Attitude towards Learning Oral Arabic among Students in Different Learning Environments

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Abstract

The Arabic course in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Malaysia is an elective offered to first degree students. Consequently, students' attitude towards language learning has been identified to influence the learning process. This article reports two studies, (1) to investigate the difference in students' attitude in different UiTM campuses (2) to investigate the difference in students' attitude in three different faculties, namely (a) science and technology, (b) social science and humanities and (c) management and business. Both were quantitative studies using a questionnaire adapted from Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) involving 193 samples (study 1) and 237 samples (study 2). The samples were selected based on stratified random sampling technique. The results found that (1) there was no statistically significant difference in students' attitude in different UiTM campuses, but (2) there was a statistically significant difference in students' attitude in different UiTM faculties. Science and technology students possessed a significantly higher level of attitude compared to social science and humanities students. These two studies have some pedagogical implications. Firstly, all UiTM campuses have similar level of students' attitude. Some advantages in Shah Alam campus such as higher number of students' enrollment and the existence of Arab students are seemed not to have significant influence on students' attitude. Meanwhile, some faculties possess students with higher positive attitude as compared to others, which recommends the use of different approach of teaching and activities in the classrooms. Appropriate approach is vital in moulding students' behaviour which consequently affects their performance in learning oral Arabic.

Keywords: *Attitude, Oral Arabic, Learning environment, Foreign language learning*

Introduction

The Arabic course as a third language in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Malaysia is an elective course offered to first degree students. Starting from June 1999, UiTM has improved the third language courses to become one of the university's requirement subjects, thus making it compulsory to all first degree students. Students need to choose one of the third language courses offered and complete it before graduation. Two hours is allocated for Arabic language class every week. Cumulatively, within three semesters of the course, they will have six credit hours which equals to approximately 84 hours of meeting, whereas 28 hours of meeting in every semester (The Academic Affairs Division, 2009).

However, the students' learning backgrounds are different in terms of their prior experience in learning Arabic and the faculties they belong to. Some of them have years of experience in learning Arabic at school while some of them do not have any experience at all. For them, learning Arabic at UiTM is the first step. During formal teaching, all these students are joined in the same classroom consisting of

mixed abilities and experienced learners. According to previous research (Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Parilah, 2010c; Ghazali Yusri & Nik Mohd Rahimi, 2009), the combination of the classes has some negative effects towards some students. This situation is in accordance to the Causal Attribution Theory, which stated that individual factors such as prior experience and knowledge are expected to influence the level of self-efficacy for learning and students' perceptions to succeed in their learning (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). The different gender had also been found to influence the level of motivation and attitude among students (Bembenutty, 2007; Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Parilah, 2010b; Lundeberg & Mohan, 2008; Ray, Garavalia, & Murdock, 2003). Due to the effects of prior experience and gender towards students' attitude, these two variables were controlled by selecting equal number of samples with similar prior experience and gender in both studies in order to eliminate potential biasness that might influence research findings.

In addition, there are recently more than 25 UiTM campuses in Malaysia. UiTM is the biggest university in Malaysia which contains more than 100 thousand students. Students are placed in different UiTM campuses all over Malaysia which the highest number of them is in Shah Alam Main Campus. However, for Arabic language course, not all UiTM campuses offered this language and the highest number of students is still in Shah Alam Campus. Therefore, the difference learning environment in UiTM campuses may influence students' attitude towards learning oral Arabic. Shah Alam Campus as the biggest campus may offer some advantages over other campuses in terms of larger number of total students' enrollment in the course and the existence of many international Arab students from Arab countries pursuing their study, which may affect learning environment, thus affect students' attitude. Meanwhile, other campuses share a similar environment such smaller number of students and the absence of international Arab students in learning environment.

As the biggest university in Malaysia, UiTM has more than 23 faculties. They can be divided into three clusters based on their nature of learning. The first is science and technology cluster which consists of engineering, medical, pharmacy, dentistry and architecture faculties. The second is social science and humanities cluster which consist of faculties of art and design, law, language studies, education and mass communication. The third involves management and business faculties which consist of faculties of business, accountancy, office management as well as hotel and tourist management. Almost all science and technology students and majority of social science and humanities students are in Shah Alam campus due to the facilities and expert availability factors. While management and business students are scattered all over UiTM campuses in Malaysia. The various faculties which students belong to may also influence students' attitude as mentioned by Feather (1988) who found that students' enrollment in humanities, science social and science faculties was related to their expectancy and task value towards science and mathematics.

