ARABIC-SPEAKING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH IN THE STUDY ABROAD CONTEXT

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COP   **:** Community of practice

AILC **:** Attitude towards Intercultural Learning Community

ESL   **:** English as a second language

EFL   **:** English as foreign language

IFO   **:** Intercultural friendship orientation

LC   **:** Learning Community

ILC   **:** Intercultural learning community

IIGW **:** Interest in intercultural group work

IP   **:** Intercultural posture

SC   **:** Self-confidence

GC   **:** Group cohesiveness

IAT   **:** Intergroup approach tendency

LCA   **:** Language communication anxiety

MLE   **:** Motivation to learn English.

RCD   **:** Respect for cultural differences

SPCC **:** Self-perceived communication competence

SLA   **:** Second language acquisition

L1   **:** First Language

L2   **:** Second Language

WTC   **:** Willingness to communicate

SEM   **:** Structural equation modelling

KESEDIAAN PELAJAR UNIVERSITI YANG BERBAHASA ARAB UNTUK BERKOMUNIKASI DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM KONTEKS BELAJAR DI LUAR NEGARA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan menjelaskan kesediaan pelajar penutur bahasa Arab yang sedang menuntut di luar negara untuk berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggeris. Diharapkan kajian ini akan dapat menambah nilai kepada bukti-bukti yang agak terbatas dalam penyelidikan empirik tentang kesediaan untuk berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua, iaitu dalam konteks belajar di luar negara di Malaysia. Selanjutnya, kajian ini juga bertujuan mengkaji pengaruh sikap individu terhadap komuniti pembelajaran antara budaya, keyakinan diri (*self-confidence*, SC) dan motivasi terhadap kesediaan untuk berkomunikasi (*willingness to communicate*, WTC). Situasi kognitif, model sosio-pendidikan dan model kesediaan untuk berkomunikasi telah digunakan untuk menyokong rangka kerja teoritikal dalam kajian ini. Seramai 180 orang pelajar penutur bahasa Arab di Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM) telah terlibat dalam kajian ini, dan 12 orang daripada mereka telah ditemu bual. Data telah dikumpul sepanjang tahun akademik 2010/2011 berdasarkan teknik pensampelan tak kebarangkalian. Analisis data telah dijalankan dengan menggunakan pelbagai kaedah termasuk regresi berganda; pemodelan persamaan struktur menggunakan SPSS; dan pakej perisian AMOS telah digunakan untuk data kuantitatif, sementara perisian NVIVO 8 telah digunakan untuk data kualitatif. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar mempunyai tahap-tahap yang sederhana untuk kesediaan untuk berkomunikasi (WTC), kecekapan berkomunikasi tanggapan kendiri (*self-perceived communication*

confidence, SPCC), kebimbangan komunikasi bahasa (*language communication anxiety, LCA*), motivasi, dan sikap positif terhadap komuniti pembelajaran antara budaya. Semua pembolehubah komunikasi ini didapati berkolerasi secara signifikan antara satu sama lain pada tahap 0.1. Namun begitu, pembolehubah 'menghormati perbezaan budaya (*respect for cultural differences, RCD*) tidak berkorelasi dengan WTC. Kebimbangan komunikasi bahasa dan kemahiran berkomunikasi tanggapan kendiri yang menggambarkan keyakinan diri berkomunikasi pelajar adalah faktor-faktor yang paling berpengaruh, dan motivasi adalah faktor berpengaruh kedua yang menunjukkan bahawa kedua-duanya adalah peramal yang baik bagi WTC pelajar. Walau bagaimanapun, sikap (postur antara budaya) seorang pelajar juga didapati merupakan peramal yang signifikan untuk WTC. Faktor ini juga didapati merupakan faktor separa berpengaruh terhadap WTC. Keputusan SEM menunjukkan bahawa kesediaan pelajar untuk berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggeris mempunyai hubungan langsung yang secara statistiknya adalah signifikan i dari segi keyakinan diri, dan secara tidak langsungnya dari segi postur antara budaya (*intercultural posture, IP*) melalui keyakinan diri (*self-confidence, SC*). Postur antara budaya (IP) mempunyai hubungan langsung terhadap motivasi. Membangunkan dan memahami peranan-peranan berpengaruh kesediaan, sikap, motivasi, kecekapan berkomunikasi tanggapan kendiri, dan kebimbangan komunikasi dalam komuniti antara budaya bagi perspektif yang diamalkan boleh mewujudkan suatu teori yang dapat membantu menjelaskan kejayaan pelajar penutur bahasa Arab dalam pembelajaran kemahiran bahasa, dalam konteks belajar di luar negara.

