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The Relationship of Individual and Social Variables
On English Language Achievement among Upper
Secondary Students in a Secondary School
in Likas, Kota Kinabalu

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DECLARATION

The materials in this thesis are original except for quotations, excerpts, summaries and references, which have been dully acknowledge.

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ABBREVIATION

L2	-	Second Language
SLA	-	Second Language Acquisition
SPSS	-	Statistical Package for Social Science
PMR	-	Penilaian Menengah Rendah



ABSTRAK

***The Influence of Individual and Social Variables
Affecting English Language Achievement among
Upper Secondary Students in a Secondary School
in Likas, Kota Kinabalu***

Kajian ini dilakukan untuk mengenal-pasti beberapa pembolehubah individu dan sosial yang menyumbang kepada pencapaian dalam Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan pelajar tingkatan empat di sebuah sekolah menengah di Likas, Kota Kinabalu. Pembolehubah individu yang dikaji dalam kajian ini adalah, "sikap pelajar terhadap bahasa Inggeris" dan "sikap pelajar terhadap kawan-kawan mereka yang bertutur dalam bahasa Inggeris". Pembolehubah sosial yang dipilih ; "kekerapan menggunakan bahasa Inggeris di rumah", "sokongan dan galakkan ibubapa", "tempoh masa yang diluangkan untuk bahan dalam bahasa Inggeris" dan "kekerapan menggunakan bahasa Inggeris dengan kawan-kawan". Kesemua pemboleubah ini dikaji dengan meminta para sampel memberi respon mereka kepada beberapa kenyataan pada skala 5 mata. Pencapaian dalam bahasa Inggeris adalah bersandarkan pada pencapaian responden dalam subjek bahasa Inggeris dalam PMR 2004. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bukan semua pembolehubah yang dikaji mempunyai korelasi dengan pencapaian dalam bahasa Inggeris. Pembolehubah "kekerapan menggunakan bahasa Inggeris di rumah" , "tempoh masa yang diluangkan untuk bahan dalam bahasa Inggeris" dan "kekerapan menggunakan bahasa Inggeris dengan kawan-kawan" mempunyai korelasi dengan pencapaian bahasa Inggeris dalam PMR 2004..

ABSTRACT***The Influence of Individual and Social Variables
Affecting English Language Achievement among
Upper Secondary Students in a Secondary School
in Likas, Kota Kinabalu***

The study seeks to confirm the various individual and social variables that affect English language attainment among the Form 4 students in a secondary school in Likas, Kota Kinabalu. The individual variables that were selected for the study were, "students' attitudes towards English language" and "students' attitude towards English-speaking peers". Whereas, the social variables that were selected were; "parental encouragement and support", "availability and length of time spent on English language materials at home", "claimed use of English with peers" and "frequency of English language spoken at home". All these variables were measured by means of a series of statements to which subjects were asked to respond on five-point scales. English language attainment was based on subjects' achievement in English language in PMR 2004. In some cases, the correlations were contrary to the direction that one might expect. The results show that "frequency of English language used at home", "the length of time spent on English language materials at home" and "claimed use of English language with peers" correlate with English language achievement in PMR 2004.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to Study

Education is seen in Malaysia as an instrument indispensable to economic progress, national unity and social stability. Education has been thought of as the essential ingredient for the advancement of human civilization and for a better quality of life (Musa b. Muhamad, 2002).

Such is the profound nature of education in our society today. Many factors contribute to the success and failure of students in their studies. This research focuses on specific social and personal variables that contribute to the successful acquisition of English language among students.

Before Malaysia achieved independence in 1957, English was the medium of instruction at all levels in English medium schools. However, with the implementation of the Education Ordinance 1957, the situation changed gradually. Since the Ordinance was enforced, *Bahasa Malaysia* has in stages, been made the main medium of instruction in all schools with the aim of making it the tool to foster unity amongst the multi-racial composition of the Malaysian society. Nevertheless, English language is still taught as a subject at all levels in schools. English is offered as a subject in schools and in all public examinations, although it is not compulsory to obtain a pass in it in order to be promoted to the next level of studies.



