

Learners' Attitudes, Perceptions and Efforts towards English at Mosque Course

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the attitudes and perceptions of learners towards English language learning as a second language course in a short course named 'English at Mosque'. In Malaysia, English language short courses are often offered as remedial class for specific target groups. Nevertheless, most of the students are still unable to communicate well in the language upon completion of the course. This quantitative research employs questionnaire and purposive sampling technique as the methods of collecting data. The sampling involves 20 students near the Muhammadi Mosque area in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. This paper discusses learners' attitudes and also highlights their perceptions towards English language learning environment and their efforts to enhance the mastery of English during the learning period. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents seemed to show positive attitudes towards English, such as their willingness to promote the course to their friends and determination to continue to learn the language after the course. However, majority of the students were found to have feelings of anxieties while learning English. Thus, the anxiousness arose during the language class has no apparent effect on their language learning as they claimed. As a whole, this research suggests that language instructors should seek ways to motivate the students to improve their speaking skills especially through group learning strategies.

Keywords: Attitudes, Perceptions, Efforts, English at Mosque, Short Course for English as Second Language

INTRODUCTION

Educators in the language teaching profession have proposed many hypotheses concerning the effects of remedial courses in enhancing the skills of students in the English language. Many researchers have shared the belief that remedial courses are quests in vain when it comes to improving the skills of students learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Those who learn English as a Second Language tend to have problems with different areas in the use of language. More often than not, learners have been taken through short or long courses to learn the appropriate use of the English language. The influence of western nations on South East Asia and the rest of the world have prompted the need for students to at least learn basic skills in English. Students in Malaysian National Schools are expected to pass their English tests when they enroll for a higher level of education: from primary to secondary and secondary to tertiary. The effectiveness of remedial teaching of students in their English as a Second Language course varies according to personal experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have been conducted to examine the issue of effectiveness by looking at attitudes and perceptions. Broadly speaking, previous studies have focused on both of these factors either in combination or separately. First and foremost is in terms of attitude. In the context of ESL in Malaysia, a few studies have been conducted probing into the relation of attitudes and language learning. As cited in Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009), Vijchulata and Lee (1985) and Sarjit (1993) conducted two separate studies on attitudes and motivation in English language learning based on the theoretical framework of Gardner and Lambert (1972).

The findings conforms to the theoretical framework as attitude does play an important role in English language learning.

Among the recent studies conducted looking into the subject were by Thang, Ting and Jaafar (2011) in which they probed into the factor of attitudes of Malaysian secondary students towards learning English as a second language. The result of the study showed that learners' attitude affected their proficiency with a more positive attitude resulted in a higher level of proficiency. Another study with a local setting was conducted by Jain and Sidhu (2013) probing into the same topic. They found that attitudes are interrelated to language learning. However, in contrast to the previous study, they suggested that low proficiency learners might not necessarily possess poor attitudes towards English language learning.

Second is in terms of perceptions. Past studies confirmed that perceptions and ESL learning are very much interrelated. Castellotti & Moore (2002) in their studies on social representations of languages and teachings declare that there is a high correlation between learners' perceptions of the targeted language and the process of learning. This is in fact agreed by Baker (1992) who mentioned that positive perceptions resulted in a promising input for the language learning process. To add to the concreteness of the role of perceptions in language learning, the scholars cited above were also supported by Gardner (1985)'s theories of motivation as well as other profound studies on the same field by Baker (1988, 1992) and Alkaff (2013).

Despaigne (2010) asserts that by making students aware of their perceptions, and discussing and criticizing them, it is likely that they will be able to self-correct themselves which will in turn, eliminate the barrier and fear they have towards English. She continues by saying that it is not necessarily for instructors to change learners' perceptions on the targeted language, but what is important is to make them aware of why learning the targeted language is important. This awareness will change their attitudes towards the language because they will be able to make a fundamental distinction between the learning processes of the language on the one hand and their perceptions of what the language represents to them on the other (Ibid).

Referring to Malaysian context, there are also a number of studies focusing on learners' perceptions and ESL learning. One of it is a study by Ahen (2010) that agrees the factor of perceptions impacts learners' interest in learning and using English language. More importantly, Ahen (2010) strongly believes that the study on learners' perceptions towards English is indeed crucial to increase their level of interest in learning the language. Thus, it can be seen that studying learners' perception towards English language is certainly vital in ESL. Another exemplary study based on the local context would be the study by Lau and Elias (2011) who stress on the correlation between learners' perceptions with how they acquire the targeted language. The study agrees to the belief that indeed, perception is a factor that needs to be considered in the learning of English as a second language and the understanding of learners' perceptions is crucial for an effective process of ESL acquisition.

