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# The Role of Motivation, Attitude, Anxiety and Instrumental Orientation in Influencing Learners' Performance in English as a Second Language in OUM

Prof. Dr Latifah Abdol Latif, Faculty of Science and Technology, OUM. [latifah@oum.edu.my](mailto:latifah@oum.edu.my)

Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil, Senior Vice President, OUM. [mansor@oum.edu.my](mailto:mansor@oum.edu.my)

Prof Ramli Bahroom, Finance and Planning Division, OUM. [ramli@oum.edu.my](mailto:ramli@oum.edu.my)

Dr Wardah Mohamad, Faculty of Business and Management, OUM. [wardah@oum.edu.my](mailto:wardah@oum.edu.my)

Ng Man San, Consultant, OUM. [mslymy@oum.edu.my](mailto:mslymy@oum.edu.my)

***Abstract:** The objective of this research is to determine the relationship between the various socio-psychological variables like attitude, motivation, anxiety and instrumental orientation on performance in English as a second language. An impact study of each of the variables on learners' performance was also carried out in order to elucidate the variable that is most significant. A survey methodology was used, in which 757 out of the 2016 questionnaires were used. The results indicate that all the four variables were significantly correlated with learners' performance in the English course conducted at Open University Malaysia (OUM). The regression analysis showed that all the variables except for personal motivation exert significant impacts on performance with anxiety having a negative impact while attitude and instrumental orientation having positive impacts. Several implications were discussed and some recommendations were put forth, taking into consideration the open and distance learning environment at OUM.*

## Background of Study

English has become an important language in the world due to the need to have a shared linguistic medium in the era of globalization and the impact of global networks such as the Internet (Baharum & Tretiakov, 2008). Globalization and the introduction of e-commerce have reinforced the status and use of English as the lingua franca in international business communication (Seidlhofer, 2004) and made it imperative for any country wishing to access the global community to ensure that its citizens have sufficient proficiency in the language (McKay, 2002).

Malaysia inherited the use of English from her colonial days but English was replaced by Bahasa Malaysia (the National Language) as the medium of instruction in all schools except vernacular Chinese and Tamil primary schools in 1970, when the Education Enactment Bill was implemented (Thang, 2005). Until now, English is retained as a strong second language and taught as a subject in all primary and secondary schools in the country (Thang, 2005; Murugesan, 2003). English is also used widely in businesses, media, high courts and diplomatic services (Thang, 2005). Despite this, there has been a decline in the proficiency of English amongst Malaysian learners since the replacement of English as the medium of instruction in schools (Thang, 2005; Thangiah, 2005). English, was later brought back as a medium of instruction in Malaysian private higher education institutions (HEIs) with the establishment of the 1996 Private Higher Education Act, which resulted in the setting up of private colleges and universities nationwide (Thangiah, 2005).

Among the many HEIs in Malaysia, six of the private HEIs operate in an open and distance learning (ODL) mode, and the first ODL institution to be established was Open University Malaysia (OUM). Since its establishment in 2000, OUM has cumulatively enrolled more than 100,000 learners, and has produced over 30,000 graduates. Nationwide, it has made its presence felt through 61 learning centres, located at all major towns and cities across the country. At the international level, OUM has collaborated with institutions from Yemen, Bahrain, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Ghana in offering under-graduate and post-graduate programmes. To date, the total number of international learners has reached more than 2,000.

OUM, like any other universities, engages in a rapid process of change, particularly in areas that concern the quality of its graduates and their professional competencies. Quantity and quality are both important considerations as it seeks to continuously improve its services to its increasing number of learners. Learners have become increasingly diverse, bringing with them a variety of backgrounds and experiences. In its efforts to meet the challenges posed by this diversity, OUM has adopted a “flexible mode of delivery” through a “blended learning” approach.

A large majority (>90%) of OUM learners are working adults, and their main reasons for joining OUM are to enhance their knowledge and skills and to earn either a Diploma, Bachelor, Master or Ph.D degree. In its early years of operation, most of the courses were offered in Bahasa Malaysia. Starting in 2007, the university decided to change the medium of instruction to English so that its graduates would become more proficient in the language. Some learners experience difficulty in coping with English as a medium of instruction, while some sail through smoothly without much of a hassle. As a strategy to overcome the language difficulty faced by a portion of its learners, OUM offered “English for Communication” course, which is compulsory for all first time entrants into OUM. The course covers grammar, reading, writing and speaking. Upon completing this course, OUM learners are expected to perform well in the examinations and they should also be able to use the skills acquired for effective oral and written communication in English. However, the expectations have not been satisfactorily met. This presents a major concern to OUM as the lack of English proficiency can be one of the primary causes of attrition which will be very costly to both the learners as well as the institution.