ARABIC-SPEAKING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH IN THE CONTEXT OF STUDYING ABROAD

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explain Arabic-speaking students' willingness to communicate in English while studying outside their country. It is hoped that this study will add value to the limited empirical research evidence regarding a person's willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia. Furthermore, this study also aims to investigate the influence of an individual's attitude towards intercultural learning community, communication self-confidence (SC) and motivation on their willingness to communicate (WTC). Situation cognition, socio-educational model, and willingness to communicate model were applied to underpin the theoretical framework of this research A total of 180 Arabic-speaking learners at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) were surveyed and 12 of them were interviewed. Data was collected during the 2010/2011 academic year using the 'non-probability sampling' technique. Data analyses were performed using various methods, including multiple regression; structural equation modelling using the SPSS; and the AMOS software package was used for quantitative data while the NVIVO 8 software was used for qualitative data. The results of this study have shown that students had moderate levels of willingness to communicate (WTC), self-perceived communication competence (SPCC), language communication anxiety (LCA), motivation, and positive attitudes towards the intercultural learning community. All

of these communication variables were found to be significantly correlated with each other at the .01 level. However, the 'respect for cultural differences' (RCD) variable was not correlated with WTC. Language communication anxiety and self-perceived communication competence that reflect the communication self-confidence of the students were the most influential factors and motivation was the secondary influential factor that showed good predictions of students' WTC. However, the attitude (intercultural posture) of a student was also found to be a significant predictor of WTC. This factor was found to be a partially influential factor of WTC. SEM results revealed that students' willingness to communicate in English has a statistically significant direct path from self-confidence and an indirect path from intercultural posture (IP) through Self-confidence (SC). Intercultural posture (IP) has a direct path to motivation. Developing and understanding the influential roles of willingness, attitudes, motivation, self-perceived communication competence, and communication anxiety within an intercultural community of practiced perspectives presents a theoretical lens that would help to explain the success of Arabic-speaking students in learning language skills in the context of studying abroad.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The study of language learning and how an individual is successful in obtaining language skills is the question many have asked. Intercultural communication has become a required skill for developing either personal relationship or language learning. However, learning English as a second language (ESL) facilitates better communication and understanding among learners from different cultural and language backgrounds. Hence, communication has expanded to become a crucial factor that could explain second language learning. In other words, willingness to communicate (WTC) is a new construct that has currently joined the second language learning research. Several studies have examined WTC in English as a second language among learners who were pursuing their education outside their countries. The social-cultural perspective has increased its position in explaining WTC in English. Thus, intercultural posture (IP) was developed from a new perspective, which takes into account ESL learners' attitudes towards intercultural community overseas. However, this study will contribute mainly to the body of knowledge in research of WTC in English as a second language.

Moreover, this study looks at specific factors that have helped English language learners to improve their communication, particularly when speaking, and try to discover its effects on the language learner, if any. Most importantly, the purpose of this study is to explain the factors that have contributed to a learner's willingness to communicate in English as a second language, especially among Arab learners as

international students, in the study abroad context in Malaysia. Furthermore, this study will examine the effect of attitude towards intercultural learning community, self-confidence, and motivation as independent variables on willingness to communicate as the dependent variable.

1.2   Background of the study

In today's global society, students should gain global competency and one's ability to function successfully and effectively will depend largely upon his/her ability to communicate, work and live with people who are culturally different (Hunter, 2004). Therefore, the ability to speak more than one language may be regarded as a prerequisite for communication. It is important for students to be able to express themselves, not only in writing and reading, but also in speaking. Language is a powerful tool that may either create communication barrier or lead to effective communication (Ieva & Riamonda, 2002). English language is an important tool to help students to engage in communication and how the competency can be explored depends on how much the individuals are willing to talk in English. Therefore, a second language can be considered as an effective avenue towards improving and promoting communication in a multicultural society (Clement, 2003). The goal of learning a foreign language can be defined as to facilitate communication and understanding between persons who come from different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages (Yashima et al., 2004).

Thus, English language learning helps students to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate, and perceive the world around them. Students should be equipped to deal with international issues and communicate with people from various backgrounds (Clarke et al., 2009). Yashima (2002)

postulated the "international posture" construct as an alternative to Gardner's attitudinal and integrative construct, with the view of English as a language for international communication rather than communication with a specific L2 group. This term was further developed in this study to capture the tendency to see oneself as connected and immersed in the intercultural community, to have concerns about intercultural issues and readiness to interact with people other than their own. Learning occurs effectively when there is a strong sense of community among learners (Rovia & Wighting, 2005).

