

# Attitudes and Motivation of Young ESL Learners

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**Abstract**— English language is widely used all around the world for the purpose of communication. It has been one of the languages used in Malaysia ever since it was brought into the education through the colonization back in pre-independent days. Due to its prestigious, English language is seen important among the education stakeholders. Various programmes had been implemented to raise the awareness among the students of how essential the language can impact their knowledge. However, there were very limited studies had been implemented in rural primary schools to find out the pupils' attitude and motivation towards English language learning. Therefore, this paper was aimed to investigate the attitudes and motivation towards learning English of Year 6 pupils. A total of 60 Year 6 pupils from three primary schools in Upper Tinjar Baram had participated in this survey study. An adapted survey questionnaire from Gardner's Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was used to collect the data. The findings showed that all pupils had positive attitudes and motivation towards English language learning. The outcomes of the study had highlighted the impact of teacher's roles and parents' support in pupils' learning of English.

**Index Terms**— Attitudes, ESL learner, language learning, motivation

## I. INTRODUCTION

English language is universally spoken and written by people all over the world. Due to its widely used, English language is seen as a significant language in Malaysia. The ability to speak and write proficiently using this language is a demanding factor to jobs application acceptance. Therefore, the Malaysian government gave their serious attention towards the importance of English language and had launched the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) in 2013 with hope to transform our education system. Of all the eleven shifts carefully planned and discussed in the MEB, proficiency in English language is placed in the second shift whereby each child is ensured to be proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English language [12].

This is because English language is not a new subject to the learners. In fact, it had been established as the second language learned by the Malaysian students in schools and one of the main subjects taught and assessed in public examinations. To increase the awareness among the learners,

government had made English subject as a compulsory subject to pass in secondary school public examination, the SPM (Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia). As such, researcher attempted to look into the attitudes and motivation towards learning English of Year 6 pupils in rural schools.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research are;

- 1) To find out the attitudes and motivation of Year 6 pupils in Upper Tinjar Baram toward English learning
- 2) To find out the motivation of Year 6 pupils in Upper Tinjar Baram toward English learning
- 3) To investigate the related factors that influence attitudes and motivation toward English learning among the Year 6 pupils in Upper Tinjar Baram

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research had answered the following questions;

- 1) What are the attitudes of Year 6 pupils in Upper Tinjar Baram toward English learning?
- 2) What are the motivation of Year 6 pupils in Upper Tinjar Baram toward English learning?
- 3) What are the related factors influence attitudes and motivation toward English learning among the Year 6 pupils in Upper Tinjar Baram

## IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Attitude Towards English Learning*

Education stakeholders like the teachers, learners and researchers will surely agree the learning of second language is much helped by the high motivation and positive attitude toward the second language and its people [3]. Attitude toward language learning plays role in deciding the success of the learners [17][9][16]. However, the positive attitude will bring great impact in contributing to the second language learner's success [6][14][15][16]. Whereas the negative attitude brings low achievement in the language learning.

On the other hand, Gardner and Lambert [4] stated that learners' attitude determines their motivation toward the others and the learning task. Lifieri [8] added that attitude plays a role but when is paired up with the motivation, only then it will make more sense to relate level of second

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language learner progress. Masgoret and Gardner [10] defined the attitude toward language learning as the learner’s reaction or responses to the context in which the language is taught.

*Motivation in Language Learning*

For decades, Gardner’s motivation theory has been an influential in the field of education. Gardner [5] stated the elements of motivation such as the effort, desire and positive affect. Effort is defined as one’s effort to learn the language, desire is the one’s wanting to achieve a goal and positive affect is understood as the feeling of liking or enjoying the task of learning the language.

Meanwhile motivation is simply defined as a goal-directed behaviour [7][10]. Masgoret and Gardner [10] further claimed that motivated learners will be willing to expand more effort to achieve their goal by different strategies and exhibit interest in the learning task.

The relationship between attitude and motivation are connected and must coexist to ensure the success of second language learners. While these two variables are essential, motivation is however does not affect much of learner’s achievement compares to the attitude’s role in defining achieving the target goal.

V. METHODOLOGY

This research had used the survey design. Surveys included cross-sectional and longitudinal studies using questionnaires or structured interviews for data collection, with the intent of generalizing from a sample to a population [2]. As of for this research, researcher employed the cross-sectional survey.

A. Population and sample

A population is considered as a group of people who live in the same geographical area whereas sample is a part of the population. A sample of population from Upper Tinjar Baram primary schools had been participated in this research with the total number of 60 pupils. The respondents were chosen from the Year 6 pupils in three primary schools in the Upper Tinjar zone of Baram. The respondents were of mixed-ability. The researcher chose Year 6 pupils due to their longer schooling period in the primary school. This means they had more exposure to English language in schools as well as higher proficiency level compares to the lower level.

