



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***EFFECTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE INSTRUCTION ON
ENGLISH COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND ORAL SKILLS
AMONG MALAY ESL LEARNERS***

MARY THOMAS A/P T.O.THOMAS

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By

MARY THOMAS A/P T.O.THOMAS

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2017

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DEDICATION

I dedicate the pages of this academic work to my husband and children whose unconditional love and support has enabled me to make my dreams a reality.

To my parents who moulded the person I am today. My late mother instilled in me the spirit of perseverance to achieve goals in life and my father taught me to trust God in all that I do. Abiding by these qualities in life and with both their blessings, I have achieved the fruits of my labour.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2017

Chairman : Nooreen Noordin, PhD
Faculty : Educational Studies

Many graduates today face difficulties to secure jobs upon graduation due to poor English language proficiency and communication skills. The Malaysian Education Blueprint specifies that tertiary institutions need to address these shortcomings. These institutions are also expected to mould the future workforce into holistic individuals not only intellectually but also ethically and spiritually to meet market demands. This study explores the concept of emotional intelligence as a means to achieve this vision as emotional intelligence (EI) is viewed as a greater measure of overall success in life than mental capacities. The main objective of the study was to explore the effects of emotional intelligence instruction on communicative behaviour specifically among Malay tertiary learners and determine the impact of socio-cultural influence on their communicative behaviour. This quasi-experimental study involved two intact groups of forty students each enrolled in an English for Occupational Purpose (EOP) class. The intervention for the experimental group was based on the Emotional Learning System proposed by Nelson and Low (2011) while the control group continued with the conventional EOP lessons. A correlation design was also utilised within the study to explore the strength of the relationship between the main variables. The results indicate a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and communication apprehension with the domains of intrapersonal skills having the strongest impact followed by leadership and self-management skills. The same three domains of EI have a positive correlation with communication skills but the leadership domain had the greatest influence. The results of the paired-sample test indicate a reduction in communication apprehension for only the experimental group. For communication skills, both groups improved in the oral discussion test but only the experimental group improved in public speaking. This means that EI intervention can assist learners to overcome

their oral anxiety and increase their confidence in public speaking contexts. The evidence from the interview indicates that exposure to the language, cultural identity, socio-economic background and religious practices influence Malay learners' communicative behaviour. The study provides optimistic findings on the potential benefits of an EI curriculum for students at all levels. Adopting EI within the language curriculum will allow learners to delve into their inner-selves and proceed through a journey of self-discovery to emotionally intelligent behaviour. The ability to use both their emotional and cognitive intelligences to regulate their behavior will benefit them not only academically but also professionally.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN PENERAPAN KECERDASAN EMOSI KE ATAS KERESAHAN
BERKOMUNIKASI SERTA KEMAHIRAN LISAN BAHASA INGGERIS
SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR MELAYU**

Oleh

MARY THOMAS A/P T.O.THOMAS

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Ramai graduan kini menghadapi kesukaran untuk mendapatkan pekerjaan selepas tamat pengajian kerana lemah dalam kemahiran bahasa dan komunikasi. Pelan Tindakan Pendidikan Malaysia menyatakan bahawa institusi-institusi pengajian tinggi perlu meningkatkan aspek-aspek kelemahan ini dalam graduan. Pada masa yang sama mereka juga perlu membentuk tenaga kerja masa hadapan menjadi individu yang menyeluruh bukan sahaja secara intelek tetapi juga dari segi etika dan rohani untuk memenuhi permintaan pasaran. Kajian ini meneroka konsep kecerdasan emosi sebagai satu cara untuk mencapai visi ini kerana kecerdasan emosi dilihat sebagai ukuran keseluruhan kejayaan dalam hidup berbanding kecerdasan mental. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat hubungan antara kecerdasan emosi dan tingkah laku komunikasi khususnya dalam kalangan pelajar Melayu di institusi pengajian tinggi dan menentukan kesan pengaruh sosio-budaya ke atas tingkah laku komunikasi mereka. Kajian kuasi eksperimen ini melibatkan empat puluh orang pelajar dalam dua kumpulan yang berasingan yang telah mendaftar untuk kursus English for Occupational Purpose (EOP). Intervensi untuk kumpulan eksperimen adalah berasaskan Sistem Pembelajaran Emosi (Emotional Learning System) yang dicadangkan oleh Nelson dan Low (2011) manakala kumpulan kawalan meneruskan pelajaran EOP mereka secara konvensional. Satu rekabentuk korelasi juga telah diguna pakai dalam kajian ini untuk meneroka kekuatan hubungan kait antara pemboleh ubah yang utama. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan hubungan negatif yang signifikan antara kecerdasan emosi dan keresahan komunikasi dengan domain kemahiran intrapersonal yang mempunyai kesan yang paling ketara diikuti kemahiran kepimpinan dan kemahiran pengurusan sendiri. Ketiga-tiga domain Kecerdasan Emosi (EI) tersebut mempunyai korelasi yang positif dengan kemahiran berkomunikasi

