ESL PUPILS' ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION TOWARDS SPEAKING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

SASHIKALA A/P APPUKUTTAN

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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I dedicate this piece of work to my mother, Madam C. Narayani, husband, Mr. K. Saseetharan, beloved children, S. Yashvindran, S. Lakshmindran, S. Dharshyana, my siblings and my friends for their love, motivation and support.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the ESL pupils' attitude and motivation towards speaking English. It aimed to examine the performance, attitude and motivation of pupils in speaking English language. Thirty two Year 6 pupils from the national primary school were the respondents of the study. The research instruments used were oral assessment, questionnaires and interview sessions. The data obtained were analysed manually. The oral assessment showed that the majority of the pupils did not achieve good results. The findings reveal that pupils have a negative attitude towards speaking English due to lack of motivation. Fear of making mistakes, being embarrassed by it and shyness caused pupils to develop a negative attitude towards speaking English. Lack of motivation to eliminate the negative attitude further discouraged pupils to speak the language. However, pupils responded positively to motivation and exposure to a variety of interactive speaking activities. Thus, teachers play a vital role in motivating pupils and giving them sufficient practice in speaking in order to boost their confidence and develop a positive attitude. It was also found that the pupils lack motivation and support from the parents and society in encouraging them to speak in English. Therefore, teachers, parents and society shoulder great responsibility in motivating pupils to speak English in the classroom and the real world.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyiasat sikap dan motivasi pelajar-pelajar yang belajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua terhadap lisan Bahasa Inggeris. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat pencapaian, sikap dan motivasi pelajar terhadap lisan Bahasa Inggeris. Responden kajian terdiri daripada tiga puluh dua pelajar Tahun 6 dari sebuah sekolah kebangsaan. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk kajian ini adalah pentaksiran lisan, borang soal-selidik dan sesi temuramah. Data yang telah diperolehi telah di analisa secara manual. Majoriti pelajar tidak memperolehi pencapaian yang baik dalam pentaksiran lisan Bahasa Inggeris. Hasil dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar menunjukkan sikap yang negatif untuk betutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris kerana kurang bermotivasi. Perasaan takut membuat kesilapan, malu dan segan menyebabkan timbulnya sikap negatif untuk bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Olehkerana kurang motivasi dan galakkan, pelajar tidak dapat menghindari sikap negatif untuk bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Walaubagaimanapun, pelajar telah menunjukkan sikap yang positif terhadap penggunaan pelbagai aktiviti-aktiviti lisan interaktif. Ini menunjukkan bahawa guru-guru memainkan peranan yang utama untuk memberi latihan lisan yang secukupnya supaya pelajar dapat meningkatkan keyakinan diri dan mengujudkan perasaan positif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar kurang mendapat motivasi dan sokongan dari ibubapa dan masyarakat untuk menggalakkan pelajar untuk bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Dengan ini, guru-guru, ibubapa dan masyarakat memikul tanggungjawab yang besar untuk memberi motivasi kepada pelajar-pelajar supaya bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris di dalam dan di luar bilik darjah.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL   -   English as Second Language

SBOA   -   School Based Oral Assessment

KBSR   -   Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah

UPSR   -   Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study and the statement problem. It covers the objectives of the research, research questions and the significance of the study.

1.1   Background of the Study

English language is considered as the universal language all over the world. It is commonly used as a medium of communication at global level. It is essential for the development of the country, especially in the fields of science, technology,

education, tourism and business. Therefore, the importance of acquiring the language in the present era is undeniable. It is important that pupils master and communicate English language in order to be able to equip themselves for their future endeavour and contribute to the development of the country. However, most pupils have difficulty in communicating with others in English. This is often due to their lack of motivation and negative attitude towards mastering the language.

