

LANGUAGE CAMP IN MALAYSIA: ASNAF STUDENTS' NEEDS AND PERCEPTION

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: This study aims to identify Asnaf students' needs in language learning and their perception of the implementation of the language camp module that had been developed by researchers using the ADDIE model

Methodology: In-depth analysis of focus group interviews with Asnaf students was conducted, and the data obtained were analysed thematically according to several categories

Main Findings and Novelty: The findings of this study revealed that students believed that their anxiety was lowered when they were given the opportunity to cooperate with their friends in a fully immersive and fun English language learning context

Applications of this study: The modules and the findings of this study could be used by any English language educators to conduct English language camps especially to Asnaf children who stay in charity homes.

Keywords: *Asnaf Students, English as a Second Language (ESL), Instructional Materials, Language Camp, Module Development and Evaluation, Needs Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Acquisition of a second language (L2) is one of the crucial aspects in building a developed nation towards 21st century. Language literacy weighs a great value to national security, economic growth, and international relations ([Lacorte, 2013](#); [Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011](#)). To improve language and literacy skills, interactive activities should be integrated as it could benefit language learners in improving their competency and promote teamwork spirit among students ([Combs et al., 2008](#)). Group-based activities in a language camp also enable students to actively engage with their peers ([Maarof & Tan, 2013](#)). Implementation of language camp has reflected a positive impact on language learning as it allows the participant to engage freely throughout the session ([Vercellotti, 2017](#); [Spahiu, 2013](#)). In language camps, language learners are able to share their knowledge and communicate effectively with their peers and this could lessen the chance to be passive as in a traditional classroom. In a survey conducted by [Combs et al. \(2008\)](#), students who were taught in an interactive classroom performed better in language learning in comparison to students who were taught in a teacher-centred classroom.

Problems regarding English language performance among students have received great attention from ESL researchers in general. As a matter of fact, underprivileged students are constantly having difficulties and unsatisfying results in academic as a result of insufficient opportunity for learning ([Battle & Lewis, 2002](#)). Asnaf students are the ones that come from low socioeconomic status (SES) society and receive financial assistance from the Pusat Zakat (Alms and Welfare Centre) ([Azman et al., 2016](#)). Most studies related to Asnaf students' only concerned on the economic wellbeing of the society and development of human capitals ([Azman et al., 2016](#)). In the context of this study, more than half of the residents in the charity home (53.8%) failed in their English subject and only 16% of them showed satisfying result (B and above). Constant failure and ineffective teaching and learning process elicited more studies on the development of instructional materials for language classroom ([Gayton, 2010](#); [Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2015](#)). Most studies have discussed on the use of technology to enhance language learning but limited findings were reported in the implementation of language camp outside of the classroom ([Morat et al., 2016](#) & [Mohamad et al., 2011](#)). In the case of low proficiency of English among Asnaf students, one of the factors asserted by previous scholar is the inadequacy of chances and opportunity to get involved in highly engaging programmes such as language camp ([Sirin, 2005](#); [Ahmar & Anwar 2013](#)). Another factor contributed to Asnaf students' low performance in academic was the students' attitudes and motivation towards the language ([Zakaria & Mohamad, 2017](#)). In this case, the Asnaf students' interest in learning the L2 decreases and the motivation to learn the language gradually declines. Therefore, their anxiety towards the learning of L2 becomes greater. Despite considerable amount of language learning problems postulated in the context of L2 learning, limited studies have

been conducted in regards to the Asnaf students' situation. Therefore, preparation of activities should be carried out in a way that is applicable to the students and relevant to their lives ([Mohamad et al, 2011](#)). To the best of researchers' knowledge, this is the first study to discover the aspect of L2 learning among Asnaf students particularly in implementing a language camp. Therefore, this study was carried out in order to answer the following research questions:

- (i) What is expected from *Asnaf* students in learning English at language camp?
- (ii) How do the *Asnaf* students' perceive the language camp module?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language camp is widely perceived as language immersion programme for English language enhancement ([Ismail & Tahir, 2011](#)). [Rugasken and Harris \(2009\)](#) stated that language camp, or summer camp is generally regarded as one of the initiatives to improve communicative ability of teenagers. Interactions in language camp occur between students and facilitators with the integration of appropriate learning materials. [Juriza et al. \(2011\)](#) also asserted that students build their own confidence to communicate with their peers while constructing knowledge for better understanding. Learning session in a language camp enables students and educators to evaluate the problems faced and solutions to overcome these problems through the learning process ([Ismail & Tahir, 2011](#)). In a fully immersive context like language camp, knowledge transfer occurs in a less threatening situation; making the students feel less pressured as the interaction with peers reduces language anxiety among students ([Krashen, 1982](#)).