Therefore, this study is intended to investigate the differences between students in different UiTM campuses and different faculties in order to distinguish the importance of using different approaches in teaching and learning of oral Arabic in UiTM. It had shown some classroom implications that may be considered to improve the Arabic language instructional practices in UiTM. These studies need to be carried out separately because science and technology students are only can be found in Shah Alam Campus and majority of social science and humanities students are also in Shah Alam.

Attitude towards a language refers to the perception of a community towards that language such as interesting and easy to learn. It can be influenced by some factors related to economic, social, politic, culture and religiosity (Norizah, 2005). According to Socio-Educational Theory (Gardner, 1985), attitude is part and partial of motivation. There are two types of attitude in language, namely attitude towards language learning and attitude towards language community. The former refers to the attitude towards the language itself and the language teachers, while the latter refers to the attitude towards a language community such as Arab or Malay. Gardner (1985) had divided attitude into three main components namely cognitive, affective and conative. Cognitive component refers to a person's belief towards a language, affective refers to his reaction emotionally according to his previous belief towards the language, while conative is associated with his behavioral actions towards his belief. According to Yorio (1986) perception and belief can influence learners conatively towards learning. For instance, if students' perception towards a subject is low, therefore they will not give their full focus and effort towards that subject. Alkusairy (1998) found that the main problems faced by Malaysian students in speaking Arabic were fear and shyness of making mistakes due to their low self confidence.

Problem statement

Oral skills consist of listening and speaking. Generally, researches in oral skills have been carried out widely either at the international level (see Buck, 2001; Bygate, 1987; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Fulcher, 2003; Hughes, 2002; James, 1998; Rost, 2002) or at the national level (Abdul Aziz, 1988; Baskaran, 1990). At the national level, there were some studies either solely on listening Arabic (Nik Mohd Rahimi, 2004) or speaking Arabic (Zawawi, 2008). Meanwhile, at UiTM level, previous researches (Norhayuza, Naimah, Sahabudin, & Ibrahim, 2004; Sahabudin, 2003) generally concluded that UiTM students were still weak in oral Arabic. Azman and Ahmad Nazuki (2010) on the other hand, stressed on the importance of the use of transliteration in learning Arabic at UiTM to help students in mastering the language.

There were two previous studies investigating UiTM students' attitude in oral Arabic context (Ghazali Yusri, et al., 2010c; Ghazali Yusri & Nik Mohd Rahimi, 2009). However these studies were entirely based on qualitative data and not meant to generalize the findings into UiTM population. There were also other previous studies investigating some components of self regulated learning strategies among UiTM students in oral Arabic context such as motivation and test anxiety (Ghazali Yusri, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Parilah, 2010a) and the effect of different courses on the use of self-regulated learning strategies (Ghazali Yusri & Nik Mohd Rahimi, 2010). These two studies were aimed to investigate the differences in students' attitude in different UiTM campuses and faculties by using quantitative data inferentially and supported by some insight explanations from previous studies.

Research questions

There were two main research questions:

Question 1: Was there any significant difference in attitude level among students in different campuses of UiTM?

Question 2: Was there any significant difference in attitude level among students in different faculties of UiTM?

Methodology

Both studies were a cross sectional study aimed to investigate students' attitude in different UiTM campuses and faculties in learning oral Arabic. They were quantitative in nature using a self-report questionnaire - The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) - developed by Gardner et al. (1985). They only used AMTB scales which were related to attitudes towards learning French and then were adapted to measure students' attitude towards learning Arabic. Students responded to a seven point Likert scale from 'not at all true of me' to 'very true of me'. Before distributing the questionnaires to students, the scales were translated into the Malay Language because all the students were Malays. All items were also modified according to the research objective which was to measure oral Arabic. A study had been carried out to determine the internal consistency between the items. The alpha value for these scales was .72 which was accepted by scholars (Sekaran, 2003).

Previous studies have shown that there were a few variables that influenced students' attitude which were prior experience and gender (Ghazali Yusri, et al., 2010b). Therefore, the samples from both groups were selected equally in numbers in term of prior experience and gender. These two studies have to be conducted separately using a different number of samples and analysis because the comparison between three clusters of faculties cannot be conducted by involving all UiTM campuses due to the absence of science and technology students, as well as lack of science social and humanities students in branch campuses. Meanwhile, in the second study, the selection of samples involved all UiTM campuses in order to generalize the findings to all UiTM campuses.

