

Communicative Readiness and Motivation among UNHCR Refugee Teachers of English in Malaysia

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Abstract

To explore communicative readiness and motivation among refugee teachers in Malaysia, 30 refugee teachers registered under UNHCR were recruited. Drawing on a quantitative approach, questionnaires consisting of 20 items adapted from McCroskey and Richmond's (2013) Willingness to Communicate Scale, Gardner's (2004) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and Fulmer's (2010) Organisational Communication Survey were distributed. The data analysis revealed that communication apprehension was negatively associated with willingness to communicate and anxious teachers were less willing to communicate with strangers and acquaintances. A negative relationship between interpersonal conversation subscale of communication apprehension and intrinsic motivation was also observed. Those who regarded learning English as important were more willing to converse in the said language. It is hoped that this study could serve as an introductory guide to NGOs and existing voluntary groups when designing materials, syllabus and curriculum specifications for refugee teachers.

Keywords: refugees; English teachers; willingness to communicate; communication apprehension; language learning motivation

Abstrak

Dalam usaha mengkaji tahap kesediaan berkomunikasi dan motivasi antara guru-guru pelarian di Malaysia, seramai 30 orang guru pelarian yang didaftarkan di bawah UNHCR telah direkrut. Dengan menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif, borang soal selidik yang mengandungi 20 perkara yang disesuaikan dari Skala Kesediaan Berkomunikasi milik McCroskey dan Richmond (2013), Ujian Bateri Motivasi/Sikap milik Gardner (2004) serta Kajian Selidik Komunikasi Organisasi milik Fulmer (2010) telah diedarkan. Analisis data menunjukkan bahawa kebimbangan komunikasi secara negatif adalah berkait rapat dengan kesediaan untuk berkomunikasi dan guru yang dalam keadaan cemas kurang bersedia untuk berkomunikasi sama ada dengan orang asing atau kenalan. Hubungan negatif antara komunikasi subskala interpersonal dan motivasi intrinsik juga telah diperhatikan. Mereka yang beranggapan bahawa pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris adalah penting didapati lebih bersedia untuk bercakap dalam bahasa tersebut. Kajian ini diharap dapat dijadikan sebagai panduan kepada para NGO dan kumpulan sukarelawan dalam penyediaan perancangan bahan, sukatan pelajaran dan kurikulum khusus untuk guru pelarian Bahasa Inggeris.

Kata Kunci: Pelarian; guru Bahasa Inggeris, kesediaan untuk berkomunikasi; kebimbangan untuk berkomunikasi; motivasi pembelajaran bahasa

INTRODUCTION

Defined as people who are not able to return to their home country because of racial, religion, political issues, refugees are stateless, in other words, refugees are residing out of their country due to the mentioned events. Malaysia houses a few groups of refugees from the neighbouring countries such as Rohingyas and Chins from Myanmar.

While many have sought refuge in Malaysia due to the various job opportunities offered in the country, Idris (2012) noted that the country's attitude towards refugees is far from good. According to Idris (2012), Malaysia is still unwilling to sign the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention that allows the country to provide basic necessities to this group of people; this implies that refugees based in Malaysia are by default labelled under the undocumented or illegal immigrant category. If the refugees were caught breaking any laws, they are given similar punishment to illegal immigrants (Litvinsky as cited in Idris, 2012). Despite being protected under UNHCR, these refugees still face many difficulties to make ends meet. They are found working at construction sites, plantations, restaurants, orchards or engaged in some forms of odd jobs to earn a living. Ongoing assistance has been provided by UNHCR to ensure that refugees are not denied basic human needs such as food, shelter, healthcare and education. Nevertheless, the latter, which is deemed as a basic necessity for personal development and growth seems to have been overlooked. This is in line with Low, Kok, and Lee's (2013, p. 2) assertion that refugee children are lacking of the means for education entry, but it is important to provide appropriate education to the excluded and marginalised groups because possessing a certain level of knowledge can be the key to securing a better and brighter future.