tetapi domain kepimpinan mempunyai pengaruh yang terbesar. Hasil daripada ujian sampel berpasangan itu menunjukkan pengurangan dalam keresahan komunikasi untuk kumpulan eksperimen sahaja. Bagi kemahiran komunikasi, kedua-dua kumpulan meningkat pencapaian mereka dalam ujian lisan berbentuk perbincangan tetapi hanya kumpulan eksperimen yang telah meningkat pencapaian mereka dalam ujian pengucapan awam. Ini bermakna bahawa intervensi EI boleh membantu pelajar untuk mengatasi keresahan berkomunikasi secara lisan dan meningkatkan keyakinan mereka dalam konteks pengucapan awam. Bukti-bukti daripada temu bual yang telah dijalankan mengesahkan bahawa pendedahan kepada bahasa, identiti budaya, latar belakang sosio-ekonomi dan amalan-amalan keagamaan mempengaruhi perlakuan komunikasi pelajar Melayu. Kajian ini menonjolkan penemuan optimistik mengenai potensi faedah kurikulum yang merangkumi aspek EI untuk pelajar pada semua tahap. Menerima pakai EI dalam kurikulum bahasa akan memberi peluang kepada pelajar untuk menyelami batin mereka dan menempuh perjalanan untuk mengenali diri dan melangkah ke arah tingkah laku emosi yang cerdas. Kebolehan untuk menggunakan kedua-dua kecerdasan emosi dan kognitif mereka untuk mengawal perlakuan mereka akan memberi manfaat kepada mereka bukan sahaja dalam bidang akademik tetapi juga secara profesional.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 27 February 2017 to conduct the final examination of Mary Thomas a/p T.O.Thomas on her thesis entitled "Effects of Emotional Intelligence Instruction on English Communication Apprehension and Oral Skills among Malay ESL Learners" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Communication Apprehension
CS	Communication Skills
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EI	Emotional Intelligence
ELS	Emotional Learning System
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
ESAP	Emotional Skills Assessment Process
ESL	English as a Second Language
FLA	Foreign Language Anxiety
ICC	Intra Class Correlation Coefficient
MEB	Malaysian Education Blueprint
PRCA	Personal Report of Communication Apprehension
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi MARA

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the main thrust of this research and it is divided into several sections. The first section is an introduction to the topic with the relevant background that supports the need for this study. In the second section, the research problem is described and this is then linked to the next section which highlights the objectives of the study as well as the research questions. The following section of the chapter focuses on the significance of the study which then proceeds to the section that states the limitations of the study. The final section of the chapter provides the definition of the key terms used in this study.

1.2 Background of the Study

Communicating orally in an efficient manner requires both the ability to convey meaning and the confidence to use the language for various purposes in different situations. However, in the second language environment, learners are not able to master this type of competence and confidence in the language as they also have to deal with their internal mechanisms like motivation, personality types, learning behaviour and external factors like socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and exposure to the language. (Young, 1991; Francis & Thomas, 2005). These variables continue to affect language learning endeavours of second language learners even up to tertiary levels of learning and many of these learners manifest traces of anxiety when learning the second language and in using the language for communicative purposes. However, the sad reality is that the ability to communicate effectively in the English language is the crucial ingredient needed to secure employment after graduation. Second language learners even up to tertiary levels of learning continue to be affected by these variables and it has an impact on their journey as second language learners. Although these learners are aware of the importance of English for their future, they are extremely anxious and unwilling to use this language for communicative purposes (Che Musa, Koo & Azman, 2012).

