

PROFILING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING
ANXIETY OF SELECTED RURAL AREA SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SELANGOR: A CASE STUDY

BY

TUAN MUHAMMAD HANIF BIN TUAN AB HAMID

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International Islamic University Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the phenomena of English Language Learning Anxiety among selected secondary school students in rural area of Selangor. It studied the relationship between two different anxiety English language skills; listening and speaking, and their correlations. A quantitative survey was administered on 311 students in rural area secondary schools by utilising a composite questionnaire of adapting multiple language learning anxiety scales, mainly the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale, English Language Listening Anxiety, English Language Speaking Anxiety, English Language Reading Anxiety and English Language Writing Anxiety. Descriptive analysis and Pearson Correlation analysis was utilised to extract required information regarding the English language learning anxiety among secondary school students in Selangor. The result showed the students in all three schools in the three different districts experience moderate to high level of anxiety in learning the English language inside the classroom. A positive correlation was also discovered between the English listening anxiety and English speaking anxiety from the data collected. These findings point to the fact that language learning anxiety occurs inside the classroom even in rural area secondary schools in Selangor, and it is debilitating to the students' acquisition of the English language. The correlation of anxiety between the two language skills paves a way to formulating methods that can solve the problem simultaneously. This research is hoped to provide additional information to the existing literature by focusing on the rural area secondary schools, an area which needs more coverage in terms of English Language Anxiety.

خلاصة البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص ظاهرة القلق من تعلم الإنجليزية بين طلاب المدارس الثانوية في المنطقة الريفية في سلاغور. كما تعتمزم دراسة العلاقة بين مهارتين من مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية المثيرة للقلق؛ هما الاستماع والكلام، ومدى ارتباطهما. وتم إجراء مسح كمي على ٣١١ طالبا في المدارس الثانوية في المناطق الريفية باستخدام استبيان مكون من مقاييس قلق تعلم اللغات المتعددة، وبصفة رئيسة مقياس القلق من اللغة الأجنبية، والقلق من الاستماع للغة الإنجليزية، والقلق من التكلم باللغة الإنجليزية، والقلق من قراءة اللغة الإنجليزية، والقلق من كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية. استخدم التحليل الوصفي وتحليل ارتباط بيورسون لاستخلاص المعلومات المطلوبة فيما يتعلق بالقلق الذي يسببه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بين طلاب المدارس الثانوية في سلاغور.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Education.

.....
Faizah Idrus
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Education.

.....
Mohamad Ridhuan Abdullah
Internal Examiner

.....
Izahan Kamal
External Examiner

This thesis was submitted to the Department of Language and Literacy and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education.

.....
Muhammad Sabri Sahrir
Head, Department of Language
and Literacy

This thesis was submitted to the Kulliyah of Education and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education.

.....
Ainol Madziah Zubairi
Dean, Kulliyah of Education

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

English language has been used widely in Malaysia due its historical background in Malaysia prior to its independence. The British colonial power which governed the administrations of the country used English as its official language and was utilised in many sectors of the government. The British colonial occupation was imprinted in the status of English among local people as English was continually used in formal settings especially in government administrations and education (Subramaniam, 2007; Ali, 2000; Stevenson, 1975; Wong & Thambyrajah, 1991). English medium schools were central to the mainstream education system before Malaysian independence, and were deep rooted in the education system of Malaysia. The educational reports after independence, specifically The Rahman Talib Report (1960) stated central importance and endorsement of Bahasa Melayu as a medium of instruction. However, the status of the English language in Malaysia as an important language remained and preserved in its use after the independence, as the Rahman Talib Report 1960 recommended bilingual medium of education for racial unity in Malaysia (Darmi & Albion, 2013; Pandian, 2008).

