survival per se. This corresponds with Gardner and Lambert's [26] instrumental motivation in learning a language. The medium of instruction, in NSS and CIS is Malay language and Chinese language respectively could be one of the factors leading to students' reluctance to communicate in English with other people. These students may be anxious and perceive themselves as incompetent to be conversing in English, which is proven in Hashimoto's [15] study.

When comparing the relationships between motivation to learn English and willingness to communicate in English between students from NSS and CIS, significant relationship is found among students from CIS only. It is very likely that those who study in private schools tend to continue their tertiary education in private universities. Assuming that most students from CIS choose to study at private universities, they are more motivated to learn English because it is usually the medium of instruction. When they are highly motivated to learn the language, they become more willing to converse with other people in English hoping to improve their English proficiency. Students from NSS on the other hand tend to opt for public universities where BM is the medium of instruction. Although they are highly motivated to learn English, students from NSS are less willing to speak English with other people. Nonetheless, more research should be conducted to support this explanation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research project is sponsored by Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman Research Fund - UTARRF Project number: IPSR/RMC/UTARRF/2013-C2/T01.

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