Despite having had eleven long years of exposure to the language in schools and being taught using the communicative approach, Malaysian learners are still not able to communicate fluently in the English language (Charles Spawa & Hassan, 2013; Darmi & Albion, 2013). Research on the reasons for this phenomenon has revealed that motivation is a key factor. In fact, studies that explored the motivational factors for studying English among Malaysian learners have revealed that these learners are only extrinsically motivated in

learning the language especially for examination results and career opportunities in the future (Atef & Munir, 2009). In addition, a study by Ming, Ling and Jaafar (2011) found that secondary school students are not intrinsically motivated to learn the English language for reasons such as “self-development, communication purposes and integration into the L2 community” (p.51). This lack of intrinsic motivation to use the English language in their daily interactions impedes the development of fluency in the language (Gentner, 2016) and these learners continue to behave in the same way when they enter tertiary institutions.

The issue of language anxiety especially communication apprehension (CA) has attracted a lot of research as educators are aware that a conducive atmosphere that is learner-centred will be beneficial for learners (Darn, 2007; Gentner, 2016). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) argue that language learning within the classroom context can generate situation specific anxiety which they describe as “an undifferentiated, negative affective response to some experience in the language class. With repeated occurrences, anxiety becomes reliably associated with the language class and differentiated from other contexts” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 297). They later defined FLA as “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language (L2) contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284).

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) define foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) as “the special communication apprehension permeating foreign language learning [derived] from the personal knowledge that one will almost certainly have difficulty understanding others and making oneself understood” (p. 127). The implication here is that as language is used as a means of expression, learning a foreign language in a formal classroom context is filled with anxiety as learners may have difficulty understanding others and expressing their own thoughts. Communication apprehension in language learning is characterised by a reluctance to talk or shyness in communicating and is “a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours . . . arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.128) and this has been identified as one of the major obstacles to acquisition and fluent production of foreign languages. Similarly, in the second language classroom, the concept of communication apprehension is taking credence. Dewaele (2005) states that second language acquisition needs to account for the psychological and emotional dimensions of second language learning. This emotional environment in class includes all aspects such as the internal aspects within the learners like feelings of trust and belonging as well as external factors that affect learning like the physical environment, the social environment and the cultural setting. This means that the context in which the learning takes place will play an important role in influencing each other and shaping what happens within it.

University students who suffer from communication apprehension face difficulties in securing jobs upon graduation. Research by the National Economic Action Council (NEC) and Socio-Economic Research Centre (SERC) has identified that many graduates in Malaysia remain unemployed due to poor communication skills (Abdul Razak, 2005; Chew, 2013). To overcome this lack of communication skills among graduates, the government of Malaysia implemented a 1Malaysia training scheme in June 2011 which aimed to firm up the soft skills of graduates and improve their marketability (Augustin, 2011). Similarly, universities have stepped up measures to improve communication skills but such training will not be successful if the root causes of communication anxiety are not identified. The usual practice in most universities is to introduce subjects that help develop overall communication skills, but, Hassall, Joyce, Ottewill, Arquero and Donoso (2000) note that “communication apprehensions cannot be overcome by techniques aimed at the development of communication skills” (p.93). Instead, they recommend that apprehensive emotions in individuals must be reduced first before application of communication building techniques to ensure improvement in their communicative performance. Based on Hassall et al’s (2000) statement, it may be worthwhile to consider improving learners’ emotional intelligence (EI) levels as a means to lower CA. This is because with emotional intelligence skills, learners would be able to monitor their own feelings and those of others more effectively and use their judgment and reasoning to deal with stressful situations (Mayer & Salovey, 1990).

1.2.1 Need for Emotional Intelligence Instruction in Tertiary Institutions

According to Goleman (1998), it is emotional quotient or emotional intelligence which sets apart a successful individual from a less successful one. He states that, “we are being judged by a new yardstick: not just how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other” (p.3). There is increasing evidence on the importance of incorporating personal skills and emotional intelligence into academic and student development programs (Low & Nelson, 2005). Research with college students has consistently revealed that improving emotional intelligence contributes towards personal excellence, college achievement, personal well-being, work performance and leadership (Nelson, Low & Vela, 2003). Students who have strengths in both academic and emotional aspects are more likely to demonstrate positive behaviour which leads to achievement of goals and overall success in life. Howard (2009) predicts that the multiple benefits of emotional intelligence skills would enable individuals with high emotional intelligence skills to be less prone to suffer from communication apprehension as opposed to those with low emotional intelligence. He also concludes that people with high EI would naturally create a warm surrounding enabling those who interact with them to feel comfortable and be less apprehensive.