The notion of community has encroached into the learning field; many researchers emphasized the importance of community in the learning process. This term has been introduced in the literature as; a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), learning community (Wilson, 1996), international community (Yashima, 2002), and imagined community (Dornyei, 2003). Palloff and Pratt (1999) had stressed on the relationship between the individual and the community he/she is in. They stated that "…the power of community is great. The power of a learning community is even greater, as it supports the intellectual as well as personal growth and development of its members" (p. 163). However, individual learning and experience from participating and engaging in the community will definitely depend on the person's attitude towards the community that he/she is living in. Therefore, attitude towards the community is considered as a key component of intercultural relationship and a significant marker of social cohesion.

The community plays an essential role in the learning of language. The amount of engagement in the community will definitely influence the attitude and motivation among practitioners. Therefore, attitudinal and motivational factors may cause variations since attitudes and motivation influence one's second language learning

behaviour (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; 1959). Motivation level varies when learners experience success or failure in learning, when they become more or less motivated towards learning (Christina, 2006). Gardner (1985) proposed that attitudes act as a support for motivation. Additionally, among the affective individual difference variables, motivation is the proximate cause of language achievement. However, in real life situations outside the classroom, motivation is not necessarily sufficient for the students to initiate communication because "they actually have to initiate or participate in communication in their less familiar language" (Matsuoka & Evans, 2005). Willingness to communicate with the intention of initiating communication was the predictor for the frequency of communication in a second language, whereas motivation was the predictor for either the willingness to communicate or frequency of communication, or both (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

As teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language has shifted from the old method of grammar translation, new communicative approaches have helped students participate in the social community around them. The importance of communicative language learning is through the engagement of language learners in communication to allow them to develop their communication behaviours. Willingness to communicate then enhances the learning process. Researchers have considered willingness to communicate as a key concept in learning a second language and in communication (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Yahima, 2002; Kim, 2004; Peng, 2007). MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued that WTC is the final step in preparing the language learner for second language use. For example, the students' increased willingness to talk can be result in their increased success in SLA if they have more opportunities to have contact with speakers of the language.

McCroskey and Richmond (1987) have defined the construct of willingness to communicate (WTC) as referring to an individual's general personality orientation towards talking. Willingness to communicate is "a personality-based, trait-like predisposition, which is relatively consistent across a variety of communication context and types of receivers" (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). Therefore, willingness to communicate is a valued behaviour that helps to develop communication skills.

An essential reason for not being willing to communicate is the fear or lack of willingness to communicate with others. Richmond and McCroskey (1995) stated that lack of communication results from "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (p.41). Possessing a lack of communication has typically been seen in one's reluctance to speak, and is generally subsumed in the construct of communication apprehension (Clark, 1989). Communication competence is related to an individual's willingness to communicate. When individuals do not perceive themselves as competent, they would be more likely to be anxious about communicating. They may withdraw from communicating, indicating them to be less willing to engage in communicative behaviour (Barraclough et al., 1988). "A person's self-perceived communication competence, as oppose to their actual behavioural competence, will greatly affect that person's willingness to initiate and engage in communication. It is what a person thinks s/he can do, not what s/he actually could do, which impacts the individual's behavioural choice" (Barraclough et al., 1988, p.188). Communication anxiety and communication competence have been found to be significantly related to each other, thus producing self-confidence among individuals. Communication self-confidence can be defined in terms of self-perception of second language

communication competence and a low level of communication anxiety (Clement, 1980, 1986; Yashima, 2002; Yahima et al., 2004).

However, English language communication is clearly an important condition for successful second language acquisition (Hashimoto, 2002). Moreover, the ultimate goal of language learning was recently defined as "…authentic communication between persons of different language and cultural background" (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Therefore, learning a new language is not just learning its grammatical and lexical components. It requires an understanding of when and how to use the language in actual daily situations. Learning a second language cannot be accomplished in isolation, but through the interaction with others in a supportive environment (Ellis, 1999; Yeh, 2005). Therefore, any adult student who has seriously tried to learn a second language in a classroom in his/her home country may show the difficulty of reaching a good level of communication, even after years of studying that language. Students may spend considerable time and may complete numerous lessons, only to become dissatisfied with their slow progress. However, learning a new language in other countries might provide to be a good opportunity for the development of a person's language skills.

