

English as a Medium of Communication: Testing of Major Differences

Zuraida Mohamad, Norudin Mansor

Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

English has been used far and wide around the world, making it one of the most influential and useful languages, ranking third following Spanish and Mandarin among the top ten most widely spoken languages by the first language speakers. People use it extensively for communication purposes, business matters, formal papers, academia, public interactions, public signs, road directions and names of buildings which making English as one of the official languages in numbers of countries. Though Malaysia has been highly ranked for having good English speakers, there are still vast numbers of the students that are incompetence in using the language; both in written and oral form. Thus, this study was aimed to unravel the issue of English competency. The first objective of this study is to examine the relationship between students' attitudes, the lecturer's involvement and motivation with students' English competency. The second objective is to identify the significant differences of English competency in students of different institution and gender. Using questionnaires as the data collection method, it was distributed to 300 students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Dungun and Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin (PSMZA). Analysis has shown that the independent variables have certainly affected the dependent variable, thus answering the first objective. The second objective is also answered as the data shows that there is no significant differences of English competency in students of different institution and gender.

KEYWORDS: English, Competency, Attitudes, Lecturer, Motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool used to convey knowledge and to converse among humans. Aside from that, language also benefits the users in terms of their cognitive development. Acquiring a second language is equal to opening door to another world of people, ideas, ways of thinking and literature[3,8]. English has been used far and wide around the world that making it one of the most influential and useful languages, which ranking third following Spanish and Mandarin among the top ten most widely spoken languages by the first language speakers[16]. People use it extensively for communication purposes, business matters, papers presentation, academic paper discussion, communication within the public, road sign and directions which making English as the main medium for communication in numbers of countries. Though it started as a foreign language in many countries, now English has become one of the core subjects taught in formal school; from as earliest in kindergarten to the highest of university level. Presently, the English language has been included as one of the subjects taught in school in Malaysia as the country was once colonized by the British.

In 2013, Malaysians had been ranked as the best English speakers in Asia, which placing 11th out of all 60 countries participated[17]. It is not surprising that most Malaysians are considered as proficient and good speakers of English, since it is used widely in most sectors and everywhere in everyday life. However, there are still vast numbers of individuals who cannot proficiently use English especially among the youngsters and students[27] even after years of studying it in schools. Knowledge introduced by the teachers or obtained through reading would not be fully exploited if a student is unable to reproduce these ideas in a written form or orally.

Several factors had been debated by most scholars and practitioners about students' incompetency in learning English but this study wished to highlight 3 major factors which are the attitudes, motivation and lecturers' involvement.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Incompetency in English language among the students has always been a major concern among English language instructors. Students who are very fluent in English communication have better advantages in acquiring a job in various industrial sectors[1]. Due to the poor English communication skill, it becomes a one of the major reasons for being employed, especially well-paid jobs.[34]. Despite the importance, many are still not competence in using English. Therefore, this study wishes to investigate several influential factors that can be associated with competency among students.

Research Objectives

- i. To examine the relationship between students' attitudes, lecturer's involvement and motivation with English competency.
- ii. To identify the significant difference of English competency in students of different institution and gender.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concepts of Competency

Competency is the ability to apply knowledge, skills, capabilities and behaviors to effectively carry out a crucial particular set of tasks or a given role or position[5]. It is the combination of crucial skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors necessary for successful performance of a real world task or activity[24] and ensuring that job will be properly and efficiently performed[26]. In an attempt to improve workers' performance as well as achieving organizational success, it is therefore necessary to have the combination of the above skills with the favorable personal traits required within the industry. Moreover, competency can also be defined as "the state of being functionally adequate or having sufficient knowledge, strength and skill or in another word for an individual's knowhow or skill"[40].

Language competency is a person's ability or talent to articulate and comprehend English according to the situation and condition[18]. There are 2 aspects of language competency namely the oral skills which consist of speaking and listening, whereas text based skills consist of writing and reading[10]. Thus, in order to be considered competent in the language, the capability of the students to use English proficiently in all prominent aspects is highly essential.

English still remain as the main medium of communication and instruction in many higher institutions, which be it locally or internationally. Most textbooks, notes or articles are in English thus it is important to comprehend the language. Thus, it is agreed that English competency affects academic performances. Students who were more proficient in English showed to have higher grade point average (GPA)s[21]. A good command in English is positively correlated with academic achievement[15,41,20,42]. In most cases, a high achiever is a student with high language proficiency which means that for those students who are more proficient in English will end up with better achievement in academic subjects. Likewise, if the students are not competence in English, they will not understand the lesson then resulting in poor GPAs.