The National Education Policy implemented in 1989 has already integrated the development of emotional intelligence in learners through its curriculum for both primary and secondary school learners. The Educational Philosophy clearly states that learners' intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical domains must be developed in tandem to produce well-balanced individuals. Although this holistic development is enshrined in the curriculum, many educators over the years have paid more attention to the intellectual/cognitive domain due to the over emphasis on performance in major examinations at the school level. This is also the case with language teaching in Malaysian schools, as there is an emphasis on the teaching of grammar skills rather than the communicative aspects of language learning (Che Musa, Koo & Azman, 2012; Charles Spawa & Hassan, 2013). The excellent performance of students in exams is often perceived as an indicator of not only the students' but also the schools' success. Furthermore, developing emotional intelligence is often considered the responsibility of moral or religious teachers which is a fallacy that has to be corrected (Hassan & Sim, 2013).

At the tertiary level, unlike the school system, the incorporation of emotional intelligence is done within a hidden curriculum. The syllabus of specific subjects does not specify the need to inculcate values or develop emotional intelligence. However, these aspects may be incidentally referred to when the need arises. As tertiary institutions prepare students for positions of responsibility and leadership, there is an increased interest and recognition of the importance of the contributions of the emotional mind. According to Andres (1993), if educators want students to develop their inherent potential to learn, they must pay attention to the affective variables such as anxiety, motivation, self-esteem and inhibition because these represent inner needs of learners which cannot be neglected. Whitaker (1995) adds that understanding and affirming learners in the classroom will boost their confidence levels and help overcome their fears in learning.

In addition, it is believed that individuals who have high EI levels are better able to regulate their emotional reactions over time, manage stress, and be assertive (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Therefore, it is hypothesized that improving learners' EI levels would raise learners' confidence levels and their communicative abilities and decrease the likelihood of communication apprehension when having to speak in the second language.

According to the report of a market research on industrial needs in terms of English competency for entry level employment by Prestariang Systems (2011), Malaysian employers rate English competency as the most critical skill lacking among local graduates. In addition, the employers indicate that apart from knowledge and specific competencies in technical aspects, most employers want their employees to possess good "communication, social, emotional and critical thinking skills". The same report also indicates that the

skills of speaking (98%), listening (77%) and writing (63%) are the three crucial language skills that are evaluated when recruiting employees. This research report by Prestariang (2011) establishes the necessity for institutions of higher learning to ensure that their learners are equipped with fluency and confidence to communicate in the English language. However, this will not be possible if learners suffer from communication apprehension. McCroskey (1983) cited in Francis and Miller (2008) emphasizes that individuals with high communication apprehension would face difficulties in developing communication skills and overall communication competence. This is because such individuals would more likely avoid communication situations leaving them with less opportunity to improve their ability in this area. Tertiary institutions in Malaysia have continued to offer a variety of skill-building courses to ensure that learners are ready to meet the demands of the industry but the sad fact is that many graduates are rejected for job placement due to poor oral communication skills (Abdul Razak, 2005; Chew, 2013).

A research by Francis and Miller (2008) on the communication apprehension of first generation college students at two year institutions revealed that students used several strategies to alleviate communication apprehension. Some of these strategies mentioned by these students are in fact components of the emotional intelligence model like intrapersonal communication, assertiveness and self-regulation. In addition, there were a large number of students who were unsure of the specific strategies to be employed in managing high apprehension levels. This clearly indicates that there is a need to train students to handle communication apprehension effectively and this possibly could be done successfully with emotional intelligence training. In the local context, a study by Mohamed Khatib and Maarof (2014) identified that learners with a high level of self-efficacy are more confident in oral communication, thus they encourage educators to focus on this aspect when teaching oral skills. Idrus and Saleh (2008) recommend that verbal persuasion and encouragement be used as a means to boost self-efficacy in learners. Emotional Intelligence infused instruction has the potential to assist students to improve in these aspects.

Brackett, Rivers and Salovey (2011) reviewed the concept of emotional intelligence and highlighted that the ability to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions is crucial for “personal, social, academic and workplace success”. They stress that emotional intelligence can be taught and developed. Their ‘RULER’ approach which is the acronym for recognizing, understanding, labelling, expressing and regulating emotions when used in the classroom created a positive learning environment. In short, a systematic method of inculcating social and emotional learning could have a long lasting impact not only in the individuals undergoing the training but also on the quality of graduates produced by educational institutions which have included such an emotional intelligence training programme within their curriculum.

