

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises the findings of the study. It also offers some recommendations for further studies.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study took place at Pusat Penataran Ilmu dan Bahasa (PPIB), Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah where 100 respondents who had completed Level 2 English for Reading and Writing participated in the study.

The data showed that all the investigated factors, namely the respondents' socio-economic background, English use and exposure to the language, attitude towards the English Language and perception of their English Language instructors have influenced their achievement in the English Language to some extent. The findings of the study have answered the following research questions:

5.1.1 Research Question 1: Does a student's socio-economic background influence his/her academic achievement in the English Language examination?

The study shows that the respondents' socio-economic background does have a slight influence on their achievement or grades in the English Language examination. As expected, respondents from the lower social class scored the poorest grades. However, this group also achieved the best grade as well as the best average grade of the two social classes. The fact that the poorest grade was scored by the lower social class should not be disregarded. Hence, it can be concluded that the socio-cultural background of the respondents does play a minor role in influencing their grades in the English Language examination.

5.1.2 Research Question 2: Does a student's use and exposure to English influence his/her academic achievement in the English Language examination?

The study found that the respondents' use of the English Language and exposure to the language does influence their grades in the English Language examination. Research shows that those with low English use and exposure will do poorly in the English Language examination. In this study, it was the respondents with low English use and exposure who obtained the poorest grades. Hence, this finding validates the expectation. It was found that the same ethnicity of neighborhood, the use of the mother tongue at home with siblings, parents and neighbors, the lack of reading, watching and listening to English Language channels and programs on television and radio, the inability to buy English Language materials and shyness contribute to less exposure to the English Language and hence to poorer grades. In a surprising twist, the data showed that the respondents with medium English use and exposure in this study obtained the best grade

as well as the best average grade. This finding verifies previous findings that the higher the English use and exposure to the language, in this case, medium English use versus low English use, the better the achievement in the English Language. These respondents are motivated to use the language despite being laughed at by friends. They see the need for and importance of the English Language in order to improve their competency in the language so that they can get a job. All of these findings show that high English use and exposure to it do not necessarily guarantee the best grades. On the whole, however, the findings show that English use and exposure to the language have a strong influence on grades in the English Language examination.

5.1.3 Research Question 3: Does a student's attitude towards the English Language influence his/her academic achievement in the English Language examination?

The study found that the respondents' attitude towards English does not strongly influence their grades in the English Language examination. As shown in this study, it was the respondents with a positive attitude who achieved the best grade and the best average grade, but the same group also achieved the poorest grade. Moreover, the respondents with a neutral attitude towards the English Language also achieved the best grade. Studies have shown that those with a positive attitude towards English will have better grades in the English Language. This is verified by the findings of this study which show that the respondents with a positive attitude achieved the best grade and the best average grade. However, the achievement of the poorest grade by this group should not be disregarded. In addition, the respondents with a neutral attitude towards the language also achieved the best grade. This contradicts the findings of previous studies that a

positive attitude will positively influence the grades achieved in the English Language examination. The findings of this study showed that even the respondents with a neutral attitude towards the language can also achieve the best grade. Thus, it can be said that the respondents' attitude towards English does not have a strong influence on their grades in the English Language examination.

5.1.4 Research Question 4: Does a student's perception of the English Language instructors influence his/her academic achievement in the English Language examination?

The respondents' perception of their English Language instructors does have an influence on their academic achievement in the English Language. Research shows that respondents with a positive perception of the English Language instructors can expect to perform better in the English Language examination. The findings of this study validate this expectation. It was the respondents with a positive perception of their English Language instructors who achieved the best grade as well as the best average grade. However, this group of respondents also achieved the poorest grade. But the achievement of the best grade and the best average grade verify the expectation that positive perception of the English Language instructors influences positively the performance in the language.

5.1.5 Conclusion

The study shows that all three levels, namely the language, learner and learning situation levels of Dornyei's framework on second language motivation play a role in motivating students to achieve good grades in the English Language examination. The socio-

economic background of the respondents and the use of English and exposure to the language correspond to Dornyei's language level, while the respondents' attitude towards the English Language corresponds to the learner level of Dornyei's motivational framework. The respondents' perception of the English Language instructors corresponds to Dornyei's learning situation and learner levels. Among these four factors which were studied, it was the respondents' use of English and exposure to the language that have the strongest influence on their achievement in the English Language examination. The respondents' attitude towards the English Language does not strongly influence their achievement in the English Language examination. The respondents' socio-economic background was found to play a minor role in influencing their achievement of good grades, while the respondents' perception of their English Language instructors positively influences their grades in the English Language examination. The findings also illustrate that many respondents chose the "not bothered/do not know" variant for their answer in Sections D and E of the questionnaire. Section D elicits the information on the respondents' attitude towards the English Language and Section E elicits the information on the respondents' perception of their English Language instructors. Their choice of answer could be due to their ignorance or uncertainty regarding the question.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

For this section, the researcher offers two main recommendations, namely recommendations to the stakeholders and for future studies.