English language has been accorded the official second language status by the Malaysian Government and the Cabinet Committee that reviewed the implementation of the Education Policy in 1974 has accepted this. The accordance of English as an official second language status clearly illustrates the importance of the language as the language of commerce, international, communication, science and technology. As renowned academic Prof. Emeritus Tan Sri Awang Had Salleh puts it, *English is a major vehicle through which knowledge and information are transmitted* (Indramalar, *The Star*, 27 April 2003).

With the aim of maintaining the standard of English, the education authorities constantly undertake various steps, such as revising and improving the existing syllabi, retraining teachers, devising innovative language materials, and lately the reintroduction of English as the medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science, etc. However, the learners' performance in English is still considered far from satisfactory, particularly among the learners in national schools.

This acknowledgement of low performance in English among students in national schools makes one ponder why this unsatisfactory state of affair should exist though they have undergone the same curriculum over the same number of years. What factors contribute to the varying degree of success in the learning of English as a second language among the learners?

In response to the question, the effects of various individual and social variables on linguistic development and attainment have interested local and foreign investigators for a long time (Hess and Shipman 1965 in Ginsberg



(1997), Attan, 1982; Khana, 1994; Khoo, 1996; Satiadevi, 1996). There are many factors such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety and opportunities etc. that influence second language learning among students.

Hence, the aim of this study is to shed some light on the individual and social variables that influence second language learning among the form 4 students in a secondary school in Likas zone, Kota Kinabalu.

1.1 Background of the Study

Second language acquisition is the study of how second languages are learned and the factors that influence the process. Researches have shown interest in how learners, particularly the non-natives learn English. There have been an increasing number of empirical studies designed to investigate how learners acquire a second language, especially the study of the non-linguistic influence on second language acquisition such as motivation, attitude, age, support and encouragement from the people around them (teachers, peers and parents).

Krashen (1986) claims that people can acquire a second language if they obtain comprehensible inputs, their affective filters are low and the lessons contain messages that students really want to hear, so as to allow learners to take in the language input. Ellis (1994), on the other hand, argues that comprehensible input in itself does not guarantee language learning, but it is the results of interaction involving the speaker and the learner.



In the Malaysian scene, the advent of the national language policy, which brought the use of the *Bahasa Malaysia* as the official and national language, saw a decline in the standard of English as *Bahasa Malaysia* became the language of administration and the language of the classroom (Mead, 1988). Although the proficiency level of English dropped with the change in language policies, the wide disparity in the abilities among present-day students is rather staggering and warrants investigation.

This is evident from the fact that students come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse needs and goals. Freeman (2001) points out that, this common phenomenon in classrooms today, is due to the fact that, L2 learners brings to the language learning situation a wide spectrum of individual differences that will influence the learning rate and the ultimate learning result.

Social psychologists have argued consistently that non-linguistic influences, which they term as individual differences, have contributed considerably to the differences in the level of language achievements among second language acquirers. According to Walqui, A. (2004), many discussions about learning a second language focuses on teaching methodologies, while, little emphasis is given to the contextual factors - individual, social, and societal - that affect students' learning. She again emphasizes that language attitudes in the learner, the peer group, the home, the neighborhood, and society at large can have an enormous



effect on the second language learning process, both positive and negative.

Among these individual differences, the factor of attitude has long drawn the interest of social psychologists. They are interested in the idea that the attitudes of the learners towards the target language, its speakers, and the learning context may play some part in explaining success or lack of it. Gardner (1979), cited in Skehan (1993), suggests that expectations regarding bilingualism, combined with attitudes towards the target language and its culture, form the basis of an individual's attitude towards language learning.

Taking a different stance, Khana (1994), emphasizes the importance of social variables such as socio-economic status, parents' education level and knowledge of English and exposure to English through mass media as a key factor in determining the achievement level of a second language.

With adolescent language learners, factors such as peer pressure, the presence of role models, and the level of home support can strongly affect the desire and ability to learn a second language (Walqui, A., 2004). Therefore, this study seeks to confirm that students possess different levels of achievement in English due to various individual and social factors such as exposure to the language, parental support and encouragement etc. that could significantly influence language achievement.



