THE PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF FORM FOUR MALAY
STUDENTS TOWARDS THEIR PEERS SPEAKING ENGLISH

by

HAZMAN BIN MURSHIDI
(9403)

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The Degree of Bachelor of Education with Honours (ESL),
Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development,
University Malaysia Sarawak

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DEDICATION

To my beloved baby girl, NurNabilah Hana (died June 30, 2005),
my wife Nora Kamal and my only child, Nabil Hafiz,
both my parents and in-laws
for all their support and understanding throughout my pursue for my First Degree.
Your prayers and support has helped me to complete my studies and completion of
this project.

May the Al-Mighty Allah S.W.T bless you all.
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<tr>
<td>UMNO</td>
<td>United Malay National Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<td>SL</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
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<td>MT</td>
<td>Mother Tongue</td>
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<td>Native Language</td>
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ABSTRACT

The Perceptions and Attitudes of Form Four Malay Students Towards Their Peers Speaking English in Urban Secondary School in the Kuching-Samarahan Division

Hazman Murshidi

This study seeks to find out Form Four Malay students’ attitudes and perceptions of their peers speaking English.

The samples for this study were twenty Form Four Malay students from one urban secondary school in the Kuching-Samarahan division. The data were obtained through open ended interview. Data from the open ended interview were analysed descriptively.

The findings of the study indicated that the Form Four Malay students have positive attitudes and perceptions towards their peers speaking English.
ABSTRAK

Kajian Mengenai Sikap dan Persepsi Pelajar Melayu Tingkatan Empat Terhadap Rakan Melayu Mereka yang Berkebolehan Bercakap Inggeris

Hazman Murshidi

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sikap dan persepsi pelajar Melayu Tingkatan Empat terhadap rakan Melayu mereka yang berkebolehan bercakap Inggeris.

Sampel bagi tujuan kajian ini melibatkan seramai dua puluh orang pelajar Melayu Tingkatan Empat di sebuah sekolah menengah di bahagian Kuching-Samarahan. Data dikumpul melalui temubual. Data tersebut dianalisa secara diskriptif.

Hasil daripada kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar Melayu Tingkatan Empat menunjukkan sikap dan persepsi yang positif terhadap rakan mereka yang berkebolehan bercakap Inggeris.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of study

The former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad mentioned about the importance of English in one of his speech during the General assembly of UMNO's. He has addressed the delegations that the command of English among the Malay students is very much worrying. He stressed that if proper actions are not taken seriously, then the ability to use ESL among Malays will continue to decline. He also pointed out the attitudes of the Malay students when prompted to speak English in class. It would be most difficult to overcome a situation when one speaks in English with another, one would be laughed at, teased at as that hinders one’s progress.
1.1 Statement of problem

Various researches had been done on related issues concerning language. The issues are usually associated to the learner of second language.

Jamali Ismail & Hasliza Aris (1996) did a research about the L2 learners' perception to speak English. Their research involves secondary school within the vicinity of Selangor, West Malaysia. These secondary school students comprise Malay ethnics, Chinese and Indians and they are from urban and rural secondary schools. Although they are second language learner and based on their findings, it was reported that the L2 students perceived English as important and they want to speak the language. They also state that these students have a favourable attitude towards the second language and these students felt English are important for them to get a good job and to further their studies locally and abroad.

In another similar research, Stables et.al (1995) did a research on L1 children’s attitude to learning English. It was carried out in New South Wales on children with English as their L1 at stage 3. Their aim was to find out the attitudes of learning English at an early stage and the significant of it towards their excellence in learning English language subject. They have also looked in other subjects as well but the main concern here is the English language. Though this study is on gender differences about the attitudes of learning English as their L1 and based on their study, it was reported that there is no decline in studying the subject. Both genders have positive
attitudes towards learning English as their L1 where girls’ having more interest in reading whereas the boys felt that it is important for them to secure them a better job in future to come. Thus it can be concluded that learning English was extremely well liked by children who is using English as their L1.

These two research, from my point of view although English is taught as a second language, generally, in Malaysia the main goal of learning it is to pursue higher education and the syllabus of Malaysian secondary schools’ are design in such a way to cater the students’ need as a whole correlates with the first study of the literature review.