In Malaysia, refugee children usually receive education from classes which are run by refugee communities themselves aided by faith-based groups or education projects arranged by UNHCR in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Zachariah, 2012). There are eight education projects run by UNCHR Malaysia together with NGOs in Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Selangor and Penang (UNHCR Malaysia, 2011); no information on education related matters at other parts of Malaysia has been reported thus far. This shows that even with the constant support from UNHCR and international communities, refugees' basic welfare especially education is still inadequate. To substantiate the claim made, statistics from UNHCR official website (2011) showed that only about 40% of the total 18,500 refugee children aged 18 and below have access to education in Malaysia but 75% are at the school-going age; this could be associated with the availability of resources including qualified teachers.

Generally, refugee teachers in Malaysia are self-trained and have never been exposed to any proper teaching methodologies. However, they are institutionally granted the right to educate their children. Being able to converse and write using the English Language is the refugee community's main aim as it serves as a survival tool when they are relocated to a new country, and most of them wish to resettle in the first world countries in which the English Language is used as the main language. Considering the unconducive environment these refugees have to succumb themselves to, it seems more sensible for them to thrive on securing other basic needs i.e. food and shelter than to picking up a new skill or even acquiring a new language.

Focusing on the latter, many researchers for example Dornyei (1998) and Ng and Ng (2015) state that external motivation which includes a supportive environment is vital in acquiring a new language. This is especially crucial to refugee teachers who are self-learning a new language, i.e. the English Language. Nevertheless, having discussed earlier on the unsupportive environment and the uncertainties the refugees have to deal with almost daily, chances for the refugee teachers to be motivated to learn a new language are low, and this undoubtedly increases communication apprehension among teachers. While many past studies such as Pattapong (2010), Riasati (2012), Zarrinabadi (2014) have focused largely on the readiness to communicate and motivation among students, there seems to be a lack of study done to examine the willingness of teachers to communicate as well as their level of motivation in delivering lessons in the classroom. It is crucial to understand the communicative readiness and motivation among teachers because teachers who are fearful and anxious to speak are unable to create an environment full of trust and respect alongside their learners and as such students will fail to recognize their teachers' enthusiasm to a particular task (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011).

It is the goal of this study to examine the relation between willingness to communicate, communication apprehension as well as their learning motivation towards the targeted language among 30 refugee teachers in Malaysia. To fulfil this objective, the questions addressed are as follows:-

- 1) Does willingness to communicate correlate with communication apprehension among UNHCR refugee teachers of English?
- 2) Does communication apprehension correlate with language learning motivation among UNHCR Refugee teachers of English?
- 3) Does willingness to communicate correlate with language learning motivation among UNHCR refugee teachers of English?

Reiterating the importance of English Language that serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool of survival for the refugees when resettlement takes place, this study is in its hope to unravel reasons for the frequent or limited use of English language among refugees teachers in their daily activities.

Before presenting the findings of this study, an overview of willingness to communicate, communication apprehension and language learning motivation alongside other related studies will be presented. A thorough means used for data collection will also be described, followed by findings and discussion of this study. Suggestions to improve the current condition of the teaching and learning environment among the refugee community are provided in the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Willingness to Communicate and Communication Apprehension

Willingness to communicate, by definition is the probability of engaging in communications when given a choice and is seen as a personality trait (Macintyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1998). Willingness to communicate can offer an opportunity to incorporate psychological, linguistic, communicative, and educational approaches to justify reasons for some individuals willingly using second language (L2) while other avoid it (Macintyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan as cited in Zarrinabadi, 2014). McCroskey and Richmond as cited in Roach (1999) state that “although situations could significantly affect individuals’ willingness to communicate, they tend to exhibit different behavioural tendencies to communicate more or less across communication situations” (p. 167). This phenomenon is more apparent among L2 speakers because their competency levels according to Macintyre et al. (1998) measure from almost zero mastery to full mastery. Having no or low competence could lead to communicative apprehension, ultimately unwillingness to communicate.

