THE IMPACT OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS MANDARIN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Attitude plays a fundamental role in the learning process of foreign languages. It has recently gotten much attention from first and second-language researchers. Previous studies have indicated that learners showed a positive attitude towards learning Mandarin. Limited studies investigated the correlations between language learning attitude and course achievement among Mandarin foreign language learners. Therefore, this study tends to fill this gap. 614 non-native Malay learners of Mandarin from 5 different public universities in Malaysian participated in this study. The study used a quantitative design, and data was collected through questionnaires and the end-of-semester course grade. Descriptive statistics analysis, correlation and linear regression using SPSS. 25 were run to analyse the collected data. This study revealed a statistically positive correlation between attitude and Mandarin foreign language course achievement. The linear regression result revealed that learning attitude statistically predicted Mandarin foreign language learners' course achievement (β = .20, .001). This study has concluded limitations and recommendations to help institutions and interested researchers shed light on these further research studies.

Keywords: Attitude, Achievement, Mandarin foreign language

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is complex psychological, physiological, and even social process. This process involves many factors such as motivation, learning attitude, learner's native language, learning environment, age, gender, teaching strategies, and learners' factors. (Richards, 2021 In recent years, many language researchers and second or foreign language instructors have paid more attention to affective factors in language learning. The research and explorations from different perspectives and angles are expected to guide second or foreign language learning from the psychological perspective of learners so that second or foreign language learners can get some psychological support to ease the language learning process. (Arıkan & Özgür, 2020).

Learning a new language, especially a language different from the learners' native language, can be very stressful and challenging. Many factors can influence foreign language learners in the learning process. Factors such as learning environment, native language, age, gender etc., play a role in language learning. However, other factors such as self-efficacy, attitudes towards learning, learning engagement, and anxiety can influence second or foreign language learning. (Liu et al., 2022). Oroujlou & Vahedi (2011) also claimed that motivation, attitudes, and beliefs about learning a language are among the determinants that can influence students' efficiency in language classes.

Attitude in language learning

Research on attitude was not drawn much attention among language researchers before the 1960s. At that time, language attitude gained much interest in the field of Psychology. The findings of studies among psychologists on the roles of attitudes in language learning have acquired the attention of many language acquisition researchers about the importance of this internal construct in affecting the language learning process and performance.

Attitude is a behaviour that evaluates ideas, objects, events, or people (Gardner 1985). Attitude may be positive or negative toward something, yet it can also be ambiguous sometimes. Language and attitude are inextricably linked since they serve the same purpose in everyday life. In sociolinguistics, the attitude has assumed the position of an element humans should have to communicate with one another. Some studies of linguistic attitudes focus solely on attitudes toward the language itself. However, most definitions of language attitudes include attitudes toward speakers of a certain language.

Gardner and Lambert (1959, *as in* Kubś & Michałowska-Kubś, 2020*)* believe that attitudes play a significant role in language learning. The idea has also supported by Tódor & Dégi (2016), who argue that one of the most important predispositions of L2 learning is the learner's attitudes toward the language and its speakers. Tódor & Dégi's (2016) study found that learners' attitude influences motivation and significantly correlates with language learners' performance.

Since there is a correlation between attitude and language proficiency, more studies are conducted to gain a clearer view of this correlation. The well-known Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis synthesised findings of studies on effects and concluded that attitudes and proficiency in L2. (Krashen, 1981a as in Kang, 2022)

Attitudes toward language learning and its speakers often positively impact learning and outcomes. A positive attitude can boost motivation, which can lead to improved performance. Previous research (Shinge & Kotabagi, 2021; Doley, 2022) showed a connection between attitude and motivation.

Many factors can influence learners' attitudes towards learning foreign languages. Conteh (2002, p. 192–193, as cited in Getie, 2020) discovers the factors that affect learners' attitudes towards second or foreign language learning, which will influence their language proficiency. Among these factors are (1) personality factors, (2) educational factors, (3) social factors, (4) age factors, (5) and gender factors.

Relationship between Attitude and Achievement

Numerous studies have found a strong relationship between job attitude and job performance. Studies in various fields, including psychology, social science, business, health, and the workplace,

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explored the effect of attitude on job performance. Abdulkarim and Elhalim (2017) studied the effect of attitude toward work, job satisfaction, and performance using collected data using a questionnaire from 360 on-Saudi high education academicians. The study discovered that attitudes toward jobs and job satisfaction significantly affect education academicians' job performance. In another study, Wang et al. (2018) investigated competitive attitude and behaviour, job crafting, and job performance among the staff of a big private insurance company in China. The study concluded that competitive attitude and competitive behaviour could be predicted by trait competitiveness. Competitive attitude and behaviour can be related to work performance through job crafting, and the competitive environment controls this link.