When students travel away from home for any length of time, they will feel homesick at the beginning. However, this feeling becomes less of a problem as they adapt to their new environment or community and start to enjoy new relationships and experiences. Today, many students are studying abroad and for them, it is probably their first time away from family, friends and everything that is familiar. The country they have moved to may have a different culture and language, so they need to adjust to this new situation and learn how to communicate in new ways. Therefore, the opportunity is available for students to develop their attitude,

motivation, increase their self-confidence, and willingness to communicate in a second language with other students and speakers. Previous studies have presented various differences in the language usage of study abroad (SA) versus non-SA students (Freed, 1995). The nature of the SA context is; foreign students who interact with other people, both in and out of the classroom, can enhance one's willingness to communicate in a second language (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008).

The antecedents of willingness to communicate in L1 and L2, communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence have consistently demonstrated a substantial influence on WTC. However, not sufficient studies have assessed these variables in different cultures and language contexts. Barraclough et al. (1988) stated that culture has an impact on willingness to communicate to the point that it "would be expected to operate more at a trait than at situational level. Although cultural differences might be more apparent in some contexts than in others, it would be assumed that differences in an individual's day to day communication behaviours may be accounted for more by context than by cultural variations" (Barraclough et al., 1988, p.188).

The number of Arabic-speaking students in the abroad context, that is culturally different from the home context, has increased. The ability to communicate across culture is becoming increasingly important. Recent studies on a willingness to communicate have shifted the research interest from the perspective of first language communication to second or foreign language communication. Yet little is known about learners' social psychology including their motivation, intercultural attitudes, and willingness to communicate in English in the study abroad context. Generally, this current research explores the relationships between the Arabic–speaking student's motivation, attitude towards intercultural learning community, self-

confidence, and willingness to communicate in second language learning, which has been previously unexplored.

1.3 English and education status in Malaysia

The English language was first introduced in Malaysia by the British Government in the early-nineteenth century (Foo and Richards, 2004). It has been a predominant language in both colonial and post-colonial Malaysia though the country's national language is Malay (Chung, 2009). Nevertheless, after its independence, the Malaysian government has taken steps towards implementing Malay into the national language policy and has included it in the educational system as a medium of instruction.

The emergence of the globalization phenomenon has forced many people, including Malaysians, to claim their membership in the wide and intercultural global community that uses the English language as a global language or lingua franca where there exists a pressing need for changing educational language policy. Accordingly, the Malaysian government has decided in the 1990s, to reconsider its educational language policy in order to meet citizens' needs based on the globalization view. It was reported that, "The national promotion of English seems to signal the end of the period when nation-building depends on the national language and the beginning of the time when the survival of a nation in the world economy becomes dependent on English" (Choi, 2010, p.1).

During the early stage of redefining the national language policy, Mahathir had argued that "...we should not become fanatical about it because that will make it difficult for us to acquire knowledge to benefit our race in a competitive world. Whether we like it or not, English is an international language." (Malaysian

Business, 1-15 October 1992. Cited in Ożog 1993:70). He further added, "Learning the English language will reinforce the spirit of nationalism when it is used to bring about development and progress for the country... true nationalism means doing everything possible for the country, even if it means learning the English language." (The Sun, 11 September 1999. Cited in Gill, 2002, p. 41). Hence, English has become a language of science, technology, business, and communication, as well as a vehicle for acquiring knowledge in higher learning institutes. In other words, its importance emphasizes Malaysia's place in the global community as a country that is renowned for the quality of its higher education programs that would attract the attention of international students (Gill, 2002).

In 2003, the Malaysian government had issued a series of reforms in the educational system. The subjects of Science and Mathematics have to be taught in English beginning from the first year of primary school. In 2005, all public universities in Malaysia had mandated the use of English as a medium of instruction for all science, mathematics and related courses (Mohini & Aziz, 2007). Additionally, the Malaysian Former Higher Education Minister, Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, had stressed the importance of Vision 2020 in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan that will transform the higher education sector "to turn Malaysia into the regional hub of excellence in education." Former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, at the official opening of Lim Kok Wing University of Creative Technology and the Malaysia Design Innovation Centre on 11th October, 2004, said that "An education system that emphasizes cognitive and other transferable skills and builds capabilities in science, technology, innovation and creativity will ensure that Malaysia's economy continues to leapfrog. More importantly, a good education system that emphasizes these aspects will ensure that the persons who graduate from

the system are better off. After all, people who have the right knowledge, skills and capabilities will be more marketable, able to command better pay, and as they are equipped with transferable skills, able to move between industries with little cost. This means that they are more resilient to economic uncertainties."