Education in Malaysia regards the English language as an important language (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012; Azirah, 2004). The English language is the L2 or the second language for Malaysians, as Malaysia is one of the countries in Asia that practices bilingual education. (Darmi & Albion, 2013; Ali, 2000). Therefore, the English language and its nuances are apparent in the speech of Malaysians, as they are

exposed to the language in their primary and secondary education, a cumulative of eleven years learning English as a compulsory subject in public schools (Yamat, Fisher & Rich, 2014). However, there is a growing concern in the decline of English proficiency among Malaysian students and graduates, as both employers and parents opined that the current generation of Malaysian is experiencing deterioration in English proficiency (Sukri, Yunus & Rahman, 2017; Azirah 2004; Ali, 2000, Saltana & Rosli, 2016). Educational policies and overhauls, such as PPSMI (English for Teaching Science and Mathematics) were implemented to reduce the decline of English proficiency. However, the policies were insufficient as reports and studies done to examine the effectiveness of the policy seemed to indicate the contrary. (Yunus & Sukri, 2017)

Second language acquisition has difficulties and problems. A renewed interest is being focused on language learning anxiety as it might be a substantial factor in the English language learning process. Focus is being shifted to the classroom setting, as this is the where students engage with the second language frequently (Ratnawati, 2004, Pandian, 2008). Since the English language learning setting for Malaysians are mostly formal, problems might arise from the classroom. A typical issue of the English language class in Malaysia is that it is too exam oriented (Idrus, 2012; Musa, Lie & Azman, 2012; Baboo, 2013). Therefore, anxiety can be a factor in these learning problems.

Anxiety can appear in a form of a mental block preventing or interrupting language acquisition or learning in their second language classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986). Mastering a new language is an unsettling psychological experience (Dewale & Thirtle, 2009) Therefore, English language classroom might influence the students' affective domains by inducing anxiety which inhibits learning (Krashen, 1982. Unlike

test anxiety, which occurs during an evaluated performance of any subjects (Sapp, 1995), language anxiety manifests specifically during language classroom and language lesson (Horwitz et al., 1986).

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

English proficiency among Malaysians has always been under scrutiny, especially in the recent decade, where globalization and its challenges are stressed by the government along with the need to improve current English proficiency in order to remain competitive in the global arena (Sukri, Yunus & Rahman, 2017; Ali, 2000; Padian, 2008), especially with the advent of IT and technology, where English is a pre-requisite for mastery in the field (Darmi & Albion, 2013, Padian, 2008; Ali, 2000).

The decline in the English proficiency among Malaysians has further increased scrutiny in examining the reasons for the incompetency in the English language among Malaysians, even after every Malaysians underwent 11 years of formal English classroom in the national schools (Musa, Khoo & Azman, 2012). This decline is deemed significant as it has affected the employability of graduates who are declined employment due to their inability to demonstrate a good proficiency in the English language (Hashim, 2004; Ratnawati, 2004; Ali, 2000), despite acquiring good Grade Point Average in their university studies (Guan, 2016).

Communicative competence is a desired language skill by employers as the English language is integral to business transactions, particularly in recent times where international trade is booming, and English has become an international language for business and trades (Subramaniam, 2012; Ali, 2000; Ratnawati, 2004;

Pandian, 2008). Since employability is influenced by English competency, this stress on English proficiency is reviewed with an eminent purpose.

The students in urban area schools frequently use the English language outside of the classroom as its usage extends into communication among friends and family members (Ali, 2000) and having English speaking home setting (Wong & Thambyrajah, 1991) due to better educated parents and better socioeconomic status of the family(Thien & Ong, 2015). In general secondary students in the urban area experience wider exposure and usage of the English language compared to their rural counterparts. Rural area secondary schools perform poorly in English compared to the urban schools (Wreikat, Kabilan & Abdullah, 2014). English in the rural area can be perceived as a foreign language, as they do not use the language for functional or social purposes (Yamat, Fisher & Rich, 2014) as they mainly rely on their mother tongue for communication outside of the classroom (ibid). The only exposure, source or interaction in the English language is through their English teacher and inside the English classroom (Musa et al., 2012; Pandian, 2008). Apart from the lack of materials and resources (Wreikat et al., 2014; Baboo, 2013; Ratnawati, 2004), English language learning anxiety could be an additional factor, as the anxiety experienced by the students whether through intrusive thoughts or negative emotions (Horwitz et al., 1989) in the classroom affects their English language learning as multiple studies indicated that language learning anxiety disrupts learning of students inside the classroom and their cognitive functions which hinders language learning (Horwitz et al., 1989, McIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Krashen, 1982). Flavel's cognitive model (1989) demonstrated the metacognitive processes a student experience when learning, and is proven crucial for better learning for students. Students who utilises metacognitive strategies has better scores in their language performance (Bursali &

