

CONGENITAL AMUSIA AMONG YOUNG ADOLESCENTS IN KUCHING, SARAWAK

Rachael Kar-Way Ang
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Sock-Siang Thia*
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines an investigation into the occurrence of congenital amusia, commonly known as tone deafness, among young adolescents in Kuching, Sarawak. It provides new insights on the prevalence of congenital amusia, among young adolescents aged between 13-14 years, using Montreal Battery of Evaluation of Amusia (MBEA). It also compares the occurrence of congenital amusia between tonal and non-tonal language speakers; and establishes the predictors of the MBEA scores, namely musical experience, musical training/listening habits and musical difficulties, with questions adapted from Queen's music questionnaire. Using quantitative method, the results suggest that there is no prevalence of congenital amusia among the group of young adolescents who took part in this study. It also appears that first language, either tonal or non-tonal, does not have significant impact on the ability to comprehend music. The findings show that musical experience, musical training/listening habits and musical difficulties are not the predictors of the Montreal Battery of Evaluation of Amusia (MBEA) scores among young adolescents. The study contributes useful knowledge about how first languages, both tonal and non-tonal languages, could have an impact on the ability to comprehend music among young adolescents.

Keywords: Congenital Amusia; Tone Deafness; Tonal and Non Tonal Languages; Young Adolescents.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research examines the occurrence of congenital amusia among young adolescents aged 13 and 14 years in Kuching, Sarawak. Although research into congenital amusia has expanded over the past twenty years mainly with the aim of developing a deeper understanding into its nature and also attempting to identify its underlying causes (Patel, Wong, Foxton, Lochy and Peretz, 2008), very few studies have been conducted from the Asian context especially among a population which consists of a mixture of people from diverse ethnicities, cultures, native and first languages.

As in speech and language, humans are believed to be born with the innate ability for perceiving and producing music. There are, however, instances, where individuals never acquire these basic musical abilities (Peretz, 2008; Peretz et al., 2008b). These individuals, called amusics, are said to have congenital amusia or more commonly known as tone-deafness, note-deafness or tune-deafness (Peretz, 2008; Peretz et al., 2008b).

* Corresponding author: Sock-Siang Thia, Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 UNIMAS Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia. Email: ssthia@unimas.my. Tel: +6082 581403.