However, research on attitudes, perceptions and efforts in learning English from the student perspective is limited. Therefore, this paper is intended to fill this research gap and enrich this area of language and educational research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study endeavors to examine the effectiveness of the English at Mosque course through the attitudes, perceptions and efforts put forth by the students involved in the short course by analyzing the responses to the three research questions:

- RQ1: What are the students' attitudes towards English language learning in the course?
- RQ2: What are the students' perceptions towards the English language learning environment?
- RQ3: What efforts have the students made to enhance their mastery of the English language?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This quantitative research is carried out to assess the students' attitudes, perceptions and effort towards English language learning in the English at Mosque program. A set of questionnaire was designed and administered to a total of 20 students who took the course at Muhammadi Mosque in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. The respondents were chosen based on purposive sampling as the researchers wants to determine the characteristics of the respondents, for example, regardless of gender, the respondents must be enrolled in the English for Mosque course. After all the questionnaires were returned, the data was then processed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS Version 16.0 for Windows). Out of the 20 questionnaires given out, 12 were returned and analyzed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Respondents' Attitudes towards English Language Learning

There are a few studies showing the negative attitudes or feelings towards English language learning. English language learners who were more motivated would likely employ English in their conversations or try to learn English longer than those who were less motivated. In other words, it indicates that the students with more favorable attitudes towards a target language are said to show explicitly less attrition than those with less favorable attitudes (Gardner et al. as cited in Yu, Chan dan Ain Nadzimah, 2013). Hence this research seeks to identify the negative feelings (anxieties) that exist among the learners as it is believed it could be one of the constraints influencing the learners' achievement in English language learning.

Questionnaire Item	Respondent
Do you have any anxiety or uncomfortable feelings while in English class?	
• Shyness	2,4,7,8,9,10,11,12
• Low self-esteem	-
• Feeling less confident	-
• Nervousness	7,8,11,12
• Fear of making mistakes	7,11,12
• Fear of being ridiculed	-
• No, I don't. I'm very positive.	1,3,5,6
• Others	

Table 1: Respondents from the English at Mosque Course and their choice of variables

Questionnaire Item	Frequency (Number of Respondents)	Percentage (%)
Do you have any anxiety or uncomfortable feelings while in English class?		
• Shyness	8	66.67
• Low self-esteem	-	-
• Feeling less confident	-	-
• Nervousness	4	33.33
• Fear of making mistakes	3	25.00
• Fear of being ridiculed	-	-
• No, I don't. I'm very positive.	4	33.33
• Others		

*Note: The respondents can choose one or more of the variables given.

Table 2: The Anxieties of the Respondents from the English at Mosque Course

Table 1 shows the questionnaire items provided by the researcher and the number of respondents with the choice of variables that the respondents have ticked. Table 2 shows the anxiety of the respondents towards English language learning. The findings of the research reveal that 8 students (66.67%) involved in the English at Mosque Program experienced shyness throughout the course. 4 students (33.33%) claimed that they have experienced nervousness; on the other hand, 4 students (33.33%) mentioned that they were very positive throughout the program, thus further elicit the claim that they did not experience any anxieties. Only 3 students (25%) mentioned that they had the feeling of fear in making mistakes throughout The English at Mosque Program. Therefore, the data derived from table 1 indicates that more than half of the respondents experienced anxieties in the program while only a small number of students had enrolled the program with a positive attitude or feeling.

Questionnaire Item	Yes		Not Sure		No		Total	
	Frequency (Number of Respondents)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (Number of Respondents)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (Number of Respondents)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (Number of Respondents)	Percentage (%)
Did your anxieties become a barrier for you to learn the English language well?	-	-	3	25.00	9	75.00	12	100.00
Will you advise your friends to take this English language course?	8	66.67	4	33.33	-	-	12	100.00
Will you continually practice/learn English language after the course?	9	75.00	3	25.00	-	-	12	100.00

