

AN EXPLORATION OF LANGUAGE LEARNERS' ATTITUDES AND CONSTRAINTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION-TAKE COLLEGE STUDENTS IN MACAO AS AN EXAMPLE

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Abstract - This paper intends to explore college students' attitude and constraints towards English learning after starting their new college life. In order to achieve this goal, the questionnaires were modified on the basis of the theory of planned behaviour to explore the attitude and constraints of college freshmen. A total of 470 questionnaire valid responses were collected from college freshmen in Macao. The findings confirmed that attitude and perceived behavioral control of learners were significantly related to their behavioral intention. Moreover, gender and the places of previous studying also revealed significantly differences on their attitude, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention. It is finally hoped that the findings of this study would provide some suggestions to language educators and learners on language learning and teaching contexts.

Keywords - Theory of planned behaviour, Attitude, Constraints, Perceived behavioral control, Behavioral Intention

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of English education has been considered as a strategy on increasing the competitiveness to international environment. English learning and teaching has, therefore, become a focus and been aware of its importance on formal education in non-native English speaking countries. Different teaching methods and learning strategies have been studied among educational researchers in various contexts. Teaching cannot be discussed without taking learning into consideration. Teaching is guiding and facilitating learners to learn better under different settings and conditions [1]. Many researchers such as Canale, M., & Swain, M. [2], Long [3], Bachman [4] have devoted themselves on finding the way of teaching, which could allow language users to use language efficiently. On the other hand, as to language learning, researchers such as Lightbown & Spada [5], Johari et al., [6] put more emphasis on the perspective of learners. More recent, the computer assist language learning (CALL) and teaching have also been researched owing to the development of technology [7]

Little research has been conducted from the psychological perspectives of learners' behavioral intention. This may be because that English has been long been considered as a subject to be taught at schools, so that students take learning English for granted. However, if learners do develop their English proficiency continuously after entering universities is an issue that still needs to be uncovered. As a result, this study attempts to explore the attitude and constraints of college freshmen on English learning in Macao. Specifically, the constraints originate from internal or external factors, which can be viewed as a behavioral control because they prevent learners from performing their behavioral

intention. On the basis of this theory, therefore, learners' behavioral attitude, perceived behavioral control towards their behavioral intention would be examined. In addition, gender differences on their attitude, perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention are explored. The comparison between Macao and non-local college freshmen in terms of attitude, perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention are also included in this study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is the most famous theory which applies to exploring attitude-based behavior in social psychology. This theory can facilitate researchers into capturing how individuals change their behavior patterns and as their behaviors are the result of deliberate planning [8]. This theory predicts that behavioral intention is the most direct factor affecting behavior, which in turn is influenced by attitude.

The origin of the Theory of planned behavior derives from the Theory of Multi-attribute Attitude [10], which claims that behavioral attitude determines behavioral intention, and the expected behavioral results and the evaluation of the results. Thereafter, Fishbein and Ajzen [8], on the basis of the previous Theory, developed multiple attribute attitude Theory, and proposed the Theory of rational behavior (Theory of Reasoned Action, TRA).

This theory suggests that behavioral intention is a direct factor determining behavior, which is influenced by behavioral attitude and subjective norms. After that, in practical application, Ajzen [11] believes that in the theory of rational behavior it is assumed that an individual's behavior controlled by will, restricts the wide application of this theory. In order to expand the application scope of this theory,

Perceived Behavior Control is added on the basis of the theory of rational behavior. Eventually, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) becomes the maturity of theory [12].

As the purpose of this study, subjective norm was not included so that the following paragraphs would not discuss this dimension of TPB further. In other words, attitude and perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention would be discussed below.

Attitude is the positive or negative emotion held by an individual towards a specific behavior. In other words, that is a kind of psychological "good and bad", "harmful and beneficial", evaluation of "pleasure and unhappiness" and "like and dislike"[13].

Perceptual behavioral control refers to the degree to which an individual is aware of the ability to perform a specific behavior, and it reflects the degree to which an individual is aware of the ease or difficulty in promoting or hindering the implementation of behavioral factors [13]. Its influence can be explained in two forms: firstly, is to have the meaning of motive to the behavioral intention (autonomy); Second, it can predict behavior directly (self-efficiency).

Intention refers to the possibility of an individual's subjective probability of taking a particular action [8], which reflects the individual's willingness to take a particular action [13]. Ajzen [12] proposes the stronger the intention to perform a behavior, the more likely the individual is to perform the actual behavior. The positive relationship between intention and actual behavior is also confirmed by Venkatesh and Davis[14] and Venkatesh, Morris, and Ackerman [15].