B. Setting of the research

The setting of this research took place in three primary schools in Upper Tinjar Baram namely Sekolah Kebangsaan Long Sobeng, Sekolah Kebangsaan Long Aton and Sekolah Kebangsaan Long Loyang. Researcher chose these three schools as they are in the same subzone of Tinjar zone and researcher is currently in service in one of these schools. Apart from that, pupils from these schools are multi-ethnics and this factor is one of the factors influenced the objectives of this research. The setting of this research which took place in a very remote areas and far from the main city had attracted researcher’s interest to find out the Year 6 pupils’ attitudes and motivation toward English learning.

C. Instruments and procedures of data collection

A survey questionnaire was adapted from Gardner’s [6] Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (ATMB) was employed in this study. The ATMB was reported to have good reliability and validity [6]. Due to respondents’ low proficiency based on their Mid-Year Examination result, the questionnaire was translated into Bahasa Malaysia to assist their understanding of the instructions and questions. The questionnaire contained 38 items and was divided into two sections. The first section of the questionnaire had 30 items collect information on pupils’ attitudes toward learning English. The second section contained 8 items which was used to extract pupils’ level of motivation towards English learning. The questionnaire was designed using 5 Likert scales which the degree of agreement to the statements given were ‘Strongly disagree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Slightly Agree’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly disagree’. The data collected from the questionnaire was analysed using frequency counts and later converted to percentages.

The pupils were asked to complete the questionnaire in the class during one session. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the research and the scales used as well as to instruct them to read the questions thoroughly. The questionnaires were collected at the end of the session. Respondents were informed and assured that the information given will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. A sample of questionnaire is provided in the Appendix.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

The findings of this research were tabulated and analysed based on the frequency counts and percentages. The items on attitudes of pupils towards English learning were categorised into 4 parts meanwhile the items on motivation was discussed in 1 category.

Table I Pupils’ Self-Esteem and Attitudes Towards Learning English

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I wish I could speak using English language very well.	(3) 5%	(7) 11.7%	(26) 43.3%	(19) 31.7%	(5) 8.3%
I do not feel afraid or anxious whenever I have to answer to questions during English lesson.	-	(6) 10%	(8) 13.3%	(29) 48.3%	(17) 28.3%
I have a strong will to learn all aspects in English language.	-	(6) 10%	(30) 50%	(12) 20%	(12) 20%

<b>I feel confident when I am asked to speak using English language in class.</b>	(1) 1.7%	(8) 13.3%	(25) 41.7%	(16) 26.7%	(10) 16.7%	<b>English language speakers.</b>					
<b>I improve my English speaking skills almost every day.</b>	(2) 3.3%	(7) 11.7%	(18) 30%	(23) 38.3%	(10) 16.7%	<b>Learning English is important because I will need it for my future career.</b>	(1) 1.7%	(2) 3.3%	(2) 3.3%	(14) 23.3%	(41) 68.3%
<b>I want to learn English language better so that I can be familiar using it.</b>	(2) 3.3%	(1) 1.7%	(15) 25%	(19) 31.7%	(23) 38.3%	<b>I prefer to use more time in English class than other classes.</b>	(1) 1.7%	(6) 10%	(39) 65%	(8) 13.3%	(6) 10%
						<b>I really love learning English.</b>	(1) 1.7%	(4) 6.7%	(12) 20%	(28) 46.7%	(15) 25%

Table I shown the findings on pupils' self-esteem and attitudes towards learning English. It can be indicated that most respondents had low self-esteem towards learning English. Respondents had slightly agreed to their wish of being able to speak English very well, strong will to learn all aspects in the target language and confidence of speaking the language when asked. However, majority of the respondents agreed that they wanted to learn English language better so that they will be familiar to it. That is why 23 (38.3%) respondents verified that they improved their speaking skills every day. Moreover, the data had also shown that 29 (48.3%) respondents did not feel afraid or anxious whenever they have to answer questions during English lesson. Despite their low self-esteem, respondents showed positive attitudes to improve their speaking ability and learn better.

