CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of i) a summary of the research ii) suggestions to resolve the problems in learning of English and iii) implications of the problems and suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary

This study attempts to identify factors in the rural schools to explain the reasons for the poor proficiency in English. It also tries to show that the identified problems are linked or caused by some characteristics of rural cultural factors.

Twenty students were interviewed and ten teachers responded to a questionnaire. The questionnaire method was selected as the teacher respondents were heavily committed to work and were not able to provide time for a semi-structured interview. Both the responses to the interviews and the questionnaires were then analyzed. These findings show that they are able to answer the research question that is, whether the rural cultural setting affects the English proficiency of students (see 4.2). There are in fact many similarities in the factors (see Appendices D and E) given by both the student and the teacher respondents for the poor English proficiency and these can be seen in the data analysis in Chapter 4.
It is interesting to note that one can categorize the variables in the rural settings affecting the proficiency of English into five factors namely,

1) The negative attitude towards the learning of English of the rural students,
2) Peer pressure and lack of motivation,
3) Teaching methodology,
4) The lack of an English speaking environment and limited exposure due to the effects of Islamic government and
5) A non- supportive school culture.

5.2 Solutions and recommendations to resolve the identified problems

5.2.1. The negative attitude of the students

5.2.1.1 The role of the students

The students need to change their negative attitude towards the learning of English to a positive one. As discussed in the literature review in 2.1.1, attitudinal variables can affect the learning of the second language. Research overseas as well as local studies like Subramaniam’s (1976) show students in urban areas have a positive attitude towards English, therefore they can acquire better proficiency of English than students in rural areas can. Attitudinal studies by Gardner & Lambert (1959), Ainsfield and Lambert (1961) and Spolsky (1969) also show that positive attitude can affect the success in the learning of a second language.

Special attention should be focussed on the attitude of the students because English is hardly used in the rural areas and even worse, the students themselves see little relevance
in using English. One of the reasons is because students consider using English as being unpatriotic, a rural cultural belief. Students should be reminded that English is not a threat to Malay. The negative attitude toward English among rural students should be corrected and students must realize it is a global language. Awareness must be created that the mastery of English is crucial to survive in the New World conditions.

Students should be encouraged to use English daily and teachers can keep a watch to make sure students speak English. A duty roster to supervise and regulate English speaking situations can be made. English talks and seminars must be held weekly or monthly to make students aware of the importance of English. Announcements in school assemblies should be bilingual (using English and Malay for a start) so that the students are exposed to spoken English daily. Students should also plan their daily English activities, for example, they should have English logbooks to write their thoughts and feelings. All students in class have to take turns to compose essays or poems in English either daily or weekly. Notice boards should have a section dedicated only to English literary contributions like compositions, proverbs and vocabulary. Regular competitions in essay writings, debates, choral speaking can be organized too. One can also organize activities like Grammar Quiz, Vocabulary Contest, Spelling Bee, English Mail, English Sketch, singing and drama, Deejay Corner, Speak and Sign (where the students after speaking English will ask for signature from the teachers), Book jacket, Treasure Hunt, Email, Newsletter production, DIY Notice-board, puppet show, Shakespearean night and inexhaustible list of other more creative activities. Interdepartmental activities can be carried out in English like Science Quiz and English Hadith (Islamic Quiz).
Educational trips and visits to English speaking factories, offices and higher institutions both locally as well as in neighboring countries should be encouraged and supported by the school authorities and endorsed by the educational authorities and Parent-teacher Associations.

In fact, the Education Director-General Datuk Seri Dr. Abdul Shukor Abdullah has given permission to schools to take pupils to places of educational and tourist interest even during school hours (The Star, 12.12. 2000). This is a good move as these places are where English is spoken frequently as most tourists use English. Such field trips will not only expose the students to the language but also help them put into practice and use English. A good example is a trip to the British Council or Foreign Embassies where natural exposure to English is available.

Students should also take the initiative to lead and not wait for the English teachers to suggest new plans to help them. The students should be empowered to organize, plan and implement activities. The school authorities should guide them, not discourage them so that a positive and supportive approach will help change the current negative attitude toward the learning of English. The students can be masters of their learning and hopefully their success in the learning of English will change their negative attitude towards English.