Oz, 2018). Anxiety disrupts this metacognitive process which then may inhibit the language learning of a student.

Therefore, this research intends to profile the anxiety level in English language learning among secondary school students in rural area Selangor. It also intends to investigate the possible relationship that might exist between English listening anxiety and English speaking anxiety and whether both English language anxieties might supersede or precede one another.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study focuses on the profiling of English language anxiety among secondary school students in the rural area of Selangor and the objectives are as follows;

- i. To investigate the level of anxiety in English as a second language among secondary school students in selected schools in rural area Selangor.
- ii. To find a correlation between listening anxiety and speaking anxiety of the English language among selected secondary schools students in the rural area of Selangor.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What is the level of English language anxiety among students in selected rural secondary schools of Selangor?
- ii. What is the relationship between listening and speaking anxiety among secondary schools students in selected rural schools of Selangor?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The study aims to provide information on English language learning anxiety in the secondary school settings in Malaysia; specifically the rural areas. The rural area is of interest due to the impoverished learning facilities and basic amenities (UNESCO, 2013). The study will help to complement existing literatures on English language learning anxiety in the Malaysian secondary school settings, by providing additional information revolving around the setting of rural area schools and with target population of students that is not facing national examinations. Also, it will also be one of the researches which stress the debilitating effect of anxiety and that it is one of the variables that might factors in the decline of proficiency in English among Malaysians even among rural area students. Lowering the anxiety level of students inside the English language classroom might help improve the learning experience of the rural area secondary school students. It is also interesting to investigate whether the input skill (listening) is affected by anxiety and whether it influences the output skill (speaking) of the English language. Investigating the relationship between the two skills in the light of anxiety can help in determining interrelation between two language skills with regards to anxiety and reveal new information on the extent of English language anxiety affecting language skills. It also intends to explore the possible factors that induce anxiety in rural area students and whether if the anxiety level is moderate to high, do the factors overlap between the two settings, namely the urban area and the rural area. This information will help build a stronger foundation to develop more proficient secondary school students in English and reduce the problem of low-proficiency English among Malaysian.

The study is focused on rural secondary school students in Selangor, where rural secondary school students make up for almost 33% of the sum of secondary school in Selangor as shown in the table below taken from the State Education Department Selangor, JPN Selangor (2018).

Table 1.1 The Number of Urban and Rural Secondary Schools in Selangor

LOKASI	BANDAR			LUAR BANDAR			TOTAL
	PPD	A	B	TOTAL	A	B	
PPD SEPANG	4	1	5	3	4	7	12
PPD KUALA LANGAT	3	1	4	7	5	12	16
PPD SABAK BERNAM	5		5	11		11	16
PPD HULU SELANGOR	3	2	5	5	7	12	17
PPD KUALA SELANGOR	5		5	8	6	14	19
PPD PETALING UTAMA	15	11	26				26
PPD GOMBAK	20	2	22	5	7	12	34
PPD KLANG	23	3	26	5	7	12	38
PPD HULU LANGAT	19	12	31	2	6	8	39
PPD PETALING PERDANA	22	22	44	1	2	3	47
Total	119	54	173	47	44	91	264

Therefore, this study and its result can provide an additional insight on the effects of language learning anxiety on the English language acquisition and

proficiency of secondary school students, and how it impacts the listening and speaking skills of the students.

