CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN RURAL AREAS

EE CHOP LER

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITI MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR
2001
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the rural 'cultural' problems and to determine their effect on the learning of English. Twenty students from different ethnic backgrounds and English language proficiency in six rural schools were interviewed. In addition, ten teachers also from different rural schools and ethnic backgrounds responded to a questionnaire. The problems discussed by both the teacher and student respondents arose due to the rural cultural setting. The findings of this study show that i) five major problem areas exist, namely peer pressure and motivation, attitudes towards English, teaching methodology, school culture, influence of Islamic teaching on the learning of English ii) the problems discussed by the teachers and students are similar and iii) most importantly all these identified problems are closely related to the rural setting. Therefore, one can conclude that rural cultural factors adversely affect English proficiency of the rural students of this study.
ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mencari punca masalah pelajar luarbandar dalam mengkuasai Bahasa Inggeris dan menentukan bahawa faktor cara hidup diluarbandar mereka boleh mempengaruhi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. 20 orang pelajar dari berbagai latarbelakang dan enam buah sekolah luarbandar ditemuduga. 10 orang guru juga terlibat untuk menjawab soalselidik dalam masalah pengajaran. Didapati bahawa masalah utama dibincangkan oleh pihak pelajar dan guru ada berkaitan dengan suasana budaya luarbandar. Keputusan yang didapati dari kajian ini termasuk i) 5 masalah utama diberikan iaitu pengaruh rakan setara dan motivasi, sikap terhadap Bahasa Inggeris, kaedah mengajar, budaya sekolah dan pengaruh ugama Islam ii) masalah yang dibincangkan oleh pihak pelajar dan guru adalah sama dan iii) lebih pentingnya faktor-faktor tersebut ini adalah berkaitan rapat dengan budaya luar bandar. Kesimpulannya, faktor budaya luarbandar menpunyai pengaruh dalam pembelajaran dan pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Madya Dr. Maya Khemlani David for her significant advice and guidance towards this thesis. She gave her time generously in guiding and supporting me at every stage of the study. I am indeed very thankful for her patience and constructive comments. Secondly a big thank you, to my Director, Tuan Hj. Ahmad Roslan of the secondary school division in MARA for his encouragement, support and permission to gather data from the rural MRSM schools in Terengganu. I also want to thank all the twenty students and ten English teachers from the six rural schools who volunteered to be the subjects in this study. They have kindly responded to the interviews and questionnaires to identify the existing rural cultural problems affecting the proficiency level of English among the rural students. I greatly appreciate the invaluable moral support and help given by my sister Meryl, Michael Voo, Sheena, Roziah and Kiranjeet. Lastly, I also like to thank my beloved mother for being very understanding towards my commitment on spending a lot of time on this thesis despite the fact that her health needs a lot of care and attention from me.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH ii
ABSTRACT IN MALAY iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS v

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND 1

1.0. Introduction 1

1.1. Background of the study 2

1.1.1 The Malaysian Education system 2

1.1.2 The status and role of English 4

1.1.3 Concern for the standard of English 5

1.2. The statement of the problem 8

1.3 The purpose of study 8

1.4 Definitions of terms used in this study 9

1.4.1 Language proficiency 8

1.4.2 Second Language 9

1.4.3 Rural Schools 10

1.4.4 Attitude 10

1.4.5 Motivation 10

1.4.6 Exposure, language environment and use of English 11

1.4.7 Peers 11

1.4.8 Rural society 12

1.4.9 Socio economic 12

1.4.10 Culture 12

1.5 Methodology of the study 14
CHAPTER 2  REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction 16

2.1 Factors/variables affecting the learning of second language 16
  2.1.1 Attitudes 16
    2.1.1.1 Attitudes toward the language 17
    2.1.1.2 Attitudes towards the English speaking groups and their culture 19
  2.1.2 Motivation 20
    2.1.2.1 Instrumental motivation and performance 21
    2.1.2.2 Integrative motivation and performance 23
    2.1.2.3 Instrumental and integrative motivation and proficiency 23
  2.1.3 Exposure and proficiency achievement 25
  2.1.4 Other related factors which affect the learning of language 29

2.2 Models of second language acquisition 33
  2.2.1 Model of linear casual relationship 33
  2.2.2 Social-educational model 33
  2.2.3 Revised socio-educational model by Gardner & Macintyre 1993 36

