

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *LEARNER BELIEFS*
TO THE COMMUNICATION APPROACH, *LEARNER*
ATTITUDE AND APTITUDE WITH *LEARNER*
ACHIEVEMENT AMONG ESL LEARNERS IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENINGAU, SABAH**



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UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH
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UMS

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *LEARNER BELIEFS* TO THEIR COMMUNICATION APPROACH, *LEARNER ATTITUDE* AND *APTITUDE* WITH *LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT* AMONG ESL LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENINGAU

Most of the ESL learners in the rural parts of Sabah incorporate their feasible languages in the ESL classroom. These feasible languages may and may not necessarily be the national language as the learners' dialects could be one of the languages incorporated in the ESL classroom. The incorporation of the learners' feasible language in the ESL classroom is known as *learner beliefs*. The English pedagogy in Malaysia does not incorporate other languages in the teaching and learning of English. However, one of the principles in *Communicative Language Teaching* acknowledges the use of the learners' feasible language in the ESL classroom and this incorporation is seen as the learners' natural approach to communication. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between *learner beliefs in CLT* with *learner achievement*. *Learner attitude* and *aptitude* are also correlated with *learner achievement*. This study took place in four rural secondary schools in Keningau. The samples were gathered from 240 participants from all levels of proficiency and were divided into three levels. The selection of the rural secondary schools in Keningau was based on the researcher's observation of the low achievement in the English Language SPM result and the learners' rich language backgrounds. The data were gathered through questionnaire and were analyzed using statistical descriptive analysis and correlational analysis. The findings of this study revealed that the learners who incorporated their feasible languages in the ESL classroom obtained good grades. The learners were also found to have positive attitude and the aptitude to language learning.

Keywords: Learner Beliefs, Learner Attitude, Learner Aptitude, Learner Achievement, Communicative Language Teaching

ABSTRAK

Kebanyakan pelajar yang bersekolah di pedalaman mencampurkan bahasa kebangsaan atau dialek mereka dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Bahasa – bahasa yang digunakan semasa sesi pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris adalah bergantung kepada bahasa yang paling banyak digunakan dan setiap kali bahasa tersebut dikenalpasti sebagai dialek tempatan. Amalan mencampurkan bahasa lain selain Bahasa Inggeris di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris tidak mempunyai garis panduan secara pedagogi. Walaubagaimanapun, pendekatan Communicative Language Teaching menerima amalan dan praktis pelajar ini dengan melihatnya sebagai satu pendekatan semulajadi dalam komunikasi. Ianya digelar sebagai 'learner beliefs'. Oleh itu, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui sekiranya terdapat sebarang hubungan di antara learner beliefs dengan pencapaian pelajar. Sikap dan kebolehan pelajar terhadap pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris juga diambil kira untuk mengetahui sekiranya terdapat sebarang hubungan dengan pencapaian pelajar. Kajian ini telah dijalankan di empat buah sekolah di pedalaman Keningau. Sampel terdiri daripada 240 orang pelajar dari setiap tahap profisiensi. Pemilihan sekolah- sekolah di pedalaman berserta pelajarinya adalah hasil daripada pemerhatian penyelidik di mana sekolah – sekolah ini mempunyai rekod pencapaian Bahasa Inggeris yang rendah. Pelajar – pelajar dari semua sekolah ini juga mempunyai latar belakang bahasa yang banyak. Data diperolehi melalui soal selidik dan dianalisa menggunakan analisa deskriptif statistik dan analisa korelasi. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa wujudnya hubungan yang signifikan di antara learner beliefs dengan pencapaian pelajar. Data juga menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan di antara sikap dan kebolehan pelajar dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris dengan pencapaian pelajar.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLT	- Communicative Language Teaching
CBI	- Content-Based Instructions
NEP	- National Education Philosophy
EDB	- Educational Development Blueprint
MOE	- Ministry of Education
ETeMS	- English in Mathematics and Science
KBSM	- Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah
L1	- First Language
L2	- Second Language
LSP	- Language for specific purpose
ESP	- English for specific purpose
U.S.	- United States of America
U.K.	- United Kingdom
ACTFL	- American Council for Teaching of Foreign Language
DESI	- German-English-Student-Assessment-International
IBE	- International Bureau of Education
BALLI	- The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory
ESL	- English as Second Language
EFL	- English as Foreign Language
JET	- Japan Exchange and Teaching programme
ALTs	- Assistant Language Teachers
JTEs	- Japanese teachers of English
SEDC	- State Education Development Commission in China
MET	- Matriculation English Test in China
TLL	- Transforming Language Learning in Thailand
EP	- English Program in Thailand
REAP	- Reading and English Acquisition Programme in Singapore
ACT	- Active Communicative Teaching in Singapore
IT	- Information Technology
EST	- English for Science and Technology subject in Malaysia
GE	- General English Language in Malaysia
UNESCO	- United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
PMR	- Penilaian Menengah Rendah