The study is localized in rural area in Selangor. Selangor is relatively developed compared to other states in Malaysia, so the rural area is more accessible compared to the rural areas in other parts of the country. Therefore, the data collection will be much smoother and larger sample size can be taken due to the accessibility of the population. It also contains a wider range of schools, where excellent schools, religious schools, boarding schools and daily schools all situated in the rural area, therefore a wider range of samples can be obtained, because different types of schools might have different factors that can influence; firstly the proficiency level of English, and secondly, the English anxiety level in the students. Therefore, the data obtained will include other factors which can be used to identify whether they affect English language anxiety or are benign.

The study is also conducted on non-examination takers, which are the form 1, form 2 and form 4 students; therefore examination is not an overwhelming factor that causes anxiety in English language classrooms in rural area. This is important to consider because examination anxiety is not specific to English language classroom. Sapp, 1993 defined test anxiety as the harsh emotions with emotional and physiological effects on a person undergoing evaluative assessment. Therefore it is important to minimize test anxiety as it is a different form of anxiety to English language learning anxiety and it certainly does not involve language learning and language use specifically.

1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Anxiety

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) defined anxiety as subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, worry and nervousness associated with a stimulus on the autonomic nervous system.

Second/Foreign Language Learning

Acquisition of language through an affective filter existing in a language learner, where if the learner is anxious or feels negative, the filter will be high, and there will be a metaphorical barrier that disallows the learning of the language, even if all the necessary inputs are available as theorised by Krashen in his five input hypothesis (Lightbrown&Spada, 2010).

Language Learning Anxiety

The anxiousness triggered by attributing factors that affects learning of the language, or as Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) termed it; specific anxiety reactions. It is a term used to differentiate between people who are generally anxious in multiple situations and anxiousness that appears in specific situations.

Rural Area

Department of Statistics Malaysia defined urban areas as gazetted area with their adjoined built-up areas with a combined population of 10,000 or more, with at least 60% of the residents are not involved with agriculture (2010). From this the study assume the definition of rural area as the area outside of gazetted areas with a population below 10,000, and the main activity of the residents involves agriculture and intensive manual labour.

Rural area in Malaysia, as defined by Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia and Jabatan Perancang Bandar dan Desa is an area with residents of less than 10,000, with features of agriculture and natural resources where the housing is grouped, parallel or scattered (RISDA, n.d).

Rural Area Schools

Citing Johnson and Strange (2005), Marwan et al (2017) defined rural area schools as schools that are located outside the metropolitan area with a population of less than 2500 people. This definition matches most to the description of rural area secondary schools in Selangor (Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Selangor, 2019).

Operational Definition:

Profiling Language Learning Anxiety

Categorizing the scores obtained from the questionnaire into three different categories; low, moderate and high anxiety level.

English Language Learning Anxiety

The cumulative scores obtained by the students in the questionnaire from all four sections.

English Language Listening Anxiety

The scores obtained only from the listening section of the questionnaire.

English Language Speaking Anxiety

The scores obtained only from the speaking section of the questionnaire.

Rural Area

The schools from three different rural area district in Selangor.

Secondary School Students

Non examination students in form 1, form 2 and form 4 aged 13, 14 and 16 respectively.

1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The study is based on the need to investigate the extent of English language learning anxiety and its occurrence in selected rural area secondary schools in Selangor, and the relationship that might exist between listening and speaking skill anxiety. The decline of English proficiency among Malaysians prompted a probe into the factors that influence English language learning inside the classroom and English language anxiety has been extensively researched in recent years as it involves a component that exists in every student of the language, the affective component. This study intends to profile the English language anxiety among selected rural area school students in Selangor in order to understand the level of anxiety experienced by school students in the rural area, and the ways it might differ from the anxiety levels experienced by the urban and sub-urban secondary schools in Selangor. The relationship between listening and speaking anxiety is done in order to investigate possible correlation between the anxiety in language input and in the language output. The chapter outlined the background of the research, the research objectives and questions along with its significance and definition of terms in order to provide a clear purpose, direction and the driving motivation for the research.