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Perceptions of Foreign Language Study among KPTMAS Students.

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Abstract

This article is to determine the student perceptions of foreign language study (FL) in Kolej Poly-Tech Mara Alor Setar. A foreign language is also known as a second language. Case study method was used to explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of the student perceptions of foreign language study with very limited number of individuals as the subjects of the study. The researchers were becoming more concerned about the limitations of quantitative methods in providing holistic and in-depth explanations of the student perceptions of foreign language study. The data derived from in-depth interviews with eight students from two programs which are Diploma in Business Management and Diploma in Tourism Management and who had taken high school or college foreign language courses or both in this study. There were four categories of data: learners' perception and beliefs, common language learn on FL, factors that influences FL learning and evaluation of their own level of success in FL study. In general, some students report low estimates of their level of competency towards oral communication due to their lack of effort in the foreign language classroom.

Keywords: Perceptions, foreign language, holistic, qualitative

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, our world is a multicultural and globalized place. The possibility of communicating and interacting with people around the world is high with the inventions and improvement of the new technologies, combined with their applications and the Internet. Lambert and Peal (as cited in Gibbons, 1991, p.2) mention that having a second language also means having access to another world of people, ideas, way of thinking and literature. Language was views as a medium of knowledge for transferring and sharing among people whole over the world. The freedom to argue and express each other's thoughts and feelings with the views of certain ideas or concepts presented can be obtained through the language. Thus, the ability to communicate in a second language enable people to interact with each other and changes the way they perceived things and matters happening around them. Hence, they will develop further as a result from the knowledge transfer and sharing through the often interaction activities.

Due to globalization, speaking another language is not just an additional qualification, but it has quickly become a prerequisite for a successful career. The teaching and learning of foreign languages is inherently global. A foreign language is a language not widely spoken and used by the people of a community or nation. In order to satisfy global needs, the different nations of the world have become interdependent (Smit, 1993:162). Learning languages can contributes to mutual understanding, a sense of global citizenship and personal fulfilment. As a result of foreign language learning, students will appreciate different countries, cultures, communities and people. Linguistic and cultural competence will be the mark of the well-educated citizen of the 21st century (Genesee & Cloud, 1998:65). Brown (1994, p. 1) stated the learning of a second language is a complex process, involving a

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seemingly infinite number of variables. Gardner and Lambert (as cited in Brown, 1994, p. 168) claimed that motivation is a construct made up of certain attitudes and the most important of these is group specific, the attitude learners have toward the members of the cultural group whose language are learning. Additionally, understanding and communicating in other languages are lifelong skills for education, employment and leisure in this country and around the world.

According to the article “The Global Dimension: A Practical Handbook for Teacher Educators”, languages are part of the cultural richness of our society and the world in which we live and work. However, higher education students do not always know what is expected of them in the working life (e.g. Palviainen 2011, Fiilin 2013), which may affect their motivation to study languages in higher education institutions (e.g. Lantolf and Pavlenko 2001). Furthermore, different perceptions of language skills and language learning can have an impact on students’ motivation to study languages (e.g. Csizér and Kormos 2009, Mantle-Bromley 1995).

Student perceptions cover a variety of factors related to their foreign language experiences, including their opinions about teachers, views of instructional activities and approaches, and expressions of satisfaction with their progress in the classroom. There are many studies in foreign language literature about factors of concern, attitudes and beliefs, while other factors of the desired level of success in foreign language proficiency, attributions of success or failure are not much attention.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Design

This study was completed within the context of KPTM students experienced with foreign language courses. A qualitative case study was adopted as the methodological framework for this study. This is part of a larger initiative to explain the advantages that students should know in foreign language learning. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2009). Case study approach particularly suited to research questions that require a detailed understanding of social or organizational processes (Moll.S, 2014). Context is particularly important when trying to understand and explain an activity or event; it can be a rich source of data that allows the researcher to retain the meaningful characteristics of real life activity. This design fit the original study’s goal of achieving deep understanding of student perceptions of foreign language study toward a broad range of issues related to classroom atmosphere and instruction and to understand the effects of language courses on student perceptions on their views of their own ability to acquire a foreign language.

2.2 Participant

We recruited eight participants from college undergraduate students enrolled in two programs which are Diploma in Business Management and Diploma in Tourism Management and those who had taken high school or college foreign language courses or both in this study. Participants were recruited through our observation towards KPTM students who had taken college foreign language courses. Five of the participants are female and the rest are male. Participants among 19 to 23 years of age with different type of foreign language courses which are English, Arabic, Mandarin, French and Japanese. Overall, all the participants had studied English since the young age. The entire participants were selected randomly with no preference in age or gender.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection methods included semi-structured in depth interview. Interview is the most widely used technique for data-gathering, together with the retrieval of recorded data and one of the most common powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human being (Fontana & Frey, 1994). These studies are explanatory, exploratory and describing about student experience in learning different foreign language courses. The mean interview time was about 30 minutes per participant. The purpose of the interview is to probe the ideas of the participants about their perceptions towards foreign language study, in order to get an in-depth understanding of the issue from the explanation and discussion given by the respondent.