Table 3: Attitudes of respondents from The English at Mosque Course

Meanwhile, Table 3 displays the analysis of the attitudes of respondents involved in the English at Mosque program towards English language learning with the answer “yes”, “not sure”, or “no”. From the research findings, there were no respondents who claimed that anxieties (such as the feeling of less confident, fear of making mistakes, nervousness, etc.) have become a barrier in learning the English language. 9 respondents (75%) mentioned that anxieties are not the barrier that hinder them from learning English language well, whereas only 3 respondents (25%) indicated that they are not sure whether anxieties are the barrier for them in learning English. Despite having the mentioned anxieties, over half of the total of the respondents (8/66.67%) mentioned that they would like to advise their friends to take the English course provided by the English at Mosque program, whereas 4 respondents (33.33%) were not sure whether to recommend the course to their friends or not. Although most language teachers and learners undoubtedly feel that anxiety is a major hurdle to be overcome in second language learning, however most researches on second language learning could not adequately define the language learning anxiety and its specific effect on second language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). From the 12 respondents involved in the research, 9 respondents (75%) claimed that they will continually practice or learn English after the program has ended. However, 3 respondents (25%) were still in doubt of whether they should continually practice or learn English after the English at Mosque program has ended. According to Li (2012), attitude can be one of the significant attributes that can help to predict effort. Therefore it can be seen from Table 3 that respondents’ positive attitude such as having less anxieties in learning English can help to increase their effort in not only promoting the course to their friends but also having continued practice of learning the language.

The Analysis of the Respondents’ Perceptions during English Language Learning

Questionnaire Items	Frequency (Number of Respondents)	Percentage (%)
If the English language teacher is from a foreign country, does it become difficult for you to learn the language? • Yes • No • Not sure Total	11 1 - 12	91.67 8.33 - 100.00
What is the medium of instruction that you prefer to be used when learning English language? • Malay language • English language • Malay language and English language • Others Total	1 - 10 1 12	8.33 0 83.33 8.33 100.00
How was the atmosphere in the English language class? • Very enjoyable and interesting • Quite interesting • Plain • Less interesting • Very boring and not interesting to attract students to learn the language Total	6 - 6 - - 12	50.00 0 50.00 0 0 100.0
Did you feel satisfied with your English language class schedule? • Yes • No • Not sure Total	9 1 2 12	75.00 8.33 16.67 100.0
In your opinion, when is the best time for you to attend the English language class? • Morning • Afternoon • Evening • Late evening • I don’t mind Total	10 - - 2 - 12	83.33 0 0 16.67 0 100.0
I am more comfortable with the class capacity of: • Less than 20 people • 20 – 30 people	11 1	91.67 8.33

• 31 – 40 people	-	0
• More than 40 people	-	0
• I don't mind	-	0
Total	12	100.00
Were the teaching aids used by the language teacher during the English language class enough?		
• Yes	12	100.00
• No	-	0
• Not sure	-	0
Total	12	100.00
Were you satisfied with the quantity of English language syllabuses provided?		
• Yes	12	100.00
• No	-	0
• Not sure	-	0
Total	12	100.00
Were you satisfied with the time period allocated for learning the English language?		
• Yes	12	100.00
• No	-	0
• Not sure	-	0
Total	12	100.00

Table 4: Students' Perceptions towards the English Language Learning Environment

As portrayed in the analysis of data in Table 4, the students' perceptions were determined based on a few relevant items embedded within the questionnaire. Perception can be defined as the process of becoming aware of object and events from the senses (Harter, Nelson, Pearson & Titsworth, 2010). Therefore, in this research, it can be evaluated that active perception plays a major role determining the students' experience throughout this program. Active perception involves the process of mind selection, organization and interpretation of the events or things that they sense. 11 respondents (91.67%) claimed that it will be difficult for them to learn English if the instructor or teacher is from a foreign country, whereas only 1 (8.33%) had an opposing claim. 10 respondents (83.33%) mentioned that they prefer to have English and Malay as the medium of instruction in learning English. On the other hand, 1 respondent (8.33%) prefer to learn in Malay and another 1 respondent (8.33%) prefer other languages. The respondents were also asked to evaluate the atmosphere in the English Language class. 6 respondents (50%) claimed that the class was very enjoyable and interesting whereas another half (50%) claimed that the class is plain. In terms of the class schedule, 9 respondents (75%) mentioned that they were very satisfied with the existing schedule while 1 respondent (8.33%) was unsatisfied and another 2 respondents (16.67%) were not sure. The respondents were also asked to determine the best time for them to attend English language classes. 10 respondents (83.33%) claimed that they prefer to attend the class in the morning; while another 2 (16.77%) prefer the class to be conducted in the late evening. The capacity of the class required by the students in the future were also determined by having 11 respondents (91.67%) opting to the choice of having 20-30 people in a single session and 1 respondent (8.33%) prefer to have 31-40 people in a single session. In terms of the availability of the teaching aids, 12 respondents (100%) claimed that the teaching process did possess enough teaching aids. 12 respondents (100%) also gave positive feedback when they were asked whether they were satisfied or not with the English language syllabus provided. Nevertheless, all of the respondents (100%) also claimed that they were satisfied with the time period allocated in each English learning session.