Roach (1998) describes individuals with high communication apprehension as those who prefer avoiding situations which require them to verbally interact with other people. Fear, anxiety and other forms of negative thoughts due to communication apprehension are regarded by McCroskey and Richmond as cited in Fulmer (2010) as the ideal yardstick of a person’s willingness to communicate. Communication apprehension can be detrimental and beneficial to an organization at the same time. According to Fulmer (2010), apprehensive communicators are perceived as incompetent which could in turn affect an organisation’s morale and productivity; consequently, they are motivated to work harder and improve their performance. When investigating men and women’s willingness to communicate, communication apprehension and personal esteem in organizational environment, Fulmer (2010) finds the differences in both variables between both sexes are not highly significant. However, the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication apprehension was proven by several researchers in Macintyre et al.’s study (1998). It is therefore worth exploring second language and foreign language English speaker’s willingness to communicate and communication apprehension.

Factors influencing learners’ willingness to speak English in classrooms have been explored by several researchers. When Pattapong (2010) wanted to find out factors influencing Thai students’ willingness to communicate in English in class, she found that cultural context hindered them to speak in English while social and individual context indirectly affected their willingness to communicate.

Classroom context was found to be directly influencing Thai students' willingness to speak (Pattapong, 2010). Through semi-structured interview, Riasati (2012) pointed out that types of task, topics of discussion, students including their personality and self-perceived speaking ability, teachers and classroom environment were important factors contributing to Iranian learners' willingness to communicate. Similarly, Zarrinabadi (2014) who asked 50 advanced English language learners in Iran to point out circumstances in which had affected their willingness to communicate, it was discovered that that teachers' wait time, error correction method, decision on the topic, and support were the main factors influencing learners' willingness to communicate.

Teachers' willingness to communicate is rarely investigated which may be due to the general attitude assuming teachers should not be unwilling to communicate or have communication apprehension. Roach (1998) highlighted the possibility of teachers having high anxiety or low willingness to communicate leading to detrimental effects on students' learning. Aiming to assess teaching assistant general level of willingness to communicate and communication apprehension, Roach (1998) surveyed almost 300 teaching assistant in an American university. Findings indicated that there were significant negative correlations between their communication apprehension and experience in teaching, training pertaining to content and teaching; nevertheless, there was a positive correlation between teaching assistants' willingness to communicate and their teaching experience alongside training in content (Roach, 1998). A year later, Roach (1999) analysed the outcome of willingness to communicate and communication apprehension among teaching assistants by utilizing the same respondents and only 29 teaching assistants gave permission to distribute surveys to their students. Results indicated that when teaching assistants appeared to be anxious to speak, students' perceived the former' as having nonverbal immediacy and low power use; moreover, willingness to communicate among teaching assistants had negative relationship with students' perception of teaching assistant nonverbal immediacy (Roach, 1999).

Language Learning Motivation

Gardner (1985) defines motivation pertaining to the learning of second language or foreign language as the combined effort alongside desire to meet the goal of learning a second language in addition to having the right attitude towards learning the language; an 'organism' is said to be motivated when the desire to meet the goal and the right attitude towards the goal are connected closely with the force or effort. Gardner (1985) too proposes a socio-educational model using guides from various attitudinal and motivational scales, which he refers to as the language attitude motivation battery (AMTB), a rather prominent instrument in language learning motivation studies. It is good to see how other and more current researchers conceptualise motivation. Motivation is described by Dornyei (1998) as the main force that initiates L2 learning, also the motivational drive to sustain learning process that is deemed long and tedious. Dornyei (1998) proposes 2 theoretical approaches to motivation which are Social Psychological Approach and Cognitive Approach; the former comprises instrumental and integrative motivations while the latter consists of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. This study will adhere to the instrumental and integrative concept of motivation even though both pair of terms is similar to a certain extent. Definition of instrumental and integrative orientations by Liu (2012, p. 125) fits well into this study that is "the integrative orientation is characterized by the willingness to communicate with members of the target-language group or the desire to integrate into it; instrumental orientation is defined by having more pragmatic reasons for language learning, such as the desire to earn higher salary or enter a better school."