A few student respondents mentioned that they have a negative attitude because of the low status given to English in public examinations. All the students are required to study
English and sit for the examination but they need not pass English in order to pass examination. Credit should be given to Maktab Rendah Sains MARA colleges as they have made a pass in English, in internal college examinations, a necessity before one can graduate. Likewise in schools, a pass in English can be made an essential criterion in passing public examinations.

Another way to change their attitude is perhaps by streaming the students into classes of almost equal linguistic abilities so that students can learn at the same rate. This is important especially for rural students who are shy and lack exposure. Cooperative learning can be included as a technique hence allowing students to enjoy peer companionship. In addition, student exchange programs can be introduced to expose the students to an English speaking environment.

5.2.1.2 The role of teachers

The role of the teachers in helping to change the attitude of the rural student is crucial too. They are the best personnel to counsel and guide the students. They not only endorse their school activities but also help to give their invaluable views on correct form of grammar. In class these students lack study skills, as mentioned in interviews, hence teachers must make sure their explanations are clear.

The teachers must also be proficient in English in order to create a good impression on the students hence indirectly, help to change their attitude towards English. In addition to having English proficiency, the English teachers should also have a positive attitude
themselves in teaching the four language skills to the students. According to Director General of Ministry of Education, Datuk Seri Abdul Shukor Abdullah there are insufficient English teachers in schools especially in rural areas, as English teachers are not evenly distributed (The Star, 8.11.2000) in the country and there is a surplus of English teachers in the West Coast hence creating an imbalance. In Ipoh itself, there is a surplus of 140 English teachers while in Terengganu there is a shortage of 600 qualified English teachers (The Sunday Star, 21.1.2001). Therefore it is common to find in rural schools, non-English i.e. Conversion Teachers teaching English. These teachers should improve their language proficiency.

According to the interviews, some English teachers have requested to serve in their own villages. Hence, it means rural students have less exposure to outsiders and these teachers, being local-bred may find it difficult to change the rural negative attitude towards English and unless they do, the proficiency level of their students will not improve. This will result in disappointment and dissatisfaction in teaching profession among the rural English teachers.

Apart from class activities, the teachers should include group conferencing, one to one meeting, activities, outings, counseling sessions and endless creative encounters to instill in students the view that a positive attitude is necessary to learn English. Teachers should not hesitate to praise, motivate, guide and correct students.
Language learning is not merely the accumulation of knowledge but the building up of linguistic skills hence it is better to teach the correct grammatical skills than to let the students relearn and reconstruct the errors learnt from non-TESL teachers. For example, pidgin English usually spoken by the less proficient English teachers might not help change the attitude of the students. According to a retired UKM lecturer “only 30% of B.Ed Tesl students are qualified to teach English” as most of them “can’t even string together a proper sentence” (The Sunday Star, 28.1.2001). The Ministry of Education should therefore ensure that rural areas receive equal distribution of qualified English teachers. As with other problems, the best solution is to get to the root of the matter i.e. at the primary level. Qualified English teachers must be sent to teach in primary schools so the students can acquire the language at an early stage. The recently poor performance of UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test) 2000 where only 56.7% of pupils in national schools, 63.2% in Chinese schools and 45.6% in Tamil schools obtained at least a C in the English paper (The Star, 7.12.2000) shows the need to have good teachers at the primary level. There should also be a gradual phasing out of teachers untrained to teach English.

5.2.1.3 The role of parents

Parents, like the teachers, should also help to motivate the students and create a need to use English for example, short English conversations and singing together at home. They must get rid of the traditional beliefs of the past effect of colonial rule, an exclusively rural cultural trait and speak English if they can, to set good examples and help students to develop a positive attitude. Parents should reward rural students by providing gifts in
the form of English books. Parent-teacher associations should cooperate with public companies like Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Watson etc in organizing English activities and competitions to motivate the students to participate in English learning activities.