## **Objectives of Study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the extent to which attitude, motivation, anxiety and instrumental orientation influence learners’ performance in an English language course in OUM. The specific objectives of the study are:

- (a) to determine the relationships between motivation, attitude, anxiety and instrumental orientation variables and learners’ performance in an English as a second language course;
- (b) to determine the impacts of motivation, attitude, anxiety and instrumental orientation on learners’ performance in the above English language course.

## **Significance of Study**

While language learning appears to be affected by the intricate effect of anxiety and motivation, and there is some existing evidence, which suggests that there is a relationship between the two constructs, there has been no systematic investigation which provides empirical evidence in an ODL environment in Malaysia. Thus, this study is undertaken to gain useful insights on how these factors relate to one another. The findings of this study will also provide some implications for today’s proficiency-oriented learning in an effort to alleviate obstacles that prevent learners from gaining the competence in speaking and writing in English. This is vital as learners who lack the competence will most likely falter and drop out and not achieve the goal that they had set to achieve which has serious implications on learner success and retention in OUM.

## **Literature Review**

Teaching aims to achieve at least two essential goals for learners (Dyan, Cate & Rhee, 2008) and they are a) to increase knowledge with respect to a particular content, and b) to develop skills that will serve learners well, even beyond the content of a specific course.

In light of the above, it is vital for learners to be proficient in English as it is needed to access the wealth of information and data available in this globalization and information age (Sulaiman, Hassan & Baki, 2009; Othman, 2005; Murugesan, 2003). Kovačić, Vidaček-Hainš, and Balaban, (2007), for example, in their studies in a Croatian university found that a vast majority of respondents recognized the importance of English as a useful tool for their studies.

Moreover, employers in developing countries, such as Malaysia, are interested in employing graduates with both professional and English language skills (David & Govindasamy, 2005; Marsh, 2006). English language competency provides a competitive edge when securing jobs in the workplace (Murugesan, 2003; Sprague & Gearing, 1999). Poor proficiency level in English has been found to be a major reason for high unemployment rates among graduates (Peng & Abu Samah, 2006).

OUM's efforts in enhancing English proficiency of its learners is in line with the country's aim of creating a new generation of graduates who are fluent in English not only as a communicative device, but as a technical and scientific tool to facilitate Malaysia to become a fully industrialized nation by year 2020 (Baharum & Tretiakov, 2007; Murugesan, 2003). In this context, English is seen as vital to the nation's growth (Othman, 2005). As an open and distance learning (ODL) institution which offers programmes through the blended mode of delivery, OUM has to leverage on the Internet. Thus, proficiency in English is essential as 80% of webpages are in the said language (Sprague & Gearing, 1999). A research conducted by Peng and Abu Samah (2006) found that the medium of instruction is an important factor which acts as a quality indicator to learners' satisfaction. Their study found that UNITAR's use of English as a medium of instruction has contributed to the higher level of satisfaction amongst its learners (Peng & Abu Samah, 2006) and this could lead to student loyalty and retention (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006). Thus, enhancing English proficiency amongst learners is an indirect intervention strategy in the management of student enrolment and retention in OUM.

Literature indicates that motivation enhances English proficiency as a second language (L2) acquisition (Gardner, 1985). According to the author, motivation is categorized into two types, namely instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation is defined as "learning a language because of the perceived value in the language for the learner". On the other hand, integrative motivation is defined as "learning a language because the learner wishes to identify himself with or become integrated with the society" of the target language. Besides Gardner's integrative and instrumental constructs, Cooper and Fishman (1977) mentioned a third type of motivation which they termed "developmental or personal" which refers to motivation relating to "personal development or personal satisfaction". This includes such activities as watching movies and reading books in English (ibid). Gardner (1985) also considers attitudes as components of motivation in language learning. As such, attitudes may play a very crucial role in language learning as they would appear to influence learners' success or failure in their learning.

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) defined L2 anxiety as, "...the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language, including speaking, listening, and learning." (p.284). A number of studies have investigated the effect that anxiety has on learning and performance. For example, Horwitz (2000) concluded that anxiety is a multifaceted variable that may be regarded as a cause and consequence of poor language learning. The author also stated that it is a widely accepted phenomenon that anxiety has the potential to interfere with learning and performance.