Humanising education especially at the tertiary level of learning will ensure that learners develop not only inner confidence but also the softer non-technical skills which include both personal and interpersonal skills such as motivation, communicative ability, empathy and team-building. Learners who have undergone such a curriculum will have an added advantage when looking for job placements as more employers are looking for these criteria in their employees. In short, there is wider acceptance that learning and applying EI will contribute to academic and career success. Moreover, this sort of learning is in line with the the third shift in the Malaysian Education Blueprint which is focused on developing “values driven Malaysians”. According to the blueprint, developing values is crucial for Malaysian learners due to the complexities and challenges that they have to deal with within the environment. To be successful in life, learners must be equipped with not only with knowledge but also “ethics and morality, as well as the appropriate behaviours, mindsets, cultural and civilizational literacy to advance them to a high level of personal well-being” (Ministry of Education,2012, p. E-14). It is only such holistic individuals who can truly contribute to the betterment of the nation.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Given the importance of good English oral communication skills for both academic purposes and in the job environment, it is crucial that tertiary institutions equip learners with adequate mastery of oral communication skills. However, despite the efforts of universities towards this aim, there are still many university students who fail to meet the expected target in terms of English communication skills. Darmi & Albion (2013) in their study state that besides attitudes of the learners, it is their inability to overcome accumulated language anxiety from their schooling years that hinders their participation in language lessons at the tertiary level. They further add that those in urban areas cover more aspects of communication, including the four skills and grammar and are therefore more comfortable to use the language with their family and friends in comparison to those from rural areas. The problem of poor proficiency in spoken English and the tendency to avoid using the language is common among Malay learners due to various factors. Hence, it is necessary to describe the scenario of Malays as ESL learners and the relationship between their cultural context and their communicative abilities in the English language.

1.3.1 Malays as English Language Learners

Jamali (1994) conducted a study among 441 Form Four Malay learners from selected schools in Selangor to explore the relationship between exposure to English and their competence in the language. His findings indicate that many Malay learners come from a “non-supportive environment” where there is minimal use of the English language. In addition, the study by Mahyuddin, Yaakub & Elias (1994) on anxiety levels in learning English among first year

Malaysian undergraduates in a public university, found that Malay undergraduates were more anxious than Chinese and Indians in learning all the four language skills. According to Baharum, Tretiakov and Kinshuk (2007), the proficiency among Malays in the English language is generally lower than the Malaysian Chinese and Indians not only due to their limited exposure to the English language but also because of the high concentration of Malays in rural areas where there is a lack of qualified teachers and instructional materials (Baharum et. al, 2007; Jamali, 1994). Therefore, it is common to find the Malays in the urban areas more proficient in the English language than their counterparts from rural areas. Rajadurai (2009) reports that Malay students also have very little opportunities to communicate in the English language within the community as speakers who tried to do so were regarded as “rude, offensive, showing off, patronizing and arrogant” (p. 78). This scenario is particularly evident in the institution that the researcher is employed in as the student population is exclusively Malay with a minority of indigenous ethnic groups from East Malaysia. In the teaching experience of the researcher, students are reluctant to speak with their peers in the English language within the classroom even during classroom tasks and the likelihood of using the language outside the classroom reduces even further. Even students from urban areas are reluctant to speak with their peers in English for fear of being ostracized (Ming, 2004). The general tendency is to communicate with one another in Malay as it is the accepted medium of communication. Avoidance of communication in English is detrimental to the overall development of communication skills as there is no attempt to use and improve the ability in the language unless it is forced upon them. In classrooms, most students are anxious when they are required to make presentations or conduct classroom interactions in English as they lack confidence in using the language.

The findings of Rajadurai’s study also reveal that the English speaking community is not tolerant of the Malay learners’ attempts to speak in English unless they prove to be proficient and comfortable in the language. In fact, it was found that in most cases, the non-Malay participant preferred to switch to speaking in Malay with Malay speakers who had problems communicating in the English language. Baharum et al. (2007) also state that the Malays are hostile towards the English language due to their resentment towards colonization by the British during the pre-independence era. Furthermore, some nationalists object the change of education policies that give more prominence to English rather than the national language as it was with the implementation of the use of English to teach Maths and Science in Malaysian schools in 2003. This is because they felt it would compromise the importance of the national language (Tan & Santhiram, 2007). Another factor affecting the mastery of the English language among Malays is the fact that the majority of them are employed in the civil service where Malay is the predominant language (Ting, 2003). Many Malay students also aspire to work in the public sector as the emphasis on the English language is more heavily sought after in the private sector.