Attitudes' in Learning English

The concept of attitude as related to learning a language is defined as a way of thinking or feeling regarding something or someone. In the discipline of language learning, attitude can be considered as the sense of enjoyment about using their mother tongue language or the languages of others. The favorable attitudes of learning on top of the opinions and beliefs may have significant influence on students' cognitive behaviors and will ultimately increase their performance in learning English[13]. Furthermore, attitude is an evaluation reaction of a person towards the subject or in this case, a language, inferred based on the individuals' belief and opinions about the reference[6].

Attitude is a major influence in second language learning[12]. It is foreseen that one's attitudes in learning a new language would give an impact to his or her language competency[6]. Positive and negative attitudes will determine the level of competency in learning English[11]. They should show positive and favorable attitudes towards learning English as a second language[22]. Learners will have positive orientation in learning a new language when they have positive language attitudes[14]. Learners with positive attitudes will experience success and that will drive them to learn more, whereas learners with a negative attitude will not achieve success and that may reinforce their negative attitudes towards learning the language[12]. Attitude determines in improvement of oral English learning[7]. Findings have shown that most language learners have a positive response and attitudes towards language learners thus exhibiting good commands in English[12,19,23,14]. Regarding gender, despite males and females have a different motivation pattern in language learning. Their attitudes are almost similar, which meaning neither gender is more against or lean towards the language compared to than the other[33].

Lecturer's Involvement

In learning new language, it is important to have a role model to look up to and set as an example during learning, as they provide the learners with the opportunity to consult questions and adopt recommended strategies to learn the language better[37]. Having a good English speaking and proficient role models also can help them to set goals and imitate their pronunciation, besides motivating them to do better and be a fluent speaker of English Language. Teachers' intervention and feedback also help to foster enthusiasm and motivate

them to converse in English. Effective language methodology and strategies carried by the teachers can promote positive attitudes toward learning the language among students[2].

The success of teaching and instructions in the classrooms is greatly dependable by the teachers' experience and knowledge, teaching philosophy and opinions. Their lecturers' beliefs, methodology and motivation can influence classroom environment and promote success in second language learning [2]. Lecturer's attitudes, both positive and negative greatly influence the level of competency among students. If lecturers accept the student's mistake, react positively, help and motivate more in learning English, the students will be more open and positive in learning languages[35]. All these traits can give both positive and negative impacts on students in learning English[29]. It is said that "pupils feel the personal emotional structure of the teacher long before they feel the impact of the intellectual content offered by that teacher"[28]. Thus, the lecturers must be aware of these. It is evidence that teachers' performances in class will greatly influence their students to actively participate in the classroom.

The Concepts of Motivation

To be motivated means to act in a certain manner to do something[30]. Motivation can be defined as the enthusiasm or the purpose of accomplishing something or a goal, to act in a particular way or a desire and willingness to do something. It can also be defined as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" and the learner's orientation [6]. Motivation can be classified into 2 namely intrinsic motivation happens when the person does something for his own satisfaction or for fun, whereas extrinsic motivation is caused by external rewards or to attain some outcome[30]. For the purpose of understanding why some learners are highly motivated, it is essential to comprehend the learners' vital goal or purpose for learning the language[6]. Similarly, in the field of education and social psychology the need to understand why learners are motivated is also relatively important [36]. The success of learning foreign/second language discovered to be as a result of the strength of the motivation associated among the learners[31].

Previous reviewing of the past literature provide evidence that attitudes and motivation act as a factor in promoting the learning of a second language. It was reported that with the high degree of positive attitude and motivation, it will eventually create the success of learning English as a second language[6]. For example, Iranian students with high level of motivation and positive attitudes towards learning English showed good English competency [39]. Thai vocational students also showed a positive correlation between motivation and learning achievement[4]. In addition, previous study demonstrated that when learners are positively motivated where they tend to have positive attitudes towards the English language [36]. Students who are highly motivated and having favorable attitudes toward learning the language tended to perform better and actively participated in the module tests[38]. Motivation is the most important attribute that needs to be noted to achieve a successful learning and vice versa, where similarly excellent achievement further boasted high motivation[2]. Motivation and students' performance in English learning are undeniably positively correlated[9].