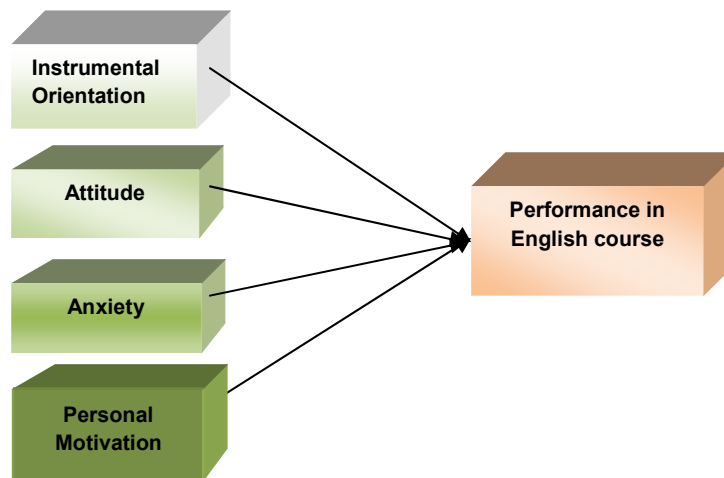
There is a plethora of empirical research concerning learners' motivation, attitudes and anxiety towards the English language. For example, Atef Al-Atemi & Munir Shuib (2009) conducted a study on learners' motivation and attitudes towards learning English in Yemen. The study investigated learners' motivation in terms of three motivational constructs, namely instrumental motivation, integrative motivation and personal motivation based on Gardner's (1985) and Cooper and Fishman's (1977) works. The study found that both instrumental and personal reasons were important motives for learning English. However, integrative motivation had the least impact on learners' English language learning. Another study by Sarjit (1993) attempted to explore the language needs of consultants at a company. The study found that instrumental motivation was the main reason for learning the language followed by personal motivation. In a survey of over 300 freshmen in Japan, Benson (1991) demonstrated the importance of integrative and personal goals as factors in motivation among Japanese college learners. Finally, Vijchulata and Lee (1985) reported that Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) learners were both integratively and instrumentally oriented towards learning the English language. It is clear that from these past studies and the works of MacIntyre and Gardner (1993), English proficiency is influenced by instrumental orientation, attitude towards learning English, anxiety and personal motivation.

## **Conceptual Model and Hypothesis**

Based on the literature review and the objectives of the present study, the following conceptual model (Figure 1) was proposed to guide in the investigation of the relationships amongst the four motivational and attitude factors on learners' performance in an English language course. Eight (8) null hypotheses were tested using data collected in a survey from a random sample of OUM learners:

1. *Ho*: There is a no significant correlation between attitude towards learning in English and learners' performance in the English course.
2. *Ho*: There is a no significant correlation between anxiety and learners' performance in the English course.
3. *Ho*: There is a no significant correlation between instrumental orientation and learners' performance in English in OUM.
4. *Ho*: There is a no significant correlation between personal motivation and learners' performance in the English course.
5. *Ho*: There is a no significant impact of attitude towards learning in English on learners' performance in the English course.
6. *Ho*: There is a no significant impact of anxiety on learners' performance in the English course.
7. *Ho*: There is a no significant impact of instrumental orientation on learners' performance in the English course.
8. *Ho*: There is a no significant impact of personal motivation on learners' performance in the English course.

**Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model**



## Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted in this quantitative study. A random sample of 4,000 learners in all the learning centres nationwide was selected to participate in the study which was carried out during the period from March to April 2010. Administrators of the learning centres were enlisted to administer the survey operations, which included seeking the cooperation of the selected learners to complete the questionnaires. Using this procedure, a total of 2,016 learners completed and returned the questionnaires, out of which 757 questionnaires were found to be usable for the present study. The following categories of data were collected and used in the study:

- (a) Demographic and academic information: Age, race, sex, programme of study and exam grades/scores obtained for “English for Communication”.
- (b) Four constructs were measured using 18 items of statements as listed in Table 1.

The scale for measuring attitude, anxiety and instructional orientation was adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test battery (AMTB), while that for personal motivation was adapted from Cooper and Fishman's (1977) personal motivational instrument. The respondents were asked to rate the given items for each construct based on a 6-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from 1= Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree.

