



EMPLOYABILITY AND MOTIVATING FACTORS AMONGST MALAYSIAN GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

Employability is a growing challenge in the current socio-economical climate especially for university graduates. The study therefore examines students' motivation toward English language acquisition in a Malaysian private Higher Education Institution (HEI). The findings indicate that Malaysian students are more instrumentally motivated in their language learning. Based on the findings some recommendations and areas for further research have been highlighted.

Keywords: motivation, employability, English Language proficiency, Malaysian graduates.

1.0 Introduction

The issue of employability is a growing concern globally. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (MOHE), in 2009 our Higher Education Institutes (HEI) churned out 202,203 graduates and expanded to over a million students in 2011. Unfortunately, the number of job seekers exceeded job vacancies for HEI graduates with one out of four graduates remaining unemployed six months after graduation (Abdullah 2014). According to the Malaysian Employer Federation (MEF), English is still a big problem for many Malaysian graduates who are unable to converse in English (Yuen 2015; Leo 2016). As of 2015, there were approximately 200,000 unemployed graduates, and one of the reasons identified was their poor English proficiency (Yuen 2015). Therefore, Malaysia is currently confronted with the dilemma facing our current and future workforce who lacks English proficiency. Although overcoming this problem has been MOHE's focus as encapsulated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, years of shifting education policies and inconsistent implementations have contributed to our graduates' weak communication skills, which are vital 21st century skills needed to survive the global work environment.

Knight and Yorke (2003), identify employability as "a set of achievements and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations". Employers expect graduates to move beyond technical/discipline competencies to a range of broader skills and attributes (Lowden, Hall, Elliot, and Lewin 2011), which includes language proficiency. Such 'transferable', 'soft' 'key' or 'generic' skills are viewed as invaluable (Thomas, Piquette and McMaster 2016), and need to be incorporated into HEI curriculums to produce a competent workforce, while fulfilling the nation's aspirations. Yet academics and employers have highlighted this lack of soft skills with English proficiency being a hindrance to employability amongst Malaysian graduates. Inadvertently, these concerns fall on the shoulders of HEIs whose focus has shifted from knowledge to producing employable graduates. With this mandate, English needs to be prioritized by HEIs to achieve this agenda. HEIs must ascertain students' interests and motivations to develop a

relevant tertiary curriculum.

Motivation is central to successful second language learning (ESL). Empirical studies have reflected the significant relationship between motivation and proficiency among language learners (Ghanea, Hamid, and Ghanea 2011). Gardner and Lambert (1959) argue motivation is a pivotal factor which comes into play when studying second language acquisition and developing socio-educational models. Motivation theorists from Gardner (1959) to Dornyei (1994) have expanded on motivation being intrinsic and extrinsic. Gardner defines instrumental (extrinsic) motivation as learning a language because of its perceived utility for learners (qtd. in Al-Tamimi and Shuib 2009). An instrumentally-oriented learner has more pragmatic thoughts concerning second language learning, such as getting a job or earning more, hence the motivation is based on the perceived efficacy of English as an instrument to achieve career and educational goals (Vaezi 2009; Noels, Clément and Pelletier 2001), whilst learners also show interest in integration (intrinsic motivation) by learning about the culture and the people of a target language / speech community (Ahmadi 2011; Ng and Ng 2015). Interestingly, Muftah and Rafik-Galea (2013) in a study on Malaysian public HEI students contend that their higher instrumental motivation could indicate that these students are trying to preserve their ethnic identity. Lower aspiration related to integration could be indicative of their reticence of being identified with Western culture whose values may not be related to their socio-cultural affiliation.

Azizi et al. contend that that further research should be done to explore factors such as students' motivation and desire to learn English as there is a lack of research in this area on private HEIs in Malaysia. Thus this study explores if the same could be true of Malaysian private HEI students since the types of motivations could impact the learner's language acquisition

2.0 Methodology

The three-fold aims of this study are to better understand HEI students' success by focusing on their English language proficiency whilst investigating their main motivation (instrumental, integrative or personal) towards learning English, and to assess if they are in line with the nation's

agenda of employable graduates, while providing solutions to address this low language proficiency.

A quantitative method was employed for validity and reliability. Data was collected face-to-face, whilst maintaining all ethical considerations. A random sample of 40 students from a private university in Malaysia was given an adapted questionnaire by Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) and Azizi et al. (2011). Participants were students who were taking or had completed a compulsory English course. Although it is a relatively small sample, it is reflective of a Malaysian private institution.

The adaptive questionnaire focused on students' motivation in learning English and inquired on preferred methods to improve the students' English proficiency.

The data collected was analyzed by using Microsoft Excel Data Analysis and Descriptive Statistics were used to compute the mean and the standard deviation of each variable. For the first objective, the highest overall mean of the motivation indicated the type of motivation in learning the English language. Standard deviation was used; thus a lower standard deviation indicated most of the values close to the mean.