Many believe that second language learners who are intrinsically motivated are more successful than those who are extrinsically motivated. However, according to Carreira (2005), the sense of achievement after gaining proficiency in English language could trigger learners to be more eager in learning the language. There is a correlation between ego boosting and sense of achievement, where students practically feel accomplished as they learn how to read, write, comprehend and speak in the target language. Moreover, only when learners are enthusiastic to perform a task, they should be encouraged to perform it because their motivation level can be boosted. It was confirmed by Carreira (2005) who highlighted the importance of learners possessing motivation to perform a task aiming to gain knowledge and new ideas. Besides, Liu (2012) found that learners who are highly anxious in language classrooms tend to have lower driving force and are less independent in learning a language.

Past researchers have hypothesised that L2 learners are driven by extrinsic motivation when learning a second language. Firstly, Zubairi and Sarudin (2009) studied how motivated Malaysian students were when learning a foreign language; results indicated that external motivation such as securing a job and meeting the graduation requirement and internal motivation were the two factors that drove them in learning a foreign language. Secondly, Ajapel, Mamat, and Azeez (2015) who explored the attitude and motivations among students when learning the Arabic Language in Nigerian universities predicted that they should be instrumentally motivated because the education system in Nigeria sets to provide trainings to students for their careers that involves teaching, translating and interpreting, administrating as well as journalism and diplomatic work. The result of the students' instrumental orientation showed their disagreement on securing good jobs but they believed mastering the Arabic language enabled them to understand Islam better (Ajapel et al., 2015).

METHOD

Participants

A total of 31 refugee teachers teaching not only English language but also other subjects participated in the study. They were all registered with UNHCR Malaysia. One respondent who did not complete the motivation scale was excluded from the analysis. Despite the small sample size, it suffices to capture refugee teachers' communicative readiness and motivation because this is one of the very few studies done on them. Moreover, the number of participants involved in this research was determined by the organiser cum sponsor of "Celebrate Learning! A Get-to-gather for Teachers Serving the Refugee and the Displaced Population" training who deemed 30 participants as the ideal number for a training.

Instrument

The questionnaire was made up of three sections namely willingness to communicate scale, Personal Report of Communication Apprehension and Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Details of each section are as follows:

Part 1: McCroskey and Richmond's (2013) Willingness to Communicate (WTC) scale. All three subscales measuring willingness to communicate to stranger, acquaintance and friend at general daily interaction (e.g., talk with an acquaintance while standing in line) were included.

Part 2: Fulmer's (2010) Organisational Communication Survey - Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). All 24 statements were taken for respondents to self-report their apprehension in daily communications (e.g., at a meeting or discussion).

Part 3: Gardner's (2004) Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Only 8 questions related to integrative motivation and instrumental motivation from AMTB were selected for the present questionnaire.

Procedure

The overall design of this study was divided into five stages which can be seen below. To answer the three research questions, the quantitative method was adopted. As the targeted respondents for this study were refugees, informed consent from UNHCR was obtained.

Stage 1: Obtain informed consent from UNHCR

Stage 2: Recruit respondents using convenient sampling

Stage 3: Distribute questionnaires

Stage 4: Collect questionnaires and analyse using SPSS

Questionnaires consisting of 3 parts (willingness to communicate, communication apprehension and language learning motivation) were distributed to all refugee teachers to gauge their English language communicative readiness and motivation. Besides UNHCR, informed consent was also obtained from the refugee teachers prior to distribution of the questionnaires.

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, a series of training workshops were conducted for the 31 refugee teachers who taught not only the English language but also other subjects. These workshops were conducted as an addition to help develop and equip refugee teachers with various pedagogical skills because according to Aharon, Egoza and Nurit (2014) and Mizell (2010), novice teachers as such are likely to feel anxious and sometimes frustrated as they are expected to perform on par with experienced teachers.