In acquiring a second language, attitude is a vital factor and it plays a main role in arousing the interest and motivation among the students in learning the language. Gardner (1985) regards attitude as an element of motivation in language learning. According to him, motivation includes positive attitudes towards learning the language. He also denotes that learning a foreign language is determined by the learner's attitudes towards the language in particular. Therefore, the learner's ability to acquire the language depends on how the learner perceives the language. Thus, pupils need to have a positive attitude towards learning English language and this will enhance their confidence in speaking the language.

There are various reasons that might cause the students' low proficiency in English. However, it is important to note that pupils' motivation has been widely acknowledged as the main factor which influences the rate and success of second language learning, (McDonough, 1983 and Ellis, 1994). McDonough (1983:142) denotes that "motivation of the students is one of the most important factors influencing their success or failure in learning the language". One more factor will be the pupils' attitudes. This is because one's motivation in language learning is affected by one's attitudes towards learning the language. This indicates that motivation and attitudes have been regarded as the main concern in language learning research. Gardner and Lambert (1972:3) highlight that "his [the learner] motivation to learn is thought to be determined by his attitudes towards the other group in particular and by his orientation towards the learning task itself".

Thus, the attitude of the pupils is directly associated to the mastery of the language. Without complete commitment and an inner desire to learn and speak the language, the task cannot be fulfilled. This can be associated to the motivation that the pupils need in order to be able to communicate with others effectively in English language.

Mohamed (2011) calls out to the undergraduates to be more proficient in English language. In his speech in University Malaya, he stressed nothing can be done if the learners do not wish to be helped. He even highlighted that the credit hours for English in the university should be increased. He emphasised that the aim is to assist learners to improve their command of English, especially in communication skills. Thus, it is apparent that there is a critical problem in the speaking of English language even among graduates in the country, who have passed the subject at school level and during their graduate studies. The root to the problem starts from the early years of the students at primary level whereby the pupils do not have the urge or commitment to communicate in English.

1.2 Statement of problem

Speaking is an essential skill in English language. Pupils will not be able to convey a message accurately without this skill. One of the main objectives for Year Six (SK) pupils in the KBSR Curriculum Specification is to speak and respond clearly and appropriately in common everyday situations using simple language, Ministry of Education (2008). Thus, it is apparent that the emphasis on acquiring the basic speaking skills is vital. Although a pupil can read and write in English, without speaking skills one will not be able to communicate with others or express one's ideas or expressions meaningfully. Pupils need to master speaking skills effectively in order to be able to communicate in English in their daily life.

Based on the researcher's observation, the problem in speaking English language in the National Primary school is significant. Although many pupils can read and write reasonably well in English language, speaking the language is a big issue. In addition, many pupils refuse to even try to communicate in English due to lack of motivation and low self-esteem. They are afraid of making mistakes, especially in pronunciation and grammar as they are afraid of being laughed at. They seem to learn English language merely to pass the examination or fulfil the requirements. Seldom do they put the language into practise and speak the language in their daily life and attempt to become more proficient in it. The pupils do not understand the importance of speaking the language and its significance for a brighter future. They develop a negative attitude towards learning English language. Thus, they grow up to be individuals who lack proficiency in English language.

From the researcher's experience, the pressing issue in attempting to speak in English among the ESL pupils is lack of motivation and confidence. They resort to giving a quick 'yes' or 'no' answer and are shy and reserved during the speaking activities. They also prefer to use gestures or switch to their first language to convey messages. This problem is significant throughout their primary education and later prevails even during the pupils' secondary education. The pupils fail to realize the importance of speaking the language from young in order to develop the skills gradually. The urgent need to address the problem from young and to ensure the mastery of the language in a more meaningful way is what motivated the study.

On the other hand, teachers face problems in getting pupils to interact in English language. Howarth (2006) highlights the problems faced by teachers in attempts to increase oral interaction among pupils. He stresses that learner resistance is one of the causes of inability of communicating in English. Pupils may think that group work and pair work are not authentic as it is abnormal to speak a language with partners who speak the same first language. Thus, they develop a negative attitude that hinders them from acquiring speaking skills. Other problems that hinder learning speaking activities are noise, bad behaviour and the use of the mother tongue.

