

Effects of English Language Proficiency (ELP) on the Process of Daily Interpersonal Communication (IPC) between Local and International Students at University Malaysia Pahang (UMP)

Abdul Qahar Sarwari, Ainol Haryati Bt Ibrahim, Nor Ashikin Abdul Aziz

Center for Modern Languages and Human Sciences (CMLHS), University Malaysia Pahang (UMP)
MALAYSIA

qaharesarwari@gmail.com, ainol@ump.edu.my, ashikin@ump.edu.my

Abstract

Interpersonal communication (IPC) is a key factor for students of higher education institutions to gain communicative skills and have enough collaborative activities at the collegiate environment. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the characteristics of daily IPCs between local and international students of University Malaysia Pahang (UMP). The level of English language proficiency (ELP) and other affecting factors on the process of daily IPCs among participants of this study were evaluated as well. Findings of this study may help lecturers and university officials to design and conduct the essential programs on strengthening of ELP among university students. A triangulation of methods was used to conduct this study by combination of a quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews. The quantitative survey had 220 participants equally from both local and international students of UMP, and also 12 participants were interviewed for the qualitative data as 6 Malaysian and 6 foreigner students. According to the both quantitative and qualitative results, lack of ELP among local and foreigner students of UMP was the main negative affecting factor on the process of their daily interactions among them. Further studies may highlight more aspects of this issue.

Key Words: English language proficiency; Interpersonal communication; interactions; Malaysian and international students, Malaysian universities

1. Introduction

Also, interpersonal communication among students from different countries and different cultures may pave the ways for them to share their knowledge, information, and experiences. At the same time, it helps them to solve their daily academic problems through collaborative works, and improve their communication skills. Lusting & Koester (2006 as cited in GAO, 2011) argued that, the skill to interact in different intercultural backgrounds is an ever more significant ability of both common and personal life. Foreigner students with self-reliance of language efficiency during interactions with host people, assumed that to be more successful in their academic and social affairs (Huang, 2010). The level of English language proficiency (ELP) among students and communicators at the collegiate campuses plays a vital role to balance the level and quality of daily IPCs among the university students.

Although, there are some works on the literature which been done by previous researchers like Aidoo (2012); Gao (2011); Izumi (2010) and so on, but their findings belong to the regions and countries with the different cultural and educational norms from Malaysia and many other Asian countries. At the same time, examination of the process of daily IPCs between local and international students at the Malaysian universities would be an interesting and important issue. Therefore, this study examined the characteristics of daily IPC between local and international students of UMP and the factors that had effects on this process as well.

1.1 Problem statement

Presence of international students at the Malaysian universities, especially University Malaysia Pahang (UMP) is a good chance for both Malaysian and international students to have daily interpersonal interactions. Also, they

can share and develop their knowledge, information, experiences, and improve their communicative skills through daily interactions. However, it is not clear whether Malaysian and international students of UMP are seizing the opportunities and gaining benefits from conducting interpersonal communications and interactions. This study proposes to investigate the issue of whether Malaysian students of UMP participate in interpersonal communication with their international counterparts, and vice versa. It will also look at whether they seize the opportunities to enhance their IPC skills, and improve their collaborative learning abilities.

1.2 Aim of Study

This study aimed to identify and evaluate the positive and negative factors that had effects on the process of daily IPC between Malaysian and international students of UMP. Also, it planned to evaluate the level of ELP among local and foreigner participants of this study and its effects on the process of their daily interactions.

1.3 Significance of Study

The findings of this study may be useful for students, university officials, and other related educational organizations. The findings may help universities to tackle the issues and pave the ways for students to enhance the level of their ELP and achieve their communicative goals. The study may add some new findings to the literature, to ease the work for other researchers in the same background and subject in the future.

2. Literature Review

Interpersonal communication is the way that individuals communicate with others by using spoken and non-spoken messages; while maximizing of attendance of the communicators are required (Dawson, 2008; Crowell, 2011). Language plays a key role on the process of daily interactions among university students, but lack of language efficiency may cause some misunderstanding among communicators. Abdullah (2008) pointed out that language was believed as an obstacle for the people including that ones who were able to speak the different language, because different implications and cultural usage of language were existed and that might cause misinterpretation. Interpersonal communication is one of the most essential aspects of social life. The progress of skills in interpersonal interactions was measured significant in the society, because human beings are all social (Aidoo, 2012).

Interpersonal communication is part and parcel of the modern life of all human beings. Nothing can take the place of interpersonal communication among people. According to Marr (2009) humans communicate often repeatedly and throughout several modalities. Communication procedure is not often replaced by any other alternative. This is a usual function of communicative persons (persons able to communicate in a number of manners apart from the level of it) to transfer information verbally, through writing, by gesture, by slight action and glance, and by some other instruments. The messages might be relayed from a person to another one (Marr, 2009).