This study will seek to compare the achievement of students in English language (PMR-2004) to the social variables of home support and exposure to English language through mass-media, students' claimed use of English language with peers and with family members, and the individual variable of students' attitude towards English language and the people who speak English. As a favorable background and attitude can create an environment that is conducive to successful language learning (Mager, 1968 in Ellis 2003), therefore the researcher believe that it is important to study and understand the combination of individual and social variables that produce significantly different levels of achievement of English.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The English Language result of this particular school for the past five years has been the lowest as compared to all the subjects that students are assessed in the PMR public examination. Table 1.1 shows the form 3 students of this school have attained a passing percentage of more than 80% for all the other subjects except for English language. The percentage of passes for English language has never been above 69.1% for the last five years.



Table 1.1: PMR Achievement in School A from the Year 2000 - 2004

Year/Subject	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Bahasa Melayu	93.2	94.5	94.3	96.0	93.5
English Language	49.2	55.9	54.3	69.1	62.8
Mathematic	86.7	88.4	86.3	93.1	80.1
Science	92.2	94.5	94.3	95.4	83.5
History	90.1	92.9	92.2	92.5	94.6
Geography	94.2	96.1	92.3	96.6	93.5
<i>K.H – KMT</i>	83.0	95.1	93.7	81.1	88.9
<i>KH – ERT</i>	93.8	98.2	97.9	88.7	97.4

Table 1.2 shows that the overall achievement of the school for the past five years in the PMR. This indicates the overall achievement in PMR could have been better if the percentage of passes in English Language is improved.

Table 1.2: PMR Overall Achievement of School A from 2000 - 2004

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Overall PMR Achievement	52.6	51.4	52.3	56.5	49.6

Therefore the low achievement in English language can be regarded as one of the contributing factors that hinders the school from higher overall percentage passes in PMR. Therefore this phenomenon has to be studied in order to improve the achievement in English language and in directly improve the overall PMR performance of the school.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

There are many external factors in addition to internal factors, which can greatly affect a student's success in learning another language. From the studies conducted by Hess and Shipman (1965) cited in Ginsberg (1997); Khana (1994), Khoo (1996), and Satiadevi (1996), there is strong evidence that a child who has been brought up in a home that provides favourable learning environment, learns English language effectively. Ellis (2003) further supports this notion, he claims that social conditions influence the opportunities that learners have to hear and speak the language and the attitudes that they develop towards it.

This claim is supported by Walqui, A., (retrieved 16/9/04). She asserts that support from home is very important for successful second language learning. Some educators believe that parents of English language learners should speak only English in the home (Rodriguez, 1982 cited by Walqui, A. retrieved 16/9/04). However, far more important than speaking English is that parents value both the native language and English, communicate with their children in whichever language is most



comfortable, and show support for and interest in their children's progress.

However, there still lacks systematic documented information about the individual and social variables that affect the learners of English in School A. As such, this study is important as an insight to the learners' background will help teachers in identifying strategies that could be adopted in an effort to produce learners who can acquired better level of English achievement.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to give some meaningful answers to the pupils' problem in the achievement of English language competence by focusing on the influence of individual and social variables such as exposure to English materials, frequency of English language spoken at home, parents' encouragement and support, and attitude of learners that influence the learning of English among students in School A in general and the form four students in particular.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to consider the independent variables and to determine those that would significantly influence the different language achievement levels of the learners. The assumption is that learners have different language achievement levels due to one reason or another. These reasons need to be identified. The individual and social variables included in this study are; the use of English language at home, the amount of time spent on English materials, claimed use of English with

peers, parental encouragement and support, attitude towards English language and attitude towards English-speaking peers.

By comparing the students' English language achievement in PMR to the variables in the study, this study hopes to identify some of the variables that influence the learning of English among learners in this school, a national school in Kota Kinabalu located in the zone of Likas.

Therefore the four main objectives of this study are;

- i. To find out if there is or not a significant correlation between students' claimed use of English with peers and home with students' English language achievement in PMR
- ii. To find out if there is or not a significant correlation between the length of time spent on English language materials and students' English language achievement in PMR.
- iii. To find out if there is or not a significant correlation between parental encouragement and support, and students' English language achievement in PMR.
- iv. To find out if there is or not a significant correlation between students' attitude towards English language and English-speaking peers, and students' English language achievement.

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