<b>Learning English is important because it makes me more educated.</b>	(3) 5%	(3) 5%	(12) 20%	(18) 30%	(24) 40%
<b>Honestly, I am not really interested in learning English.</b>	(15) 25%	(24) 40%	(8) 13.3%	(12) 20%	(1) 1.7%
<b>English is my favourite subject.</b>	(3) 5%	(6) 10%	(10) 16.7%	(16) 26.7%	(25) 41.7%

Table II Pupils' Interest and Realization of the Importance of Learning English

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>I do not pay much attention to the feedback received in English class.</b>	(11) 18.3%	(9) 15%	(32) 53.3%	(8) 13.3%	-
<b>I am always interested to be in my English class because my English teacher is so good.</b>	-	(4) 6.7%	(13) 21.7%	(17) 28.3%	(26) 43.3%
<b>Learning English is interesting.</b>	(2) 3.3%	(3) 5%	(6) 10%	(21) 35%	(28) 46.7%
<b>Learning English is important because it helps me to speak with</b>	-	(3) 5%	(4) 6.7%	(24) 40%	(29) 48.3%

Table II shows that most respondents agreed to that English language is important to them as well as making them more educated. More than half or 41 (68.3%) respondents had strongly agreed that learning English is important for their future undertakings. 29 (48.3%) realized that good command of English can help them to be able to converse with the English language speakers. Apart from that, majority of respondents found that English is interesting and they love learning English. In addition to that statement, 24 (40%) of the respondent disagree that they are not interested to English. 25 (41.7%) had strongly agreed to admit that English is their favourite subject.

Table III Parents' Support in Learning English

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>My parents try to help me to learn English.</b>	-	(29) 48.3%	(7) 11.7%	(17) 28.3%	(7) 11.7%
<b>My parents think that it is important for me to learn English.</b>	(2) 3.3%	(3) 5%	(6) 10%	(19) 31.7%	(30) 50%

<b>My parents tell me that English is important for me especially after I finish my schooling.</b>	(1) 1.7%	(3) 5%	(6) 10%	(21) 35%	(29) 48.3%
<b>My parents advise me to seek my English teacher's help whenever I have problem during the lesson.</b>	(1) 1.7%	(4) 6.7%	(11) 18.3%	(28) 46.7%	(14) 23.3%
<b>My parents are interested with what I am doing in my English class.</b>	(1) 1.7%	(5) 8.3%	(19) 31.7%	(28) 46.7%	(7) 11.7%

skills.

<b>I always ask my teacher whenever I do not understand something in English lesson.</b>	(3) 5%	(4) 6.7%	(11) 18.3%	(28) 46.7%	(14) 23.3%
<b>I am quick to give up and pay less attention when I do not understand my teacher's explanation.</b>	(23) 38.3%	(16) 26.7%	(14) 23.3%	(3) 5%	(4) 6.7%
<b>My English teacher inspires me a lot.</b>	(2) 3.3%	(3) 5%	(10) 16.7%	(30) 50%	(15) 25%
<b>I choose to have other teachers as my English teacher.</b>	(10) 16.7%	(11) 18.3%	(21) 35%	(12) 20%	(6) 10%

Parents' support plays equally important towards their children's attitudes in learning English. Based on Table III, half of the respondents had strongly agreed that their parents think it is important for them to learn English. Their parents were also interested to what they are doing in English lesson. It is understood that majority of them 29 (48.3%) stated that their parents did not try to help them to learn the language. This is mainly because most parents are illiterate and uneducated. Therefore, respondents mostly admitted that their parents encouraged them to seek teacher's help and assistance to deal with their difficulties faced in learning English.

Teachers are the primary source to respondents' knowledge and education in school. Therefore, 28 (46.7%) respondents seek their teacher for further clarification and explanation to their questions and difficulties. Besides, 30 (50%) of them had stated that their teacher inspires them the most which is why a bigger number of respondents believed that their English teacher is competent to teach them the subject. However, their teacher might be seen as possessing less interesting teaching skill. This is probably due to the public examination target to achieve for Year 6 pupils and thus explains why the lesson could be less interesting compares to the lower level in primary school.

Table IV Teacher Factors

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>I do not think my English teacher is good.</b>	(24) 40%	(17) 11.7%	(8) 13.3%	(7) 11.7%	(4) 6.7%
<b>My English teacher is better than the other teachers.</b>	(4) 6.7%	(7) 11.7%	(38) 63.3%	(4) 6.7%	(7) 11.7%
<b>The lesser I see my English teacher the better.</b>	(24) 40%	(17) 11.7%	(8) 13.3%	(7) 11.7%	(4) 6.7%
<b>My English teacher has interesting teaching</b>	(5) 8.3%	(1) 1.7%	(27) 45%	(16) 26.7%	(11) 18.3%

Table V Pupils' Motivation in Learning English

Items	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
<b>My motivation to learn English to enable me to speak with English speakers is</b>		(5) 8.3%	(35) 58.3%	(10) 16.7%	(8) 13.3%
<b>My interest towards English language is</b>	(2) 3.3%	(6) 10%	(10) 16.7%	(20) 33.3%	(22) 36.7%
<b>My desire to learn English language is</b>	-	(3) 5%	(14) 23.3%	(28) 46.7%	(15) 25%