Nowadays, skill of interpersonal communication is required for all educated people to be successful in their occupations and the level of language efficiency helps communicators to have successful daily interactions. In the 21st century all educational and business-related works are paying high value on the employees and educated people who have enough skills on interpersonal communication; therefore, communication and gatherings of students at the university may bring these skills, when students cooperate with people of several societies (House, 2004 cited in Aidoo, 2012; Crowell, 2011; Aidoo, 2012). Also according to Huang (2010) international students with confidence on the level of their language competence on the daily interactions with local people, suggested to be in a better situation in the academic and social affairs.

According to the literature, it is clear that IPC and daily interactions among university students are the main essential factors to pave the ways for them to learn some new things and have daily university related collaborative activities.

3. Methodology

This study was designed to conduct a survey research and the quantitative method used for data collection process by distribution of questionnaires. The main method for this study was the quantitative method and the qualitative interviews were nested into it to enrich the findings.

3.1 Participants

The quantitative survey had 220 participants as 110 from Malaysian- and 110 from international students of UMP, and also the qualitative interviews had 12 participants equally from both local and foreigner students.

3.2 Instruments

The main instruments for this study were the questionnaires. The questions included the demographic information, interpersonal communication characteristics and competence. The instruments had been prepared by the researcher with reference to some questionnaires and instruments of previous works like Aidoo (2012); GAO (2011); Izumi (2010). Also, a package of interview questions was prepared for qualitative data.

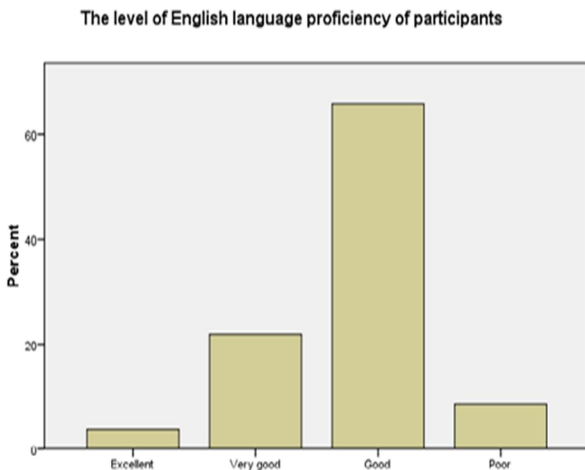
4. Findings

A descriptive test of SPSS was conducted to find out frequencies and percentages of the quantitative data. According to the descriptive test, 220 Malaysian and international students of UMP were participated in the survey. As the frequencies show, Malaysian participants N=110 and international N=110 as well. From all participants 147 were male and 73 of them were female students, and from female participants 60 of them were local and 13 international.

Also, beside other factors and items the level of ELP among communicators at the university campus was examined and based on the quantitative results, it had direct effects on the process of their daily IPC and interactions. This study examined the main positive and negative affecting factors including the level of ELP on the process of daily IPCs between local and international students of UMP. The findings that illustrated by this conference paper are the answers of those quantitative and qualitative questions which were related to its topic.

4.1 Quantitative Findings

The figure bellow illustrates the level of ELP among the participants of this study.



According to the figure, the majority of participants of this study chose the option of (Good) for the level of their ELP, which is a moderate level.

Also, for the question (how do you evaluate the level of your understanding of talks and conversations during interpersonal communication with international/Malaysian students?) which was the second question of the package of items for the communicative characteristics among UMP students, from four options almost half of the participants (49.1%) chose the 2nd option which was (I understand the most parts of the conversation). And from 220 participants of this study 51 of them chose the 3rd option (I understand almost half of the conversation) and just 20% of participants accepted that they understand all parts of the conversations and messages when interact with other people. The Mean/Standard Deviation for this question was 2.19/.84.

The frequency and percentages of participants' answers for the question 14 of the package of communication competence items are illustrated by the following SPSS table with the Mean/Standard Deviation of 2.51/.93.

I want to start and have interpersonal communication with international Malaysian students, but I cannot start because of my lack of English language proficiency.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Completely agree	33	15.0	15.0	15.0
	Agree	81	36.8	36.8	51.8
	Disagree	71	32.3	32.3	84.1
	Completely disagree	35	15.9	15.9	100.0
	Total	220	100.0	100.0	

4.2 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative interviews had 12 participants from both local and international students of UMP. As local students were 1) Mr. Has Sanal Haris, a Master's Malay-Malaysian student, 2) Miss. Aziza Binti Aziz, a degree Malay-Malaysian student, 3) Mr. Mohammad Amir Bn Abdullah, a degree Indian- Malaysian student, 4) Miss Jamunaa, a degree Indian-Malaysian student, 5) Miss. Khair-un-Nesa, a degree Malay-Malaysian student, and 6) Mr. Yeow Jian Qin, a senior degree Chinese-Malaysian student. And International interviewees were 1) Mr. Ahmad Jahid Mushtaq, a master's student from Afghanistan, 2) Mr. Amarchand Chordia Murugan, a PhD student from India, 3) Mr. Abdulhakim, a PhD student from Algeria, 4) Mr. Johni Chinese, a senior degree student from China, 5) Mr. Aziz Qannaf, a degree student from Yemen, and 6) Mr. Belo Ibrahim Garko, a master's students from Nigeria. In the results, participants of qualitative interviews will come as MSX (MS for Malaysian student and X for number) ISX for international students.

