


## ATTITUDES AS EXTRA LINGUISTIC FACTOR IN LEARNING SECOND LANGUAGE AMONG FOREIGN STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA




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### ABSTRACT

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The study involved extra-linguistic factor of attitude in learning a second language among foreign students at five universities in Malaysia. The objectives in this study are to identify factors that influence students' attitudes toward learning a foreign language and analyze the main factor in instrumental and integrative attitude by foreign students surveyed. In this study, researchers found that the positive attitude of foreign students in studying languages other than Malay language as a second language. The respondents consisted of a group of foreign students from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). The total of the sample was 150 people from 27 countries. This basic attitude is divided into instrumental and integrative. If someone is learning to recognize a nation, understand the culture through the language of the nation, it is called integrative. While instrumental refers to the desire to learn the language without they want to be part of the nation or for a purpose. The results of observations and field studies showed that foreign students choose Question 5 as variable integrative dominant attitude. This suggests learning the Malay language is very useful and encouraging them. Overall, integrative attitude among foreign students are at the highest level against the instrumental attitude.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study is one of very few studies that investigated the importance of extra linguistic factors such as attitude in learning second language. This research is still new in academic study of language learning. With this research, it could help teachers, students, parents and those who are involved in learning languages.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language and communication skills are given heavy emphasis in Malaysian education system especially in public universities. Foreign students who study in public universities are also not exempted from this policy. They

need to master Malay Language as it is a must-pass subject. This is because Malay Language is the official language and main medium of instruction in Malaysia.

Ability to master a variety of languages is an important factor in realizing the country's aim towards globalization especially in academics in order to achieve world class education. To better our life and to build a developed nation, we must be able to understand foreign languages. Multilingual skill can produce skillful generation in mastering a few of international languages. International language teaching also contributes in making national education goals a success (Education Act, 1996).

Ministry of Education Malaysia has introduced a few major international languages in residential schools and now it has been expanded to daily schools to achieve this goal. Arabic, French, German, Japanese and Mandarin are the international languages introduced to schools (Curriculum Development Centre, 2006). Based on the current scenario, the researcher has taken the initiative to identify extra linguistic factor that is attitude in learning Malay Language as second language.

Extra linguistic refers to language situations outside of linguistic environment, but in language learning, extra linguistic element is still taken into account as it gives information about motivation, emotion, attitude, personality and others, which has been proven to help a student to master a certain language (Schmidt, 2010). In this study, it is predicted that students' attitude is going to influence the second language learning among the foreign students in five universities in Malaysia.

Attitude factor is the second language extra-linguistic variable in Monitor Theory which has relation with filter function. Filter is said to be responsible in determining when the effort to master stops, that is either the second language learner has positive or negative attitude.

Attitude towards a language is the reflection of a person's feelings for his own mother tongue or other people's language (Crystal, 1991). The type of attitude plays an important role when someone is learning a language. Basic of attitude is divided into instrumental and integrative. If someone learns a language to get to know a race and its culture, it is called integrative. According to Ellis (1991) the desire to learn a language without being part of its race or certain purpose is called instrumental.

There are many researchers who are interested in doing researches on students' attitude in learning the second language. One of the researches is 'Between Interest and Attitude of students towards Arabic: A Study on Bachelor of Arabic Language students in Public Universities in Malaysia' which was conducted by Halim and Wan (2006). This study tries to reveal the relationship between interest and attitude of Bachelor of Arabic Language students towards Arabic Language. The respondents of the study consisted of 130 students who took Arabic Language as major in public universities such as UPM, UIA, UKM, UM and KUIM.

The research findings concluded that majority of the students have high interest in Arabic Language but they did not show parallel attitude with their major and interest. The research found that less than half of the respondents like to read newspapers, novels, short stories in Arabic or access Arabic information through internet.

Other than that, they lack of interaction with Arab students and lack in using Arabic in their daily communication. This shows that the Arabic language culture usage among them is still at the minimum level due to some negative attitudes such as embarrass to speak, low self esteem, not confident, afraid of making mistakes and fear of being ridiculed by their friends. These attitudes are the obstacles that stop them from practicing Arabic language in their daily life.