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 The Historical Perspective of *Learner Beliefs* in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The teaching and learning of English in the Malaysian ESL classroom has created opportunities both for teachers and learners to acknowledge the various ways of teaching and learning. One of the most popular *learner beliefs* is by using the feasible language found in a particular community. The Malay language is considered to be the feasible language in Malaysia. On the contrary, it is not the feasible language at certain districts in Sabah and there are other dialects, incorporated in the ESL classroom. The *learner beliefs* in the incorporation of other languages in the ESL classroom are under the approach of Communicative Language teaching (CLT).

Since CLT has received vast critics from other researchers, it is best to refer to the development of CLT and its principles. In order to understand CLT, it is best to refer to the development of language teaching at its root. In language education particularly in language teaching, Stern outlines the fundamental concepts of language teaching that comprise of theories, approaches, methods and techniques (Stern, 1997).

CLT has received vast inputs and outputs throughout its birth year till the present time. The focus of language learning at this time concerns primarily on syllabus design. However, many have failed to realize the background to CLT and accused it as being speculative, exploratory and lacking coherence. The development of CLT in language teaching has now reached 50 years and its trends can be conveniently grouped into three phases as in traditional approaches up to

the late 1960's to the classic CLT from 1970's to 1990's and the current CLT from the late 1990's to the present (Richards, 2005).

One of the present approaches to language teaching and learning is the *learner beliefs* of the incorporation of other languages in the ESL classroom and according to CLT; an integral part of learning a language. The tenets of CLT derive from the blooming of other theories and practices in language teaching (Stern, 1997). The fundamental concepts of CLT are communication.

CLT as theories arises from the theory of language as communication. The term CLT is never in use at this time as language learning is based on communicative competence, a term initiated by Hymes to counter Chomsky's argument on competence. The goals of language teaching at this time are linguistic competence and communicative competence. The needs to describe the approach of communication lead to an approach to language teaching. Hence, communicative approach (CA) comes into being.

Language teaching offers a systematic approach in the early years as linguists and grammarians like Chomsky realize the needs of learners to perform the language correctly. However, Hymes has a different view of language teaching and sees language as being communicative. Canale and Swain have at first hand identified four components to structure the system in the communicative competence to enable Richards and Rodgers to come up with the term CA. What is then a belief and theory has become an approach. CA at this time has acknowledged the interdependence of language and communication. This acknowledgement has contributed to a shift in the field of CA in the late 1970's and early 1980's from a linguistic structure-centred approach to a CA. CA provides the components in language teaching supported by the communicative structure-centred approach in its system.

The comprehensive view of the language means it has a system, consisting of components and provides the structures in syllabus design. Thus, the emergence of a new approach called CA. CA is established by an anthropological

linguist known as Hymes in 1972. Hymes believes that language learning includes the study of social sciences. Another linguist who sees the needs of CA is a Firthian Linguist, Halliday in 1973.