Based from these two researches, this triggers the researcher to carry out a research study to out the attitudes and perceptions of Malay students that leads to a questionable attitude of them towards their own peers speaking English. Moreover, the research was carried out in other places. In view of this, this research which is going to be carried out in Sarawak hopes to give an insight on how students perceive others who speak English and what attitudes they hold for them.
1.2 Scope of the study

This research study involved twenty Form Four students in the urban school in the Kuching-Samarahan division. It focuses on the attitudes and perceptions of Malay students towards their peers speaking English.

1.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Form Four Malay students’ attitudes towards their peers speaking English.
2. Form Four Malay students’ perceptions towards their peers speaking English.

1.4 Research Questions

The objectives of carrying out this study are to find out:

3. What are the Form Four Malay students’ attitudes towards their peers speaking English?
4. What are the Form Four Malay students’ perceptions towards their peers speaking English?
1.6 Significance of the study

This study is to get some insights into the attitudes and perceptions of Form Four Malay students towards their peers speaking English. Results from this study are hoped to act as a guideline for teachers of the English Language to understand Malay students’ attitudes towards English. The useful information will also shed light into the cultural atmosphere among Malays to who speak English. Moreover, findings from this research will bring about the conduciveness of English campaigns whether they are useful and the information gathered will enable teachers to take necessary actions and at the same time come out with strategies and suggestions to inculcate positive attitudes. This will ensure that aims and objectives of the Ministry of Education can be achieved. Furthermore, understanding the attitudes and perceptions of Malay students towards their peers speaking English will promote better understanding as how to make the English campaign more conducive. Findings from this study is also hoped to let the teacher aware the methodology and the pedagogy used in teaching and promoting English. Thus, teachers should consider the pedagogical approaches which consider students attitudes and aware that they consider students’ belief structure, their behaviour and emotions. It is also imperative that they take more care when relating to students’ grouping them and designing their activities.
1.7 Definition of key terms

It is essential to define some of the terms used in this study to make them explicit in meaning and purpose for this research study. Apart from that, it is also useful to avoid confusion for the readers. There are many definitions on attitudes and perceptions. Below are some of the definitions used in this study.

1.7.1 Attitudes

According to Spooncer (1992) attitude consists of three main components: the cognitive, affective and behavioural components. The cognitive components refer to an individual’s belief structure, the affective refers to emotional reactions and the behavioural component comprehends the tendency to behave in a certain way towards the attitudes.

The Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary (1999) defines ‘attitude’ as ‘a way of thinking about somebody/something or behaving towards somebody/something’. Thus, students’ attitudes refer to the way Malay students think or feel towards their peers speaking English.
1.7.2. Perception

Campbell (1967) defines that perception is closely related about something that is being observed and what is said about it. It is a process where one will form an impression about someone or something. It is formed from close observation that will be stored as added information which in turn will be evaluated based on its suitability.

1.8 Limitations of the Research

This research has a few limitations due to time and financial constraints. Firstly, the respondents were from Form Four class and at the time of the research was conducted, students were preparing for their mid-term semester examination. Moreover, the research was conducted in one selected school in Kuching-Samarahan division. Thus, the data collected was insufficient to form an accurate generalization to represent the whole population of Malay students.

Secondly, this research only focuses on the Malay students’ attitudes and perceptions towards their peers speaking English. Other variables such as their language acquisition, learning strategies and motivation are not looked at.
This chapter is followed by Chapter Two, which discusses critical review of literature both and reports by other researchers. This will be followed by the research methodology in Chapter Three and the analysis and discussion on the findings in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five will provide the summary of the study and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter begins by looking at the different level of achievement in developing language proficiency. Researchers in their related studies report that the level of achievements are related to attitudes. This chapter gives insights of information regarding the definition, roles of attitudes and perceptions and other studies relating to these two definitions.

