



BARRIERS AND MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

In countries where learning English as a Second Language (ESL) is made compulsory, yet it is actually a foreign language to many learners, problems occur among learners. Language is the reflection of culture itself as the language can shape the society. Problems in language learning may occur due to several barriers. Firstly, cultural barrier is one of the barriers that is difficult to resolve. The barriers may influence the motivations to learn. The aim of this study is to investigate cultural barriers and motivation issues that might influence the process of learning English. 69 respondents participated in this quantitative study. The instrument used is a survey and it has 3 parts; 1) demographic profile, 2) culture and language learning and 3) motivation and language learning. Findings reveal that cultural barriers and motivational issues do have influence on learners' language learning. Findings of this study bear interesting implications towards the teaching and learning of English as second language.

Keywords: ESL, learners, problems, cultural barriers, motivation issues

1. Introduction

1.1 Cultural Barriers in Language Learning

Culture is defined in many aspects to represent the characteristics of a group such as religion, language, food and the social habits. The way people live can be shown through culture. The process of socialization in culture involves people to communicate using languages. Amin (2013) and Schein (1990) stated that language is a part of culture and vice versa. As language is a part of a culture, people need to understand the culture itself in order to learn it language.

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1.2 Motivation for Language Learning

Tohidi & Jabbari (2012) state that the word 'motivation' was originally inspired from the Latin term, 'move'. Motivation as defined by Dornyei (2001) is something that can only be recognized in the act of others. Motivation is a very complicated thing that it cannot be expressed by just one approach. It is a will or drive that makes people do something in their life. Tohidi & Jabbari (2012) state that motivation can empower people to achieve high performance and help them to overcome the barriers that prevent them from changing. It helps to drive people by guiding, controlling and be persistence in human behavior. Motivation helps people by maintaining and enhanced the behavior

Motivation in language learning can be classified into instrumental and integrative (Brown, 2000). For integrative motivation, the learners are usually aiming on their own self-improvement and by the desire to increase their knowledge of foreign cultures (Gilakjani, Leong, & Saburi, 2012). The learners learn it in order to get well-received by the others who speak the foreign language. However, instrumental motivation is not something that being done because of what they want by their own. It is from the need to learn the language for other reasons that made them to learn.

Past studies that have been made by other researchers state several causes of limited English proficiency among second language learners. The study by Musa, Lie & Azman (2012) identified the factors that affect the level of achievement for English literacy among the Malaysian English learners. Next, the study by Musa, Lie & Azman (2012) stated that the lack of support to use English as communication tools in the learners' home or community, is one of the causes of limited English proficiency among the English language learners in Malaysia. English is also being viewed as a difficult subject for the learners to learn and the learners display their lack of motivation and unwillingness to learn English.

Another study was done by Ismail (1994) to find out if the English language learning in a non-supportive environment for Malay learners in secondary schools. The study is made on 441 Form Four Malay student from nine schools in Selangor. In his study, it was found that the society around the learners may affect the level of English proficiency. Being outside of their classroom, the learners get less exposure to English, especially at their home. The society or environment is not supportive at all for the learners to learn English. This insufficient exposure is apparently the cause of their weaknesses in learning English. An effective language learning occurs when the learner made use of the language learnt in their communication. Learners lack confidence and are afraid to use English as they fear that they will be laughed at if they make any mistakes. The researcher also mentioned that the disapproval of the society around the learners. The learners are also ridiculed when they want to communicate in English. The study made by Hossain (2016) mainly focused on the cultural barrier that affect the ESL and EFL in Bangladesh. The study (Hoque,2017) involved 100 students from Science and technology using a set of questionnaire, interviews and classroom observations. The study found that the Bangladesh students could have a better learning understanding when the learning used both the Bangladesh and English culture.