RESEARCH METHADODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Scope and Research Design

The study wishes to identify the English competency of students at UITM Dungun and Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin (PSMZA). Thus, 300 diploma students from these 2 institutions were sought after to participate in the study. The primary data was collected through questionnaires that were distributed to gather the students' opinions on the study and it is assumed that students from different institutions would offer diverse opinions. Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software had been used in order to analyze the data gathered.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework shows the relationship and correlation between the dependent and independent variables. From here, the possible hypothesis are developed. The framework that provided in this research is to find the relationship between competency with other independent variables.

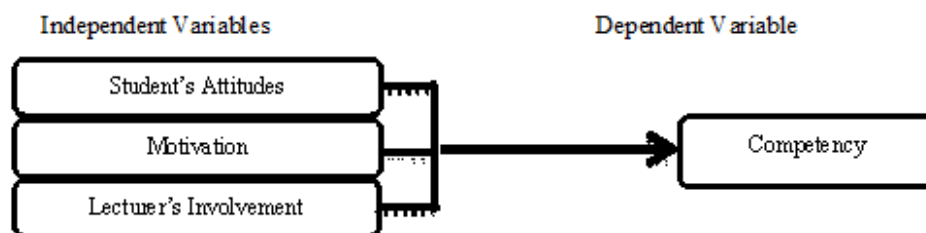


Figure 1: Research framework explaining the relationship between the variables

Hypothesis

Hypothesis developed based on the relationship between competencies with students’ attitudes, motivation and lecture’s involvement among UiTM Dungun and PSMZA students.

- H1: There is a significant relationship between students’ attitude and English competency.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between lecturer’s involvement and English competency.
- H3: There is a significant relationship between motivation and English competency.
- H4: There is a significant different between UiTM(T) and PSMZA with regards of the competency in learning English among students.
- H5: There is a significant different between male and female with regards of the competency in learning English among students.

Sampling Procedure

The target respondents are students of different courses from varying faculties. Relying on the registration record from the Academic Affairs of the 2 higher learning institution as the sampling frame, the total population of Diploma students from both institutions approximately recorded to be 6,193 students. Out of the estimated 6,193 total population, about 2,193 were respondents from PSMZA and the remaining of 4,000 respondents were from UiTM(T). Due to the limitation of approaching the right prospects, eventually the sample size of 300 students is considered appropriate to represent the whole student population for both higher learning institutions. Almost 151 of the questionnaires were collected from UiTM and 149 of the respondents were from PSMZA.

Data Collection and Instrument

The data for this study were collected from 2 different higher learning institution namelyUiTM(T) and PSMZA. About 300 questionnaires were distributed using the convenience sampling technique to explore the English competency among the university’s student at diploma level.

Section A was designed using a nominal scale and focuses on the respondents’ demographic profile. Among the questionnaire items include the respondents’ gender, age, institution, marital status and level of the semester enrolled. Section B of this questionnaire was constructed on the English competency among UiTM(T) and PSMZA students. Section C, D and E was constructed from capturing perceptual information on independent variables represented by students’ attitude, lecturers’ involvement and motivation.

FINDING AND ANALYSIS

Reliability Analysis

As to conclude, all items measuring each variable have high strength of association between each other. As suggested by[32], when the alpha scores more than 0.70, then the measuring items are considered highly reliable and therefore acceptable for further analysis.

Frequency Analysis

Table 1: Respondent demographic information

Demographic Factors	N	(%)	Demographic Factors	N	(%)
Gender			Age		
Male	108	36	19-20	148	49.3
Female	192	64	21-22	151	50.3
			23-24	1	0.3
Institution			Marital Status		
UiTM	151	50.3	Single	297	99
PSMZA	149	49.7	Married	3	1
Level of semester enrolled					
				20	6.7
				53	17.7
				75	25
				112	37.7
				40	13.3

Out of total respondents, about 192 or 64% were female and 108 or 36% were male. Those respondents from UiTM made up 50.3%, while the remainder 49.7% were from PSMZA. The observed representation on age displayed the highest representation of the sample were those with the age of between 21-22 years old which made up the total of 50.3%. There were 148 or 49.3% students representing the age group of between 19-20 years old and only 1 student with the age between 23-24 years old. The analysis of marital status revealed that 99% of the student still single and the rest of 1% were married. The highest responds were from semester 5 representing 37.3% and the lowest were semester 2 with 6.7%.

Correlation Analysis

The data were analyzed by using Pearson Correlation Matrix since it is more appropriate when dealing with interval or ordinal measurements of scale and it depends on normality. With this analysis, the observation in determining whether the coefficient is statistically significant or not will be tabulated. Table 2 illustrates the Pearson Correlation Matrix.