1.3   Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the research are:

- to examine the oral assessment performance of pupils in English language

- to investigate the attitude of the ESL pupils towards speaking English language

- to identify the motivation of the ESL pupils towards speaking in English language.

1.4   Research Questions

This research aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- What are the pupils' oral assessment performances in English language?

- What are the pupils' attitudes towards speaking in English language?

- What are the pupils' motivations towards speaking in English language?

1.5   Significance of the Study

The function played by the English language both at national and international level is vital. Custer (2012) clearly indicates that, "The ability to communicate in English provides access to opportunities in every facet of life – whether that's connecting with the outside world through international social media, or getting a better job." In other words, the ability to communicate in English language is essential for the development of individuals, the nation and at global level.

This research and the findings are essential to upgrade the speaking skills among the ESL pupils in the primary schools. The result of the research will be significant to the key officials of English language and the concerned stake holders, like the policy makers, ESL teachers, the pupils of the primary schools in Malaysia and their parents. Moreover, it might create a sense of urgency to have campaigns to combat the lack of motivation and eliminate the negative attitude that hinders the ESL pupils from communicating in English language.

Furthermore, the findings of the research could also encourage English language teachers to motivate the pupils and guide them to speak English language more confidently. It will also guide them to create a non-threatening environment for pupils to actively participate and practice their speaking skills and use English language in their everyday life. This study will also create awareness among the teachers the need to understand the pupils' desires in developing a positive attitude towards learning and speaking English language. Thus, more fun-filled and contextualized learning could motivate the pupils to enhance their speaking skills effectively.

Based on the findings, pupils will have an opportunity to explore English language in their virtual life as they will be motivated and exposed to a variety of

interactive activities. In addition, they will also develop a positive attitude towards the language and participate actively in the classroom and acquire the speaking skills. Thus, it will prepare them to face a brighter future.

1.6   Scope of Study

This research is designed to investigate the ESL pupils' attitude and motivation towards speaking in English language. From a total population of 110, a number of 32 pupils from a government national primary school were chosen to be the respondents of this study. The respondents of this study are twelve years old. They are currently in Year 6, the highest level in the primary education.

The scope of research is limited to speaking skills although there are three other skills involved in language learning, namely listening, reading and writing. This is due to the lack of proficiency in English language among the pupils.

1.7   Definition of Terms

Attitude

Gardner (1980:267), defines the term attitude as "an inference which is made on the basis of a complex of beliefs about the attitude object".

Motivation

According to Gardner (1985), motivation is defined as a 'combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes towards learning the language'

Speaking

According to Chaney (1998:13), "speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal symbols in a variety of contexts". It can be regarded as an interactive process or production skill to convey meaning.

Performance

According to Trost (2007), performance is used broadly to describe different factors, like cognitive skills and attitudes, academic behaviours and academic achievement that may influence students' success in school.

1.8   Limitations of the Study

This study will be limited to the male and female pupils of year 6 from a government national primary school in Johor of the academic Year 2013. A total of 32 pupils have been selected as the sample from population of one hundred and six students. Therefore, it does not represent the whole population.

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APPENDIX A

ORAL ASSESSMENT

Part 1 (1 minute)

Choose up to five questions from the list as time allows.

In the first part of the test I'm going to ask you some questions about yourself.

Questions

• Where do you live?

• Where do you study?

• What do you do during your free time?

• What's your father's occupation?

• What's your phone number?

• What food do you like?

• Can you tell me something about your friends?

• When's your birthday?

• How do you come to school?

• How many brothers and sisters do you have?

(5marks)

Part 2 (2 minutes)

Pupils are required to respond to the situations given.

(Choose 2 situations)

1. You are in a shop. You want to buy some fruits. What would you say?

2. You are in a new town. You want to post a letter. You want to ask direction to the bank.

   How would you ask?

3. You are going to celebrate your birthday. You want to invite me. What would you say?

(10marks)