The objective of this study is mainly to examine the way culture can influence language learning among ESL learners. It is also done to examine how motivation can influence language learning among the ESL learners. In order to conduct this study, several research questions are identified which are;

- 1) How does culture influence language learning among learners?
- 2) How does motivation influence language learning among learners?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There are lot of studies on the cultural barriers affecting the effectiveness of learning English language. Those past studies have discussed several aspects of cultural barriers that affect the learning process of English language. These are discussed as below.

2.2 Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Dorsch (2010) defined Second language acquisition (SLA) as the acquisition of foreign language, where it is added to the mother tongue unconsciously. It is also stated in Hoque (2017) where SLA is defined as the process of learning other languages in addition to the first language. When the learners have already established the native or first language acquisition, the process of learning SLA occurs when the learners start to learn other languages. For example, a student who speaks Malay as her mother tongue will start to learn English when she starts going to school. It is learnt through the process of SLA. Hoque (2017) also stated that second language learning is a formal learning happens in a classroom. SLA can occur when the learners go to different countries that have different native languages and acquire that foreign languages. It also can be done by the learners through their everyday routine by making interactions with people around the learners such as their parents, friends, sellers at the supermarket, teachers and others (Hoque, 2017).

2.3 Importance of Culture in Language Learning

Culture plays a vital part in language learning for the learners. According to Kramsh (1991), when learning a language, learning the culture inseparable. Students who have the culture awareness of the target language learnt, can drive them to have a high achievement in mastering the new language. Keumala et al. (2019) stated that the learners can be exposed to a new culture through various ways such as the foods, beliefs, ways of life and also the social norms of the culture. Kramsh (1991) states that the learners must learn the target language's culture because a new language cannot be learnt without the understanding of the culture that the target language is used. However, in the perspective of the process of learning, the learners should mix their own culture with the English culture in order for them to understand the language better because when they only use the foreign culture in the learning process, it might demotivate them to learn the new language (Ahmad, 2015).

2.4 Motivations for Language Learning

Wagiyo (2018) states that integrative motivation can be defined as the learner's attitude that is aiming to learn a second language. Integrative motivation is involved when the learners that are successful in learning the second language, admire the people who speak the language, having interest with the culture and have their own desire to integrate into the society in which the language is used. Other than that, when someone is staying at a new resident in a new community that uses different language in its social interactions, integrative motivation is the main thing that helps the learners in developing a new level of proficiency for the language. A more suitable approach for the concept of integrative motivation in the context of EFL is the learner's thought of their own desire to become a bilingual and also to become a bicultural (Benson, 1991).

On the other hand, instrumental motivation is in contrast to the integrative motivation. Hudson (2000) states that this type of motivation is characterized by the learner's desire to obtain something that is practical or concrete from the study of their second language. Wagiyo (2018) states that by having instrumental motivation, the purpose of language acquisition made by the learner is more utilitarian. For example, the learners learn the language to meet the requirements for the school or university graduation, needing for a job raise, entering any competition or trying to achieve a higher social status. Although both integrative and instrumental motivation is very important elements of success in language learning, the integrative motivation is found to keep on long-term success for the learners when learning a second language (Wagiyo, 2018). However, integrative motivation is hard for the learners to achieve and the main role that helps the learner to achieve the motivation is the society around them. The society plays a vital part in order for the learners to have the drive that keeps them to admire the culture where the language is origin from and the people who speaks the language.

2.5 Cultural Barriers in Language Learning

However, the second language acquisition might be hindered by several barriers such as cultural barriers. Cultural barriers in SLA is not an odd phenomenon as it happens in most places around the world. Culture is the symbol of a society and the language is a symbol of a culture. Cultural barriers include the ideology, beliefs, norms, religions, openness and others. In this study, it will focus more on the social beliefs and social norms that affect the English language learning. Aravind and Dwivedi (2015) and Hossain (2016) state that the differences of cultures can be deal with a cultural intelligence. People should understand the knowledge of the culture of the language learnt by using flexible set of skills.