Table 2: Pearson correlation analysis

	Students' Attitude	Lecturers' Involvement	Motivation
Competency			
Pearson Correlation	0.649	0.142	0.386
Sig (2 tailed)	0.000	0.014	0.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between the competency and student's attitudes has a strong positive correlation where $r = 0.649$. The two-tailed significance test, 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) at 0.01 significant level indicates that there is a positive relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 1 (H1) is supported.

From the table, the correlation result is 0.142. This indicates a very weak positive correlation between lecturer's involvement and competency in learning English among students at UiTM and PSMZA. The relationship is however still significant because the two-tailed significance test, 0.014 ($p < 0.05$) at 0.01 significant level indicates that there is a positive relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 2 (H2) is supported.

Moreover, there is a weak relationship between motivation with competency in learning English among students at UiTM and PSMZA where $r = 0.386$. The two-tailed significance test, 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) at 0.00 significant level indicates that there is a positive relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 3 (H3) is supported.

From the entire 3 hypotheses, it can be concluded that all the three independent variables consisting of the students' attitudes, lecturers' involvement and motivation correlate with the dependent variable; competency respectively and thus achieve the research objective in determining the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables.

Testing of Differences Analysis

Table 3: Analysis of differences of institutions

Institutions	N	Mean	Sig
UiTM	151	3.3273	
PSMZA	149	3.3087	0.819

The significant value of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances is 0.111 ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the significant value under Equal variances assumed should be referred which is 0.819 ($p > 0.05$). Meaning that, there is no significant difference between UiTM(T) and PSMZA in regards of the competency in learning English among students. Thus, hypothesis 4 (H4) is not supported.

Table 4: Analysis of differences of gender

Gender	N	Mean	Sig
Male	108	3.3452	
Female	192	3.3028	0.616

The mean difference between males and females is just a small gap. It is only 0.04241. Although the male group displayed with a little bit higher mean value of 3.3452 as compared to the female group in the mean value of 3.3028, the difference in the above mean value indicated that there was no significant different between them in 0.616. Thus, hypothesis 5 is not supported.

CONCLUSION

English is a very important language to master in this very day since it is one of the common languages used worldwide, not just for business purposes but also for daily interaction. However, competency in English by many users is still questionable, especially among the students. Thus, this study aimed to identify the competency of its usage among the students.

Based from the data collected, it can be derived that indeed students' attitudes, lecturer's involvement and motivation can indeed affect the English competency. However, the study shows that students' attitudes towards the language and their motivation to learn the language play more vital roles in enhancing their competency as compared to the lecturer's involvement.

Attitude has shown a positive relation to competency[7]. This finding is congruent with many past research that attitude plays a role in determining the students' competency, be in positive or negative[12,6,11,25,22,14]. Both female and male students show only a little gap, thus proving that gender does not affect the English

competency and achievement. Neither gender has shown to be more competent in the language naturally[33]. Attitudes are basically depends on the students' perception of the language not the gender. Males and females have equal opportunity and ability to learn and master the language.

Though lecturers' involvement exhibited a weak positive correlation, it is still a significant positive relationship. The finding has supported the past research that claimed that students' competency depends on the lecturers' methodology, belief, motivation and classroom management[37,2,35,29]. It may be a less influential factor but without the teachers and lecturers to educate and assist the students, the language cannot be conveyed and taught hence resulting in bad competency.

Motivation also shows a positive relationship in acquiring a new language. This is as supposed and proposed by[38,31,39,4,36,2,9]. If the students do not have motivation at all, be it intrinsic or extrinsic, they will not sit down to learn this foreign language and even practice this. If that is so, there would not be any practitioner of English aside from the native speakers.

The study also shows that there is no significant difference of competency in students of UiTM and PSMZA. It does not matter which institution the students enroll in, it is their drive to learn the language that sets the level of their English competency.

It is recommended for future researchers to make this research more interesting and effective by including other variables like classroom environment. This is so that wider comparison can be made and more thorough and in depth investigation can be supervised. It is also recommended that the population of respondents is amplified in order to obtain more accurate data and broader responses. It is definitely recommended for the questionnaire to be revised and more specific questions or statement being included. Lastly, we can also make a comparison between private and public institution by comparing the students of UiTM and Universiti Selangor (UNISEL) in English competency.

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