[Zarei and Supyan \(2016\)](#) claimed that language learning in the era of 21st century takes place beyond the walls of a classroom. Henceforth, teaching in the digital age becomes a constant challenge for language instructors to make sure that the teaching tools are parallel with students' expectations. In response to the aforementioned situation, teacher could also provide tasks that are slightly challenging and out of learners' comfort zones and encourage them to challenge themselves in the future ([Zakaria & Yunus, 2017](#)). The following subsection highlights the foundational theories and models used in this study.

ADDIE Model

In the current study, the researchers employed the ADDIE Model to develop the instructional materials. This model consists of five sequential stages, namely Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate. As discussed by [Molenda \(2003\)](#), the ADDIE Model starts with the first stage, which is to analyse the learners' backgrounds and characteristics related to their learning needs (2003). The process is followed by the designing stage, in which the researchers construct appropriate learning objectives, as well as the content of their learning. After the designing process is completed, researchers developed instructional materials to be conducted to the students. Next, the module is implemented by carrying out the learning activities according to the developed materials. In the final stage, the effectiveness of the learning materials is evaluated.

Theoretical Background

The module of this study was designed based on Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML) in 2004. This theory suggests that the effectiveness of learning is greatly enhanced through simultaneous use of visual and audio materials, particularly pictures and videos. The portrayal of images and graphics in visual form would strongly trigger the learners' thinking, indirectly reinforcing an active learning process ([Mayer, 2009](#)). Another underpinning theory, [Paivio's dual coding theory \(1990\)](#), centralises the use of images as the representation of written information. Based on these theories, the researchers developed a language camp module to learn English by incorporating visual materials; namely, images and graphics that are relevant to the activities.

Another related theory is the theory of second language learning formulated by [Krashen \(1982\)](#). According to him, the learning of a second language should not be forced on the second language learners. In addition, he suggests the module designers for L2 learning course to include comprehensible input in teaching. The educators should also provide comfortable and conducive learning environment to facilitate the learning of a second language. Therefore, the learning of a second language should take place in the most natural situation to minimise the students' anxiety level and to optimize language learning ([Krashen, 1982](#)).

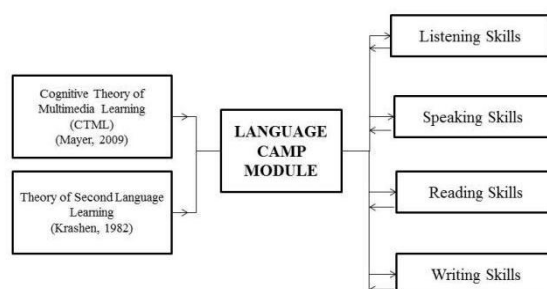


Figure 1: Theoretical Background of the Study

Source: (Mayer, 2009; Krashen, 1982)

Previous researchers have noted various impacts of the implementation of language camps (Juriza et al., 2011; Ismail & Tahir, 2011; Emotin-Bucjan, 2011). The studies include students' attitude towards language (Juriza et al., 2011), interest for cooperative learning (Ismail & Tahir, 2011) and development of independence and autonomy in using the language (Emotin-Bucjan, 2011). From a survey conducted, students appreciated the opportunity to express their thoughts along with constant support from the facilitators and peers (Juriza et al., 2011). Ismail and Tahir (2011) also discovered positive feedback from the students as they were very satisfied with assistance provided by the instructor of the language camp. The researchers also asserted that language camp promotes cooperation among students and allows them to participate actively throughout the learning process. Implementation of such activities provides the opportunity to work creatively with minimal supervision from teachers (Emotin-Bucjan, 2011). His view is supported by a claim by Juriza et al. (2011) that minimum supervision provided by the teachers maximises the chance to complete a task independently. However, the effectiveness of a language camp depends on the learning materials and teaching approaches employed by the teachers (Salve-Opina, 2014). Materials such as graphics and audio-visual aids are the most effective tools for learning as it attract the students' interest to participate in the learning process actively (Salehi & Salehi, 2012). It is also evident that students who learn in an ICT-integrated environment tend to perform better than students who learn in a traditional classroom instruction.