Besides motivation from the parents and teachers, motivation from other subject teachers and administrators is much needed too. If possible, the school administrators can also try using English books too, as rewards for school awards like the best staff, best disciplined student and the most diligent teacher so as to make students aware of the importance of English and hence motivate them to learn English. Rural students need not have to speak only Malay (a rural cultural practice) in school.

5.2.2 Peer pressure & lack of motivation

The rural students in the study are also influenced by the narrow-mindedness and shyness mentality of their peers. This is typical of limited exposure. According to Musgraves (1972) and Murdock (1965) peer help is important, as peers are capable of influencing each other. English teachers can implement punishments and a fine system to curb the 'teasing, jeering, laughing and shyness culture' (a rural cultural feature) among the peers hence monitoring the reactions of the students when their peers speak English. The students need support from the peers so as to overcome their shyness, 'segan' and 'enggan' to speak in class as well as outside class. This lack of motivation to speak in English is closely related to the negative attitude (see 2.1.2). If there is a motivation to use English, students may be able to learn English well. The students ought to have both
intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to effectively learn English. Students should be told that they could also acquire extra knowledge by learning English and a prestigious language might help them in self-development in order to survive. It is vital to master English, the lingua franca of the 21st century.

5.2.3 Teaching methodology

The ten teacher respondents admit the difficulty of using the most up-to-date method in the teaching of English and the twenty student respondents feel strongly that their poor proficiency results from the boring teaching techniques of their English teachers. There is a need to review the existing English teaching methods (The Sunday Star, 21.1.2001). The teaching of English in Malaysian schools and institutions of higher learning has been based on a grammar-structured approach leading to boredom, lack of interest and limited motivation (The Star, 3.1.2001). According to Gill (2001), uninspiring, traditional, uninteresting and conventional styles of teaching will kill students’ interest resulting in students not learning. Teachers are expected to be “actors” and each performance must interest the audience so as to create a conducive ‘proactive’ learning environment (The Star, 10.11.2000). This suggestion needs more attention especially in the rural schools where exposure to English is limited and the rural cultural belief that English is colonial in nature and related to the yellow culture.

The teacher should also change the focus of teaching towards examinations so as to create interest and motivation for students to learn. Rural English teachers as described by the student and teacher respondents, are exam oriented when it comes to lesson
preparation and exercises in class. Knowing that the students have little interest in English learning, the English teachers resort to using exam-oriented techniques of teaching. Such an approach will definitely mean boredom and repetitive work in class.

One suggestion is using a variety of teaching approaches, which has to depend on the proficiency, students and topics to be taught. Such an approach, which focuses on the learner, should incorporate the use of the computer as a tool so as to create interest. These approaches also compensate for the lack of exposure to the latest technology. The English teachers must think of more authentic and realistic methods like role-plays, dramas, field trips and educational visits. Factories in the West Coast can be visited. To teach vocabulary on food, one can take the students to the supermarkets to list the names of the vegetables, food & fruit as their labels are in English. This is fun and might interest the students, help them in their spelling as well as improve their general knowledge and exposure to real life.

Teachers can also introduce the dynamic Montessori style to teach English in rural areas. Tahseen Sosfi (1998) of Esena Foundation High School in Lahore, Pakistan suggests teaching using games. Interesting and challenging activities requiring student participation can be introduced. Children can feel the language in the air and get interested in studying English. According to Sosfi a student can improve his vocabulary as much as 40% and reach Grade A in creative writing (cited in The Star, 24.5.1999).
Furthermore, Deputy Education Minister Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin has announced that certain subjects can be taught in English so as to provide exposure to the learning of English. Physical Education, Home Science and another Science subject are tentatively planned (The Star, 20. 8. 2000) to be taught in English. This change in the medium of instruction is indeed wise, provided the teachers involved are well trained in English. In addition, the teachers can also use English in the co-curriculum activities. St John activities can be carried out in English and likewise English can be used in societal meetings like Interact Club etc. Formal as well as informal use of English can increase exposure to English and language learning can take place outside classrooms too.