Besides, a study on Attitude Theory Towards Language by Zimbardo and Leippe (1991) in Rohaidah (2012) also helped in this study. Attitude Theory Towards Language by Zimbardo and Leippe (1991) discussed about factors that influence the overall attitude of a person towards the language s/he is learning. The theory is summarized in Figure 1 below:

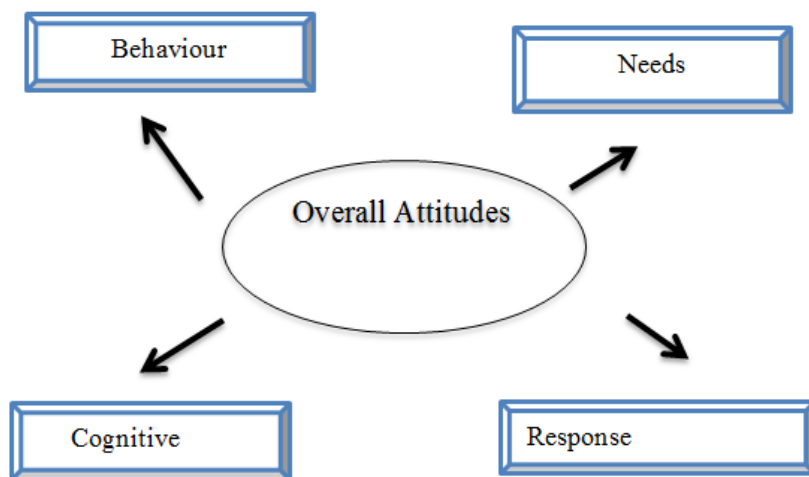


Figure-1. Zimbardo and Leippe (1991)

(Source: Zimbardo and Leippe (1991))

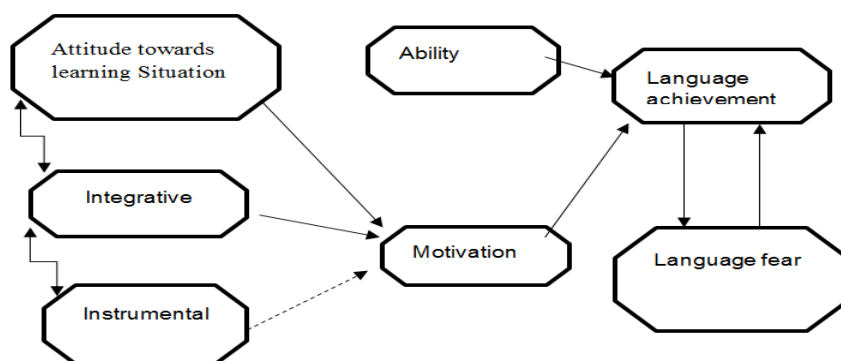


Figure-2. Socio – educational Model

Source: Gardner (2005)

This model emphasises that learning second language is different from learning other subjects such as Mathematics, History and Geography because it involves other society’s cultural characteristics (Gardner, 2005). Therefore, a person’s achievement in language learning is influenced by his attitude and perception towards other language’s community. This model describes that the perspective on the importance of learning a language, skills gained and the role of individual differences can influence an individual’s second language acquisition. As an example, if cultural aspect is deemed as the most difficult aspect in learning the second language, the language acquisition will be low (Gardner, 1978).

A language acquisition level is related to individual’s differences such as intelligence, inclination, motivation and/or fear. On the other hand, language acquisition level is going to be high when its importance is known and many individuals are learning the second language. Therefore, the achievement is more related to intelligence and inclination rather than other variables.

Socio-Education Model (Figure 2) shows that an individual’s motivation to learn the second language has relation with two groups of variables. One of them is the attitude towards the learning situations. It is very clear that learning situations influence students’ motivation. Passionate teachers, skilled in second language, dedicated, interesting curriculum, carefully planned lesson plan and meaningful procedure assessment will increase students’ motivations to a higher level.

One more factor in second language acquisition is instrumental orientation. In many situations, someone would like to learn a certain language due to some practical reasons. If this concept is linked to acquisition, it is called motivation. From related opinions from previous researchers, Gardner (2005) was able to produce a test called *The Attitude Motivation Test Battery* (AMTB). AMTB was developed to manage a variety of socio-education components

in second language acquisition. There are two sub-tests; a test with 10 items and a sub-test with four items. The designed concept variables are listed as follows:

1) Attitude towards learning situation

Refers to affective reactions to any aspects in class and can be assessed based on classroom climate, the quality of learning materials, material availability, curriculum, teachers and others. In AMTB, these aspects are evaluated through opinions given by participants on teachers and the course.

2) Integration

Assessed through a variety of ways and represent the affective reaction of a group. Integration involves an individual's orientation towards language learning, which is focused on communication with different group members. This matter also covers interest toward foreign language groups, as well as attitude towards targeted language. This concept includes tolerance towards other cultures. An individual who has high integrations values will not only focus on his language community and race. He will be open to accept language group's characteristics which are different from his.

3) Motivation

Motivation have multitude of aspects. The basic of motivation is identified through three things. Effort evaluation, persistence and inclination to learn the language. In socio-education model, attitude towards a learning situation as well as integration are main pillars of motivation. The same goes with instrumental as well as learning motivation and personality characteristics. Nevertheless, these factors do not give big impact to motivation.