It is obvious, from the above mentioned speech, that the Malaysian government has implemented well-planned strategies to modernize the country from the educational perspective. Students in Malaysia start to learn English as a second language and as the language of instruction in Mathematics and Science subjects since they are 6 to 7 year-old, at the primary schooling level (May, 2011).

The English Language is widely used among the people of Malaysia; tourists, businessmen, international students, scholars, and domestic people as well. The community provides a conducive place to use and practice English on a daily basis. "English continues to serve as the language of communication among Malaysian elite and as the symbol of their social, cultural and moral superiorities to the rest of the citizens. Being able to speak English does not just indicate a person's linguistic skills. It is often interpreted as a marker of modern and open-minded citizens who are qualified for the best opportunities in society and befit the new model of globally competitive citizens" (Choi, 2010, P.2).

 Due to several factors; i) the availability of English language, ii) increasing number of multi-ethnic students from different parts of the world in Malaysian universities and colleges, and iii) the quality of education in this country has been widely recognized by other countries, education in Malaysia has been attractive for a variety of learners from around the world. Their desire to engage the Malaysian learning community has made the learning community more international and intercultural-

oriented. Furthermore, the Malaysian government had planned to increase the intake of international students from 52,000 to 100,000 in 2010. The Former Minister of Higher Education, Datuk Mustafa Mohamed had once stressed that international students are not only helping the exchange of knowledge in Malaysia but most importantly, adding to the international dimension to the campuses of Malaysia's institutions of higher learning. He stated that "this is an important factor, given the fact that the globalized world is already seeing a more open environment and greater mobility among knowledge workers, managers, professionals and specialists between regions of the world" (Mathaba, 2007).

Thus, it can be said that Arab students who are studying in Malaysia have joined the second language community, which can be considered as an international and intercultural learning community, in the campuses of Malaysia's institutions to continue their study, to help them improve both their communication skills and cultural awareness.

1.4 English status in the Arab world

The Arab world contains 22 states and remains the second-most rapidly growing region in the world. Arabic is a national language and is widely spoken among 280 million people. The states spread from the Atlantic Ocean in the west, to the Arabian Sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the north, to the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean in the southeast (Wikipedia, 2011). Although the majority of these states were under the colonial influence of the British government in the early-nineteenth century, English language was not a predominant language. Since obtaining independence for each state, the Arabic language was predominantly used in the governments and educational systems. The English language was later

introduced as a foreign language (FL). It was taught in preparatory and secondary schools as a subject for four to six hours per week, rather than as a medium of instruction.

However, starting in the 19th century, the Arabic and English language have been in competition with each other to be the medium of instruction (Al-Jarf, 2008). The majority of the governments in the Arab world, except for the Syrian government that had fully implemented Arabicization in its teaching policy, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco that have implemented French as their medium of instruction, have acknowledged the significance of English language in their educational policy. Some Arabic universities have started to use English as the medium of instruction during the early 20th century (Al-Jarf, 2008). It was implemented only for scientific fields such as medicine, science, and engineering. However, previous researches have revealed that a majority of students still preferred Arabic as the medium of instruction whenever textbooks in Arabic are available (Assuhaimi & Al-Barr, 1992; Abu-Arafah, Attuhami & Hassein, 1998; Al-Mohaideb, 1998; Al-Jarallah & Al-Ansari, 1998, cited by Al-Jarf, 2008). Using English as a medium of instruction in universities had caused many problems for students. "Students found instructors' explanations in English difficult to understand; they could not follow lectures, could not take notes and had poor knowledge of English scientific terms. Studying in English required more efforts and more time than studying in Arabic" (Al- Jarf, 2008, P.197).

In the 21th century, the era of globalization, English has become more predominant and important around the world. English language is a language of politics, technology, business, finance and tourism. Governments and people became more aware of its important and necessity. Arab countries need to adapt to the dramatic

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changes that are bound to be accompanied by many challenges. One crucial issue for the Arab governments to heed to is to restructure policies in all sectors. It has been argued that in the education field, the most important issue is to mandate the use of English as the medium of instruction in many academic institutions (Ahmed, 2010).

Thus, many institutes for English learning were established in the Arab countries. English hours have been increased in all colleges and universities in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.). Private schools started teaching English for kindergarteners and use English as the medium of instruction for international programmes (Al-Jarf, 2008). The Minister of Education in Saudi Arabia had stressed that English is to be taught alongside the Arabic language and specialists will be supervising to ensure the effectiveness of teaching English in Saudi public schools (Al-Riyadh Newspaper, 2003).

