

## **MALAYSIA CHINESE INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOLS ESL LEARNERS' ENGLISH LEARNING ATTITUDES**

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The English learning attitudes of English as a Second Language learners in five Chinese independent high schools located in three southern states of peninsular Malaysia are examined in this study. 150 Form Four (Senior One) students who had sat for PMR (Lower Secondary Assessment) the previous year (2013) were administered in this investigation. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected for analysis in this study via questionnaire, classroom observations and oral reports. Significant difference is found between learners' English Learning Attitude and Subscription of English Magazine or Newspaper at Home as well as English Speaking Family. Moreover, significant difference is also identified between learners' PMR English Score and Subscription of English Magazine or Newspaper at Home including English Proficiency. Findings further indicate that there is no significant difference between learners' Gender and Language Attitude including Anxiety which corroborated with research done elsewhere. Only 19.33 percent of the students (N=29) believe good language learners are more intelligent and a meager 8 percent (N=12) will give up learning English while 92 percent (N=138) will try other means, such as going for private tuition or surfing online for assistance when their English teacher is not a good one. 91.33 percent of the students (N=137) show interest and perceive learning English as a joy and pride. Pearson Chi-square analysis also concludes that there is no correlation between learners' PMR English Score and Gender as well as School.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Research done previously concluded that a learner's attitudes play a significant role in language learning, viz., towards the target language and the teacher. Rodriguez-Brown *et al.* (1987) further found that a learner's attitudes towards the target language play a more important role in second language learning than previously described.

This paper, inspired by the foregoing findings, investigates the English learning attitudes of English as a Second Language students in the Malaysian context in general and Chinese independent high schools in particular, hoping to see the relevance between language attitudes and the respondents' learning process revealed by variables such as Gender, English Speaking Family, Subscription of English Magazine or Newspaper at Home, English Proficiency, Belief in Learning, Anxiety, Teacher-fronted Time, Student-student interaction and Physical Environment of the Classroom.

It is believed that by closely examining learner's attitudes in English learning as this investigation attempts might inform learners and teachers how the findings could be adapted to develop a more effective and applicable model. It is also

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anticipated that by understanding the complexities of English language learners and background knowledge of the language acquisition process can be beneficial for educators, parents, and learners in educational reform efforts for English in this country.

### **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

In Malaysia, English made an entry in the mid-18th century. When Malaysia declared independence in 1957 after 150 years of British colonization, Bahasa Malaysia became her national language. In 1970, year one students in schools across Malaysia underwent the new English as a Second Language programme where English was taught as a subject with the introduction of the Education Bill which officially accorded English the status of a second language (Asmah Omar, 1979: 23).

Since English is the second language of Malaysia, it is widely used by many people everywhere and one cannot deny the need to command it to fulfill the demands of the challenging world ahead in various aspects.

It is further thought that there are some gaps which point to the need of a context dependent and qualitative study. These gaps are (1) As a high school teacher, to the researcher's knowledge, not much research on English learning attitudes had been done in Chinese independent high schools, (2) Respondents are scarcely asked to make comments on their English learning attitudes, and (3) The existence of Chinese independent high schools is in itself unique and they emphasized English learning though employing Chinese Mandarin as medium of instruction for most subjects, hence a probe into their learners' attitudes towards English in learning will be insightful to all concerned.

The purpose of this research is to identify the English language attitudes of learners in Chinese independent high schools and their relevance with variables since English learning is prioritised in their syllabuses, as seven periods (280 minutes) of English is taught on a weekly basis for both junior and senior levels (Dong Zong, 2010).

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This investigation examines the attitudes of Chinese independent high schools' ESL learners towards English and their correlation with PMR English Scores, Gender, School, Family Background, English Proficiency, Subscription of English magazine or Newspaper at Home, Teacher-fronted Time, Student-student Interactions and the Physical Environment of the Classroom.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Agheyisi and Fishman's behaviourist viewpoint (1970) is adopted in this study. According to the viewpoint, attitudes are a dependent variable that can be statistically determined by observing actual behaviours in social situation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The conclusions from the research done globally which are documented below point out that researchers, ESL teachers and administrators need to consider the fact that they need to have keys for knowing their students' attitudes and preferences towards learning English for motivation purposes.