METHODOLOGY

The current study employed a qualitative case study design by gathering data from focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews with participants and facilitators of the language camp. It is employed to gain in-depth insights of the participants and present a detailed account of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). The main characteristics of this study are relevant to a case study. It was conducted in a natural setting (Mannan Khan, 2014), the researcher as the main instrument (Sarma, 2015) and focused on real experience of certain group of people.

The context of this study was focusing on the underprivileged Asnaf children in a non-profit charity home in Bandar Baru Bangi. The language camp was conducted in three separate sessions every fortnight. Focus group interview with Asnaf students (who were the potential participants for the language camp) was conducted before the implementation of the language camp to answer the first research question. Another focus group interview with the participants was conducted after the implementation of language camp to answer the second research question. The primary data were further triangulated with other techniques namely semi-structured interview, researchers' observations and field notes.

Participants

In this study, 14 Asnaf secondary school students participated in the language camp and facilitated by four facilitators. Purposive sampling technique was employed to obtain the information from the participants. The researchers went to meet the gatekeepers of the charity home to seek their permission before conducting this study. A letter of consent was signed by both parties – researchers and gatekeepers. In order to embrace research ethics, the participants were given pseudonyms (R1-R14) and the facilitators were labeled as (F1-F4). The selection criteria are the participants should belong to secondary school Asnaf (underprivileged community) and stay in a charity home.

Data collection and analysis

Collection of data was carried out through focus group interviews, semi-structured interview, researchers' observation and field notes. To sum briefly, the researchers divided the collection of data into three different phases.

In first phase, *Asnaf* student' expectation for a language camp was obtained through focus group interview with them. The main objective is to discover their interest and expectations in learning English before the language camp is conducted.

In the next phase, the researchers carried out a three-session language camp using prepared instructional materials which were priory validated by ESL experts. Observations and field notes were also recorded throughout the sessions.

In the last phase, five participants volunteered in the focus group interview to give their insights and perception on the language camp. The interview session was conducted after all sessions completed at a predetermined schedule for the participants' convenience. In order to increase the truthfulness of the data, participants were encouraged to give their honest perceptions on the activities. The interview responses were transcribed in verbatim and be given back to the participants to be checked and verified.

Both focus group interview and semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded. Data obtained in all phases were analysed thematically and categorised into several categories. In addition, all facilitators were also interviewed to gain in-depth insights about the language camp. In order to increase the validity of the data, the researchers also triangulated the primary data with other data from other research instruments namely observation notes and responses from semi-structured interview with all facilitators.

Trustworthiness, validity and reliability

In conducting qualitative study, trustworthiness is the most crucial aspect to be considered. Trustworthiness deals with credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the research ([Merriam, 1998](#); [Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#)). Four main aspects of trustworthiness were postulated in this study by avoiding development of anticipated outcomes, scrutinising findings through other measures such as peer checking and reviews by ESL experts and verification of transcribed data by the informants. Therefore, data credibility was ensured by employing peer checking and reviews by ESL experts. Transferability was also taken into consideration as the researchers provided thick description of the research context and the procedure before adapting or replicating the study.

In addition, dependability is largely contributed to the validation of data through peer review and expert checking. Its aim is to ensure consistent findings based on the raw data collected. Conformability of the findings was posited through detailed presentation of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data. It is to make sure that data obtained are not biased with researchers' anticipation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Feedbacks from the *Asnaf* students in focus group interviews were triangulated with data from semi-structured interview with the facilitators, researchers' observations and field notes during the camp. The data was divided into two major categories: i) students' expectation in language learning and ii) students' perception towards language camp.

I. Students' Expectations in Language Learning

Obtaining students' responses on their needs in language learning is crucial before implementing any material for language instruction ([Combs et al., 2008](#)). In answering the first research question, data were thematically analysed into three main categories: (a) interest of ICT-integrated materials, (b) preference for collaborative activities (c) expectation for guidance from facilitators for difficult tasks. In terms of interest of ICT integrated materials, they proposed the integration videos, songs and graphics in future language camp. As mentioned by R4 and R2:

R4: "Video is fine. I like it when the teacher uses video for learning. But most of the time, my teacher will just show us a movie and that's it. We don't learn anything from the video."