However, teaching English as a foreign language (TFL) in the Arab world had failed to achieve its aims. Students faced obstacles trying to master the language proficiently, particularly in mastering speaking skills after studying English for many years. Abdo and Breen (2010) illustrated that "…at present, there is a serious gap and deficiency in Arab students' abilities to acquire and use spoken English effectively for the purpose of general and formal communication" (p.40). The lack of a supportive community of English speakers raises the challenge for EFL instructors (Parker, 1995, cited in Al-Jarf, 2008). On the other hand, as an urgent remedy, educational ministers should reconsider language planning and linguistic policies towards developing language teaching methods that promote the English language, through adequate English language resources. Moreover, the Arab governments should internationalize their universities by attracting international students. This move might help domestic students to practice the language. International students

who used to study abroad in other countries showed good levels of language and communication proficiency.

1.5 Problem statement

There is an increasing need for higher communication skills, particularly in speaking in English, in the world that is moving towards globalization; economically and culturally (Alseyabi, 2002). However, Arabic-speaking learners face several obstacles when using the English language, even though they have studied English for many years (Al-Issa, 2006; Al-Mekgkafi, 2004; Gahin & Myhill, 2001; Rababah, 2003). Rababah (2003) stated that speaking problems faced by Arab learners are due to the methods of teaching and the social context that may be unsuitable for language learning. He supported his opinion by stating that most of the Arab students learned the language only through formal instructions in their classrooms. According to Al-Mekhlafi (2004), Arab-speaking students had faced tremendous difficulties during higher education where the language of instruction is English. This had resulted in dissatisfactions among parents, teachers, and students. He stated that "the reason behind this include – but not limited – to the social and political situations of the English language in those countries; the artificiality of the learning environment, and the scarcity of language resources" (p.94). Al-Issa (2006) stated that the majority of students who enrolled in courses preparing them for undergraduate studies had failed to demonstrate any ability to communicate in the English language, even though all courses were taught in English and all of them had studied English for nine years.

However, international students, in the context of studying abroad where English language is taught as a second language, are required to use English language in their daily communications. This situation encourages the change in intergroup attitudes,

interest in international activities, motivation, and communication behaviour to prepare students for a successful education and working life. They will not only achieve the appropriate study skills required to progress in university but will also be prepared with knowledge that are fundamental to do well in activity outside of the classroom, whether it is for personal pleasure or social advancement. Similarly, Arabic–speaking students who are pursuing their studies as international students in Malaysia need to use English language for the communicative purpose.

To address the communication challenges among Arabic students, the individual differences variable play an important role. Studies have shown that individual differences are strongly correlated with a broad range of second language performance (Dornyei & Skehan, 2003; Gardner, 1985). Other scholars have also shown the interrelatedness and effects of these individual differences variables, through path analysis or structural equation modelling (SEM), which have suggested causal links between a variety of affective and communicative variables (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997; Kim, 2004; Hashamito, 2002; Yashima, 2002, 2004)

Given the emphasis on communication, in terms of talking in order to learn (MacIntyre et al., 2003), this view is largely accepted both by instructors and learners that L2 learners need to practice speaking in order to communicate. In other words, the central goal of English language learning is defined as an authentic communication among individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages (MacIntyre et. al, 1998; Yashima, 2002). Therefore, the problems of whether Arabic learners will communicate in English when they are free to do so and what will influence their willingness to communicate, have gained the attention of the research community. Arabic-speaking students who are studying abroad in

Malaysia seem to choose to remain silent when there are opportunities to communicate in English. They need to be tested whether they would communicate in English when they have the chance and what factors would influence their willingness to communicate. Willingness to communicate (WTC) has become an additional individual difference factor in the research of second language learning and communication.

The diversity of the individual differences variables was found to play a significant role in the second language communication and the learning process. These variables involve motivation, attitude, perceived competence, and language communication anxiety. Arabic students who studied overseas may experience some or all of these traits that may influence their communication performances.

Hence, it seems highly likely that motivation would play a role in language learning and communication in the study abroad context. When Arabic students move from a local context (in their country) to an abroad context (in another country), students' motivation could be decreased or increased. It has been documented that students' motivation is either directly or indirectly related to their L2 WTC (Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement & Donovan, 2002; Yashima, 2002; Baker & MacIntyre, 2003; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). However, Donyei and Skehan (2003) viewed L2 WTC as an extension of the motivation construct. Yet, very few studies have viewed the role of motivation in the study abroad context and a few studies have looked at the relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate in the study abroad setting. Attitude, on the other hand, is another important contributing factor to the enhancement of Arabic-speaking students' WTC in a second language in the study abroad context. Studies have shown a direct and/or indirect relationship between attitude and WTC (Yashima, 2002; Clement et al., 2003). However,

Yashima (2002) have made changes to Gardner's socio-educational model (1985). She introduced a new concept known as the "international posture" as the attention to the general attitude towards the international community rather than the attitude towards the native speaker's group in Gardner's model. She named international posture as a predictor of WTC.