The latest approach of English Language teaching is geared towards ‘Thinking’ as a strategy, which is a skill, incorporated in language examinations. Creative learning institutions are established in United Kingdom (The Sunday Star, 28. 1.2001) to help bring about quantum leaps in teaching and learning a language. English teachers can use this ‘thinking’ approach to help rural students, as it is something different, yet useful.

Besides ‘Speak it’ method can also be introduced, as the best way to learn a language is to speak. For the rural students ‘silence’ is one of their major cultural traits (Bahiyah, 1992), either to show politeness or for group solidarity and silence can be overcome by asking them to speak more. Encouragement to speak can be in the form of interesting language activities. Zimbardo (1977) asserted that shyness is negative in language learning and in rural schools this is true. Speaking helps us to understand the language better.
The introduction of Literature is yet another way to combat boring lessons. Students are inquisitive and like to ask questions. As individual responses are needed on literature, the students will not feel shy to speak up if their answers are different. This will encourage the rural students to share opinions and new ideas, inculcate the reading habits and improve their language proficiency.

The use of movies can be introduced to complement the English lesson in rural schools. Even though theatres are lacking and hardware difficult to buy in the rural setting, movies can break the local rural class monotony. Gaudart (1985)'s recommendation of JENNY the first locally produced English movie aired over TV3 provides a good choice of an educational movie to be used in class (The Star 24.11.1991). To arouse interest, cartoons can be shown as well. This can motivate the rural students to be interested in learning, as movies are something new to the rural cultural setting.

ETV (Educational Television Vision) no doubt may be outdated with the advent of Astro, RTM 1,3 & 4 and even INTERNET but can be employed to provide a variety. In Indonesian schools, Islamic values are projected through ETV (The Sunday Star, 22.12.1991). The Ministry of Information can also help by allowing TV stations to air English news and programs at prime time so that students can watch them. RTM should also create its own English Channel, just like ASTRO.
Teachers can also try integrated teaching method where the focus is a variety of learning styles as students vary differently in their learning process. One can see freedom given to students in class so long as they can absorb the lessons. Music is used and at times eating is allowed hence the atmosphere is relaxed and stress-free. Role-plays are common too.

Another suggested method is a controversial one. The use of tests as a teaching technique can be employed according to Heaton (cited in The Star, 4.6.2000). Progress tests help both the students and teachers in the rural schools to test the effectiveness of learning English. If the score is high, it will boost students’ confidence and greatly motivate them, besides giving the teachers an idea of their teaching success.

The Ministry of Education should examine the way English is assessed in public examinations especially in the rural setting. Is the assessment based on the skills, knowledge of language, grammar rules or the use of English for other objectives? Then the passing mark must be considered and maintained to set a national standard. This will make rural students aware of the importance of English as an examination subject.

The use of computers to teach is yet another innovative way. Out of 3,500 Malaysian web-sites only 35% are in Malay (The Star, 13.6.2000), hence it can attract the attention and interest of the rural students to learning English. In fact computer literacy is implemented in selected schools like the Smart Schools. 1,250 computers have already been sent to Smart Schools (The Star, 10.10.1999) and this move will be extended to other rural schools. The web-site ihenglish.com launched by Najib (1999) on 10 Oct
1999 provides a unique opportunity to learn English. Most of the materials are
downloaded free from the Internet. The rural students can also communicate through
Email, MIRC and ICQ. Such modern ideas will help to expose the rural students to the
use of English. Some of the old fashioned methods in the rural schools like the chalk and
talk teaching style are outdated and teachers should try other alternatives.

5.2.4 The influence of the ruling Islamic government and its effects on English
Learning
Since the opposition government, which stresses fully on Islamic teaching now rules the
state of Terengganu, it does have some effects on the learning of English among the
students in the rural schools. This current emphasis and mandatory change into the
Islamic ways of administration and practices create a religious rural setting. The rural
students are influenced by the traditional beliefs handed by their grandparents and
parents, for instance, the effects of colonial rule and the association of English with
yellow culture. Rural life therefore depends on religious beliefs. Rural students should be
aware that change is necessary for progress and learning a foreign language is not
forbidden in the religion. Students should be given frequent talks about Islamic teachings
in English so that this rural cultural misconception regarding English Language can be
corrected.