R2: "Yes, I like it when she showed us short film and ask us to guess what's next also supported her response. It makes us wonder what is going to happen next".

From the observation, it is noted that all participants paid their attention and remained focus on the materials portrayed on the screen through the projector. Integration of videos enables them to be more attentive in language classroom (Salehi & Salehi, 2011; [Hamilton, 2010](#)) and the incorporation of ICT for incidental learning could also improve the students' interest in language classroom ([Letchumanan et al., 2015](#)). In comparison to language learning at school, R4 and R2 mentioned that,

R4: “Most of the time, the teacher will do it (write notes on whiteboard) and we will copy her handwriting from the whiteboard”.

R2: “Yes, I like using technology, but we rarely were given permission to go to the computer lab,”

Responses from the students implied that they were not given the opportunity to learn via ICT in language classroom at school. The use of interactive media such as videos from Youtube give a wider selection of materials to be used in language learning, thus, increase their inquiry for the subject matter ([Morat et al., 2016](#)). Overall, majority of the participants agreed that the integration of ICT in learning materials in the language camp is more appealing.

Approaches employed by the language facilitators are the most crucial aspects in the language camp. All participants expressed their boredom and unwillingness to learn when the English teachers used teacher-centred approach. Even though memorisation technique is found to be useful for beginners, it is also noted that heavy reliance on this technique may hinder students’ improvement of cognitive ability ([Cornell et al., 2016](#)). Typical English lessons are very much exam-oriented as mentioned by R1 and R3,

R1: “For literature components and writing, usually the teacher (at school) will give us the answer keys (guidance to answer questions) and we will memorise them for examination,”.

R3: “Most of the time my teacher (at school) will complete the syllabus first and after that we will do revision for examination,”.

R3 and R5 suggested a learner-centred approach where students are given wider opportunity to participate in the learning process. These responses also imply that the students prefer hands-on activity and appreciate collaborative learning in language classroom. They also expressed their willingness to participate collaboratively with other students. Participants mentioned that,

R3: “When there’s group work, I will be excited. When the teacher only gives exercise, I am lazy to do it,”

R5: “Yes, I like to do my work with my friend. I feel it is easier. For difficult task, it is better if the teacher teaches us”.

From the researchers’ observation, students only relied on the facilitators’ explanation and preferred guidance by them to avoid distraction and confusion for difficult task. Generally, all participants preferred to be given more chances to participate in simple language activities and guided by the teachers for complex tasks. R1 stated,

R1: “For difficult task, it is better if the teacher teaches us”.

II. Students’ Perception of Language Camp Module

Planning a lesson to meet certain learning objectives using appropriate materials is rather burdening ([Baecher et al. 2014](#)). However, the effectiveness of learning process largely depends on the type of materials used by language teachers. When participants were asked about their perception of language camp, all participants responded positively. R1 mentioned that,

R1: “I want to have it (the activity) regularly. Since I will sit for SPM this year, I would prefer this camp to be conducted more often,”

In language camp, participants were given ample opportunity to interact with their peers. This friendly environment resulted in less-threatening language learning environment ([Krashen, 1985](#)). Therefore, interaction among peers could positively affect a student’s performance in language learning ([Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2011](#)). R2 added,

R2: “At school, we cannot move a lot like in language camp. We just discuss with friends beside us. In language camp, we are more free to move around,”

The participant, R2, explained that language learning at school is restricted to a confined space. In other words, group discussion does not happen regularly and students are not able to move around as much as in a language camp. According to [Yunus et al. \(2012\)](#) most classrooms in Malaysia are filled with large number of students which affects the effectiveness of a lesson and hinders students’ performance. From the researchers’ observations, hands-on activities such as origami attracted participants’ interest more than merely showing videos via LCD. The findings from the researchers’ observations are supported by semi-structured interview responses with the facilitator as he mentioned,

F2: "I saw that the students were more interested to learn when we conducted activities that requires them to physically do it – like an activity whereby they needed to follow step-by-step process in origami".