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is ongoing and data is still being collected and analyzed so the results presented only pertain from February to 10th of March, 2019. Quantitative research method was employed in this study to investigate college students' attitude and perceived behavioral control toward their behavioral intention of learning English. A self-administered questionnaire was developed based on a comprehensive literature review. This questionnaire consisted of four sections, and a 7-point Likert scale was used. The first section was demographic characteristics; the second section was the identification of the Theory of planned behaviour involving attitude, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement that ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree.

Based on the intensive reviews of previous studies, the following hypotheses were proposed.

H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between attitude and behavioral intention.

H₂: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention.

H₃: Learners' genders have significant differences in attitude and perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention.

H₄: The places of learners' previous studies have significant differences in attitude, perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention.

Participants

Data collection took place from February to March in 2019. This study used purposive sampling and participants were Macao college students. The pilot study was conducted on the first week of January 2019. After the pilot study, this research checked whether the wording and meaning of statements were clear for participants while distributing the paper questionnaires. After modifying some unclear meanings and language in the questionnaires, the main study was conducted by using an electronic questionnaire and distributed to all universities and colleges in Macao.

After conducting the data collection of the main study, there were 478 questionnaires that had been collected from 10th of February to 10th of March. 8 surveys that provided multiple or blank answers were excluded. A total of 470 questionnaires were used for data analysis. Thus, the response rate was 98%.

The pilot study adopted Cronbach's α to measure the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire. The results showed that Cronbach's α for attitude, perceived behaviour control and behaviour intention was between 0.937 and 0.830. The α values were all greater than 0.7, which indicates an acceptable level and reveals high internal consistency. The convergent validity factor loading β values was 0.913 and 0.812 and all greater than 0.5. The results showed that the survey questions were related to each other and valid.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Collected data was analyzed using SPSS software. As this is an on-going research, the results are presented to respond to the four hypotheses. After the testing validity and reliability of this study, a regression analysis, and t-test were applied to verify the established research hypothesis. In addition, description frequency analysis was used to analyze respondents' demographic information to ensure normal distribution of the participants.

A total of 470 college freshmen participated in this study. The gender of the respondents was almost equally distributed, with 47.4% female and 52.6% male. In regard to the place of participants' previous studies, 151 participants (33%) are Macao local students and 307 participants (65%) are from

Mainland China. The rest 12 (0.02%) participants are from other places such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Africa countries.

Factor Analysis

The 8 items measuring learners' attitude, and 8 items measuring perceived behavior control including self-efficiency and autonomy were factors analysed with Varimax rotation using Principal Component methods. The Principal Component Analysis with eigenvalues greater than one was rotated by the Varimax analysis. Only factor loadings of 0.50 or higher were retained, indicating good correlations between the items and the factors to which they belonged [16].

Regression Analysis

The relationship between attitude, perceived behavioral control and behavior intention

The learners' attitude ($\beta=.159$, $\text{sig}<.001$), perceived behavioral control (self-efficiency) ($\beta=.445$, $\text{sig}<.000$), and perceived behavioral control (autonomy) ($\beta=.0195$, $\text{sig}<.000$) positively affect learners' behavioral intention ($\beta=1.653$, $R^2=0.548$, $\text{Adj.}R^2=0.545$, $p<0.000$). It presents that the learners' perceived behavioral control (self-efficiency) is the most influential factor which affects their behavioral intention in comparison with learners' attitude and perceived behavioral control (autonomy). That is, the behavioral intention of learners resulted from their self-efficiency. In other words, learners obtain individuals' beliefs regarding their ability to perform specific tasks.

T-Test

Gender differences

The male learners' attitude ($M=4.80$) was no significantly difference (t value $=-1.00$, $p=.316>.05$) between female learners ($M=4.92$). The mean of perceived behavioral control (self-efficiency) between male learners ($M=4.90$) and female learners ($M=5.25$) was significantly difference (t value $=-2.65$, $p=0.008<.05$). This indicates that perceived behavioral control (self-efficiency) of female learners was significantly higher than that of male learners. The male learners' ($M=4.57$) perceived behavioral control (autonomy) was no significantly difference between female learners ($M=4.76$) (t value $=-1.469$, $p=0.143>.005$). The mean difference of behavioral intention between male ($M=5.42$) and female learners ($M=5.76$) was significant (t value $=-2.668$, $p=0.008<.05$). This indicates that behavioral intention of female learners was significantly higher than that of male learners.

