

MOTHER TONGUE AND SOCIAL ANXIETY AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT UPSI, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Moving abroad as international students would changes the social environment due to language, food, people and cultural diversity in a foreign country. This condition may cause the feeling of social anxiety in their new daily life. At worst, social anxiety might increase problems in cognitive, affective, and behavioral areas. This study aims to describe more about social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University according to the mother tongue, and gender as additional analysis. Research was designed by quantitative approach using descriptive, t-test and anova analyses. There were 117 International Students who completed the survey using Social Interactions Anxiety Scale (SIAS) for university students. The Anova test result reported, there is a significant difference in social anxiety among international students according to their mother tongue, $p= 0.03$ ($p<0.05$) and $F = 2.326$. International students who have mother tongue, English, seem had the lowest score of social anxiety (mean=2.12), followed by Indonesian (mean=2.54), followed by Korean (mean=2.57), and followed by Chinese (mean= 2.75). This study revealed international language, English, become as one factor that effected social anxiety problems among international students in the university.

Keywords: *International Students, Foreign University, Mother Tongue, Social Anxiety*

Introduction

International students in Malaysia has been increasing since 1996 (MoHe, 2009) till now. There were 17.531 international students, came from more than 175 countries around the world, which enroll in Malaysian higher education institutions during 2003-2007. Department of Immigration (MoHe, 2009) has shown 70,259 total international students who have enrolled in either Private Higher Education Institutions or Public Higher Education Institutions in 2009. The top five countries of enrolling students were from China (10.355), followed by Indonesia (10.020), Iran (6.245), Nigeria (6.054), and Bangladesh (3.586). The latest statistics showed that there are more than 90,000 international students currently studying in the several institutions of higher education in Malaysia (Yusoff & Chelliah, 2010).

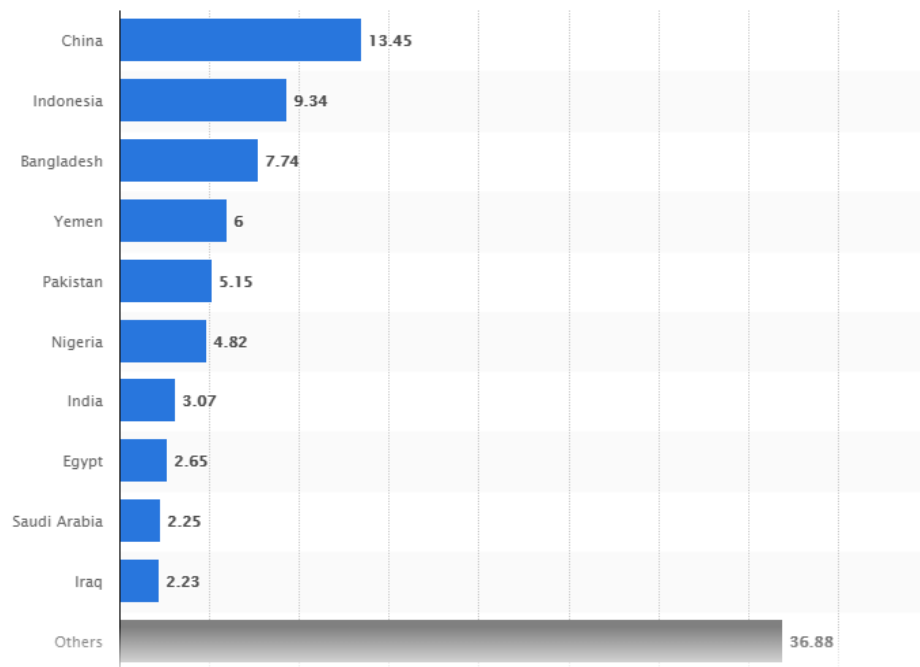


Figure 1: Number of international students in higher education in Malaysia 2019, by country

According to the figure 1, in 2019, there were approximately 13.45 thousand international students from China, followed by Indonesia (9.34 thousand), Bangladesh (7.74 thousand), Yamen (6 thousand), Pakistan (5.15 thousand) and Nigeria (4.82 thousand) studying in Malaysia. A large share of international students in Malaysia come from Muslim countries, a majority of whom were enrolled in private higher education institutions (Hirschmann, 2020). However, In this study, the researcher concentrated on Sultan Idris Education University as one of the larger public sector education universities in Malaysia, which has developing international standards for education levels.

Different students from various countries have their own language as mother tongue and communication style, originating from their home countries, then when they group together, each individual may feel a different level of social status, based on their native environments.

In this condition, international students should have the skills to adjust to new environments without anxiety in social life, either to academic performance, the local environment or the variety of environments among themselves as international students. This creates more various conditions in

culture, mind-set, language, and attitude. Successful social interactions will lead students to better their lives and achieve their goals as they want. Contractively, Brown (2008) has established many international students suffer anxiety due to the stress of communicating, feeling shame and inferiority, including even those who are able to speak English well. Vitasari, Wahab, Othman and Awang (2010) have shown that most of university students used to feel discomfort and anxious when doing class presentation because of social anxiety.