The previous findings proper are as follows: Hong Kong Chinese respondents show a strong bias against English speakers and regard it as the language of power (Lyczak *et al.*, 1976); high school students hold a negative attitude towards the use of English though they express a positive value towards English at the same time (Pierson *et al.*, 1980); university students of Hong Kong adopt positive affective, pragmatic and socio-political attitudes towards the English language (Littlewood and Liu, 1996); English is the target language needed for students at secondary and tertiary level in their career and personal growth in Hong Kong (Yan and Lau, 2003); Singapore Chinese and Indian children's attitudes towards English on both attitudinal dimensions are found to be lower than their attitudes towards their mother tongue and code-switching, while the Malay children express no significant difference (Bokhorst-Heng *et al.*, 2009).

## METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the English learning attitudes of ESL learners in Chinese independent high schools. Five Chinese independent high schools' students from three states in the southern region of Malaysia (Two in Negeri Sembilan, one in Melaka and Two in Johore) were chosen using Cluster Sampling for the purpose of data collection.

It was administered among Senior One (Form Four) students in the above mentioned five Chinese independent high schools. 150 respondents (88 boys and 62 girls) were involved in the investigation. Quantitative as well as qualitative data were collected via questionnaires, observations, oral reports and stimulated reflection, if any, for not only interpretations and analysis but also triangulation. The significant difference and correlation between the respondents' attitudes identified to be important in language learning was sought after from questionnaires and classroom observations.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Two Sample T-test and Pearson Chi-square packages was utilized to identify the significant difference and correlation between the variables. It is for measurement of reliability and validity of the data collected.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics for learners derived from the questionnaire data show that the variables Anxiety and Belief in Learning top the highest scores which translate all the learners' anxiety scale is the highest (67.033) among other variables in English learning but they have strong positive belief in English learning (58.560).

Analysis indicates that there is no significant difference between learners' Gender and Language Attitude as well as Anxiety as can be seen from Table 1 and 2 below:

TABLE 1: T-TEST FOR GENDER VERSUS LANGUAGE ATTITUDE

<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>StDev</i>	<i>SE Mean</i>
Boy	88	46.83	5.18	0.55
Girl	62	46.79	4.92	0.62

P-Value = 0.963 P < 0.05

The table above shows that of the 150 respondents, 88 are boys and 62 are girls. Their average score (Mean) in Language Attitude are 46.83 and 46.79 respectively. The standard deviations (StDev) are 5.18 and 4.92. Since the P-Value is above 0.05, meaning, there is no significant difference found between the variables Gender and Language Attitude. Likewise, the table below also indicates that there is no significant difference between Gender and Anxiety figuratively:

TABLE 2: T-TEST FOR GENDER VERSUS ANXIETY

<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>StDev</i>	<i>SE Mean</i>
Boy	88	66.91	8.34	0.89
Girl	62	67.21	8.22	1.0

P-Value = 0.8 P < 0.05

But there is significant difference found between learners' English Attitude and Subscription of English Magazine or Newspaper at Home including English Speaking Family as indicated in Table 3 and 4 and between PMR English Score and Subscription of English Magazine or Newspaper at Home as well as English Proficiency as evidenced in Table 5 and 6:

TABLE 3: T-TEST FOR ENGLISH ATTITUDE AND SUBSCRIPTION OF ENGLISH MAGAZINE AT HOME

<i>EngSubs</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>StDev</i>	<i>SE Mean</i>
Yes	18	49.33	4.19	0.99
No	132	46.47	5.08	0.44

P-Value = 0.024 P < 0.05

As clearly shown in Table 3, only 18 students subscribed English magazine or newspaper at home and the average scores (Mean) are 49.33 for subscribers and 46.47 for non subscribers. The standard deviations are 4.19 and 5.08 respectively. The P-Value obtained from T-test is 0.024, which shows there is significant difference between the variables. In other words, students who subscribed English magazine or newspaper at home will score differently in their PMR English subject.