Although, the international posture was also examined by many researchers in various different learning contexts and among different cultural groups as the ESL/EFL contexts, the results were found to be inconsistent among these studies, which "…warns us of the danger of overgeneralization across cultures" (Furuta, 2011). In the context of studying abroad where students have already immersed in their intercultural learning community of practice, the situation might be slightly different. Zing (2010) had determined an insignificant, the relationship between Chinese students' international posture and their willingness to communicate in English in Canada. Interestingly, addressing other attitude issues that might influence students' willingness to communicate in a target language while they are abroad is indeed, needed. Therefore, this study aims to go a step further and determine the other issues that might contribute to the enhancement of the willingness to communicate.

Attitude towards intercultural learning communities was developed as the "intercultural posture". Palfreyman (2006) has emphasized the importance of the learning community. He stated that less attention was paid to the learning community in which the learners are a part of, and the role of community and individual learner in learning a second language and communication.

Communicative variables (language anxiety in communication and self-perceived competence) were also found to be significantly influencing students' WTC.

Students who experience low anxiety and high self-perceived competence showed more self-confidence in second language communication. Studies have found communication anxiety and self-perceived competence to be most directly responsible for determining an individual's WTC (MacIntyre, 1994; Yashima, 2002; Clément, Baker & MacIntyre, 2003).

Recently, scholars in L2 acquisition have gradually recognized that affective variables have led to individual differences in L2 learning and communication, which, in turn, have produced different successes among L2 learners. Affective factors such as motivation, attitudes, self-perceived competence, and communication anxiety must be investigated, so that learners' diverse needs and interests can be better understood and addressed (Gardner, 1985, 1988; MacIntyre, 1994; Samimy, 1994; Onwuebuzie, Bailey & Daley, 2000). Nonetheless, the variables underlying WTC might change over time as students obtain greater experiences in the second language communication in a study abroad context (Susan et al., 2000). None of these factors, however, can uniquely explain individual differences in an abroad context, since their effects may be interrelated. Thus, a model must be developed to explain the interdependence among these variables in order to comprehensively understand the individual differences in second language learning and communication.

1.6 Objective of the study

The objectives are as follows:

1- To identify Arabic-speaking university students' perceptions of their WTC in English and individual difference variables such as their self-perceived

communication competence (SPCC), Language communication anxiety (LCA), motivation, and attitudes towards the intercultural learning community.

2- To investigate the effect of Arabic-speaking university students' attitude towards intercultural learning community (Intercultural posture) on their willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia.

3- To investigate the effect of Arabic-speaking university students' motivations on their willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia.

4- To investigate the effect of Arabic-speaking university students' self-confidence on their willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia.

5- To test the interdependence interrelationship among Arabic-speaking university students' attitude, motivation, and self-confidence with regard to their predicative effects on the students' willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia.

1.7   Research questions

This study is principally concerned with the extent of the relationships between the various variables that determine the communication skills. More specifically, this study will seek to answer the following questions:

1- What are the Arabic-speaking university students' perceptions of their WTC in English and individual difference variables such as their self-perceived communication

competence (SPCC), language communication anxiety (LCA), motivation, and attitudes towards the intercultural learning community, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia?

2- To what extent does the Arabic-speaking university students' attitude towards intercultural community (Intercultural posture) affect their willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia?

3- To what extent does the Arabic-speaking university students' motivation affect their willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia?

4- To what extent does the Arabic-speaking university students' self-confidence affect their willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia?

5- What are the interdependence relationships among Arabic-speaking university students' attitude, motivation, and self-confidence with regard to their predicative effects on willingness to communicate in English as a second language, in the context of studying abroad in Malaysia?

1.8 Significance of the study

This study can be considered as significant because it addresses the important issues of communication skills in study abroad programs. This study will prove to be beneficial for those who design and oversee study abroad programs. However, it is important to explore more fully how the various aspects of study abroad programs contribute to the desired outcomes. Moreover, many studies have focused on study

abroad outcomes from many perspectives. However, this study addresses the specific aspects of the experiences of studying abroad, which include the development of socio-psychological and communication behaviour, to understand how they contribute to students' outcomes. This holds particular significance for both students and education ministries that send students abroad. In other words, with regard to the field of language learning and communication, this research is the first step towards exploring the willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among Arabic-speaking university students overseas, particularly, in Malaysia. Willingness to communicate has been offered as one of the key concepts in L2 learning and communication. Addressing willingness to communicate, together with several individual difference variables, is significant since it can help students understand how to promote the affective variables that will enhance their readiness to communicate in English.