Holt et al. (1992) suggest that the situation that precipitates social anxiety could be classified into four primary categories. In the first category, the highest level of anxiety produces situations involving formal speaking and interactions, such as giving a speech in front of an audience, performing on stage, giving a report to a group, speaking at a meeting, and the like. The second category produces social anxiety as involving informal speaking and interaction. This category includes situations such as going to a party, meeting strangers, or trying to “pick up” someone. In third category, interactions requiring assertive behavior, such as expressing disagreement, returning goods to a store, or resisting a high pressure salesperson, also precipitate social anxiety. In fourth category, people sometimes feel socially anxious when they are simply observed by others while working, writing, or eating, for example. What all of these situations have in common is that they tend to evoke concerns with other people’s evaluations of oneself (Leary & Kowalsky, 1995).

Based on the explanation above, it seem social anxiety becomes as common problem, even for normal environment, hence foreign country may contributes more factors to lead this problem getting worse. Thereby, the aim of this study was to measure the differences of social anxiety among International students of Sultan Idris Education University, regarding to mother tongue, and gender as additional analysis.

H₀: There is no difference of social anxiety among International students of Sultan Idris Education University according to mother tongue

Methods

There were 155 international students who officially registered at Sultan Idris Education University, including exchange program students. This population comprised 89 students from degree program, including exchange students, 51 students from master program, and 15 students from PhD program. The following table describes detail about the population of this study.

Table 1.
International Students Population of Sultan Idris Education University

No	Program	Active
1	Degree	89
2	Master	51
3	PhD	15
Total		155

These students come from Indonesia, China, Korea, Iraq, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, USA, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore. A majority of the students are from Aceh, Indonesia, which is almost 50% of the population. Sultan Idris Education University is developing, and more international students attend every year. This research can also act as an evaluation for the International office at UPSI, about a general description regarding social anxiety and their students.

As some of international students travel to their home countries frequently and involve in other activities (e.g. collecting research data to other places, participation in events, etc), so it was not realistic to reach and access every international students to join in this study. Hence, participants of this study have been accessed by convenience sample technique. According to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the representative sample size for this population is not less than 113.

$$s = \frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2 (N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

Figure 2. Krejcie and Morgan's Formula

Note:

- s = required sample size
- X^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841)
- N = the population size
- P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size)
- d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05)

An introductory letter was written in English, with an official letter from Sultan Idris Education University, which was also attached with the questionnaire. The introductory letter comprised of an introduction of the researcher, reason of research, and declaration about the privacy of the respondent's given information. Since researcher has a good relation with the international students, so it was easy to contact the participants to participate in the study. The questionnaires of the study have been self-administrated and it ensured that participant answers all the questions correctly.

The questionnaires instrument has been used in the field study to gather the primary data from international students of Sultan Idris Education University. To facilitate the participant(s), the questionnaires have been used in English as every international student understands the English language.

The survey questionnaire comprises of two main sections, a) The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) and b) Demographic information.

In section 1, the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998) has been administered to assess anxiety and avoidance in social situations, and was selected as it provides a brief measure of social anxiety. The scale consists of 19 items and responses are given on a 5-point scale (1 = Not at all to 5 = All the time). The development and validation of the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) companion measures for assessing social phobia and fears were described, the SIAS assesses fears of more general social interaction, the scales corresponding to the DSM-III-R descriptions of Social Phobia-Circumscribed and Generalized types, respectively. The scale was shown to possess high levels of internal consistency and test-retest reliability. This scale has demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$) and test-retest reliability ($r = .92$). The scale correlated well with established measures of social anxiety (Mattick & Clarke, 1998).

In the last, section 2 of heading demographic section, six (6) questions were asked regarding participants' personal details, such as gender, age, country of origin, mother tongue, faculty, and level of education program.

A pilot study is an initial run-through of the procedures to be used in an investigation; it involves selecting a few respondents of target research population and trying out measure the items consistency. In this study, the researcher has conducted a pilot study to inspect the reliability of the research's instruments. There were 31 international students participated in the pilot study. The

statistical analysis result of reliability for Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) has shown the number $\alpha=0.931$ ($\alpha>0.7$).

Result

Descriptive statistics comprise of demographic information about all participants' profile such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation.