Similar indication is also evidenced between English Attitude and English Speaking Family below (Table 4) though the P-Value is 0.08. It shows the obtained P-Value has only a difference of 0.03 compared to 0.05 and there is possibility of errors in the process of data collection and thus it is considered as significant difference.

TABLE 4: T-TEST FOR ENGLISH ATTITUDE AND ENGLISH SPEAKING FAMILY

<i>EngFami</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>StDev</i>	<i>SE Mean</i>
Boy	28	48.32	4.70	0.89
Girl	122	46.47	5.09	0.46

P-Value = 0.080 (weak difference depends on errors)  $P < 0.05$

The P-Value of Table 5 and 6 below confirm the significant difference and correlation between the variables as well since they are below 0.05:

TABLE 5: T-TEST FOR PMR ENGLISH SCORE VERSUS SUBSCRIPTION OF ENGLISH MAGAZINE OR NEWSPAPER AT HOME

<i>EngSubs</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>StDev</i>	<i>SE Mean</i>
Yes	18	1.83	1.15	0.27
No	132	2.89	1.31	0.11

P-Value = 0.001  $P < 0.05$

TABLE 6: ANOVA FOR PMR, USING ADJUSTED STUDENTS ON PMR SCORE

<i>Source</i>	<i>DF Seq</i>	<i>SS Adj</i>	<i>SS Adj</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
EngPro	2	116.322	116.322	58.161	57.37	0.000
Error	147	149.038	149.038	1.014		
Total	149	265.360				

P-Value = 0.000  $P < 0.05$

In addition, Pearson Chi-square analysis also concludes that there is no correlation between learners' PMR English Score and Gender as well as School.

On the other hand, of all the 150 students from five schools, 91.33 percent of them (N=137) showed interest and perceived learning English as a joy and pride from personal interview as they were convinced English as an international language is a must for communication and possibly will secure a well paid job. There are 17.33 percent of the students (N=16) who do not think that by mastering English will secure well paid and good job though. Only 19.33 percent of the students (N=29) believe good language learners are more intelligent and a meager 8 percent (N=12) will give up learning English while 92 percent (N=138) will try other means when their English teacher is not a good one. Data also suggests that as high as 48.67 percent (N=73) of the 150 students feel panic when asked to answer questions in English class. Notwithstanding this outstanding figure, in personal interviews, these students (89.33 percent, N=134) are not afraid of being corrected in terms of

English errors made in public by their teacher though they are mostly reluctant to answer English questions posted by teacher voluntarily.

Finally, Students believe that in English teaching, teaching aids employed by teachers such as eye-catching and interesting textbooks, records, videos play central role.

From classroom observations, which were recorded on an Observation Guide Form, chalk (marker) and talk was noted for nine out of ten teachers while doing grammar translation. Hardly any interactions between students and teachers were spotted the same went with student to student interactions. Students answered questions only when they were called upon to. The size of the classes ranged from 30 and above but below 50. As for the physical environment of the classroom, computers and projectors were found installed in the classrooms. The classroom settings were identical: desks and chairs arranged in straight rows facing the board where the teacher usually stood in teaching practices.

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, data suggest that there is significant difference between learners' English Attitude and Subscription of English Magazine or Newspaper at Home as well as English Speaking Family. Likewise, significant difference is also identified between learners' PMR English Score and Subscription of English Magazine or Newspaper at Home as well as English Proficiency. Pearson Chi-square confirms that there is no correlation between learners' PMR English Score and Gender as well as School. Only 19.33 percent of the students believe good language learners are more intelligent and a meager 8 percent will give up learning English while 92 percent will try other means for assistance when their English teacher is not a good one. As a whole, most of the 150 students show interest and perceive learning English as a joy and pride.

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