2.3 Conclusion 38

CHAPTER 3  RESEARCH DESIGN

3.0 Introduction 39

3.1 Subjects 40
3.2 Research tools

3.2.1 Cloze test and Error identification
3.2.2 Interview sessions
3.2.3 Questionnaire

3.3 Description and types of the questions asked in the interview/questionnaire

3.3.1 The Interview
3.3.2 The Questionnaire

3.4 Proficiency level in English

3.5 Method of data analysis

3.5.1 Analysis of data from the student respondents (Interviews)
3.5.2 Analysis of data from the teacher respondents (Questionnaire)
3.5.3 Making connections between the cultural variables problems in teaching and learning English and determining if these rural cultural variables affect the proficiency level of English in rural schools.

CHAPTER 4  DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Analysis of the students’ and teachers’ views

4.1.1 Students’ perception of the importance of English
4.1.2 Teachers’ perception of the importance of English
4.1.3 Students’ attitudes towards the learning of English
4.1.4 Teachers’ attitudes towards teaching & learning of English
4.1.5 How students respondents studied English
4.1.6 Problems in learning English as perceived by student respondents
4.1.7 Problems in learning and teaching English as perceived by teachers
4.1.8 Common problems mentioned by student and teacher respondents
4.1.9 Lack of exposure
4.1.10 Students’ perceptions on who to blame for the poor proficiency of English in rural areas
4.1.11 Students’ perceptions on the role of rural cultural factors
4.1.12 Other variables that result in problems in the learning of English

4.2 Summary and conclusion
Chapter 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction 78

5.1 Summary of study 78

5.2 Solutions and recommendations resolving :-

5.2.1 The negative attitude of the students 79
  5.2.1.1 The role of the students 79
  5.2.1.2 The role of teachers 82
  5.2.1.3 The role of parents 84

5.2.2 Peer pressure and lack of motivation 85
5.2.3 Teaching methodology 86
5.2.4 The influence of Islamic government & effects on English Learning 91
5.2.5 Non-supportive school culture & setting 92

  5.2.5.1 Lack of an English speaking environment 92
  5.2.5.2 Attitude of the school administrators 93
  5.2.5.3 Priority given to Science and Mathematics 94
  5.2.5.4 Lack of facilities 95
  5.2.5.5 Role of Malay and English as the second or third language 97

5.3 Implications and suggestions for further research 98

References 99
Appendix A – Interview Checklist (Guidelines for the student interview ) 113
Appendix B - Questionnaires for the teachers 114
Appendix C- Questions for the Pre interview test 115
Appendix D- Analysis of the data from interviews with students 119
Appendix E- Analysis of the data from questionnaires 122
Transcripts of Interviews- APPENDICES 1 – 18 (STUDENTS 1 - 20) 124
Responses of Questionnaires- APPENDICES 19 - 28 (TEACHERS 1- 10) 192
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page
1 Schematic Representation of Gardner’s 1979 Social Education Model 35
2 Schematic Representation of Gardner & MacIntyre’s Social Educational Model 1993 37

LIST OF TABLES

Table page
3.1 Background of the student respondents interviewed 40
3.2 Ethnicity of student respondents 41
3.3 Gender of student respondents. 41
3.4 PMR score of student respondents. 41
3.5 Table showing the types of schools attended by student respondents 42
3.6 Background of teacher respondents 42
3.7 Table showing the ethnicity of the teacher respondents 43
3.8 Breakdown of the gender of the teacher respondents 43
3.9 The scale in the Class Reader Program 48
4.1 The proficiency scores of the student respondents 50
4.2 Breakdown of the proficiency scores of the student respondents 51
4.3 Proficiency Grade of student respondents (Based on Reading Program Scale) 51
4.4 Importance of English according to student respondents 52
4.5 Importance of English according to teacher respondents 54
4.6 Students’ attitude towards the learning of English 55
4.7 Teachers’ attitude towards the teaching and learning of English 56
4.8 How students respondents studied English 57
4.9 Problems in learning English according to students 58
4.10 Problems in learning & teaching of English according to the teachers 59
4.11 Different methods of teaching 61
4.12 Common problems of teacher and student respondents 62
4.13 Lack of exposure as perceived by the students 67
4.14 Differences between urban and rural areas in learning environment perceived by the students 68
4.15 Students’ perceptions: Who is to be blamed for the low proficiency in English? 69
4.16 Students’ perceptions on the role of rural cultural factor in learning of English. 70
4.17 Other variables or problems in learning English. 73