1.3.2 Cultural Context and Communication Skills

Pryor, Butler and Boehringer (2005) relating the research done by anthropologist, Edward Hall in 1959 state that the communication pattern of individuals is highly related to their cultural origin. According to their article, there are two different patterns of communication referred to as “high” and “low” context cultures. The distinctive difference between the two cultures is that the “high” cultures value “group harmony over individual assertiveness” while the “low” context ones emphasise “directness in communication” (Pryor et al., 2005, p. 248). Most European cultures are in the domain of “low” context cultures while most Asian cultures are defined as “high” context cultures. The comparative study conducted by Pryor et al. (2005) with Japanese and American students hoped to identify if communication apprehension was the product of nature (personality traits and inherited temperament) or nurture (environmental factors, culture modelling and reinforcement). Those categorized as “high” context cultures are expected to exhibit high levels of communication apprehension and this was confirmed in their research. This means that elements of nurture in the environment have a great capacity to affect the communication patterns of members in society as well as their emotional set-up as individuals. However, it must be highlighted that the communication pattern exhibited by individuals is not merely a reactive response to the environment as many individuals may choose to be different than others in their society. Nevertheless, learning how to deal with communication apprehension is crucial as Hassall et al. (2000) note that communication building techniques will not result in improved communicative performance. They recommend that educators focus on ways to reduce communication apprehension before embarking on skill development techniques.

Lailawati (2005) in her study explains that although contemporary Malays through education and socialization have changed some of their traditional practices, a large majority still hold on to their values, beliefs and practices and hence by Hall’s characteristics still fall within the category of high-context culture. This means that Malay learners would be more concerned about group harmony rather than individual assertiveness. Based on the historical background of the Malay learners and the problems faced by them in learning the second language, there is a high probability that their communication apprehension levels would also be relatively high. If nurture is confirmed to be the main culprit which inhibits communication, then it is important to establish a method that can enable learners to manage their own apprehension at the same time develop their communicative ability. Understanding the psyche of Malay learners and their problems with communication apprehension and overall communication skills will provide a systematic framework to inculcate social and emotional learning together with communication skills building. If EI is found to significantly reduce communication apprehension and improve communication skills, then efforts can be taken to incorporate EI training within the language curriculum. Education at the tertiary level is still lacking in developing holistic individuals.

This experimental study will identify key areas that are improved with raised EI levels and propose a technique that will enable English language educators to raise the EI levels of their learners. Doing so will not only have a long lasting impact on the individuals undergoing the training but also on the quality of graduates produced by educational institutions.

1.3.3 Influence of Attitudinal Variables on Communicative Behaviour

Attitudinal variables such as motivation, self-esteem, and anxiety are related to success in second language acquisition. The learners experience difficulties in second language acquisition when they have low motivation, little self-confidence, and high anxiety. In the case of Malay learners, there is a likelihood that those with low language competencies may suffer from such anxieties. A study by Mahyuddin, Yaakub & Elias (1994) on first year Malaysian tertiary learners found that Malay learners rated their grammar skills to be weak which naturally increased their anxiety levels for productive skills like speaking and writing.

Educators constantly try to create a conducive language learning environment, but, extrinsic motivation like improving classroom atmosphere can only go as far as to increase learners' readiness to learn the second language. This sort of motivation will not have a lasting effect on learners as compared to intrinsic motivation or internal motivation that comes from within the learner (Dornyei, 1994; Gentner, 2016). It is therefore crucial to help learners discover themselves and assist them to be more autonomous in their learning. Increasing learners' emotional intelligence level will assist them with intrapersonal skills which include self-esteem and stress management (Nelson & Low, 2003). Nelson and Low (2003) defined self-esteem as the learned ability of confidence to achieve individual goals while stress management is defined as the ability to manage stress, pressure and anxiety in life and work. Although communication apprehension involves both spoken and written communication, the focus of this research is limited to only oral communication apprehension. This is because it has been identified by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) that anxiety level is far higher for learners when faced with situations that require oral communication than those that require written communication. Studies in Malaysia on anxiety also produced similar results with regards to oral communication (Mahyuddin et al., 1994; Norhashimah, 2007).

