

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.0 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, based on the research questions, a summary of the findings in light of the relevant literature, implications and limitations of the findings are discussed. This concluding chapter also extends several recommendations and suggestions for future investigations in this area of study.

5.1 FINDINGS

To provide a summary of the findings, the researcher would reflect on the answers to the five research questions as stated in Section 1.3 as their answers would provide assistance to other teachers on how to teach the language more effectively.

1. Will an increase in the contact hours for English in National-type Primary Schools improve the Malay students' proficiency in the language?
2. Does the L1 of Malay students of all proficiency levels influence the learning of English Language?
3. How does the socio-economic background of Malay students affect their learning of English in school?
4. Does a positive attitude of the Malay students help them in learning the language?
5. Do Malay students of different proficiency level of English employ different types of strategies in their learning of the language?

5.1.1 INCREASE IN THE CONTACT HOURS IMPROVES PROFICIENCY

The findings based on Question 3 in Section A of the questionnaire on the respondents' UPSR results for English answer research question 1, that is "Will an increase in the contact hours for English in National-type Primary Schools improve the Malay students' proficiency in the language?" The findings showed that 26 respondents (65%) scored at least a D in their UPSR in comparison to only 23 respondents (57.5%) who scored at least a D in their Form 1 Final Examination results for English. (See Tables 4.1 and 4.3b). This meant that the 38 respondents from the National Schools who received 779 hours for English per year was not more proficient than the two respondents from the National-type Primary Schools in Form 1K who received 190 hours for English. The findings showed that more contact hours in the English learning in primary schools did not really improve the respondents' proficiency level in the language.

5.1.2 INFLUENCE OF L1 IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH

From research question 2, that is "Does the L1 of Malay students of all proficiency levels influence the learning of English Language?" findings from Questions 6 and 7 in Section A regarding the language they used to communicate with their parents (Question 6) and with their siblings (Question 7), reported all the respondents using Bahasa Melayu with both their parents and siblings. (See Table 4.5) This meant that most of the respondents used their L1 at home and it did have an influence on them in learning the English Language. This was reflected in their grades for Bahasa Melayu during their Final Year Examination, which was slightly better than their grades for

English Language. (See Tables 4.3a and 4.3b) The findings where 17 respondents (42.5%) scored Grade A, 13 (32.5%) scored Grade D as opposed to 8 (20%) and 2 (5%) scored Grade B in their Form 1 English Final Year Examination provided the answer to research question number 2, "Does the L1 of Malay students of all proficiency levels influence the learning of English Language?" which showed that most of the respondents were influenced by their L1 in the learning of the English Language. This was reflected by their abilities to understand and respond to English Language tasks given by their English Language teachers. 52.5% of the respondents reported their inability in understanding the English Language tasks and 67.5% could not carry out these tasks (See Table 4.19). They suggested that the teachers translate, explain difficult words or concepts in Bahasa Melayu when teaching so that they can understand the given tasks (See Table 4.20). These responses showed that L1 influenced the respondents in their learning of the English Language.

5.1.3 EFFECTS FROM SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Tables 4.6a, 4.6b, 4.7a and 4.7b answered research question 3, "How does the socio-economic background of Malay students affect their learning of English in school?" Tables 4.6a and 4.6b showed that the respondents have parents who do not hold high-income jobs like fathers/guardians who worked as labourers (50%), clerks (10%), 7.5% each who worked as guards, policemen and drivers, and another 2.5% each who worked as hawker, mechanic, hospital attendant, trishaw peddler or soldier. As for the mothers, (92.5%) were housewives, 5% were canteen helpers and 2.5% worked as a clerk. Their low-income jobs were likely due to their parents' low level of education, like 40% of the respondents' fathers/guardians had primary education and

2.5% was uneducated while 42.5% of their mothers had primary education, 5% were uneducated and 2.5% had religious education. These factors had affected the respondents' academic performance, as the families' income was not sufficient for additional materials or extra classes for their children to upgrade their educational level.