The population of this study was 155 international students of Sultan Idris Education University, while the sample was 117 international students. The frequency distribution about gender of participants which has shown the majority of the participants were females ($n=73$) which equals to 62.4% of the samples, and the rest of participant were males ($n=44$) which equals to 37.6 %. The age distribution of participants as follows: 20-23 years (52.1%), 24-27 years (24.8%), 28-31 years (18.8%), and above 31 years (4.3%). The majority age was ranging from 20-23 years ($n=61$) which equals to 52.1%, and the minority was above 31 years old that has only 4.3% ($n=5$). The number of countries was above 10, namely Indonesia, China, Korea, Iraq, USA, Nigeria, Pakistan, Jordan, Turkey, Brunei and others. They comprised of 47.9% ($n=56$) participants from Indonesia, 15.4% ($n=18$) participants were from China, 11.1% ($n=13$) participants were from Korea, 11.1% ($n=13$) were from USA, 4.3% ($n=5$) participants were from Iraq, 2.6% ($n=3$) participants were from Nigeria, 2.6% ($n=3$) participants were from Pakistan. The rest were from Jordan (.9%, $n=1$), Turkey (.9%, $n=1$), Brunei (.9%, $n=1$) and 2.3% ($n=3$) were from others countries. Most of participants were from Indonesia (47.9%) and China (15.4%). Most of the participants are using their own language, as mother tongue, to communicate such as Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Arabic, Melayu, Urdu, and Other. While only American participants who are using English, as also their mother tongue, in their daily communication (11.1%, $n=13$).

Normality test has been administrated by using SPSS 19 for windows. Technique of Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS-Z) was used to determine the normality of data in this study. Normality test is used to determine whether the data is well modeled by a normal distribution or not. The data with normal distribution is shown with $p > .05$. The result of data distribution of this study was normal (K-Z= 1.133, $p= 0.153$).

T-Test and One Way Anova analysis test were applied to determine the differences of social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University according to gender and mother tongue.

Table 2. reports the differences of social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University according to gender and mother tongue. According to the result of T-Test analysis has showed there was no statistical significant difference between males and females with social anxiety, ($t=-.160$, $p=.873$). The mean of social anxiety for the females was higher, (mean=2.46, SD=.674), than the males, (mean=2.44, SD=.715). This is an indication that the females' control of social anxiety is higher than the male's control of social anxiety. Even though the mean showed a difference in numbers, the t-test results didn't support the differences in gender aspects for social anxiety, with a non-significant p-value.

Table 2.
T-Test Analysis Result

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Social Anxiety	Male	44	2.4452	.71533	.10784
	Female	73	2.4666	.67493	.07899
Total		117			

Further, one way ANOVA was applied to measure the participants social anxiety was according to mother tongue. Table 3 reported that there was significant differences among mother tongue in regards to social anxiety ($F=2.326$, $p=0.03$). The lowest mean of social anxiety, according to mother tongue, was international students who speak English, (2.122), followed by Indonesian (2.544), followed by Korean (2.570), follow by Chinese (2.750), and Others, such as Arabic, Melayu, Urdhu, Acehnese, etc (2.108).

Table 3.
One Way Anova Analysis Result

Mother Toungue	N	Mean	SD
English	12	2.1225	.77165
Indonesian	48	2.5441	.64535
Korean	13	2.5701	.50624
Chinese	17	2.7509	.59827
Others (Arabic, Melayu, Urdhu, Acehnese, etc)	27	2.1081	0.4143
Total	117		

Discussion

The result of this analysis supported the previous study by Brown (2008), who has found that stress of communicating, feeling inferiority and shame are the major problems that suffered by many international students. The current study has proved that international students who speak English as their mother tongue has less social anxiety compared to others. International students from USA are more confident to communicate with international language as they are an English native speaker. Based on researchers' observation also showed, Indonesian and Korean have moderate level in English conversation skill, since Chinese in UPSI has worse English compare to the rest countries, such as Jordan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Kurdistan.

Additionally, the supporting report was also revealed by Vitasari, Wahab, and Othman (2010) that, class presentation becomes as one situation that contribute the feeling of discomfort, which also part of social anxiety, majority faced by the most of university students. More generally, there were many studies that conclude 1 in 3 people experiencing excessive anxiety when speaking in public and had a significant adverse effect on their lives (Nevid, et. al, 2005), 10-20% of colleges students suffer from communication anxiety (Meikasari, 2010), and 3 of 4 adults felt anxious when attending meeting with new people (Zimbardo, 1990).

Conclusion

This study provided no support for the first null hypothesis, since it has been found that there is a significant differences social anxiety among international university students, according to mother tongue. The current study has proved that international students who speak English as their mother tongue has less social anxiety compared to others. Otherwise, international language, English, become as one factor that effected social anxiety problems among international students in the foreign country. This study also revealed there were no differences level of social anxiety according to gender, means gender doesn't influence much to the feeling of social anxiety even though female has a tend to be more risk to have the higher level compare to male, but not significant.

Suggestion

Future research is needed to explore more detail about the social anxiety in more specific way and larger of population. Apply the variation of analysis to this each aspect of these variable will able to add deeper explanation for future study.

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