My motivation to

<b>learn English language for some purposes (example: to be an excellent pupil) is I am worried about the needs of using English language outside the class is</b>	(1) 1.7%	(2) 3.3%	(1) 1.7%	(20) 33.3%	(36) 60%
<b>I am worried about the needs of using English language inside the class is</b>	(1) 1.7%	(15) 25%	(37) 61.7%	(6) 10%	(1) 1.7%
<b>My motivation to learn English language is</b>	(1) 1.7%	(5) 8.3%	(15) 25%	(26) 43.3%	(13) 21.7%
<b>My parents' encouragement towards me learning English language is</b>	(5) 8.3%	(7) 11.7%	(8) 13.3%	(15) 25%	(25) 41.7%

Table V indicates the motivation of Year 6 pupils in learning English. 26 (43.3%) respondents showed high motivation in learning the language. Majority of the respondents stated having high interest and desire to learn English too. Their motivation was also supported by their parents with 25 (41.7%) respondents agreed to the statement. However, 35 (58.3%) chose moderate for their motivation to speak with English speakers. It can be deduced that respondents' low self-esteem had affected their motivation to converse using the language especially to the English speakers which explained why they rather less worried to use the language in class. Respondents probably found that using English in class is less worrisome when the teacher is there to guide them and their peers have the same concerns as theirs.

## VII. DISCUSSION

Based on the results obtained from the questionnaire, overall findings reflected pupils' positive attitudes and motivation towards the learning of English. Despite their achievements and the distance of their schools from the town, pupils showed their determination to be better in their English learning and they demonstrated moderately high interest in learning the language. It had long been in the field whereby researchers constantly mentioned of how the success of language learning is greatly influenced by the attitudes and motivation of the learners themselves. Oroujlou and Vahedi [13] had also claimed in their study that the progress of a learner is affected by the attitude and motivation factors. Another factor that affected pupils' attitudes and motivation in the English learning is the teacher's role. Primary pupils in secluded rural areas solely depend on their teachers for the accessibility to outside world. Apart from that, pupils' second language acquisition can improve better if parents give their continuous support towards their children's learning process [1]. In the study, parents had been supportive to what their pupils are learning although majority of the parents could not

help their children dealing with any difficulties in learning English language. Some parents were not able to converse in Malay language and what more of the English language. In addition, pupils see teachers most of the time during the school days since large number of the pupils were staying in the school dormitories. This situation implied why teachers are the best role models for English language learning compare to pupils' parents. Although pupils had appeared to have been interest and motivated in their language learning, some are undeniably still worried and shy when they were asked to speak using the language be it inside or outside their classroom. Somehow they realised that having good command in English language is an important skill for them to succeed in their academic and to seize better job opportunity in the future. Melor and Nur stated in their study that teachers' constant encouragement to pass in the examination gives pupils the fear of failure and thus results in low level of self-efficacy as well as their motivation [11]. Due to this examination goal-oriented teaching and learning, it could also be another reason of why pupils show negative attitudes and low motivation towards using English as language for verbal communication.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Researcher had come to this conclusion that this study could have provided more in depth understanding and insights if it could be accompanied with an interview. There could be more other factors influencing pupils' attitudes and motivation towards learning English language apart from the factors discussed from the questionnaire. It can also be concluded that pupils' success in language learning process mostly come from external motivation. Therefore, parents' support and teachers' encouragement can give great impact upon pupils' success. While teachers play the bigger role in nurturing pupils' learning in most rural schools, this study recommends some strategies for teachers to practise in school.

### *Friendly and encouraging classroom environment*

In this twenty-first century teaching and learning, teachers are urged to provide a friendly and encouraging atmosphere for better pupils' learning. The teacher-centred classroom is no longer practised for this twenty-first century teaching and learning to work. Pupils are given autonomy to personalise the classroom as the way they wanted. Classroom environment should be more encouraging and non-threatening. That way pupils will be more motivated and interested in their learning.

### *Offer more group activities to increase self-esteem*

Examination-based learning has decreased pupils' confidence throughout their school period because most of the time, pupils are taught to focus more on writing which is a passive language skill. Teachers can help to increase pupils' self-esteem if they offer more group activities which involve pupils to express themselves using English language. More practices will help to decrease pupils' shyness and fear of public speaking.

### *Broaden pupils' exposure to the outside world*

In today's technology savvy world, we can access to instant

information with just one touch or click away. Teachers can help pupils to expand their horizon and connection to people outside their community. Internet made it possible for everyone to reach each other despite being in different countries and continents. Therefore, teachers can provide pupils with the tools for them to get connected and make friends with the English language speakers. It could be a new exciting experience for them.

several papers at both the national and international levels and has several publications in areas related to second language acquisition and learning.

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