Preparation for the training titled “Celebrate Learning! A Get-to-gather for Teachers Serving the Refugee and the Displaced Population” began when all involving stakeholders had agreed to run the programme. The training encompassed 4 workshops namely: a) English Retreat; b) Understanding Learning Differences and Disabilities; c) Using Art to Express Emotions in the Classroom and; d) Using Phonics at Various Learning Stages.

The completed questionnaires were collected before the refugee teachers left the training venue. All the data were keyed in and analysed using SPSS software.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, correlations, and Cronbach alpha coefficients for the variables in the present study. Pearson correlation analysis on the self-report measures revealed that the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication apprehension is not statistically significant but the relationship between the subscales of the willingness to communicate and communication apprehension is significant. Specifically, a negative association is observed between stranger and interpersonal conversations and between acquaintance and meetings. Respondents who were anxious were found to be less willing to communicate with strangers and acquaintances. Specifically, because of anxiety, they were less likely to communicate with strangers and acquaintances in interpersonal conversations and meetings.

Communication apprehension is found to have a negative relationship with instrumental orientation of motivation. Those who regarded learning of English as important were reported to have less anxiety when conversing with people in English. In addition, interpersonal conversations subscale is negatively correlated with both intrinsic motivation and integrative orientation. The results indicated that teachers who were motivated to learn English had less anxiety to communicate with others in English. There is no relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to communicate.

Table 1 *Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities for variables in the study*

Variable	Mean (SD)	1	1a	1b	1c	2	2a	2b	2c	2d	3	3a	3 b
1. WTC	3.13 (.096)	(.71)											
1a. Stranger	2.88 (1.26)	.82** *	(.90)										
1b. Acquaintance	2.87 (1.23)	.91** *	.78** *	(.89)									
1c. Friend	3.63 (1.1)	.63** *	.17	.37* (.82)									
2. CA	56.20 (15.)	-.09	-.11	-.19	-.09	(.75)							

2a. Group	13.71 (3.9)	-.29	-.11	-.26	-.33	.52*	-						
2b. Meetings	13.45 (4.4)	-.28	-.18	- .39*	-.07	.78** *	.45 *	-					
2c. Interpersonl	15.10 (4.9)	-.30	-.48**	-.34	.13	.66** *	.21 *	.50* *	-				
2d. Public	17.56 (5.0)	-.08	-.19	-.17	.17	.77** *	.05	.49* *	.65** *	-			
3. Motivation	4.45 (0.6)	.24	.26	.21	.07	-.31	.11	-.29	-.38**	-	(.82)		
3a. Integrative	4.59 (0.5)	.27	.32	.18	.13	-.08	.29	-.30	-.38*	-	.79** *	(.60)	
3b. Instrumental	4.32 (0.9)	.17	.18	.19	.03	-.39*	-.02	-.29	-.31	-	.93** *	.52* *	(.)

Note. SD = standard deviation; WTC = willingness to communicate; CA = communication apprehension; Group = group discussion; Interpersonal = interpersonal conversations; Public = public speaking, Motivation = intrinsic motivation; Integrative = integrative orientation; Instrumental = instrumental orientation.

^aN ranges from 27 to 30. Cronbach alpha coefficient was given in parenthesis on the diagonal.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Similar to the studies conducted by McCroskey and Bear and Macintyre as cited in Macintyre et al. (1998), findings from this study indicate that there is a negative relationship between willingness to communicate and communication apprehension. To reiterate, results show that anxious refugee teachers were less willing to converse with strangers and acquaintances. This can be linked to the research done by Riasati (2012) who regarded L2 anxiety as one of the causes that hinders or promotes willingness to communicate. A possible explanation for refugee teachers to have anxiety in communicating could be due to the fact that English was not their mother tongue and most of them came from monolingual countries. Most of the refugee teachers were Rohingya and Somalese where English is a foreign language in their countries. Education is not even accessible to all citizens in Myanmar and so is the learning of English. This corresponds with Pattapong's (2010) account on the influence of cultural context and social and individual context on learners' willingness to communicate. In other words, refugee teachers were unwilling to converse with outsiders using the English Language due to their unfamiliarity with the language. In addition, findings from this study also support the statement by Dornyei (1998) when he notes that motivation is the main drive that helps sustain the tedious process of L2 learning. As the respondents had agreed to shoulder heavy responsibilities to educate their children, they had no choice but to learn English through various possible means. They might have been deprived from education in their country but they recognized the importance of their offspring in mastering English so that they can live more comfortably when they re-locate.