CA is synonym with the pedagogy of teaching of English as a foreign language. The rapid development of language education contributes to the many studies being conducted on language teaching. The teaching of English as a foreign language acts as the catalyst for the emergence of CA. The basis of CLT comes from the needs to teach English as a foreign language and not pedagogically meant for second language learning. Locker recommended *that language should be learnt by use rather than systematic study* (Stern, 1983: 97) and the basis of these various beliefs in teaching and learning has then evolved through the understanding of the inclusion of human factors as the subjects. Thus, it can be concluded that the theory of language learning as communication is the blueprint for CLT, envisioned by Hymes who converts it into an approach, successfully structured under Canal and Swain and further developed by Richards and Rodgers. The foundation is laid by the linguists Hymes and Halliday.

The components, structure and system in the early years of CA are accepted as an approach rather than a method (Ommagio, 2001). Richards and Rodgers are both grammarians and provide the basic framework according to the linguistic competence in language teaching. They have reconceptualized the approach in the teaching syllabus and present a wide range of principles for developing communicative competence. The term communicative competence is still not clear regardless of the systematic approach outlined by Canal and Swain in 1980 and the components inside the framework of communicative competence provided by Richard and Rodgers in 1986. A new term arises to replace the term communicative competence. CA is purely philosophical and its teaching is based on communicative language use. Hence, the term communicative competence is basically defined as communicative language use.

Finochiaro and Brumfit in 1983 outline 22 major distinctive features of this approach. The term CLT is now accepted as Richards and Rodgers propose the

term CLT in the late 1980's. The major characteristics in CLT are the primary meaning on focus and contextualization. It is clear now how a language learning theory based on communication transforms into an approach which again defines by Kumaravadivelu (2006) citing Antony (1963) *embodies the theoretical principles governing-language learning and language teaching*. As a method, CLT proposes 22 major distinctive features (Ommagio, 2001) and Richards and Rodgers have summarized these principles into smaller numbers consisting of six principles by deducing several theoretical premises. As CLT has no particular theory of language learning as its basis, the premises are taken into considerations to develop the techniques to be used by teachers in the language classroom. Richard and Rodgers (2005) outlined six major principles that are relevant to the present day CLT.

There are other methods in language teaching and learning available in the language education world. There is no absolute method to be used in the language teaching and learning as learners learn through different ways (Saedah Siraj & Ahmad Sobri Shuib, 2004). The *learner beliefs* in the incorporation of the feasible language in the ESL classroom have given teachers to engage learning in a multicultural classroom (Gaudart, 2003).

It is through historical perspective that these *learner beliefs* are acknowledged. The progression of CLT in the past years has received credits from other researchers in the late 1990's to the present and remains viable in the multicultural classrooms of Sabah. The most obvious is that the critics on CLT concerns primarily on the broad range of its tenets taken from other methods. In this study, the *learner beliefs* in the incorporation of the feasible language is taken from one of the six principles of present CLT by Richard and Rodgers (2005), together with *attitude* and *aptitude* then are related to the *learner achievement* in the rural ESL classrooms.

1.2 Background of the Problem

The present ESL classroom in Sabah incorporates other languages in the teaching and learning of English Language. These other languages comprise of Malay

language and other dialects which are feasible in a particular community. Although the status of English language is considered as the second language in Malaysia, in reality, it may be the third or fourth language for some local learners.

According to Tan Sri Muhiddin Yassin, our deputy prime minister (2009), only 26.9 percent of students in the remote areas passed the English language paper in the year 2008. In general, the level of English language proficiency among students in the remote parts of Sabah is declining. The many changes in the education policy have also affected the standard of English particularly in the reduction of contact hours and exposure of the English language (Habibah Salleh, 1979).

Not surprisingly, the local learners in Sabah speak many languages and dialects. The teaching and learning process does not only involve learning English as a second language but to the extent of taking into account the *learners belief* in incorporating their feasible language in the ESL classroom. Malay language may be the feasible language at certain schools and thus becoming the 'lingua franca' within these school communities, however, it may also be, not the learners first language. In a study conducted by Rosli Talif and Malachi Edwin (1990) on a comparative study for both achievement and proficiency levels in English as a second language amongst learners from the rural and urban areas, their findings indicated that the learners in rural areas had lower achievement and proficiency levels as compared with their urban counterparts. These learners from rural areas were not aware of the importance of English language and they only took it as one of the compulsory subjects in the national exam.