**Table 1: Statements for Anxiety, Personal Motivation, Attitude and Instrumental Orientation**

Construct	Statement
1. Anxiety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I feel I can write better in English.</li> <li>2. In class I feel shy to speak in English.</li> <li>3. I find it difficult to express my thoughts in English.</li> <li>4. I need more time to understand the subject matter in English</li> </ol>
2. Instrumental Orientation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning in English will enable me to perform better at work.</li> <li>2. Learning in English will enable me to get a job more easily.</li> <li>3. Learning in English will enable me to get a better-paid job.</li> <li>4. Learning in English will enable me to further my studies.</li> <li>5. Learning in English will enable me to discuss better with other people in the same profession</li> </ol>
3. Personal motivation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning in English is good for my personal development.</li> <li>2. Learning in English enhances my image among my colleagues.</li> <li>3. Learning in English enables me to get more respect.</li> <li>4. Learning in English enhances my status among friends</li> </ol>
4. Attitude	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I need more effort in learning English.</li> <li>2. I like to learn in English.</li> <li>3. I am sure I will benefit from learning in English.</li> <li>4. I find learning in English is more interesting.</li> <li>5. I don't mind putting in more effort to learn in English</li> </ol>

## Data Analysis

### Profile of Respondents

Table 2 presents the profile of the 757 respondents who had participated in the survey. The majority of the respondents were Malays and other Bumiputras (71.7%) followed by Chinese (15.4%), Indians (11.4%) and others (1.5%). Female respondents made up 56.3% of the sample as compared with 43.7% for males. The majority (83.4%) of the respondents were above 24 years old. The respondents' distributions by gender, race and age were consistent with the corresponding distributions for the entire student population in OUM.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Ethnicity, Gender and Age Group**

Demographic variables	No of respondents	Percent
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Malays and other Bumiputras	543	71.7
Chinese	117	15.4
Indians	86	11.4
Others	11	1.5
<b>Gender</b>		
Males	331	43.7
Females	426	56.3
<b>Age group</b>		
19-24	71	9.4
25-29	175	23.1
30-39	261	34.5
40-44	102	13.5
45 and above	93	12.3
Not reported	55	7.2

Table 3 shows the distribution of learners' grades in the English language course. Slightly more than a quarter (26.4%) of the learners scored "very good to outstanding" and 48.7% obtained a "good" grade. The 4.9% of respondents with a conditional pass and 0.3% who fail are a cause for concern. In this study, B- was chosen instead of C+ as the minimum threshold grade because our experience indicates that a higher proficiency in the language is required to ensure that learners are able to cope well in all the other courses in which English is the medium of instruction

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Grades**

Grade obtained	No of Respondents	Percent
A (outstanding)	169	22.3
A- (Very Good)	31	4.1
B+ (Good)	54	7.1
B (Good)	263	34.7
B- (Good)	52	6.9
C+ (Pass)	23	3.0
C (Pass)	127	16.8
C- (Conditional Pass)	15	2.0
D+ (Conditional Pass)	8	1.1
D (Conditional Pass)	13	1.8
F (Fail)	2	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Reliability and Validity

Reliability analysis was conducted for the four constructs of attitude, anxiety, instructional orientation and personal motivation. The minimum limit of 0.4 for item-to-total correlation as suggested by Blaikie (2003) was applied in the conduct of the reliability tests. With the exception of three items, all the remaining items for the four constructs had item-to-total correlation exceeding the minimum value of 0.4. The 3 items which failed the test were removed from further analysis. The three items involved were:

- (i) I need more effort to learn in English (attitude construct);
- (ii) I like to learn in English (attitude construct); and
- (iii) I feel I can write better in English (anxiety construct).

With the removal of the three items, the Cronbach's alphas for all the four constructs were above the recommended minimum of 0.7 as suggested by Nunnally (1988) and the item-to-total correlations for the remaining items were also above the minimum threshold of 0.4. Thus, the internal consistency of the items for the four constructs was established. Construct validity was also established by carrying out factor analysis with varimax rotation for all the four constructs. The KMOs met the minimum of 0.7 as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2006). In addition, all the items had factor loadings exceeding 0.50, thus meeting the minimum requirement (*ibid.*). The variance extracted for the four constructs were also above 60%, which exceeds the minimum threshold.