According to [Bonwell and Eison \(1991\)](#), student-centred approach triggers students' active participation and resulted in meaningful learning of the target language. R5 mentioned that showing a video clip before starting a lesson was interesting and fun because the participants could easily relate to the topics to be learnt. R5 mentioned:

R5: "I like the video when we watch it freely. Even though I don't know the meaning (no subtitles) but I understand the story,"

R3: "I think I have seen the video on Facebook, but I don't remember the story. But I know (familiar).

R3 stated that activities were interactive because he could generally relate to a topic that they are familiar with.

R1 also mentioned that integration of ICT (video) makes learning environment less threatening as they get to share their ideas with their peers.

Teachers' support tremendously impact learners' performance in learning ([Thang et al., 2011](#)). In terms of facilitators' assistance, the researchers found that participants of the language camp were highly assisted by the facilitators throughout the lessons. In the focus group interview, R5 said that,

R5: "Even though the facilitator always chose me (to answer questions), but they help me as well (to answer the question)."

His statement is in line with a response by the third facilitator (F3):

F3: "Yes, I did help him during the camp because he is the weakest student among them. But, I know he has the potential, he is also willing to learn. But of course, he needs more help than his other friends,"

When the participants faced difficulties in completing the given tasks, the researchers noted that the facilitators allowed more time for them to accomplish the task. This claim is derived from F1 interview responses,

F1: "I try my best to cater all students' needs. But of course, weak students received more assistance than good students. The reason why I paid more attention towards weak students was that, I wanted them to feel motivated to learn. By being motivated, I am sure they would have a positive attitude towards language learning,"

From the researchers' observation, participants were more interested to learn when the facilitators provided more scaffolding or assistance. R1 also mentioned that the fourth facilitator (F4) was very helpful and guided her to complete the given task within the time allocated. She said,

R1: "The facilitator helped us out throughout the lesson. Even though only some of us did not understand, she still repeated the instructions a few times "

Since more than half of the participants were male, assistance from a male facilitator (F3) was very intriguing. Male participants were very motivated to learn English and participate during the language camp, as they were delighted with the assistance provided by the F3. R2 expressed his preference to be assisted by F3 in the next session of language camp. In a session which F3 was absent, participants of the camp seemed to show less interest compared to when F3 was present. R2 mentioned that,

R2: "F3 helped me a lot. Plus, I did not feel shy because he is a male"

The researchers also noted that warm and friendly personality by F3 triggered students' interest to learn the language. In fact, male participants were highly motivated when male facilitator joined the language camp.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the integration of ICT in language learning would trigger students' interest and lower their anxiety level in learning a second language. In addition, conducive environment could highly motivate them to participate actively in language learning. They also prefer fresh and cutting-edge materials to be employed during language lessons. The students stated that group discussion increased their participation in the language classroom. However, most of the language teachers in their secondary schools do not employ student-centred approaches and only used conventional materials for language teaching, such as textbooks. The Asnaf students also agreed that the activities conducted in a fully immersive context such as language camps provide more opportunities for learning participation, allowing them to unleash their second language potential. Teacher-centered approaches are no longer relevant, as

students should become more active participants throughout the learning process. Apart from that, the participants also agreed that the number of hours for language learning at school is insufficient, and that the teacher often could not complete classroom activities due to time constraints. In addition, they also preferred language activities or language camps to be conducted outside their classrooms. In that manner, language learning would occur in a less-threatening and fun environment. Therefore, it is recommended for language instructors to bring their students to a new and natural environment instead of being restricted to a small confined place such as classroom. Hands-on activities that are conducted in an appropriate setting would greatly benefit students' language learning and allow more interaction and participation among students.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

This study has its own limitations. This study was embarked due to the problem faced by this charity home which is the students who live there have poor command of English proficiency. The language camp module was designed to spark the students' interest to learn English and to develop their confidence in using the language. As this study is a case study involving only 14 Asnaf secondary school students from one charity home, the findings could not be generalized to the big population. The findings could only be applied to similar circumstances or setting with students of similar characteristics.

As for future studies, researchers could embark on longitudinal studies in which the participants could be exposed to many sessions of language camps in a long duration of time. In addition, this module could be carried out to other charity homes with similar characteristics of students or residents, hence, multiple case studies could be carried out.

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