With regard to refugee teachers' communication apprehension and language learning motivation, results show a negative relationship between communication apprehension and instrumental orientation of motivation. For the refugee teachers, in order to migrate and earn a living in the first world countries of their choice, it is vital for them and their children to be able to converse fluently in English language; thus, this acts as a motivation to the refugee teachers which in turns lower their communication apprehension. To possess extrinsic motivation when learning a foreign language to secure a decent future has been verified by many past researchers for instance Zubairi and Sarudin (2009) and Ajapel et al. (2015).

While it is crucial for language learners to be intrinsically motivated when learning their target language, findings from this study however showed no relation between being intrinsically motivated

and being willing to communicate when learning a language. This opposes with the research done by Carreira (2005) who noted the importance of intrinsic motivation in acquiring a target language. It is foreseeable for the respondents of this study to not be intrinsically motivated because refugees especially Rohingya were stateless and even their own country denies their citizenship as reported in both local and international news. To mention a few, Aljazeera, The Straits Time and The Star have been reporting about the severity of violence in Myanmar causing the people to flee and seek refuge in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Malaysia. They were not intrinsically motivated to learn English most probably because they did not know where they were going live, their destiny and future.

CONCLUSION

Given the complex interplay between the inadequacy of refugee teachers, their future as well as their children's future after relocating to English speaking countries, this study is conducted to find out the relationships between willingness to communicate, communication apprehension and language learning motivation. Results of this study show that firstly, willingness to communicate is negatively associated with communication apprehension among UNHCR refugee teachers of English. Secondly, communication apprehension is also negatively associated with learning motivation among the teachers. Thirdly, no significant correlation is found between teachers' willingness to communicate and motivation when language learning is concerned. Knowing the relationships among the three variables can serve as the basis towards improving the teaching quality among refugee educators. Although education is secondary when compared to getting basic human needs, the ability to speak in the majority's language is crucial in order to survive in a foreign land as argued by many parties mentioned above.

In terms of practical benefits, UNHCR, NGOs and other existing voluntary groups can take necessary pedagogical measures following the outcome of this research. For instance, trainings which offer insights and tips to plan their lessons, manage and conduct their classes should be organised regularly. The essentials of conducting a lesson should be made known to refugee teachers. These teachers should also be trained to write reflective reports after their classes so that they can identify their rights and wrongs during the lesson. That shall be followed by suggested ways for improvement to refine their lessons in the next class. A team of experts should design syllabus and curriculum specifications for teachers to refer to. Materials such as text books, task sheets, etc. should also be designed so that teachers can use them in their lessons. It is important to use materials which revolve around the students' culture and belief so that they can relate and understand the lessons.

Suggestion for future research

This exploratory study focuses only on willingness to communicate, communication apprehension and language learning motivation and overlooks other personality traits such as perceived communication competence, emotional stability/neurotism, personal esteem and introversion/ extroversion. The mentioned-traits should be looked into in future studies because they are related to willingness to communicate (McCroskey and Baer as cited in Macintyre et al., 1998). Furthermore, the effects of teachers' willingness to communicate on their learners and refugee students' willingness to communicate, communication apprehension and language learning motivation should be investigated. This is because Ng and Ng (2015) assert that teachers' support could positively motivate non-native students to learn English.

It is also worth researching on reasons contributing to communication apprehension and unwillingness to communicate in English among refugee teachers. In-depth interview should be carried out to uncover what actually impede them from using English. It can be followed by recommendations to overcome or reduce their fear to speak English.

Future researchers can also consider investigating the suitability of the teaching and learning materials because according to Zachariah (2012), educators involving in educational projects make use of the local school books in teaching subjects like English, Malay, Mathematics and Science to teach refugee children.

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