### Mean Ratings

The mean ratings for the four constructs were computed, and the results are given in Table 4. With mean ratings ranging from 4.5 to 4.8 points, these indicators suggest that OUM learners had fairly strong positive attitude, personal motivation and instrumental orientation towards learning English. For anxiety, the learners scored a mean rating of 3.6 points, suggesting that they experienced a fairly high level of anxiety in learning English.

**Table 4: Mean Ratings for Instrumental Orientation, Personal Motivation Attitude and Anxiety**

Variables	Sample size (n)	Average rating	Standard deviation
Instrumental Orientation	757	4.7	1.1
Personal motivation	757	4.8	1.0
Attitude towards learning in English	757	4.5	1.0
Anxiety	757	3.6	1.3

#### Correlation Analysis

For this study, a correlation coefficient analysis was carried out in order to test the first four null hypotheses as stated earlier in this paper. The test results as shown in Table 5 indicate that all the four variables (attitude, anxiety, instructional orientation and personal motivation) were significantly correlated with the learners' exam performance in English course. The correlation coefficient for anxiety variable was negative with a coefficient of  $-0.391$ . On the other hand, the remaining three variables of attitude, instructional orientation and personal motivation were positively correlated with learners' performance in the English language course. The correlation coefficients ranged from  $0.307$  for personal motivation to  $0.382$  for attitude.

**Table 5: Correlation Coefficients between Attitude, Instrumental Orientation, Personal Motivation, Anxiety and Performance in English**

Variables	Sample size (n)	Attitude towards learning in English	Anxiety	Instrumental orientation	Personal motivation
Performance in English language	757	$0.382^{**}$	$-0.391^{**}$	$0.378^{**}$	$0.307^{**}$

*\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

#### Regression Analysis

A step-wise regression analysis was performed to test the next four hypotheses to determine the impacts of attitude, anxiety, personal motivation and instrumental orientation on learners' performance in English course.

The results of the regression analysis as shown in Table 6 indicate that the regression model explained 23.8% (as given by the adjusted R-square) of the variation in the predicted performance in English. The F-value was significant at a 0.000 level, thus indicating the regression model was acceptable for further analysis. The figures also indicate that three independent variables, namely *anxiety*, *attitude* and *instrumental orientation* registered a *p*-value of less than 0.05 for the one-tailed test, suggesting that these three variables had significant impacts. Anxiety had a negative impact on learners' grades in English language while attitude and instrumental orientation registered a positive impact. However, personal motivation did not have any impact on performance in English language. With the exception of personal motivation, these results are quite consistent with those reviewed in the literature (eg. Atef Al-Atemi & Munir Shuib, 2009; Benson, 1991; Sarjit, 1993; and Vijchulata and Lee, 1985).

The variance inflation factors (VIFs) were also examined to determine whether multi-collinearity among the three significant independent variables posed a serious problem to the regression results. The VIFs ranged from 1.1 for the attitude variable to 2.49 for instructional orientation, all of which were below the upper cut-offs of 10 as suggested by Hair, et al. (2006). These results of acceptable VIFs suggest that multi-collinearity did not produce adverse effects for the purpose of this study, and the test results were valid for the study.

**Table 6: Results of Regression Analysis**

Hypothesis/Variables	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficient	P-value	Colinearity statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta		Tolerance	VIF
Constant	59.1	2.91		.000		
Anxiety	-3.15	.358	.293	.000	.902	1.11
Attitude	2.54	.698	.181	.000	.404	2.47
Instrumental Orientation	1.96	.6522	.151	.000	.402	2.49

*Adjusted R-square = 23.8%*

The results of testing the four hypotheses are summarised as follows:

1. There is a significant negative impact of anxiety on performance in English. An increase of one point on the 6-point Likert scale for anxiety would result in a reduction of 3.15 marks for English language performance, given that the other two significant factors remain constant.
2. There is a significant positive impact of attitude towards learning in English on performance in English. An increase of one point on the 6-point Likert scale for attitude would result in an increase of 2.54 marks for English language performance, given that the other two significant factors remain constant.
3. There is a significant positive impact of instrumental orientation on performance in English. An increase of one point on the 6-point Likert scale for instrumental orientation would result in an increase of 1.96 marks for English language performance, given that the other two significant factors remain constant.
4. There is no significant impact of personal motivation on performance in English.

Based on the results for “Beta” values given in Table 6, anxiety provided the biggest impact on English language performance, followed by attitude towards learning and instrumental orientation.