Answers of interviewees were analyzed separately and for the purpose of this paper, just a section of the results that related to its theme was chosen. Based on the related qualitative results, almost all of the participants (both local and international) mentioned lack of English language proficiency as the main negative affecting factor on the process of their daily interactions and IPCs at the UMP campus. For example, participant MS1 who was a Malaysian male master's student said that "The most affecting factor which affects negatively the communication is English language." His view followed by IS4, an international senior-degree student as said "English language is the most affecting factor." And participant IS2 an international PhD male student suggested that "Both international and Malaysian students must improve their English language and communicative skills." At the same time, MS6 who was a Malaysian senior-degree male student stated that "The most problem with foreigners is using slangs and some particular words in English language."

5. Discussion and Recommendations

This study was conducted to evaluate the characteristics of IPC between local and international students of UMP, and to find out the main affecting factors of this process. The results of both quantitative and qualitative data for the questions which related and been chosen for this paper showed that the level of ELP among UMP students was a considerable issue and based on the quantitative results, ELP level of majority of the participants from both Malaysian and international student was (Good). And because of that, about 70% of participants were able to understand almost all parts or even half of the messages and conversations during their daily IPCs with students of other cultures, languages, and countries. Meanwhile, when communicators are not able to understand all parts of the conversations, they may lose some key messages, and it may bring a miss-communication among them.

Also, based on the findings of both quantitative and qualitative data, lack of English language proficiency (ELP) was the main negative affecting factor among local and foreigner participants of this study. In the qualitative interviews, almost all of the participants introduced lack of ELP among university students as the main barrier toward their daily IPCs and interactions. Also, some of them asked both local and foreigner students to improve the level of their ELP, and communicative skills.

5.1 Recommendations

It is clear that the communicators who are not the native speakers of English language and use this language as their second- and/or communicative- language they may have some ELP problems, and misunderstand some words during their daily interactions. At the same time, some steps must be taken to improve the level of ELP and lessen the number of mistaken words and expressions among communicators during their IPCs. The related university departments and English language lecturers should design and fulfil some fruitful methods and programs to strengthen the level of ELP among university students. The university students also can improve the level of their ELP and have more qualified daily interactions through internet-mediated helps, and by focusing on the new words and uncommon expressions during their daily IPCs at the university campus. However, further studies on this issue in the future, especially at the universities with better cosmopolitan areas may highlight more aspects and effects of ELP on the process of daily interactions among students of different countries at the Malaysian universities.

6. Conclusion

By and large, this study examined the characteristics and main affecting factors of the process of daily IPCs between local and international students of UMP. As one of the key findings of this study, it became clear that lack of English language proficiency (ELP) among university students is the main negative affecting factor on the process of their daily interactions. Also, the results of this study illustrated that English language as the main communicative means among students of different cultures and countries had direct and decisive effects on the process of their daily IPCs and interactions at the university campus. Based on the results, it is arguable that students with the higher level of ELP would be in a better communicative situation at the university campuses.

7. References

- Abdulla, E. A. (2008). *Transcending Ethnocentrism: A phenomenological study of Arab and American college students who experienced the other culture* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3337350)
- Aidoo, B. (2012). *An examination of mature interpersonal relationships among international and American college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No.3534803)
- Crowell, D. M. (2011). *Bridging the gap between interpersonal communication skill differences in employees: An interpersonal communication training curriculum* MA dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 1503888)
- Dawson, Y.D. (2008). *An interpersonal communication program for middle school students applying true colors* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No.3315203)
- Gao, C. (2011). *The role of face-to-face interpersonal communication with different social networks in the development of intercultural communication competence* (MA dissertation). Available from ProQuest dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 1494564)

- House, R. J. (2004). Illustrative examples of GLOBE findings. In R. J. House et al (Eds.), Culture, leadership and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies (pp. 3-8). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Huang, Y. (2010). Acculturation and academic performance: the role of media use and interpersonal communication among international students (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & These database. (UMI No. 3407905)
- Izumi,S.(2010). Intercultural communication of identity: a study of Japanese international students in the United Sates (Doctoral dissertation), Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3409336)
- Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. (2006). Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures (5th. ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Marr, J.D. (2009). Interpersonal communication and professional relationships between faculty and administrators in higher education (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3344666)