5.2.5 Non-supportive school culture & setting
Rural school culture includes the following features like non-English speaking
environment, negative attitude of the school administrators, the lack of educational
facilities, the greater importance of Science & Mathematics, the role of Malay and the status of English as the second or even third language.

5.2.5.1 Lack of an English speaking environment

All the respondents mentioned the lack of a favorable environment to inhibiting the learning of English. One can create this English environment by conducting English assembly weekly. The library, the classes as well as the tuck-shops and 'Balai English' or English Hall can be centers for English notices so students can read English literary work. The School Public Announcement system can broadcast English announcements, songs & jokes for ten minutes during break time for extra exposure to English. English Speaker Corners should be utilized after school hours. Several places or even scribble corners can be set up to help students express their feelings and ideas if they choose not to speak. They can write in English. In addition, "English tables" (dining tables for those who want to converse English during meals) in the dining hall or canteen can be set up to encourage students to speak English. English news can be televised during meals in the dining hall or canteens. Every class must be equipped with an English board for articles and there must be a display of selected English assignments weekly. The "fear culture" towards English among the rural students may be changed into a "love culture" in the long run. Teachers of other subjects, regardless of their proficiency, should encourage the students to use English for daily conversations especially in informal contexts. The school culture should be a liberal and open minded one. English days should be made compulsory. In fact, not only one day should be made an English Day, it can be alternate days or everyday to create an awareness of the importance of English. Talks, seminars,
forums and meeting should be conducted in English. Besides, the library must be equipped with English books, magazines and newspapers whether locally produced or imported, so that the students can be exposed to English literacy.

All the staff, academic or non-academic, must also be exposed to Basic English grammar and English conversation courses. Once they are exposed to such courses, they will be able to form the background support for helping the rural students to learn and at the same time inculcate a liking or love for the language.

5.2.5.2 Attitude of the School Administrators

The school culture is created by the teamwork of students, English teachers, and other subject teachers, principals and the school and educational administrators. If each and every member of the school plays his part in encouraging the use of English, then the school culture will be conducive. However, all the respondents feel that the rural school culture is negative and non-conducive towards the learning of English. One suggestion to overcome this problem is having frequent visits by students to English speaking corporate bodies & institutions. The school should encourage the hosting of English films and movie- making in schools, competitions be they sports, literary, business conferences or exhibitions. The principal and his team of staff must be reminded to treat English as the second language and stress its importance.

The principals and assistant principals are key personnel in school and are examples to the students. They should be broad-minded, regardless of whether they are fluent or not
in English. They must encourage the use of English, help to organize activities, give full support to the English teachers as well as cooperate with the educational authorities, should there be English projects like debates. The students interviewed feel that only lip service is given by the school authorities and the teachers mention the red tape somehow hinders the interest and desire to carry out English programs. The school-leaders should speak English and not be indifferent as they are responsible for the creation of a more conducive English speaking school culture.

5.2.5.3 Priority given to Science and Mathematics

According to this study, all twenty rural students agree that Science and Mathematics are more important than English. One good suggestion is to correct their perception and inform them that without English, one just cannot proceed in the study of Science and Mathematics at tertiary level. It is true that to be an engineer or an accountant, one’s Science and Mathematics must be good but without a good command of English an engineer or an accountant may encounter difficulties in doing research as professional bodies use English in their literature and practice. One good recommendation is to make either a pass or even a credit in English a compulsory entrance criteria for entry into Science and Mathematics courses in universities. It will motivate the rural students to learn English.

5.2.5.4 Lack of facilities

This study points to the lack of modern physical and educational facilities for teaching due to the distance away from English-speaking towns. New innovations and ideas take
time to be transferred. The transport cost is expensive and adds to the cost of hardware as well as software. The use of computers, the distribution and sale of English books, magazines, newspapers and electric things are less compared to urban areas. In fact the lack of facilities in the rural schools can be overcome by asking for donations and sponsorship from established English speaking bodies like The Rotary Club, The Lion Club, or newspapers like The Star, and the New Straits Times. The Star for example, sponsors English conferences as well as conducts NIE workshops and competitions. USIS (United States Information Services) also sponsors free services and designs online English lessons, which are made accessible via Internet.