## Discussion

The grading system in OUM is similar to that used by other higher education institutions in Malaysia. Based on the system, grade A is outstanding, A- is very good, B+ to B- are good, C+ and C are pass while grades C- to D are conditional pass and F means fail (Table 3). B- was chosen instead of C+ as the minimum threshold grade because our experience indicates that a higher proficiency in the language is required to ensure that learners are able to cope well in all the other courses in which English is the medium of instruction. The “English for Communication” is a 3-credit course and it is compulsory for all new learners. This course is taught along with other core courses. The objective is to enhance learners reading, writing, listening and oral skills. From the study, it was found that 25.0% of the respondents obtained grades below B-. This means that a quarter of the learner respondents failed to achieve the “targeted” proficiency in the English language course. This is not something that is unexpected as most of the learner respondents had gone through a Malay medium of instruction during their previous years of study, before entering into OUM.

The average ratings of 3.6 to 4.8 points on a 6-point Likert scale for the constructs of anxiety, attitude towards learning in English, personal motivation and instrumental orientation were fairly high for OUM learners and this is in line with the other similar studies. The study also indicated that all four variables are significantly correlated with performance, again concurring with the other studies. In the regression analysis, anxiety was found to exert a negative impact while attitude and instrumental orientation exert a positive impact. This implies that the anxiety-inducing English classes (face-to-face or online) might be a barrier to learning the language. What this means is that teachers must try to help learners manage their anxiety in the English classes, failing which the positive impacts of attitude and instrumental orientation on performance may be crowded out. However, the study found that the variables explained only 23.8% of the variation in the predicted performance in the English course, implying that there are other variables which were not included in this study that can have an influence on performance in English.

The above finding concurs with the findings of Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) who found that language anxiety was the best single correlate of foreign language achievement. In this regard, if language anxiety is not well managed, it can have a debilitating effect on learners and can possibly lead to drop-outs. In fact, a study



conducted by Phillip Bailey, Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, Christine E. Daley (2003) revealed that learners who dropped out of their foreign language classes tended to report statistically significantly higher levels of anxiety.

Language anxiety is not something to be ignored or considered a problem for learners to deal with on their own. For learning to be effective, teachers should be aware of anxiety-provoking situations and take steps to minimize their negative impacts by providing learners with positive reinforcements. In addition, teachers should create a “sense of community” both in the classroom and online environment so that learners are able to enjoy the interaction without being intimidated or embarrassed by others. In OUM, learners interact with their peers and tutors, not only in their face-to-face tutorial classes but also in the online forum via its learning management system, myVLE. The discussion on the topic that ensues in the classroom is seamlessly continued in the online forum. To engage learners in collaborative learning, group assignments are incorporated as part of the course assessment. An important and a major initiative in helping learners cope with English language proficiency in OUM is the development of an English resource center called “e-GATE”. As its name suggests, it acts like a gate that opens up to English language resources found on the Internet and at OUM. Its simple interface is designed for easy navigation and fast downloading while the skills are categorized to scaffold learning. The target audience is OUM learners, but it is also made available in the public domain for those interested to learn or elevate their English language proficiency. e-GATE can be accessed at <http://egate.oum.edu.my>.

As part of a strategy to help reduce language anxiety among its learners, OUM’s academic staff/tutors/facilitators should strongly consider asking their learners to state how they feel about studying the English course. This can be accomplished by asking the tutors/academic staff to get their learners to fill up a student information sheet on the first day of class. Some of the things that tutors can do to help learners manage their anxiety are: (i) have learners describe his or her previous experiences in learning a second language; (ii) ensure that learners are motivated and keeping up with their assignments; (iii) identify anxiety and excessive frustration as a sign of not being able to cope with English and (iv) refer severely anxious learners to a counselor.

## Conclusion

In light of the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there is evidence supporting the existence of a positive relationship between attitude towards learning English, personal motivation and instrumental orientation with second language (English) performance and a negative relationship between anxiety and performance. In terms of impact, the highest was due to anxiety, albeit negative, while attitude and instrumental orientation exert positive impacts on English language performance. This means that learners with positive attitude towards learning English and instrumental orientation perform better, while learners with high language anxiety perform poorer in their English language course.

Despite the well-known fact that attitude, motivation and anxiety are significant variables in determining learners’ performance in English as the a second language, future studies need to focus on exploring the interrelations among some other second language learning variables in such a way that plausible dependence relationships or causality could be identified. Such studies would entail the use of multivariate techniques such as structural equation modelling.

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