The feasible language for a learner in one school varies from one village to another and the school is a melting pot of such varied languages and dialects. These *learner beliefs* of communication approach are not English. These learners believe in the incorporation of their own language or dialects in the ESL classroom to be meaningful. In short, to learn English is also to incorporate the languages that they speak. The feasibility of languages also varies from time to time. The languages or dialects that the learners speak change accordingly to the particular

settings they are involved in such as the different settings at school, home, village or simply just socializing with friends.

The findings from Rosli and Malachi also highlighted the importance of *learner attitude* in the learning of English. A larger number of these learners from the rural areas are very much disinterested in having themselves involved with any programmes associated with English. The introduction of the teaching of science and mathematics in English has added to the exposure and contact hours of the English language. At the same time, a new elective subject called English for Science and Technologies is introduced to encourage the use of English language at schools. Still, these learners are not performing. The English language results in rural schools have proven to be drastically declining and could it be due to the *learner beliefs and attitude?*

The recent launch of aptitude test by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia for the year six pupils in 2009 sees the needs to gather psychometric data for the purpose of developing thinking skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, identifying levels of interests and tendency for learning. All these skills are integrated in the English Language Syllabus together with the Multiple Intelligences. The skills that are acquired in the school are supposed to be aesthetically used outside the classrooms but the scenario of English language learning in the remote areas in Sabah is that English lessons begin and end at school. The education ministry proposes school-based assessment to lessen the dependence on examinations and to monitor the learners' progress and yet, still the level of achievement in the English language paper is considered low.

Dato' Hishamuddin Tun Hussein (2004) stated that the Ministry of Education has received reports of the decline in the English language results from all educational institutions. The overall achievement for English language in all primary and secondary schools in a round total of 9922 is still on the average level. The Sabah State Education Department has come up with plans to improve the English language results and among them are the Smart Action Golden Achievement (SAGA) and EXCEL programmes. These two programmes are

designed to assist the English language teachers to have a platform for discussion and at the same time to standardize the level of difficulties in preparing the exam questions for all schools.

These *learner beliefs, attitude* and *aptitude* in the ESL classroom give the impetus for a research in the area of CLT. As CLT allows the use of feasible languages to be incorporated in the ESL classroom, and together with the *learner attitude* and *aptitude*, it is necessary to explore the relationship between these variables to the *learner achievement* in the English language paper.

As stated earlier, even though there are many critiques on CLT because of its broad spectrum of learning principles, the consent to incorporate the use of the feasible languages in the ESL classroom is practical in Sabah. Based on one of the principles in CLT according to Richard and Rodgers (2005), is the acknowledgement of other modes of communication in the ESL classroom including the use of the feasible language used in the class. These *learner beliefs* of communication are on the content and not primarily on the system of the language.

The use of CLT principles in the teaching and learning pedagogy is not limited to countries where English is the second language but also to other countries in the world where English is the national language. CLT as Richards (2005) and Harmer (2004) put it is concerned more primarily on classroom activities which include communicative competence and linguistic competence. The *learner beliefs* are in the incorporation of the feasible language that leads to the development of communicative and linguistic competence.

Savignon (2002) in her article entitled, *Communicative Language Teaching: Linguistic Theory and Classroom Practice* concludes that, non-English speaking countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Netherlands respond to the appropriateness and communicative needs of their learners and CLT has proven to be the key success to their teacher education programmes. In Europe itself, the

emphasis is given to the promotion of learner autonomy in a multilingual European setting.

In Malaysia, the English subject is taught as a second language in all Malaysian primary and secondary schools (Noreen Noordin & Arshad Abdul Samad, 2009). The syllabus is closely related to CLT as the curriculum specifications are linked with notional and functional type of syllabus so much so that it emphasizes on communicative language teaching and learning. Another part of CLT principles is to use English as the medium to teaching some school subjects (Richards, 2005) and the bold step taken by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) is in the implementation of ETeMS (English to teach mathematics and Science), a national policy to use English as the medium of instruction for mathematics and science.