Attitudes are one of the most remarkable features of social life. Education experts know the critical role attitudes play in an individual's educational development. Students' performance or achievement is always highlighted in academic literature and mass media, so educators should be aware of the factors influencing learners' achievement. Among those factors, Bajaj & Devi (2021) discovered that motivation and attitude are the most influential factors that affect learners' academic performances. Others (Demir & Akpınar, 2018；Mazana et al., 2018) discovered a significant positive correlation between learning attitudes and academic performance. A study was done by Al-Mutawah & Fateel (2018), which looked at students' learning attitudes towards mathematics. The study demonstrated a positive correlation between learners' attitudes towards mathematics and their mathematic achievement.

In the Malaysian context, Baba & Rostam Affendi (2020) investigated the relationship between learners' attitudes and their academic Performance among Malaysian public university learners by using a self-reported questionnaire. The study found a positive correlation between learning attitude and academic performance. The author argued that attitudes toward learning plays an important role in learning or any educational setting. Many studies investigated the correlation between learners' learning attitudes and their performance in a foreign language context, especially in learning English as a foreign language. Sarkhoush (2013) investigated the effect of learners learning attitudes and self-efficacy on their writing performance among learners taking the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in Iran. The study used the writing comprehension test and attitude toward writing task questionary to collect data from 30 female and 20 male participants. The study discovered that the learners' attitudes towards writing are negatively correlated to learners writing performance in English as a foreign language.

Other than English, some studies also explored attitudes toward learning a specific target language. Like Arabic (Mamat & Ajape, 2015; AlMansour, 2016). AlMansour (2016) investigate the attitude influence pronunciation proficiency among American university students learning Arabic as a foreign language. The study found that learners who show a positive attitude towards native speakers perform better in pronunciation.

Few studies investigate foreign language learners' attitudes toward language in Mandarin as a foreign language. (Yan Ju & Yan Mei, 2020; Yan Ju et al., 2022; Aatif, 2022). The previous study discovered that Mandarin foreign language learners all showed a positive attitude toward learning Mandarin and a willingness to continue studying in the future. Compared to male students, female students showed a more positive attitude in the investigation (2016) among Thai secondary school students. There was no study on the influence of attitude on Mandarin as a foreign language achievement. Therefore, this study tries to fill this gap by answering the following research questions:

1. Does attitude towards Mandarin foreign language learning predict course achievement among selected Malaysian public universities?

2. What is the magnitude of attitude in Mandarin foreign language learners' achievement?

METHODOLOGY

The current study used cluster sampling to invite Mandarin foreign language students from Malaysia's selected public universities to participate. 614 non-native speakers of Mandarin participated voluntarily. Participants with basic knowledge of Mandarin were excluded from the study (learners who learned Mandarin in primary schools in Malaysia). The participants ranged from 18 to 26 years old, with a mean of 22. The total learning hours for the Mandarin courses offered by the universities was 120, with 48 hours of face-to-face learning and 72 hours of non-face-to-face learning. As a result, the number of valid data points from participants was used for further statistical analysis.

The 20-item questionnaire to measure attitude toward learning Mandarin foreign language was adapted and modified by Abidin et al. (2012). The Mandarin learners' achievements were measured through their end-of-semester grades. The students' end-of-semester grades represented scores on oral and written quizzes and tests, projects, in-class activities, and homework. All grades were transformed to a standard grade point average (G.P.A.) scale (i.e., F = 0.00 to A+ = 4.00).

IBM. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS.) 24.0 was used to conduct the required statistical descriptive and correlation analyses. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between attitude towards learning and Mandarin foreign language course achievement. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the difference in Mandarin foreign language learners' attitudes according to their demographic variables such as gender, age, and proficiency level. The internal consistency of the instrument was checked before analysis. A reliability test of the questionnaire was run using Cronbach's Alpha analysis and obtained Cronbach's alpha of .909 for this study. Based on Taber (2017), a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 indicates acceptable reliability of the research instrument. Therefore, the reliability of the instrument for this study is promising.

DISCUSSION AND FINDING

Descriptive analysis of the background of Participants

The frequencies of the demographic variables gender, age, native language, level of Mandarin, length of learning the course, and Grade, have been checked for the sample of 614 participants of Mandarin foreign language learners. Table 1 indicated that most participants were female students (80%, n = 481), while 20% (n = 123) were male. As for the respondents' age, most of the participants' age ranges (65%, n = 399) from 21 to 22 years old, while 20.7% (n = 127) of them have ages ranging from 23 to 24 years. The analysis indicated that 11.1% (n = 68) was between 18 to 20, while 3.3% (n = 20) was 25 years and above.

The analysis also revealed that current Mandarin levels .45.5% of the participants (n = 281) were at Mandarin level one, followed by Mandarin level three with 30.5% (n = 187), while 23.6% of the total participants (n = 145) were at Mandarin level 2 when the data of this study was collected.