2.1 Attitudes

Attitude is a complex concept to describe. Many definitions have been introduced to explain and define its concept. There is no specific definition that can explain it and the researcher gathers a number of definitions by other researchers about this term and thus relates it to the Malay attitudes towards their peers who speak English.
Gibbons (1983, cited in Regan, 2003) states that language attitudes frequently reflect the history and current position of different linguistic groups within a society. Malays history is also related to their past colonizers whereby Sarawak was once ruled by the White Rajah’s from James Brook family. Those who can speak English literally can secure good jobs at that time. Thus, the statement as stated by Gibbons (ibid) supports this. The historical legacies are likely to influence attitudes to speakers of English. Nowadays learning and knowing English is generally known that will give one a job and therefore affect one’s attitude towards English. It is also generally known that the private sector in Malaysia is run by the non-Malay and the means of communication for transaction of business are done and spoken in English.

From the above definition, attitude is a complicated term to be defined. Generally, it has a great influence upon one’s reaction towards someone, something and situation and two possible ways which a person may react, positive or negative. Spooncer (1992) has categorized attitude into three different components which are the affective, behavioural and cognitive attitude.
2.2 Components of Attitudes

2.2.1 Affective component

One’s feelings are in the affective component, which means that his or her attitude is based on the emotion. When presented with stimuli, one should be able to show either negative or positive reactions towards it. Usually, the way a person feels about an object is always influenced by his previous experience whether a sweet or a bitter experience. For example, one develops a negative attitude towards smoking because he/she had a friend who died after being diagnosed of having lung cancer due to smoking.

2.2.2 Behavioural component

This component refers to how one would react towards something or someone, based on his or her attitudes towards the object or the person. Thus, the behavioural component of attitude determines the action that an individual would take based on how they think and feel. Based from the example given earlier, when one hates cigarette or anyone who smokes cigarette, he/she will distance himself/herself from those who smoke cigarette or show his/her dissatisfaction from his/her facial expressions.
2.2.3 Cognitive component

This component refers to our thoughts and beliefs. It involves what a person believes in when it comes to a certain object. The cognitive component of attitude is concerned with how one values something. For example, one participates in an anti-smoking campaign and contributes photographs and true confessions of ex-smokers and the effects of smoking cigarette.

In conclusion, the three components refer to various functions of attitudes; cognitive component, which represent a mental process, the affective component which influences the emotion of an individual to come to a decision and the behavioural component which provokes one to react or behave in certain ways towards something or someone.

2.3 Roles of attitudes

There have been many observations done on the influence of attitudes on success in second language learning. The learner's attitude is one of the most studied elements in language learning.
To understand more about the roles of attitudes, how it develops in an individual is an important factor. How does a person develop the attitude in them? Brown (1994, p168) states “…attitudes, like all aspects of the development of cognition and affect in human beings, develop early in childhood and are the result of parents’ and peers’ attitudes, contacts with people who are different in any number of ways and interacting affective factors in the human experience. These attitudes form a part of one’s culture in which one is living.”

Samovar & Porter (2004, p15) states that intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event. Because of this, the values and behaviours of particular culture may not be the values and behaviours of all individuals within that culture. Attitude is something an individual has which defines or promotes certain behaviours and this could lead to language attitudes which affect the behaviouristic interpretation of language. Littlewood (1984, pp55-56) further explains, “there is a close link between the way we speak and the way we perceive our identity and our world”. Thus when someone learns a new language, that person tends to involve himself into the community which speaks the target language. Generally, the community in Malaysia involves themselves with those who speak the target language only if the topic of discussions interests them or something that they would like to share their knowledge about the topic of discussion.
This shows that attitudes do play an important role in learning a second or foreign language. The language learning process can be affected indirectly by attitudes and a positive attitude is important to enable excellent achievement.

2.3.1 Language attitudes

Language attitudes involve the perception of a new language that someday it will take over of the present language which is currently being. This involves the learner, the society and the neighbourhood that learning and acquiring a new language does not entail that they have to give up their language in order for them to get knowledge. If learners are better and can express themselves with the languages that they acquired from informal training, teachers can teach using the second language where students are better at expressing them rather than stuck to the textbook or the formal and correct way of saying things.

2.4 Perceptions

Good (1973) gave three definitions of perceptions. Firstly, the awareness towards the elements in the environment such as the objects, atmosphere, relationship and the effects of sensory based from stimulus. This refers to a conscious state where one is aware about what he perceives from his surroundings. Secondly, it is a