4) Language Fear

Fear towards a certain language can increase in various situations (Example: interpersonal communication, interpersonal, language exercise and test). This could happen due to general fear such as bad experience in the past or lack of knowledge and skills in a certain language.

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the research study are as follows:

1. To identify factors that influence foreign students' attitude towards Malay Language learning
2. To analyze the most dominant factor in the instrumental and integrative attitudes based on the studied foreign students.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a quantitative study in the form of observation where data is collected through questionnaire instrument. Data collected is used to identify the factors influencing the foreign students' attitude in learning Malay Language and analyze the most dominant factor in instrumental and integrative attitudes based on the same students. The respondents of the study consist of 150 foreign students who study Malay Language in UPM, UM, UKM, UTM and USM. The respondents come from various countries and have different education background.

The questionnaire used is divided into three parts where Section A is about the respondents' background, Section B is about students' attitude towards Malay Language learning which contains 5 questions and Section C is about students' motivations towards Malay Language that contains 15 questions. The study scope focuses only on the most dominant attitude of the students in Malay Language learning in five universities in Malaysia.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

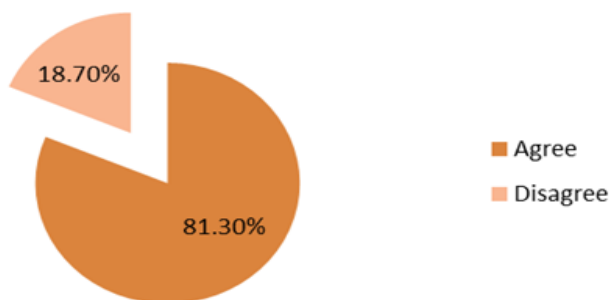
The research has chosen 5 items to be answered by the foreign students from UPM, UM, UKM, UTM dan USM. The attitude towards language test by [Zimbardo and Leippe \(1991\)](#) was applied by the researcher to find factors that influence the overall attitude of a student in the language learnt. Then, the research presented the

questionnaire findings on the attitude of the students towards the second language. The analysis was presented according to the questions listed below. The distribution of attitude based on percentage is shown in a form of pie chart below:

**Table-1.** Number of students who work hard in Malay Language learning

Question 1	Agree Number of students	disagree Number of students
I work hard in my Malay language study and seek out opportunities to interact with speakers of this language.	122	28

Source: Research Funding 2015



**Figure-2.** Percentage of Hardworking Attitude in Malay Language

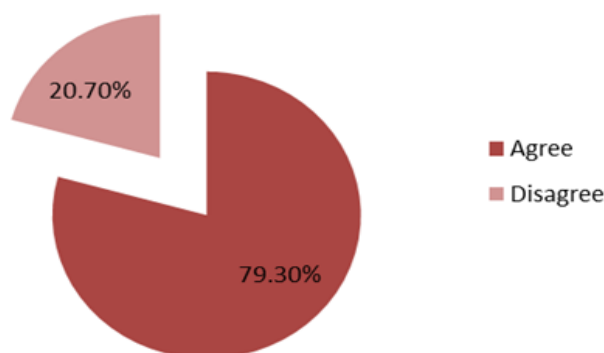
Source: Research funding 2015

From the findings, it can be concluded that students the importance and advantage of a person who learns L2. Most of the students said that they work hard in their L2 learning and always find opportunities to speak with the native speaker of the language. About 122 foreign students which is 81.3% agreed with the statement while 28 students (18.7%) did not agree with the statement.

**Table-2.** Number of Students who will continue Malay Language for Career and Future

Question 2	Agree Number of students	Disagree Number of students
I will persist in this study of this Malay language and will use it in my future career and social interactions.	119	31

Source: Research funding 2015



**Figure-3.** Percentage of Attitude in Malay Language learning for Career and Future

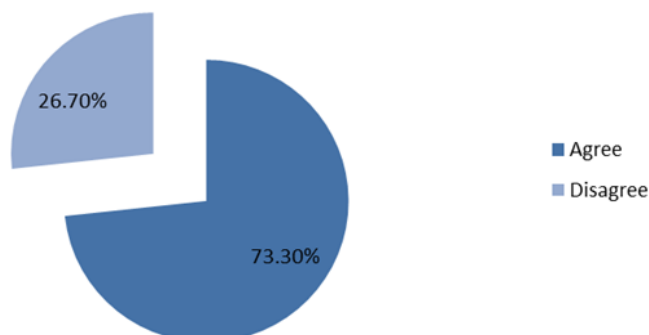
Source: Research funding 2015

Positive attitude of the students towards L2 learning can be seen when they agreed with the statement saying that they will continue to learn L2 and use it for their career, future and social interaction. About 119 respondents which is 79.3% foreign students agreed with this statement compared to 31 respondents (20.7%) who disagreed.