5.1.4 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH

The attitude of the respondents towards English Language could either assist or hinder them in the learning of English Language. This was shown by the answer to research question 4, that is, "Does a positive attitude of the Malay students help them in learning the language?" where the researcher looked at the respondents' attitude towards reading either the newspapers or storybooks both at home and in school. Findings in Tables 4.17a and 4.17b of Section 4.2 showed that 22 respondents (55%) reported that they tried reading newspapers while in school compared to 8 respondents (20%) who read newspapers at home due to a lack of reading materials at home. Table 4.18 showed that 26 of the respondents reported reading books in school since they could then seek clarification from their friends, teachers or look up dictionaries in the school libraries if the need arose. The 10 tables (Tables AS 1 – 10) on the attitude of the respondents showed them having negative attitude towards the language. They stated that many people could speak Bahasa Melayu so there would be no problem in communicating and since there are reading materials in their mother tongue, there was no need to learn English.

5.1.5 ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND AND RESPOND TO ENGLISH

LANGUAGE TASKS

The first two questions in Section C were on the respondents' ability to understand and respond to the English Language tasks. Tables 4.3a and 4.3b showed that 47.5% of the respondents could understand but only 32.5% could carry out the tasks given. They reported that the language used by the teacher (English) was an obstacle especially to those in the low proficiency class who had a low command of the language. The respondents then reported that in order to understand and respond to the tasks, Bahasa Melayu had to play a role. This could be seen in those more favoured choices (See Table 4.20) where the teachers provided the translation in Bahasa Melayu (35 times), the respondents' mother tongue, gave explanations of difficult words or concepts in Bahasa Melayu (25 times) and teachers gave the instructions in Bahasa Melayu. (16 times) However, the choice of use of the dictionary (17 times) was also recorded since the respondents realised that that was a way for them to be more independent and to take charge of their own learning. The high frequency of responses above reaffirm the researcher's belief that the Malay students would understand and carry out the tasks in English more effectively if instructions were in Bahasa Melayu.

5.1.6 STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH

Various strategies were reported by the respondents to overcome their difficulties in learning English. The responses of the strategies used in Section D of the questionnaire provided the answer to research question 5, that is "Do Malay students

of different proficiency level of English employ different types of strategies in their learning of the language?" The data from Tables SQ 1 – 4 showed that the respondents resorted to the sub-category of social strategy by Oxford's (1990) Indirect Strategy to help them in their learning especially in the strategies "Ask my teacher to explain in Bahasa Melayu" (88 responses) and "Look in the dictionary" (68 responses). The researcher also noticed that some of the respondents used the sub-category of the compensation strategy by Oxford's (1990) Direct Strategy that was categorised as "positive compensation strategy" and "negative compensation strategy". Only a handful of them, mostly from the low proficiency level classes resorted to this "negative compensation strategy" as they were keen to complete their given task. Thus, it could be concluded that the Malay respondents of different proficiency levels preferred to use social strategy to help them in their learning of the language. In order to complete their learning tasks, respondents from all proficiency levels used "positive compensation strategy" but a handful from the low proficiency level used "negative compensation strategy" (See Section 4.4).

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The research findings showed that the Malay respondents resorted to their mother tongue, that is, Bahasa Melayu in order to overcome their difficulties in learning the English Language. Other factors and sub-factors such as family and educational backgrounds, attitude and strategies also played a role in determining the way they learn.

The occupations of the respondents' parents and age of their siblings determined the choice of languages used at home. A respondent from an average income group reported using English beside Bahasa Melayu at home. (See Tables 4.5, 4.6a and 4.6b) while another respondent with siblings who were either attending college or already working also used English at home. (See Tables 4.4 and 4.5)

A majority of the respondents' parents, however, did not place much emphasis on the English Language as they felt that they could get along with only Bahasa Melayu, the national language. This had affected the respondents' reading habit at home as reported by 32 respondents (80%). Since the respondents' parents did not inculcate the reading habit (including reading materials in Bahasa Melayu) at home, their children had emulated this habit as reported by 31 respondents (77.5%) who did not read English newspapers at home for various reasons. (See Table 4.17b)