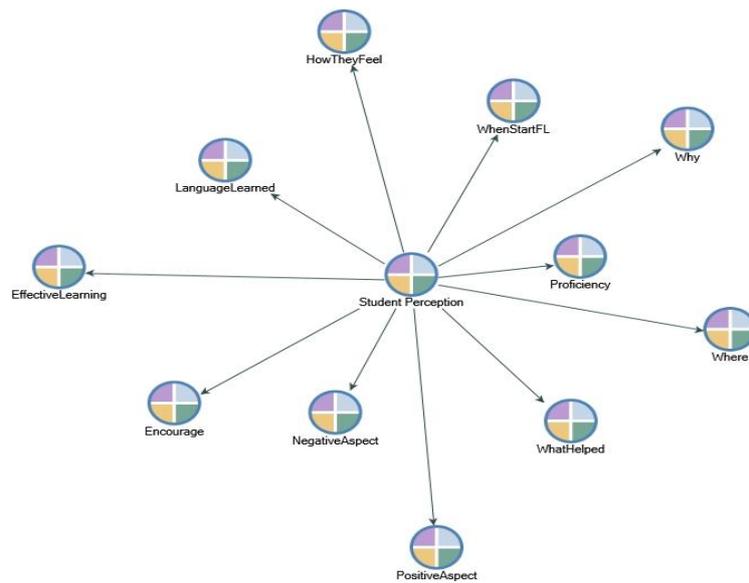


Fig. 2. Describe the Main theme and project structure of our interview.

From the diagram, we managed to group the answers into those categories.

Language Learned

Respondents mentioned all the languages that they have learnt. And there is commonality between all the languages that they have learnt between all the respondents and the most common language learned is English as the second language.

When, Where, Why they learn second language and What helped them to master the language

These feedbacks were collected, and we are able to further group it into one specific group (4W) where it is a combination of the common answers on when they started to learn FL, where did they learn FL, why do they choose to learn FL and what helped them to master the language. The results of the analysis are saying that most the respondents learnt FL during their childhood, it all started in their early age in kindergarten where by their parent is the main influence in providing them with the second language at an early age. Communication and interaction are the main factors that help our respondent to master the language faster at their early age. And by continuous learning, they manage to further enhance and improve their second language.

Proficiency

Most of the respondents are able to read, write and speak of the language that they have learnt. Although there are some of them which have more than 2 languages, they are still progressing to further improve their skill in communicating and understanding the language.

Positive and Negative Aspects

These feedbacks are collected in order to further understand the consequences on the method or the way that they learnt FL. Through these input, we are able to say that, our respondents are happy with the way they learn FL, which is highly using communication and direct interaction with the people or object that are related to the FL. But, there are three respondents who have given positive and negative aspects in FL.

Effective Learning

These inputs are group based on the suggestion that our respondents provided in order for others to improve the way others learn FL. Most the respondents are also suggesting the way that they have used to learn FL, which is through communication and direct interaction that have significant improvement to further enhance the FL knowledge and skill.

Encouragement and Feedback after acquiring FL

These information are also collected in order to know how our respondents felt upon acquiring or having a second language aside from their mother tongue and will they encourage other to learn FL. Based on the finding, all the respondents felt good upon learning FL, they have given positive feedback in learning FL and encourage others to pursue FL as their second language.

With the information collected and analyzed through cluster analysis and text analysis, we are able to further group the results into each segment as per figure below. Figure below described and are correlated with the grouping of each categories. Overall, the respondent comments are more critical of the experience in learning Foreign Language.

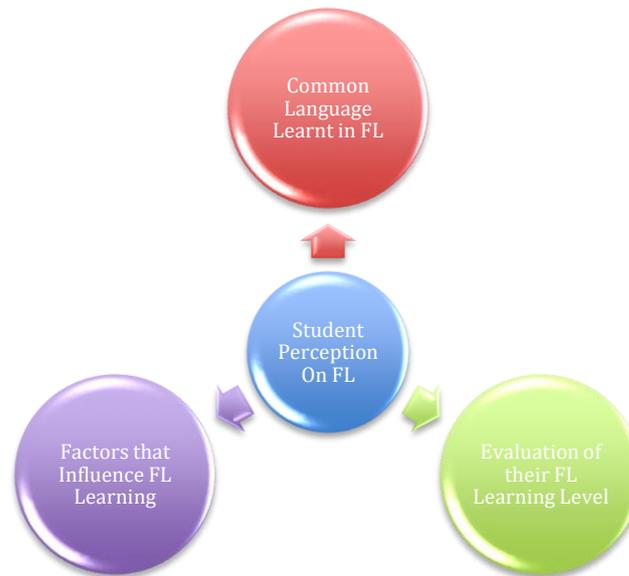


Fig. 3. Main finalize theme and results of the analysis

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1 Conclusion

From the study, we are able to identify learners' perception and beliefs, common language learned on FL, factors that influences FL learning and evaluation of their own level of success in FL study. Student preferred to learn another language aside their mother language. They believed that by learning FL, it can provide them with more knowledge which are available in that specific language by understanding the culture and also increase their own personal credibility for future enhancement. For example, by learning FL such as Arabic, it can help them with the direct translation upon reading the Quran and understand the context in depth without any other medium to enhance their understanding. A way to further improve FL learning is through direct interaction between student and the native speaker will increase their chance to acquire FL and improve their self-esteem and confidence level in communication with the native speaker or as their second language

4.2 Recommendation

Therefore, we would like to encourage other people to continue learning and progressing in our language skill. Then, we also can develop four key skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing. Besides, learning a foreign language and getting soaked into an entirely new culture and world view is the best way to be open-minded and understanding people. The foreign language requirements have more value than just learning a new language because they expand the bounds of education through the presentation of new cultures, a deeper understanding of language mechanisms, and critical thinking. As learning toward improving our skill, we are also enhancing and progressing forward towards a greater future in this globalization world.

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