2.6 Past Studies

From the past studies, several researchers have found the cultural barriers may hinder second language acquisition (SLA). Amin (2013) states that the cultural barriers found are the social factors, the religious and political beliefs, the effect of globalization and the use of taboo words. The research has been made on the Cambridge English Institutes students in Sari, Iran. From his study, it is found that when the mix culture approach is

used in the learning process, it can help learners more as the language is part culture itself. It helps the learner to understand the second language well when it involved their own culture and also the culture of the second language. Other than that, the study found out that some of the learner fear that they might lose their traditions and values when they learn too much of the second language. The religious and political beliefs are also affecting the English language teaching. The use of other religion in the learning example of the second language might affect the learning process.

In another study, Ahmad (2015) found that the learning process can be more effective in the society around the learners bring more positive attitude towards the English language learning as it affects the motivation of the learners to learn English. The research has been made on 1000 respondents that includes the Saudi EFL learners, the educated Saudi parents, teachers and Saudi journalist by using a set of Likert scale questionnaire. In this study, the cultural barriers involved are the religious belief, unambitious society, mix culture factors, and the over-reliance of the first language. Findings of the study found that the society belief that English is not a part of the religion and learning English will not give any benefits to their religion. Other than that, the unambitious society leads to unmotivated learners as the society around them did not show the ambition to achieve higher academic achievement. The teaching process is also affected by the over-reliance of the first language by their teachers themselves. The teachers preferred to speak more in their own native language rather than speaking English while teaching English language. The inclusion of too much foreign culture in their textbooks also affect the learners' motivation to learn the language.

The study by Keumala et al. (2019) discussed the influence of socio-cultural on the EFL learners' motivation. The study compared the socio-cultural influence on the learners' motivation through two points which include collectivistic culture and individualistic culture. It is found out that it is a bit hard for the learners with collectivistic culture to learn a new language as the society around them are more into traditional thinking. It will impact their motivation in learning a second language.

3. Material and Methods

This research used the quantitative method by using a set of questionnaires that consist of Likert scale questions. The participants for this study were 69 male and female secondary school's ESL learners from several parts in Malaysia that consists of various races such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and other races. The students were taken randomly, with different sort of age from 13 to 17 years old.

In this study, the tool used was a set of questionnaires that consist of the Likert scale questions that the students had to rate between 5 scale; Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Strongly Disagree, Disagree. The questionnaires included 3 sections which are 1) demographic profile, 2) culture and language learning and 3) motivation and language learning. Reliability test using SPSS showed that the Cronbach alpha (Table 1) is .627.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.627	15

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha for Instrument

The questionnaire was distributed among the 69 ESL learners from a public secondary school in a state in Malaysia through the usage of Google Form. The respondents were required to answer all of the questions given. Data is analysed using SPSS and findings is presented in mean scores.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings of the study. Findings is presented based on the research questions. Of the 69 respondents (figure 1), 50.7% claimed they spoke English at home while 49.3% claimed they did not speak English at home.

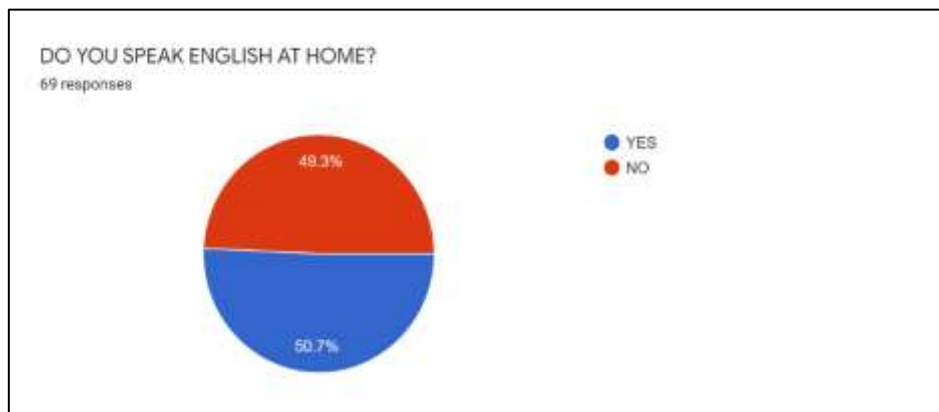


Figure 1: Percentage Who Spoke English at Home

4.2 Findings for Culture and Language Learning

Answer to RQ1: How does culture influence language learning among learners? Six items in the survey were focused on the influence of culture and language learning.