The respondents' lack of positive attitude towards the second language also attributed to their lack of achievement. Socio-cultural factors such as negative peers' reaction and their own behaviour in using English Language prevented them from speaking the language. They preferred not to use English in the presence of these people, as they were afraid of being branded as boastful, snobbish and show offs. The respondents' own personality traits, language aptitude and strategies led to negative learning outcomes. Personality traits such as introversion, non-risk taking and low self-esteem had put those respondents at a disadvantaged position. Their beliefs about their low language aptitude and ability also led them to have a low self-esteem in the company of the proficient learners, made up of mainly their peers of another race. A positive attitude towards a language would have encouraged and hastened the learning process

since the interest shown would have brought about a determination to look for the right strategies to overcome any problems encountered during the learning process.

Data obtained from the four questions about strategies showed that the respondents resorted to the sub-category of social and "negative compensation" strategies by Oxford's Indirect Strategy (1990) to help them complete the tasks given by their teachers. They were more interested in completing the tasks, which were usually very challenging to them. They did not look forward to the language lessons due to their lack of proficiency in English, a subjects they learnt since their primary school days.

Many of the respondents were aware of their lack of proficiency in English and had formed their own opinions about the importance of the language in the future, which was of less importance than Bahasa Melayu, the national language and a prerequisite in passing their examinations. Besides that, since many people of other races could speak Bahasa Melayu, so they felt there would not be any communication problems. The availability of reading materials either in Bahasa Melayu or translated from English (or other languages) into Bahasa Melayu in the market nowadays gave the respondents a false sense of security when they carried out any reading. All these reflected the respondents' negative attitude towards the English Language, the second language in both the primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. This problem had to be addressed, before it reflected our former Prime Minister's press statement regarding the poor command of English Language among young Malaysian diplomats, the future leaders of tomorrow who had failed to rise to the occasion once too often is true. (New Straits Times, 21/8/94). (See Chapter 2, p. 22).

5.3 IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF STUDY

Although the results of this research showed that the Malay respondents resorted to their mother tongue, that is Bahasa Melayu in the learning of English Language, the research did not rule out the possibilities of other variables of second language acquisition and learning. The researcher offered the following suggestions:

- a) English lessons should be held in the morning, when individual learners were usually attentive. For language learning purposes, class size should also be small (less than 35 students per class) for effective teaching and learning practices.
- b) There should be an English Language learning programme designed to meet the needs of the students with low proficiency level for both primary and secondary levels.
- c) Remedial programmes for low proficiency level students in the primary schools had been carried out for Bahasa Melayu (plus Chinese and Tamil in National-type Primary Schools) and Mathematics since the implementation of the KBSR. Students who achieved a proficient level after joining these programmes could then join their peers in the mainstream lessons. However, English had not been included in the programme so it was time that more emphasis be given to its importance in the education system.
- d) The findings of the research could provide insights to the top-level administrators at the Ministry of Education. Given a scenario whereby most Malay students were not able to utilize effective English verbally and academically, the Ministry should allow educators to adopt a policy of bilingualism in theory and practice. This meant that the use of L1 like Bahasa Melayu by the teachers especially when giving instructions or explaining abstract words to the average to low proficiency

learners could reduce a high failure rate for English Language among many of the students. Bilingualism could help the learners learn the semantics, syntax and, in some cases, phonetic connections between the two languages, which would be beneficial to them since they would be able to learn two languages at the same time and in turn motivate them to master both. This could also eventually inculcate the interest and love for the language among the learners.

- e) The poor performance of students (after 6 years of English Language) indicated that the learning of English as a subject alone was inadequate for the acquisition of the language. English should be made as a medium of instruction for some subjects (like Science and Mathematics as suggested) at the school level (which began in 2003 for Year 1, Form 1 and Lower 6 students).