The Analysis of the Respondents' Efforts during English Language Learning

Questionnaire Items	Frequency (Number of Respondents)	Percentage (%)
Have you ever sought help from your English language teacher when you have problem with the language learning?		
• Very often	1	8.33
• Often	7	58.33
• Sometimes	4	33.33

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely • Never <p>Total</p>	<p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>12</p>	<p>0</p> <p>0</p> <p>100.0</p>
<p>Was it easy to seek the help from language teacher when you were faced with problems to understand this language?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy • Difficult because the lecturer was always busy • Difficult because I'm always busy • Other reason(s) <p>Total</p>	<p>10</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>2</p> <p>12</p>	<p>83.33</p> <p>0</p> <p>0</p> <p>16.67</p> <p>100.0</p>
<p>Does the difficulty to see your teacher lead to you having problems in learning the language?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No, because I can learn by myself • No, because I can learn from my classmates/friends • Other reason(s) <p>Total</p>	<p>5</p> <p>-</p> <p>7</p> <p>-</p> <p>12</p>	<p>41.66</p> <p>0</p> <p>58.33</p> <p>0</p> <p>100.0</p>
<p>In order to improve the mastery of English, you prefer to learn the language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individually • In group • I don't mind <p>Total</p>	<p>2</p> <p>9</p> <p>1</p> <p>12</p>	<p>16.66</p> <p>75.00</p> <p>8.33</p> <p>100.0</p>
<p>Did you try to improve your English pronunciation through speaking practices each time after attending the English language class?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very often • Often • Sometimes • Rarely • Never <p>Total</p>	<p>-</p> <p>12</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>12</p>	<p>0</p> <p>100.00</p> <p>0</p> <p>0</p> <p>0</p> <p>100.0</p>
<p>Are you willing to spend your money to learn English language (e.g., for buying extra reference books other than the text book/handouts provided in class)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • Not sure <p>Total</p>	<p>8</p> <p>3</p> <p>1</p> <p>12</p>	<p>66.67</p> <p>25.00</p> <p>8.33</p> <p>100.0</p>

Table 5: The Efforts Made by the Students to Enhance the Mastery of English Language

Table 5 indicates the efforts made by the students to enhance the mastery of English Language. 1 respondent (33.33%) ask for help very often from their English teacher, 7 respondents (58.33%) often ask for help and 4 respondents (33.33%) rarely ask for assistance in their learning process. Other than that, in the process of seeking help from the language teacher, 10 respondents (83.33%) found it easy for them to ask for the teachers' assistance whereas another 2 respondents (16.67%) claimed it is difficult for other reasons. The respondents were also asked to determine whether the difficulty to ask help from the teacher would lead them to have problems in learning English. 5 respondents (41.66%) indicated that it is not a problem as they can learn by themselves; another 7 respondents (58.33%) indicated that they do not face any problem as well because they can learn from their friends or classmates. In order to improve the mastery of English, 2 respondents (16.66%) prefer to learn the language individually, 9 respondents (75.00%) in group and another 1 respondent (8.33%) do not have any specific method in learning the language. Besides that, all of the respondents (100%) claimed that did try to improve their pronunciation in English by practicing each time after attending the English class. The final item of the questionnaire evaluates the respondents' willingness to spend money in learning English language. 8 respondents (66.67%) indicated that they are

willing to spend money on text books and handouts. On the other hand, 3 respondents (25.00%) are willing to spend their money and another 1 respondent (8.33%) was unsure.

CONCLUSION

This research found that the majority of English language learners in the English at Mosque Course were not undermined by the feelings of anxieties while learning English. The feelings of anxieties which arose during the language class, thus, has no apparent effect on their language learning as they claimed. Generally, most of the students showed positive attitudes towards English language. They are willing to promote the course to their friends and are determined to continue learning the language after the course. The preferred medium of instruction for learning English is English and Malay. This shows that the medium of instruction used in teaching English does play an important role to ensure students' understanding in the lessons taught by the language teacher or lecturer.

Most students showed positive perceptions towards their learning environment. However, the analysis of the efforts made by the students on the frequency of seeking their language teacher or lecturer for help was unsatisfactory. Less than half of the respondents claimed that they did not have problems seeing their language teacher or lecturer when they have problems with the course. Others claimed that they can learn from their friends or classmates. Many students claimed that they preferred to improve their English language through group activities. This agrees to the findings by Ghazali et al. (2012) and Azani et al. (2012) which mention that group learning strategies can help improve learners' verbal skills. Language instruction too should not only teach the language but also make the students become more interested and motivated to improve their speaking skills in the English language.

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