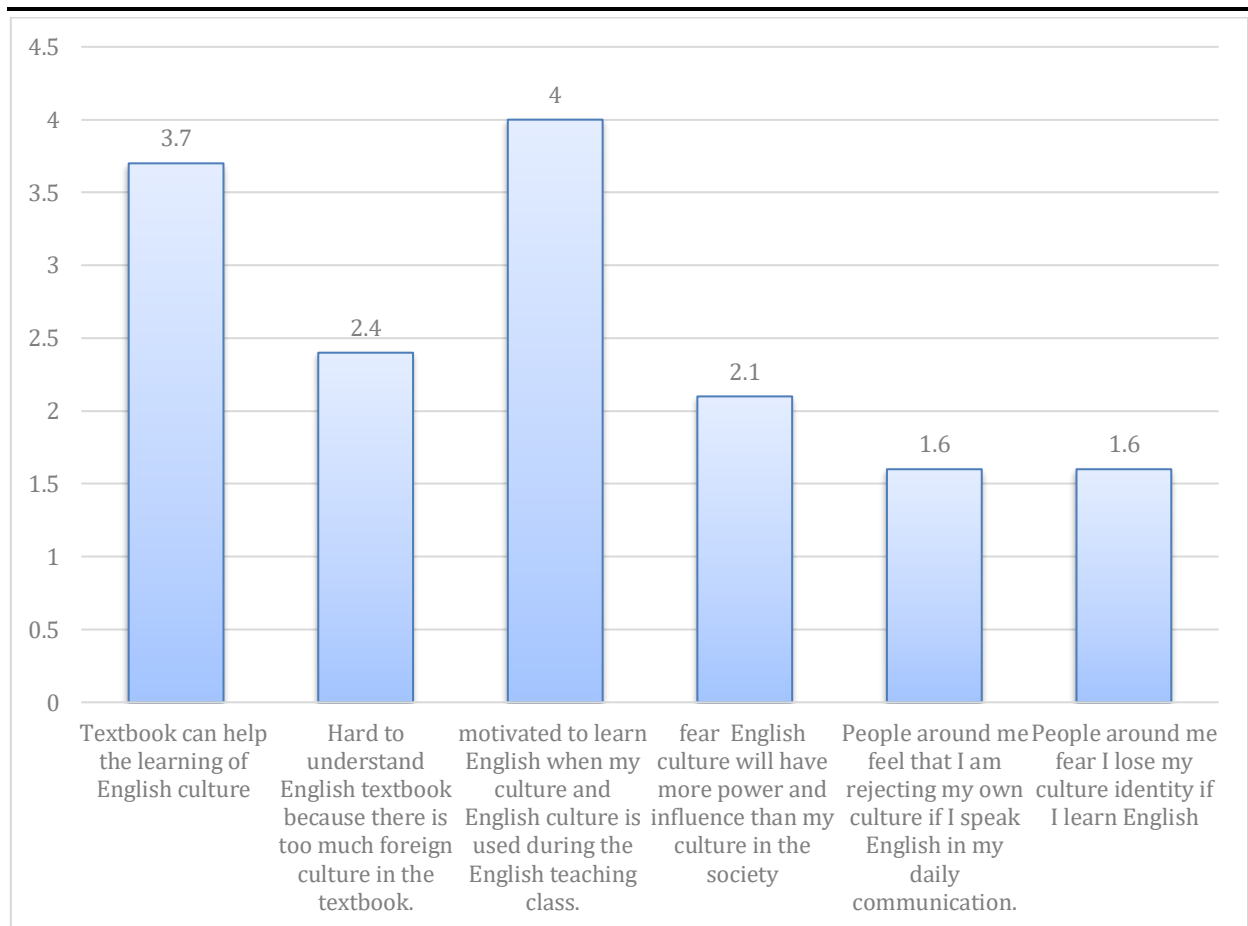


Figure 2: Mean Score for Culture and Language Learning

Findings for research question 1 is presented in Figure 2. Respondents reported that they felt “*motivated to learn English when my culture is used in the textbook*” (4.0). They also felt that “*textbook helped learning of English culture*” (3.7). In addition to that, respondents reported that “*people around feel they reject their culture is they speak English*” (1.6), and also “*people around me fear I lose culture identity*” (1.6).

4.3 Findings for Motivation and Language Learning

Answer to RQ2: How does motivation influence language learning among learners? In order to answer this research question, 9 items are used to reveal learners’ perception.

Figure 3 reports the mean score for motivation and language learning. Both comments on “*motivated if people around do not mock me*” and “*motivated to learn when people around use frequently*” showed a mean of (4.3). Learners also reported that they “*used mother tongue outside class*” (3.3).