The educational authorities should be aware of the need for a pool of proficient English teachers. Selection for English teacher training must be carefully done based on their proficiency and personality. Entry requirement to English training course must be raised, as we cannot have English teachers who teach English in Malay or cannot speak proper English. Usually ‘mediocre teachers’ (The Sunday Star, 12.9.99) will produce mediocre products. Despite undergoing 11 years of English lesson at school, schoolteachers teaching these days cannot speak good English. Besides, teacher trainees need to be diligent, responsible, empathetic and ambitious and at the same time try to upgrade themselves professionally.

As for the vernacular schools, students have to master three languages at the same time that is after Malay, English and their mother tongue of Tamil or Mandarin, which is the official Chinese dialect. There is bound to be a lot of interference, not only for the first
but second language for example in Tamil, students get confused word order and the characters in Mandarin are divergent to English. The educational authorities should therefore provide specialized training for these English teachers. Normally it is found these English teacher trainees are taught the same methods as those teaching in national schools. If careful and professional planning is provided for the teacher trainees having English as the third language perhaps these students will benefit and excel in the learning of English.

The rural English teachers should be complimented when they contribute and implement more effective ideas to teach and at the same time should be sent for courses to upgrade their teaching methods. Paper presentations in English seminars among experienced teachers should be encouraged and merit must be recognized. Experienced rural English teachers can help to conduct in-service English courses for the other staff so as to help them solve problems and share ideas. English teachers can also include other subject teachers as judges, observers, participants and supporters in the English activities hence providing support for the creation of the English environment in the rural schools.

The parents should be more liberal and support the needs of the school, especially the teachers and students. They should discard the old thinking of the colonial past and misconceptions and travel more to the West Coast areas. Frequent talks and dialogues should be arranged to help and guide these parents. Short courses should be conducted to clear their doubts and broaden their outlook. Once, all these are done, an "English environment" can be created and all these parties no doubt possessing exclusively rural
cultural traits as part of the rural society can be supportive towards the learning of English.

5.2.5.5 Role of Malay and English as the second or third language

In the colonial time, English was the medium of teaching in school, the command of English was therefore higher. The low proficiency of English in Malaysia can be improved if we change English into the medium of instruction. Of course, such a drastic move would be politically unacceptable. It is hard to do so as we need political unity but we can use two languages, Malay, the official language and English as the “informal” official language as two acceptable mediums of instruction in Malaysia.

The issue of English as the second language or in practice a third or fourth language for the non-Malay students needs to be clarified too. To complicate matters, English is a ‘foreign language’ for the rural students (David, 2000) “The English divide between the urban and rural student is really wide and getting wider by the year” (Gaudart cited in The Star, 3.1. 2001). The government after proclaiming Malay the official language made English the second language, as it is important for international understanding and contact. The second language tag becomes the third or fourth and even a foreign one to students of different ethnic backgrounds. Hence effective measures should be taken to put English in its proper place. Different strategies can be planned for English to be taught as a second language, third language or even foreign language. Hence if this distinction is made, less confusion arises especially in the rural context. If it cannot function as the second language effectively, perhaps it can be made into an effective foreign language like the Arabic language, which has been successful as many Malay students can speak
and use it. This may help to improve the proficiency level of English especially in rural areas.

5.3 Implications and suggestions for further research

The result of this study calls for a better understanding of the reasons why the rural students cannot excel in their performance in English examinations. The Ministry of Education must plan the training of English teachers to teach in rural schools, as the English learning situation (adversely affected by the rural culture) in the rural schools is different from the urban ones.

On the basis of this study, there are two suggestions for further research:

1. The need for an effective English teaching methodology in rural schools.

The English teachers need a totally different methodology to teach English as the rural cultural factors interfere with the learning and teaching of English in rural schools.

2. The role of school culture in the learning of English in rural schools.

The rural students need an English speaking environment that is missing in the rural schools to help in the learning of English as a second language. Such an environment can motivate the student integratively and instill a positive attitude in learning English successfully.