5.2.1 Recommendations to the Stakeholders

In accordance with the findings of the study, the researcher feels that there is a need to recognize the role of the university and English Language instructors so that a supportive environment which motivates effective language learning can be enhanced for the benefit of students. The researcher recommends the following:

5.2.1.1 The University

In the study, the use of English and exposure to the language has been identified as the main reason for the respondents' success in getting good grades in the English Language examination. Therefore, it is essential to make sure that students use the English Language frequently. This is to create maximum exposure to the language. Currently in UMS, there are courses taught in the Malay Language especially the arts-based courses, while other courses, especially the science-based courses, are taught in the English Language. In accordance with the findings of this study, it is recommended that the medium of instruction should uniformly be the English Language. Lectures should all be taught in English so that students get maximum exposure to the language. Lecturers should encourage students to write their assignments in the English Language. The more the students use the language, the more their exposure to the language and this in turn will affect their achievement in the English Language examination.

In addition, the time allocated for the learning of English should also be extended. At present, students spend only three hours per week in the English Language class. As there are fourteen weeks in a semester, the time allocated for the learning of English is not sufficient. Students only spend about forty-two (3x14) hours in the English Language class per semester. As shown in the study, frequent contact with the language will

improve students' achievement in the English Language examination. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the time allocated for English Language class is extended to a longer period. It is also recommended that the English Language class be held more frequently throughout the week. Instead of having a class once a week, as is currently practised in UMS, the class should be held more often. This is to ensure the continuity of the lessons as well as to increase the exposure and use of the English Language. The long break between the weekly classes at present will only negatively affect students' interest in the lessons as well as the language itself. This minimal contact with the language will influence students' performance in the examination. The finding of the study shows that frequent use of English and exposure to the language affect students' grades in the English Language examination positively.

The long hours spent in learning one subject can easily make students feel bored and lose interest. Students will only focus and stay alert during the earlier part of a lesson. Therefore, besides having a longer class time for the English Language class, it is recommended that the time allocated for the English Language class is evenly distributed over the week. This is to make sure that students have regular use of the language, contact and exposure to the English Language without feeling bored.

5.2.1.2 The English Language Instructors

As motivators, teachers or instructors create opportunities that develop students' natural

tendencies to learn, grow and take responsibility for their own learning (McCombs & Pope, 1994). Students' perception of the language instructors correspond to Dornyei's learning situation and learner levels of motivational framework. According to this framework, language instructors' personality, behavior, teaching methods and style influence students' motivation to learn a language. Instructors who have an interesting and friendly personality will make students feel comfortable in class. Students who are comfortable with their instructors tend to cooperate more in class compared to those who are unhappy with the instructors. They participate actively in class activities and do well in their examinations. They use English regularly and this increases their exposure to the language. This has been shown in studies where frequent use of English and exposure to it affect students' achievement in the English Language examination positively. To create a positive learning environment, teachers or instructors should be willing to improve their behavior, personality, teaching style and methods. This is important because it will influence students' perception of them. The study shows that students' perception of their English Language instructors plays a role in influencing their grade in the English Language examination. Therefore, it is very important for instructors to create an interesting and positive learning environment so students have a positive perception of them and learn better.

It is also recommended that instructors should not have favorites in class. Students should be treated equally regardless of their proficiency in the English Language. Favorite students normally get more attention than students who are not favored by instructors. They are praised frequently for participating in class activities. In class, they are 'popular'. This increases their motivation to do well in the examination. In

contrast, students, who are not 'popular' or favored by instructors, feel alienated in class. They feel as if their presence makes no difference to the atmosphere in the class because the instructor or teacher does not care whether or not they participate. Not only will they have a negative perception of the instructors, they will use the English Language less frequently. This will affect their achievement in the English Language examination. Therefore, it is essential for instructors to treat their students equally in class.

The teaching style of the instructors should also be enhanced. More opportunities should be given to students to participate in class so that they will develop interest in the lesson as well as the English Language. The opportunities should not only focus on the lessons but also the control of the classroom. Traditionally, a classroom is solely controlled by a teacher. The teacher is the source of knowledge and the students are the passive receptors of knowledge. These views are no longer applicable to modern teaching. In order for students to take the responsibility for their learning, they should be allowed to have some control of the learning process in the classroom. This will offset the potential negative effects of the learning experience. Therefore, language instructors should give learners the opportunities to choose activities, topics or discussions that they like. They should make students feel that they also play a role in lesson planning and this may develop the students' motivation to learn and succeed in the language. In addition, English Language instructors should also help learners to take charge of their own learning through setting some personal objectives and using learning strategies. This also enhances their motivation to learn the English Language.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the findings and limitations of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

- i. The number of respondents is crucial. Due to limitation of time, the researcher used the convenience sampling approach in order to select 100 respondents for the study which is about 5.6 percent of the total number of first year undergraduates in UMS. A larger number of respondents can be employed in future studies in order to get more representative findings. This will be helpful to obtain a more accurate picture of the factors analyzed.
- ii. In order to get more reliable and accurate data, it is recommended that more instruments should be used besides the core instrument (the questionnaire) in a future study. This is to triangulate the data collected so that more refined and clearer answers can be obtained.
- iii. Besides the four factors discussed in this study, more factors can be studied in future studies. For example, factors such as the teaching methods, the teaching materials, and the syllabus, as suggested in the learning situation level of Dornyei's framework of second language motivation, can be explored in future studies.
- iv. This study can be done with other languages. A comparison between languages can be made, and the findings can be used to identify the most influential factors affecting students' grades in the language.

5.3 CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this preliminary study will give insights and open more windows for researchers to explore the factors affecting students' motivation to learn and excel in their English Language examinations, particularly in Universiti Malaysia Sabah. It is also hoped that these insights will help researchers to develop methods to improve second language learning processes.