3.0 Results

In order to identify the main factors which motivated students to learn English, respondents were asked to rank the reasons for learning English in terms of importance according to the scale of 1 for "not important" to 4 for "very important". Furthermore, they were requested to state the activities they would like to do to improve their English proficiency. Table 1 illustrates the mean values and standard deviations calculated from their responses to each statement.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Students' Motivation in Learning English

Types of Motivation	Reasons for Learning English	Mean	Standard Deviation	Overall Mean
Instrumental Motivation	<i>It enables me to carry out my tasks more efficiently.</i>	3.425	0.712	3.483
	<i>It enables me to get a job easily.</i>	3.625	0.540	
	<i>I hope to further my education.</i>	3.400	0.709	
Integrative Motivation	<i>It enables me to integrate with the western culture.</i>	3.175	0.874	3.175
Personal Motivation	<i>It helps in my personal development.</i>	3.425	0.675	3.025

	<i>It enhances my status among my friends.</i>	2.625	0.807	
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From Table 1, instrumental motivation appears as the main factor motivating students to learn English. Instrumental motivation received the highest overall mean score of 3.483. The main reason for them to learn English is to enable them 'to get a job easily in the future', which had the highest mean value of 3.6. The second important instrumental motivation with the mean value of 3.425 is learning English enables students 'to carry out their tasks more efficiently'. Students consider learning English 'to further their education' as the least influential factor (mean=3.400) in motivating them to learn English.

Integrative motivation follows as the second motivation in students' English learning with the overall mean score of 3.175. Students claim that learning English is very important for them 'to integrate into the western culture'.

Personal motivation has the least impact on their motivation in English language learning with the lowest overall mean of 3.025. Although English learning 'helps in students' personal development' seems to have a mean value of 3.425, as high as one of the instrumental motivations, students do not think that learning English will enhance their status among their friends (mean=2.6250). The overall mean of personal motivation in learning English is the lowest.

Overall, 85% of the respondents were not satisfied with their current level of English proficiency. In the open-ended question, 95% responded that they are willing to take the initiative to increase their English proficiency. A majority of the respondents identified reading in English, communicating more frequently and attending additional English courses as steps to improve their proficiency.

4.0 Discussion

The findings clearly indicate that employability skills are essential and are recognized by Malaysian graduates as the main motivation for students to learn English.

The findings also show that instrumental motivation is the main determinant behind students' desires to learn English as it enables them to get jobs easily in future. English also enables them to perform their work efficiently and further their education. This result reflects the students' pragmatic view towards the importance of learning English. This finding is consistent with Malaysian research findings by Thang, Ting and Jaafar (2011) and Muftah and Rafik-Galea (2013), where students perceived English to be the primary utilitarian instrument in helping them to get a job easily, besides the academic reasons, namely completing their tasks efficiently and furthering their studies.

In the case at this private Malaysian HEI, integrative motivation follows closely as the second incentive of students' English learning. Students insist that learning English is essential for them to integrate into the western culture since they will be pursuing their further studies abroad.

Lastly, personal motivation is proven to have the minimum

impact on students' motivation in English language learning. Students agree that learning English will help in their personal development; however, some of them reject the statement that the reason for them to learn English is to enhance their status among their friends. Instead they are motivated to learn English to fulfil their own desires and satisfaction with their ability to master English skills.

5.0 Conclusion

The main findings of this study concur with similar studies in the public or private Malaysian context conducted since 2002 suggesting that Malaysian students are generally more instrumentally motivated in their English learning as they perceive English is an important tool for their future career, furthering their studies, and interacting with diverse people (Thang, Ting and Jaafar 2011)

Since we have identified these motivating factors, we need to establish avenues to support their language success. Firstly, the lecturers' skills in motivating learners should be seen as central in order for language learning success through a variety of pedagogies. Krashen concurs that the teacher's language instruction should be full of rich input (both in spoken and written language) that is roughly tuned at the appropriate level for the learners in the class to provide meaningful language learning experience (Krashen 1982). Further, a curricular review is needed to intentionally embed soft/employability skills, like the Graduate Capabilities and integrated CGPA initiatives (iCGPA) by MOHE. In tandem, ensuring students accept their shared responsibility for learning by giving them some measure of autonomy via involvement in decision making in the language classroom, and leveraging on technology-enabled innovations would engage and motivate students to develop their language competency.

In addition, the industry/employers need to realize that language mastery and skills development is a continuous process and they could make a more concerted effort in collaborating with HEIs. To bridge this gap between graduation and employment, in collaboration with employers, HEIs could incorporate aspects of career planning and job readiness; establish more university-industry linkages such as inviting industry speakers and practitioners to share insights on the current workforce and employer expectations; and promote early involvement in career fairs, entrepreneurship, flexible externships and internship opportunities.

These classroom, institutional and industry interventions could serve as productive directions in enabling our graduates to be future-ready. Thus with redesigning learning for current undergraduates, we would address the current gap and fulfill our national aspirations for global talents.

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