Numerous studies have focused on language learning process but less on the actual use of it in everyday communication. Undoubtedly, the authentic use of it plays a crucial role in second language acquisition (SLA) (Hashimoto, 2002; Ellis, 1999). The actual use is indispensable for the development of productive skills such as speaking (Swain, 1998, cited in Hashimoto, 2002). Therefore, this study is significant because it is not like other studies that have focused mainly on students' language proficiency, by grade gain or assessment test. It is significant because it depends on students who speak using the second language in a real context (a study abroad context). This study also has a number of theoretical and practical benefits. In terms of theory, this study is aimed at enriching the theoretical foundation of the L2 WTC construct in a study abroad context.

In addition, the relationships among variables and their influence on the willingness to communicate that were proposed in this current study are based on earlier work.

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Furthermore, this study aims to expand Gardner's integrativeness approach in the socio-educational model by developing students' attitude towards intercultural learning community among the Arabic-speaking students who are pursuing their education in other countries. From a practical point of view, this study has pedagogical implications for English teaching and learning. A better understanding of students' willingness to communicate while learning this language may help language teachers to realize and implement better strategies that would create more opportunities to promote communication and student engagement with intercultural encounters in the learning community.

The results of this study will highlight the importance of using English language in the real context that will facilitate intercultural communication competence. The findings of this study will contribute to the importance of Malaysian intercultural learning context for enhancing students' willingness to communicate in English as a second language, as well as, to add to the body of knowledge the importance of the study abroad context for second language communication.

1.9   Limitation of the Study

Similar to any empirical investigation, this study conducted has some limitations. It is restricted only to Arabic-speaking university students in Malaysia. Furthermore, the present sample is limited to the International Islamic University's students. Therefore, it cannot be generalized to include other universities in Malaysia.

There are also other variables, such as the learners' age, and gender that are unaccounted for in this study. Generally, all demographic information are not considered as variables in this study. The researcher recognizes the potential importance of these variables to language communication, but it is not possible to

include those variables in the current study. The English language is restricted only to intercultural communication interaction, particularly speaking in English. Other skills such as writing, are also not taken into consideration.

1.10 Definition of Terms

1.10.1 Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

In the first language context, WTC has been defined as an individual's trait-like predisposition, the probability that an individual will choose to communicate, specifically talking, when free to do so (McCrosky & Bear, 1985; McCrosky & McCrosky, 1988). Richmond and Roach (1992) have noted that "…willingness to communicate is the one, overwhelming communication personality construct, which permeates every facet of an individual's life and contributes significantly to the social, educational and organizational achievements of the individual" (p.104). In L2 communicating context, WTC is defined as a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a second language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). However, specific to this study context, WTC was defined by Oxford (1997) as "a student's intention to interact with others in the target language, given the chance to do so" (p. 449).

The willingness to communicate scale was measured using 12 items, as developed by McCroskey (1992), to obtain information concerning how willing people are in a variety of communication contexts such as public, meeting, group, and dyad with the verity of the types of receivers such as stranger, acquaintance and friends.

1.10.2 Self–Confidence (SC)

Ganschow and Sparks (1991) suggested that a student's self-confidence is defined as his/her perception of the comfort of L2 communication. Onwueguzie et al. (2000) argued that the high level of self-confidence among students leads to more activity in interaction with target L2 group members, which helps them to achieve successful communication. Hence, language communication anxiety and perceived L2 competence represents one's self-confidence in language communication (Clement, 1980, 1986, 2003; MacIntyre, 1998; Yashima, 2002, Yashima et al., 2004).

1.10.3 Language Communication Anxiety (LCA)

Anxiety is defined as a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry that is associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Students, while abroad, may experience communication anxiety, which refers to the degree to which the student feels anxious towards speaking in English.

1.10.4 Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC)

Self-perceived communication competence refers to a person's evaluation of his/her ability to communicate (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). This term explains how an individual views his/her communication competence, based on self-awareness rather than the actual communication competence (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). The self-perceived communication scale was developed to obtain information concerning how competent students feel when they are in a variety of communication contexts such as public, meeting, group, and dyad and with a verity of different types of receivers such as strangers, acquaintances, and friends.