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of infusing emotional intelligence instruction in an English for occupational purposes course. Its main objectives are to examine if English communication skills specifically oral presentation skills and interactions in group communication can be enhanced through emotional intelligence instruction. It also hopes to identify

if such an instruction would help them deal with their anxieties in performing such tasks. The objectives of the study are to:

- 1 determine the emotional intelligence characteristics of Malay tertiary learners.
- 2 determine the level of communication apprehension among Malay tertiary learners.
- 3 analyse the relationship among the domains of emotional intelligence and their impact on English communication apprehension and oral skills of Malay tertiary learners.
- 4 investigate if oral English proficiency affects the relationship among the variables of emotional intelligence, communication apprehension, and communicative performance in oral skills.
- 5 examine the effects of emotional intelligence intervention on English communication apprehension levels.
- 6 establish if emotional intelligence intervention affects communicative performance in oral skills.
- 7 explore the feedback from Malay learners' of different oral English proficiency levels regarding the influence of socio-cultural context on their communicative behaviour.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on its objectives, the study attempts to address the following research questions:

- 1 What are the emotional intelligence skills characteristics of Malay tertiary learners?
- 2 What is the communication apprehension level among Malay tertiary learners?
- 3 Which domain of emotional intelligence has a significant effect on English communication apprehension and oral skills among Malay tertiary learners?
- 4 Is there a relationship between oral English proficiency of Malay tertiary learners and the variables of emotional intelligence, communication apprehension, and communicative performance in oral skills?
- 5 To what extent does emotional intelligence intervention affect Malay tertiary learners' communication apprehension levels?
- 6 To what extent does emotional intelligence intervention affect Malay tertiary learners' communicative performance in oral skills?
- 7 What is the feedback from Malay learners' of different oral English proficiency levels regarding the influence of socio-cultural context on their communicative behaviour?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Many ESL students are reluctant to speak in English in the second language classroom. To understand students better and provide an appropriate language learning environment, teachers need to take into account their students' emotional intelligence. In this study both communication apprehension and emotional intelligence are examined. Thus, the results of this study will be of special interest to those who are on the front line of education such as teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, and language program directors. It is significant because emotional intelligence skills have been identified to influence foreign language classroom anxiety but the relationship between EI levels and oral communication anxiety has not been fully explored.

Additionally, the research results will serve as a guide for second language teachers. It may provide a different way to understand students who learn English as a second language. Based on this new understanding, language teachers can develop different strategies to make language acquisition less stressful for learners who lack confidence in the language. It is expected that raising learners' EI levels will motivate learners to cast aside their fears and enable them to rise above all such inhibitions. If EI is proven to enhance communicative competence, then efforts can be taken to incorporate EI training within the language curriculum specifically at tertiary institutions.

Education at the tertiary level is still lacking in developing holistic individuals. The National Education Philosophy has specified that the nation's education should focus on creating individuals who are balanced intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically but over the years, there has been more emphasis on the cognitive domain and the attempt to rectify this shortcoming is the recent introduction of the Education blueprint (2015-2025). This experimental study explores further the contribution of the emotional domain especially to identify the key areas that are improved with raised emotional intelligence (EI) levels. The results will serve as a guide to enable English language educators to raise the EI levels of their learners. A course design which includes social and emotional skills within a communication curriculum will provide ample opportunities to develop students' emotional intelligence along with their ability to apply such principles in occupational contexts. Furthermore this is in line with the latest development in the educational arena, which has a special focus on developing "values driven Malaysians". Learners who have been imbued with universal values like integrity, justice, compassion and strong leadership skills will stand as towering personalities in the future. In addition, such a course will also equip learners with the essential soft skills that are required by the industry. This will be beneficial for tertiary learners as it will improve their marketability and increase their opportunities to secure jobs. Learners who have undergone such a curriculum will have the added advantage when looking for employment as more and more employers are looking for such criteria in

candidates seeking for job placements. In fact some organizations have begun to utilize emotional intelligence tests as a means to select employees for jobs that need a high level of personal and interpersonal skills (Stuller, 1997). There is also wider acceptance today that learning and applying EI will contribute to academic achievement (Chew, Zain & Hassan, 2013; Stottlemeyer, 2002; Hassan, Sulaiman, & Ishak, 2009) and career success (Kunnanatt, 2008; Morehouse, 2007) as emotionally intelligent learners are those who can withstand the pressures and challenges in life (Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