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This research was not aimed to generalise the scenario among other Form 1 Malay students in other schools in Malacca or elsewhere in Malaysia. The study was aimed at helping the researcher understand the extent of the influence of the first language or mother tongue among Form 1 Malay students in the learning of the English Language. This population was only limited to a group of 40 Malay Form 1 students (36%) of the total population in a secondary school in Malacca. The respondents in this study were mostly from average to low proficiency levels in their academic performance based on their UPSR results (See Table 4.1). They were also from average socio-economic families (See Tables 4.6a and 4.6b) with little use of English with their parents or siblings (See Table 4.5) or with their friends of different races (Tables 4.8a and 4.8b) and did not read English newspapers at home. (See Table 4.17b) Lastly, the

average age of all the male respondents were 13 years (this is a school for boys only) and both the respondents and the researcher had just joined this school.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Clearly, more studies could be conducted in the other areas of second language learning and acquisition among Malaysian learners, especially among the Malay learners. This included several aspects and elements that future studies could focus on for more insights on second language learners' learning processes, development and attainment.

Since this research focused on Form 1 Malay students in an urban school, it would be interesting that future studies be carried out to students from rural areas or of other age groups to ascertain if the problem faced by those respondents were similar too. Another suggestion would be to examine the language learning behaviour of the other major ethnic groups, that is, Chinese or Indians of different age groups and made comparison among them. As the mechanics of writing and the sound system of Chinese Language and Tamil Language were different from that of English, there could be little or no similarities in those languages to help students in the learning of English Language. In the case of the Malay respondents in this study, although there was a similarity between the mechanics of writing between Bahasa Melayu and English Language and some similarities in their pronunciation, yet most of the low proficient students encountered some problems in the learning of English. Would the problem faced by the other age group students or other ethnic groups or from other geographical location be more profound? Since the cognitive and linguistic levels of

different age group of students differ for different ages, would these differences help them in their learning? As for those from other ethnic groups like the Chinese and Indians where there were no similarities between the languages would this motivate them to overcome the problems? Another interesting area could be, would students from other urban areas like other parts of Melaka, Kuala Lumpur or Kelantan face the same problems? If they did, what were the problems and what were the factors that assisted or contributed to their success or failure? Another area of interest could be, would the students from a school for all girls only or a co-educational school from the same or different ethnic group or from the same or different geographical location produce similar findings. The results of the comparative study could then provide further insights, complement and improve the validity of this finding. It could also assist all the English Language teachers in understanding the learning and thought processes of the learners.

Another potential area where future research could be carried out is would a positive attitude result in language learning success among low proficiency learners? Finally, more studies conducted based on the students' perceptions and needs would help by creating awareness on the need of creating the latest, interesting, attractive and beneficial teaching materials for the betterment of the students. The findings from these studies could then provide justifications for educational changes and improvement among the students, the future leaders of the country.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This study showed that respondents who had more contact hours in the learning of English in the primary schools did not have a better proficiency in the language than

those with less contact hours. This was seen in the results of the two respondents from the National-type Primary Schools who scored Grade E in their Form 1 Final Year English Language Examination. There could be other factors for their low proficiency level, which would be another area for further studies.

On the influence of L1 in the learning of English, 67.5% of the respondents reported not being able to carry out the English language tasks successfully due to their poor command of English. A majority of the respondents recommended that teachers provided the translation into Bahasa Melayu to help them understand and carry out the tasks successfully.

The low level of education of the respondents' parents resulted in their parents holding low to medium-income jobs. This socio-economic background hindered the respondents' education, as their parents could not afford to buy additional reading materials for them or send them for extra classes. In fact their socio-economic background should not be a hindrance in the acquisition of the target language if they had the right attitude. Thus, a positive attitude towards English would help the respondents in their acquiring the language if they were willing to frequently practise all the four skills and use all the facilities available in and outside the school.

Lastly, once the respondents had a positive attitude towards English, they would employ relevant strategies to assist them in their learning. Many respondents chose to be independent in their learning by employing both the "social strategy" of Oxford's Indirect Strategy and "positive compensation strategy" of Oxford's Direct Strategy *only to complete the tasks and not to learn the language.*