The first study involved 193 samples from students of Business Management Faculty which have been selected based on stratified random sampling technique. There were categorized into two groups, 102 samples were from Shah Alam Main Campus and 87 samples were from other branch campuses. All branch campuses were considered similar due to similar nature of learning environment as mentioned earlier.

The second study engaged with 237 samples which were selected based on stratified random sampling technique. Students were divided into three clusters of faculties. The first (N=79) was science and technology faculties, the second (N=79) was social science and humanities faculties and the third (N=79) was management and business faculties. The number of samples in all three clusters was equal (N=79) and the selection of students with different prior experience and gender in all three groups was also equal in number in order to eliminate potential influences in the results.

Results

Part 1

Table 1 shows that students' attitude in Shah Alam Main Campus (M=5.12, SD=.889), and other branch campuses (M=5.20, SD=.918) is slightly different. However, a T-test analysis for both groups (Table 2) shows no significant difference between both groups (t=-.583, p=.561). This result shows that there was no significant difference in UiTM students' attitude towards learning oral Arabic in all UiTM campuses.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitude towards Learning Oral Arabic

Scale	Shah Alam (N=106)		Others (N=87)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Attitude	5.12	.889	5.20	.918

Table 2: T-test - Tests of Between-Subjects Effect

Effect	Dependent Variable	t value	df	Sig.*
Different campuses	Attitude	-.583	191	.561

*significant at p< 0.05

Part 2

A one way between groups analysis of variance (one way ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of different faculties on students' attitude. Students were divided into three clusters of faculties. The first (N=79) was science and technology faculties, the second (N=79) was social science and humanities faculties and the third (N=79) was management and business faculties. The Levene's test for homogeneity of variances for the data is p=.389 (p>.05), showing that the homogeneity of variance assumption was not violated.

Table 3 shows that there was a statistically significant different effect for different faculties: F (2, 234) = 4.203, p=.016. A post hoc analysis (as shown in Table 4) had been carried out to determine the difference between groups to reach statistical significance using Tukey. It was found that group 1 (M=5.24, SD=.832) was significantly higher than group 2 (M= 4.84, SD=.988) while there was no significant difference between group 2 (M=4.84, SD=.988) and group 3 (M=5.13, SD=.884) as well as between group 1 (M=5.24, SD=.832) and group 3 (M=5.13, SD=.884).

Table 3: One way ANOVA - Tests of Between-Subjects Effect

Effect	Dependent Variable	F value	df1	df2	Sig.*
Different faculties	Attitude	4.203	2	234	.016*

*significant at p< 0.05

Table 4: Post hoc analysis: Multiple comparison between group

Faculty I	Faculty J	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.*
1	2	.4051	.14380	.015*
	3	.1171	.14380	.695
2	3	-.2880	.14380	.114

*significant at p< 0.05

Table 5: Descriptive analysis of effect (different faculties) for Attitude

Effect	Dependent Variables	Groups	N	M	SD
		1	79	5.24	.832
Different faculties	Attitude	2	79	4.84	.988
		3	79	5.13	.884

Discussion

The first study found that students' attitude towards learning oral Arabic was similar in Shah Alam Main Campus and other UiTM branch campuses, even though learning environment in Shah Alam is slightly different in terms of the number of total students' enrollment in this course and the existence of international Arab students. The finding showed that students had similar attitude towards leaning oral Arabic. This attitude is explained further by interviews. Based on a previous qualitative study (Ghazali Yusri, et al., 2010c), some respondents showed their positive attitude towards oral Arabic learning. Cognitively, they thought that Arabic is unique and beautiful. They were enthusiastic and amazed to speak Arabic even though by using easy sentences and words.

Students in all UiTM campuses also seemed to share a similar learning environment positively and negatively. Positively, there were some factors which influenced students' attitude such as religiosity, culture and the language status in Malay community (Csizer & Dörnyei, 2005; Norizah, 2005). Based on interviews from previous study (Ghazali Yusri, et al., 2010c), all respondents affirmed that oral Arabic is important to them. The importance of the language to them might due to the respondents' religion which is Islam. All respondents in all UiTM campuses are Muslims and they had been exposed to the importance of Arabic through their rituals such as reciting al-Quran and prayers.