As this study also includes qualitative data obtained through the semi-structured interviews with Malay learners of different oral proficiency levels, it will give a more holistic view in establishing the impact of socio-cultural context on their oral proficiency levels and communicative behavior. In addition, the focus on the cultural group of Malays who are the target group in this study will give a clearer perspective on how to deal with inadequate communication skills and apprehensive behaviour among Malay learners. The findings of this study will be specifically beneficial to the public university where this research is conducted as the population of students consists predominantly of Malay learners. Identifying both the communication apprehension levels and EI levels of Malay learners and experimenting with the EI component within the language classroom as a means to overcome their communicative anxiety in the English language will help the university to increase the skills and potential of their graduates. Improved EI levels will help these graduates handle and express their emotions in an improved manner thereby reinforcing in them the ability to handle the pressures of work and life in general.

Finally, the outcome of this research could contribute towards the development of specific materials on EI which focus on the emotional aspects of learners. Such materials will assist learners to discover themselves and lead them to self-regulate their actions. When learners are given opportunities and the freedom to express their feelings and to share it explicitly with others, they get to understand themselves better, foster good relations with others, and reduce their stress and anxiety substantially within the classroom context.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study is focused on exploring the influence of emotional intelligence on communication anxiety and mastery of oral communication skills in the English language among Malay tertiary learners therefore, the findings of the study may not be applicable to those of other cultures, unless there exist similarities with the Malay culture. This study also does not attempt to be a

comprehensive study of second language learning; rather, it focuses on some factors that affect second language learning of university students.

The other limitation comes from the nature of the instrument to be used. Reliability of the data obtained through self-reports is a limitation as people may not be that accurate of own perceptions, beliefs and abilities. However, it must be noted that perceptions are the determiners which affect individuals' behaviour, hence the data is significant in the context of this study as it reveals the impact of perception in determining communicative behavior.

1.8 Operational Definitions of Major Terms

- **Emotional Intelligence (EI):** The definition of EI in this study is based on the definition by Nelson and Low (2003) who regard EI as a learned ability to think and act wisely by recognizing one's self worth, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, getting along and working well with others and handling the demands and stress of daily life and work effectively. The Emotional intelligence level is measured with the Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP) instrument developed by Nelson and Low (2011) which will assess four domains of EI skills namely; interpersonal , leadership, self-management and intrapersonal skills.
- **Interpersonal Skills** – the ability to act wisely in human relationships. This skill is focused on aspects of effective communication which includes effective emotional self-control. The competency areas grouped within interpersonal skills are assertion and the potential problem areas of aggression and deference which must be converted to anger management and anxiety management skills respectively (Nelson & Low, 2011). This competency aspect is measured by calculating its total score in the ESAP instrument.
- **Leadership Skills** – the ability to positively impact, persuade and influence others, and in general make a positive difference (Nelson, Low & Vela, 2003). The competency areas include comfort, empathy, decision making and leadership or positive influence (Nelson & Low, 2011). These skills are determined through the total scores obtained in the ESAP instrument for this domain.
- **Self-Management Skills** – the ability to successfully use personal energy and motivation to achieve goals in life. The competency areas grouped under these skills include drive strength, time management commitment ethic and the potential problem of change orientation which must be converted into the skill of positive change (Nelson & Low, 2011). The total scores obtained for this domain through the ESAP instrument is used as a measure for this competency.

- **Intrapersonal skills** – the ability to achieve a deeper self-understanding. It includes the competency areas of self-esteem and stress management (Nelson & Low, 2011). These skills are measured with the total scores obtained for this domain in the ESAP instrument.
- **Potential Problem Areas** – individual aspects of behaviour that is deemed unacceptable when dealing with others. The three potential problem areas include aggression, deference and change orientation. This is measured by the total scores obtained through the ESAP instrument for this aspect.
- **Communication Apprehension** – “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1984, p.13). In this study communication apprehension refers to the fear of either real or anticipated communication in the second language specifically the English language which will be measured by learners’ scores in the PRCA-24 test. In this study, this term is used as a synonym to the term ‘communication anxiety’.
- **Oral Skills** – the ability to express one’s ideas orally and understand the ideas expressed by others in oral communication. Students’ ability in oral communication skills will be assessed through their performance in the oral discussion and oral presentation tests. Their performance in the tests is tabulated using an oral assessment performance sheet which focuses on the three main components of task fulfillment, language and communicative ability.

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