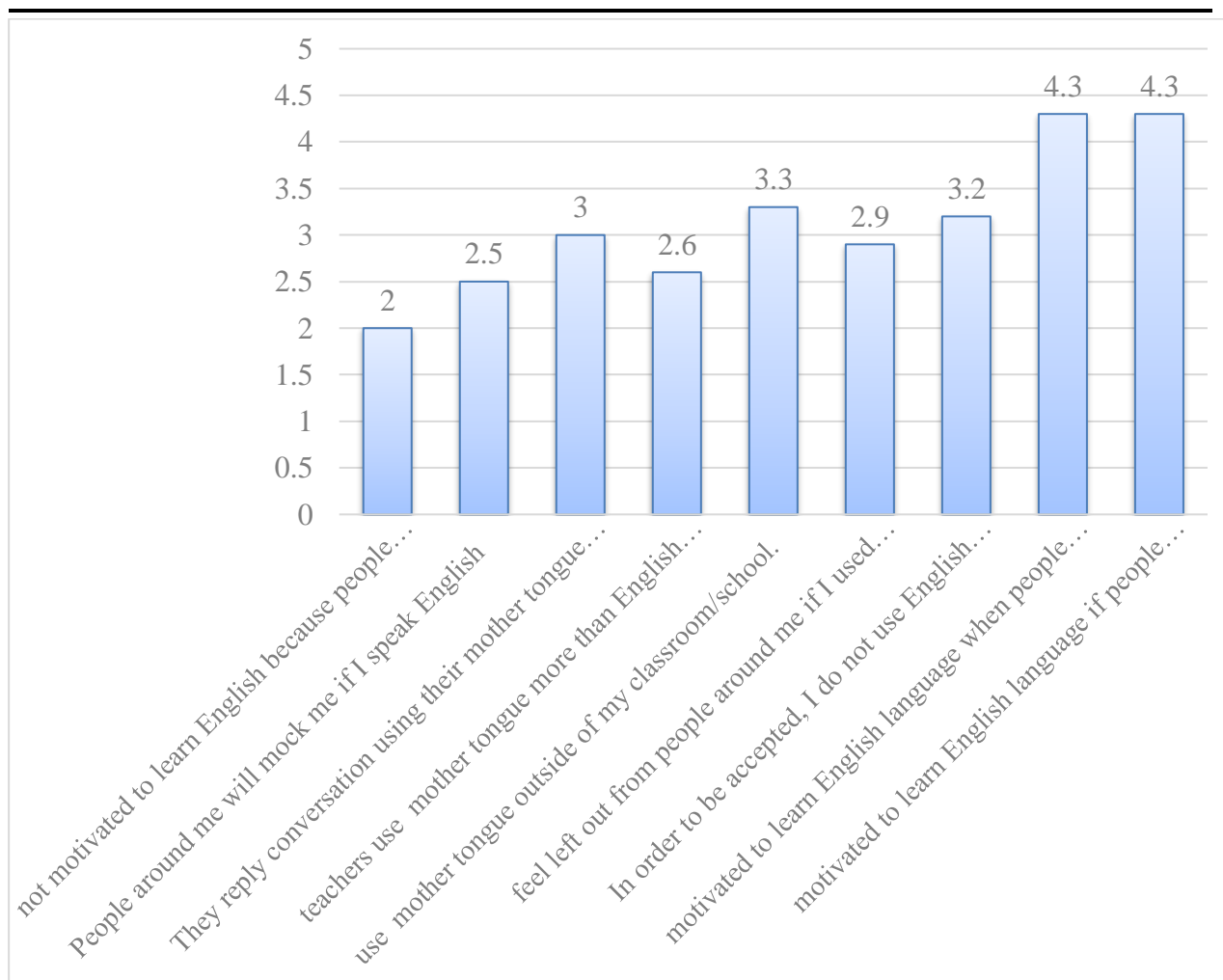


Figure 3: Mean Score for Motivation and Language Learning

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussion

5.1.1 Culture and Language Learning

For the section of culture and language learning, this study examined the influence of culture on language learning among the learners. These findings for this study is in accordance with the study by Amin (2013) and Hossain (2016) who found that English learning may become more effective when mix culture are used in the learning process as it can facilitate the learning of language as language is a part of culture. However, majority of the respondents disagreed that it is hard for them to understand their English textbook because there is too much English culture. This finding is not in accordance with the study by Ahmad (2015) where the inclusion of too much foreign culture in English textbook is one of the cultural barriers that affect the language learning process. Majority of the respondents disagreed that they feared the English will have more influence in the society when English is learnt which is not in accordance with the study made by Amin (2013) where it was found that the globalization as a cultural dominance of country affected negatively on the language learning. These findings are not in accordance with

the study made by Amin (2013), Ahmad (2015) and Hossain (2016) that show the learners faithfulness to their culture make them fear to learn English as they might lose their culture identities.

5.1.2 Motivation and Language Learning

For motivation and language learning, the findings showed that learners did not have any support to from people around them when they want to speak English makes them demotivated to learn English. It is in accordance and not in accordance with the study made by Ahmad (2015) that found the motivation of the learners are affected by the non-supportive society. As for the over-reliance of the first language, 26.1% strongly disagree that the teachers use more mother tongue than the language learnt when they are teaching in class. The findings also shown that that they tend to use mother tongue when they are speaking to other people outside of their classroom or school and it is in accordance with the study of Ahmad (2015) that state the learners rely too much on their first language that they are not interested in learning English language. Majority of the respondents agree that it is important to get acceptance, so they do not use English with people around them. According to the study by Keumala et al. (2019), it is hard for people who lives in a collectivistic culture as the acceptance of the society is important and it might affect their motivations to language learning.

5.1.3 Pedagogical Implications

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of culture and motivation on language learning. From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the culture and motivation influenced language learning. The usage of mix culture elements in textbook and teaching can be taken into consideration by the education sectors as it will help the students to learn better with a better understanding of the language context when their culture is included in the learning process. Other than that, the society including the parents, family and friends should support the learners in learning English language as it will help them to generate an integrative motivation to learn language.

5.1.4 Suggestion for Future Research

Future research should cover more population and sample. It should be made on bigger number of respondents from various state in Malaysia as this study is made only on one of the states in Malaysia. Future research also should be made on other range of age such as on the university students in Malaysia as they also learn English in tertiary education.

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