In addition, the cultural factor in Malaysia which uses this language very frequently in daily activities might cause them to get used to Arabic. Learning Arabic in Malaysia indeed cannot be separated from its culture especially in Malay Muslim community. Islam has been identified to be one of the main motivation in learning Arabic (Kaseh, Nik Farakh, & Zeti Akhtar, 2010) as well as becomes one of the learning strategies that had been used very frequently by students (Kamarul Shukri, Mohd Amin, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Zamri, 2009). This noble and sacred status contributes to high positive attitude among students affectively and cognitively, similar to previous studies (Csizer & Dörnyei, 2005; Norizah, 2005; Rueda & Chen, 2005).

Meanwhile, there were some factors that had been identified to influence negatively to students' attitude conatively. Firstly, peers' perception towards Arabic practices. Based on interviews (Ghazali Yusri, et al., 2010c), some of them especially non Arabic course takers seemed to have negative impression towards students who practiced oral Arabic outside the classrooms, thus making those students feel upset and unpleasant in speaking Arabic. They preferred to speak Arabic with their regular speaking partners which it might limit their chances to use the language orally. This finding supported Ghaith and Diab (2008) who found that students hesitated to use their language in their learning environment when they were feeling depressed and annoyed. If students' community perception towards Arabic language practices becomes positive, then students' conative attitude towards speaking will be positive too, and it will encourage them to speak Arabic, similar to previous studies such as Taha (2007), Ghaith and Diab (2008) as well as Young (2005). Taha (2007) investigated students' attitude towards Arabic after the September 11 incident. He concluded that international students' attitude towards Arabic was more positive as compared to American students due to their higher use of the language. Ghaith and Diab

(2008) concluded that students who were enthusiastic in their learnings and their interactions with peers and teachers showed more positive attitude towards language learning.

On the other hand, Young (2005) stated that faculties which offered more interaction opportunities among students will contribute to more positive attitude among students in language learning. Through interviews, the oral Arabic use among UiTM students was still not encouraging, and they admitted that they were still lack of oral practices. Some students also admitted that they only studied the course when exams were just around the corner. It seemed that all students in all UiTM campuses experienced similar experiences in learning Arabic and have similar characteristics which contributed to similar level of their attitude. It seemed that students' enrollment number in the course and the existence of some international Arab students in Shah Alam Main Campus did not become influent factors that affect students' attitude towards learning.

On the other hand, the second study found that among three clusters of faculties, science and technology students possessed the highest level of attitude compared to another two clusters. In addition, they recorded a significantly higher level of attitude than social science and humanities students, but not with management and business students.

The various faculties which students belonged to might influence students' attitude in some perspectives. Firstly, different faculties implied different prerequisites to students who enroll in their courses. Science and technology faculties concerned more on students' high school results in science and mathematics subjects while social science and humanities, on the other hand, stressed on humanities subjects. The different prerequisites and concern might affect students' attitude in learning due to their preference in study. On the other hand, the different nature of learning in different faculties might also influence students' way of thinking and study. To study science courses might acquire different learning strategies compared to study social science courses. Their way of study might influence the way they study oral Arabic and it might affect their attitude as well. This assumption is supported by Feather (1988) who found that students' enrollment in humanities, science social and science faculties was related to their expectancy and task value towards science and mathematics. Students who have higher perception and task value towards their ability in mathematics chose to register in science faculties while on the other hand, students who have higher perception and task value towards English chose to enroll in humanities.

Interviews with subject lecturers in UiTM also supported this finding. They affirmed that students in certain faculties were very weak and possessed low attitude towards learning oral Arabic compared to some other faculties. This situation influenced lecturers' motivation in teaching and also the use of teaching techniques and strategies in the classrooms. It supported Morris (2005) who found that lecturers' perception towards students in two different classrooms influenced their teaching approaches and furthermore influenced the selection of activities and students' effort in learning. These two classrooms, namely honors class and nonhonor class, had been used two different approaches whereas students in the first classroom were noticed to be more prepared to get involved in communicative learning environment which was based on more spontaneous and informal dialogues, while students in the second classroom were noticed to be not well prepared in learning, thus making lecturers to use more formal and guided conversation rather than spontaneous and informal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, UiTM students' attitude towards oral Arabic learning was similar in all UiTM campuses in Malaysia. They shared similar attitude despite of some differences in their learning environment. However, students' attitude was different between science and technology faculties and social science and humanities faculties, which might need a different approach in teaching and learning of oral Arabic.

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