The places of previous studies

According to the collected data, the participants originating from places such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and some African countries were excluded in this analysis as it only meant 0.02% of the total

participants. In doing so, the results indicate that there are significant differences on learners' attitude, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention in terms of the places of their previous studies. The attitude of learners from Mainland China ($M=5.08$) was significantly different (t value $=-7.243$, $p=.00<.05$) from the learners from Macao ($M=4.16$). The Macao local learners' perceived behavioral control (self-efficiency) ($M=4.09$) was significantly different (t value $=-9.347$, $p=.00<.05$) from Mainland learners ($M=5.39$). The perceived behavioral control (autonomy) of learners from Mainland China ($M=4.90$) was significantly different (t value $=-7.307$, $p=.00<.05$) from the learners from Macao ($M=3.90$). Macao local learners' ($M=4.62$) behavioral intention was significantly different (t value $=-9.082$, $p=.00<.05$) from Mainland learners' ($M=5.90$).

V. CONCLUSION AND COMMENDATIONS

According to the findings of this study, those four hypotheses were supported. The results could be concluded and some suggestions were proposed as follows.

Firstly, the relationship between attitude and perceived behavioral control towards behavioral intention were significantly positive correlated. This could be interpreted that the attitude and perceived behavioral control of college freshmen would have an impact on their behavioral intention of English learning. In particular, perceived behavioral control had greater influence on executing their behavioral intention. Therefore, college freshmen might not intend to learn English when they noticed they obtain less ability on learning English.

On the other hand, attitude was a less influential factor towards behavioral intention. This result could be assumed as that learners might be less interested in learning English resulting from their perceived behavioral control rather than their attitude. Therefore, it is recommended that language teachers should facilitate their learners on eliminating such difficulties from the process of English learning. Through adopting various effective curriculum and methods, learners could be made aware of the difficulties within their learning process based on the classroom teaching. Furthermore, perceived behavioral control involves two dimensions including self-efficacy and autonomy. In particular, self-efficacy was a more influential factor towards their behavioral intention in comparison with attitude and autonomy. More specifically, self-efficacy of college freshmen allows them to have personal judgments on their ability and to evaluate if it enables them to attain their goals. As a result, the suggestion of this finding is to propose establishing communication channels between teachers and

students, as it could help learners to overcome their difficulties on their English learning. In regard to the learners' autonomy, it obtained lower level of impact in comparison with self-efficacy towards behavioral intention. In other words, the learners' autonomy was a less influential factor towards learning English. The reason behind this could be that college freshmen might be passive learners. Those college freshmen only study when schools require them to do so. As a result, it is suggested that language educators or instructors should encourage students to learn by means of adopting appropriate teaching strategies and various materials to motivate their learners. In addition, language educators also need to enhance their teaching methods to guide their learners towards the autonomy of language learning.

Thirdly, the finding of this study presented the gender differences in terms of attitude, perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention. In particular, the result showed that the perceived behavioral control (self-efficacy) of female learners was significantly higher than that of male learners. This result is in the same line with the studies of Chien & Wei [17], Oxford and Crookall [18], and Wharton [19]. Their finding suggested that female learners obtained better ability in languages. In addition, female learners also obtain higher level of behavioral intention in comparison with male students. This finding was similar to previous studies such as the studies of Gist, Schwoerer, & Rosen [20] and Compeau & Higgins [21]. In conclusion, the more self-efficacy of female learners is perceived, the higher behavioral intention of female learners will be. Lastly, the results also presented that there are significant differences between Mainland China learners and Macao local learners in terms of their attitude, perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention. This finding provided an interesting information to language teaching and learning contexts. Owing to Mainland China, that is currently facing the rapid growth of economy, a great deal of international companies have launched in China. The use of English language has been more and more frequent so that learners from Mainland would attempt to put more efforts on learning English for strengthening their competitiveness. On the other hand, Macao has been considered as a tourist destination with most tourists from Mainland and Hong Kong [22]. Under this circumstance, the learners in Macao might lack the interest in learning English as the labour markets do not really require much foreign language competence. When Macao becomes a world leisure and tourism destination, Macao local students will have to equip themselves well to face the transition to internationalization. It is suggested that English language teaching and learning in Macao should be enhanced in different levels of schooling to prepare Macao local students

for future markets.

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