**Table-3.** Number of students who speak Malay Language for Future Career and Social Life

Question 3	Agree Number of students	Disagree Number of students
<i>Many people speak this Malay language and it will be useful in my career and social life.</i>	110	40

Source: Research funding 2015



**Figure-4.** Percentage of Malay Language Learning for Future Career and Social Life

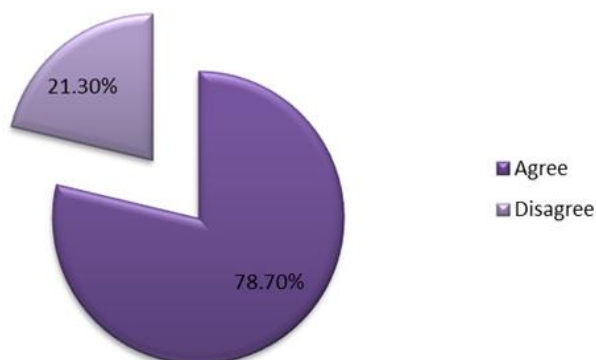
Source: Research funding 2015

Respondents of the study realize that many people in this country also use L2. Majority of them agreed with the statement that many speak in L2 thus the language is useful in career and social life. This is proven when 110 foreign students which is 73.3% agreed with this statement compared to 40 students that is 26.7% who disagreed with this statement.

**Table-4.** Number of students who like and interested in Malay Language learning

Question 4	Agree Number of student	Disagree Number of students
<i>I like learning this Malay language despite the amount of work it requires.</i>	118	32

Source: Research funding 2015



**Figure-5.** Percentage of Like and Interest in Malay Language learning

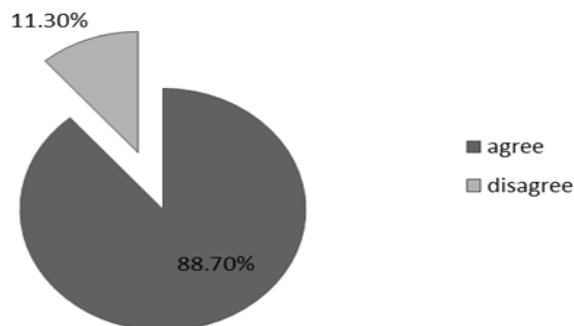
Source: Research funding 2015

Learning L2 is not an obstacle for like and commitment of students in learning Malay Language. This can be seen when they agreed that they like learning L2 even though there are many assignments. About 118 students which is 78.7% foreign students who agreed with the statement compared to 32 students (21.3%) who disagreed with the statement.

**Table-5.** Number of students who said that Malay Language learning is useful and enjoyable

Question 5	Agree Number of students	Disagree Number of students
<i>Learning Malay language is worthwhile and enjoyable.</i>	122	28

Source: Research funding 2015



**Figure-6.** Percentage of Useful Malay Language learning Attitude  
 Source: Research funding 2015

The researcher found that from attitude factor towards the language, students were aware of the advantage of learning L2. 133 students which is 88.7% foreign students agreed with the statement saying that L2 is useful and enjoyable compared to 17 foreign students who disagreed that amounted to 11.3% students. According to [Zimbardo and Leippe \(1991\)](#) when one is positive towards L2 studied, he will believe that learning L2 is useful and enjoyable.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Literally, the researcher found that foreign students' attitude towards Malay Language learning as second language can be divided into two aspects which are instrumental and integrative. Based on the research, one of the dominant factors in Malay Language acquisitions among foreign students is 'learning Malay Language is useful and enjoyable'. This is shown with the highest factor compared to others which is 88.7% which shows that Malay Language is not a language that is difficult to learn.

Meanwhile 'many people speak in Malay Language and it will be useful for career and social life' factor shows the lowest percentage among other factors that influence the foreign students' attitude which amounted to 78.7%. Nevertheless, for the researcher, this percentage is still high and it shows deep interest of the foreign students in learning Malay Language. This shows that integrative attitude among the foreign students in learning Malay Language is still high.

Therefore, it is reasonable for Malay Language studies to be made compulsory for each of foreign students who further their studies in public universities. Every public university must be alert with the change of time and current market as well as the importance of Malay Language in the global market. Realizing this fact, public universities must reinforce culturally based program on foreign students so they will be able to understand the culture of Malay society. The involvement of foreign students in such activities will not only encourage the use of Malay Language but it will also instil their interest in the local multi-culture.

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**Contributors/Acknowledgement:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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