As for participants' reported grades, the analysis indicated that 34.2% (n = 210) obtained A or A+ in their final examinations, followed by 20.4% (n 125) who obtained B+ grades. It was also found that 17.9% (n = 110) of the participants reported A- grades, while 12.9% (n = 79) reported B grades. Moreover, 7.7% of the participants reported B- grades, followed by 3.3% (n = 23) of the participants who reported C+ grades, while 2.8% (n = 17) reported C grades. Finally, the analysis showed that

.2% of the total Mandarin foreign language learners' participants (n = 2) reported that they obtained F grades in their Mandarin final semester examinations.

Table 1. Statistical analysis of Demographic data

		N	Percentage
Gender			
	Male	481	80
	Female	123	20
Age			11.1
	18-20 years old	68	
	21-22 years old	399	65
	23-24 years old	127	20.7
	24 years old and above	20	3.3
Level of Mandarin studying currently			
	Mandarin Level 1	281	45.8
	Mandarin Level 2	145	23.6
	Mandarin Level 3	187	30.5
The end-of-semester Grade			
	A-A+	210	34.2
	A-	110	17.9
	B+	125	20.4
	B	79	12.9
	B-	47	7.7
	C+	23	3.3
	C	17	2.8
	F	2	0.2

Correlation and linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship and magnitude between attitude towards learning and Mandarin foreign language course achievement. The assumptions of the Mandarin foreign language questionnaire were checked before running the analysis. The histogram and scatterplot of standardised residuals indicated that the assumptions of normality (see Table 1), homogeneity of variances, and linearity were all met. Tests for multicollinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (VIF= 1.01)

Table 2. Assessment of univariate normality assumption for attitudes towards Mandarin Foreign language learning (N=614)

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
General Attitudes	6.07	1.31	-1.91	3.20
Social Attitudes	6.01	.87	-.985	1.14
Educational Attitudes	6.09	.87	-1.15	1.61

The result of the Pearson Correlation analysis suggested significant positive correlations between attitude towards learning and Mandairn foreign language course achievement.(r (38) = .34 p=0.01<0.05) The single-liner regression was calculated to predict the Mandarin foreign language course achievement based on attitude towards learning. The significant regression equation was found (F (1,612) =11.04, p=0.01<0.05), with an R^2 of .34. The result indicated attitude toward Mandarin foreign language learning statistically predicted learners' achievement (β = .20, t=3.32,.001). It can be interpreted that learners who show a positive attitude perform better in Mandarin foreign language learning.

Table 3. Linear regression analysis results

Variable	B	S.E. B	95% CI	β	t	P
Attitude	2.06	0.54	[0.02,1.15]	0.2	3.32	0.01

Note. R ^{2}= .34 N=614 CI = confidence interval to P<0.05

This study investigates the correlation between attitude towards learning and Mandarin foreign language course achievement and the magnitude of attitude on achievement. The result discovered a statistically positive correlation between attitude towards learning and Mandarin foreign language course achievement. The finding supports many empirical studies that found correlations between learners' learning attitudes and their achievement in a foreign language context, especially in learning English as a foreign language. Wijirahayu & Dorand (2018) found in their action research that learners' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language affect their speaking skill performance. The relationship between attitudes and performance is not limited to the English language alone but is observed across different languages. For example, AlMansour (2016) investigated the attitude influencing pronunciation proficiency among American university students learning Arabic as a foreign language. The study found that the learners who exhibit a positive attitude towards native speakers perform better in pronunciation proficiency. In learning Mandarin as a foreign language, studies investigate the effects of attitudes in mastering the Mandarin language (Yan Ju & Yan Mei, 2020; Yan Ju et al., 2022; Aatif, 2022). The studies discovered that Mandarin foreign language learners who showed a positive attitude toward learning Mandarin and a willingness to continue studying in the future would outperform their counterparts without these qualities. The researchers argued that attitudes toward learning play an important role in language learning or any educational setting.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of the current study indicate that attitude towards Mandarin foreign language learning plays an important role in course achievement among Malaysian public university non-native learners. The finding provided essential implications for Mandarin foreign language teaching and learning in the high institution in Malaysia. The finding indicated that Malay speakers of Mandarin novice learners with a positive attitude tend to achieve better in the course. Therefore, the researcher recommends that Mandarin foreign language instructors create a conducive learning environment for learners and always encourage and motivate learners to learn the target language. They are organising Mandarin clubs and days since these ways could make good mandarin models for students.

The study cannot be free from limitations. Firstly, the study examined only Malay speakers of Mandarin foreign language novice learners. Most of them are Muslim. The results might be rigor-

ously varied if this study were conducted in different environments, such as multireligious and multicultural milieus. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that future studies should consider the representativeness of different ethnicities and ideologies.

Furthermore, the current student collected data from Non-native Mandarin learners who are learning Mandarin as a foreign language and are more focused on Pinyin than Chinese characters. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that future studies should consider learning Mandarin as a foreign language with a different method (Leaning Chinese characters) because the magnitude of effects on Mandarin achievement might be different.

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