In the Malaysian English syllabus also known as Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM), interpersonal, informational and aesthetic language skills are incorporated to create a realistic context of learning English. In every unit, language forms are introduced and language structures are provided. From the very perspective of CLT, the communicative and linguistic competences are covered. There is a disagreement, however, between the English syllabus and the real ESL classroom practices in the rural schools. These *learner beliefs* are in the content of the language and not in the system of the language. In the rural ESL classrooms, these learners incorporate their feasible language in their English class.

Gaudart (2003) states that, Malaysian learners' exposure to English Language is vast and totally different from one place to another and even the learners themselves come from various backgrounds and English could be the third or fourth language. Some homes do not even use English. The issue of whether or not it is pedagogically accepted to use first language (L1) in teaching second language (L2) varies accordingly in the world (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In Sabah, the *learner beliefs* to communication are by incorporating their feasible language. In CLT, there is an acknowledgement and consent to use the feasible language in a particular learning community.

The question is whether the incorporation of other languages in the rural ESL classroom has any impact on the *learner achievement*. Another question is whether *attitude* and *aptitude* do influence the learning of English in this kind of ESL classroom? One important aspect of CLT is taking into account of the learner's attitude and aptitude. The Malaysian English syllabus sees a major breakthrough when it is revised in 2002 where multiple intelligences are incorporated. The objective of every lesson is described in the learning outcomes and proposed activities are included. Again, why is then the mastery of English language is not up to the standard? In an article published by News Straits Times, Malaysia (2007), the number of candidates accepted for degree and diploma courses at institutes of higher learning have a low standard of English. Is it because of their belief or their attitude or simply, aptitude?

The purpose of this study will be to look at the relationship between *learner beliefs* to the communication approach, *learner attitude* and *aptitude* with *learner achievement* among ESL learners in rural secondary schools in Keningau, Sabah.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The *learner beliefs* in the incorporation of their feasible language in the ESL classroom in the context of teaching English in rural schools in Sabah is investigated to find any degree of relationship with their achievement. The *learner attitude* and *aptitude* are also investigated to find out the degree of relationship between these variables with the *learner achievement*.

These *learner beliefs*, *attitude* and *aptitude* are correlated with the *learner achievement* to measure the positive and negative correlation. There is a need to predict whether the *learner beliefs* in incorporating their feasible language have positive or negative correlation with the *learner achievement*. At the same time, the *attitude* and *aptitude* of these learners are also correlated to find similar results.

The learners in the rural schools of Keningau incorporate their feasible language in the ESL classroom. The feasible language varies from Malay and some

local dialects. The significance of this correlation is the prediction that the incorporation of their feasible language has positive and negative correlation since the poor English result comes mostly from these learners from rural school. At the same time, numerous studies on attitude with achievement and aptitude with achievement have been carried out tremendously by other English teachers.

There is also a demand to increase the percentage of both quality and quantity of *learner achievement*, specifically in the English Language subject (Brown, 2005). The incorporation of feasible language and dialects amongst the learners from rural areas in the ESL classroom has already existed and by correlating it with their achievement, the result would enable teachers to determine whether this incorporation brings positive or negative correlation and moreover, enable the teachers to see in what ways are this incorporation is helping the learners.

The attitude of learners to learning English is also an important variable to show the degree of interest towards the language. The result will enable teachers to identify whether the increase and decrease of the passing percentage are related with learners having positive attitude or vice versa. Aptitude Test as proposed by the ministry is also related with the *learner achievement* to make future predictions of whether learners with mental abilities are related to the increase of the passing percentage or to put it simply whether the number of passes is related to the number of learners with mental abilities.

The background of learners can be the subject of interest as learners in the urban area are greatly experiencing language exposure in their learning environment (Chitravelu *et al*, 2005). However, the learners in the rural areas of Sabah are different in demographic attributes. One class may consist of 20 different ethnicities from 10 different villages and they all speak at least three languages in one single day. The feasible language in a particular class in the rural school in Sabah may be the Malay language but once these learners are out of the class, they all socialize within their ethnic groups and speak another different language. These learners are competent in at least two languages and dialects and