

**THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MALAYSIAN CHINESE
ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH AS
A SECOND LANGUAGE**

AHMAD MAHREEZ ABDUL GHANI

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ABSTRACT		II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		III
CHAPTER 1 –	THE EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL AND MULTILINGUAL MALAYSIA.	
1.1	Historical perspectives and colonial economic policy: pre-and post-independence	1
1.2	Colonial education policy	3
1.3	Policies adopted to overcome the economic and education imbalance	4
1.4	The National Education Philosophy and the new curriculum	6
1.5	The place of English	8
1.6	Of the research	11
CHAPTER 2 –	BILINGUALISM.	
2.1	Defining bilingualism	14
2.2	The concepts of bilingualism and bilinguality	16
2.3	Bilingual education in Malaysia	18
CHAPTER 3 –	THE UNDERLYING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	
3.1	Attitudes	21
3.2	Integrative and Instrumental motivation	24

3.3	Second language learning	.....29
3.4	Gardner's socioeducational model	.....30
CHAPTER 4 – ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH		
4.1	The context	.....35
4.2	Research methodology: production of data	.....36
4.3	Results :	.....41
	4.3.1 Socioeconomic background and bilinguality.	.....41
	4.3.2 Attitudes	.....46
	4.3.3 Motivation .	.....55
4.4	Discussion	.....62
CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION		..... 69
BIBLIOGRAPHY		..... 70
APPENDICES		..... 73

ABSTRACT

There is considerable research done to find out the attributed factors which may influence the motivation and attitudes of a language learner. This study, set in a Malaysian context, attempts to examine some of the possible contributory factors, which can affect the Malaysian learners' attitudes and motivation, particularly those of the Chinese learners and how they may be related and compared to the relatively poor performances of the Malay and Indian learners. This issue has been of much concern during the recent years and some measures have been taken by the government to reduce the problem such as the implementation of a new curriculum - KBSR and KBSM (both for the primary and secondary schools) and the reformulation of a new National Education Philosophy (NEP). The fact whether such moves will create a more positive effects to the learners' attitudes and motivation is still remain to be seen.

130 undergraduates at Universiti Utara Malaysia responded to the questionnaires designed to investigate the learners' language, economic and social backgrounds, as well as their parents' opinions on learning English as a second language. The data collected will be analysed in relation to the 3 hypotheses proposed in the study. The results indicated that there is a definite change in the learning environment with regard to attitude and motivation of the learners particularly among the Malays and the Indians. In the context of the above undergraduates, they seemed to be 'immunized' or not affected by their parents' attitudes and socioeconomic background in relation to the learning of English as a second language at the university. On the whole, the attitudes and motivation of the learners are positive and instrumental in orientation. Most significant is the finding that the two mentioned aspects of the Malay and Indian learners have shifted or improved towards a better understanding of the need to learn the target language.

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CHAPTER 1 • THE EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL AND MULTILINGUAL MALAYSIA

1.1 Historical perspectives and Colonial Economic Policy: pre-and post-independence.

British rule in Peninsular Malaysia from the 18th. century caused many long term effects on the traditional and feudal Malay governmental organisation. There was deliberate economic policy by the British to create a dependent economy in Malaysia based on the production of raw materials for export, with foodstuffs and manufactured goods imported from the so called developed countries particularly from Britain. As for the local Malay population, for various political, cultural and economic reasons, it was prevented and to a certain extent was not prepared to enter into the new expanding export-oriented economy. To overcome the shortage of labour due to the lack of 'participation' from the Malays, the British administration brought in cheap Chinese and Indian labourers from mainland China and India particularly after 1850 (Ozog, cited in Baldauf, 1988) to man the highly profitable export-oriented primary sectors (where most of the raw products such as tin and rubber were produced for export purposes). With the influx of foreign workers into Malaysia, a new multiethnic society was created and a significant factor in this new society was that the Malays, Chinese and the Indians were encouraged by the British administration to only pursue those occupations that came to be identified with each ethnic group, such as the Malays – as farmers, the Chinese – as entrepreneurs and the Indians – as labourers in the rural plantations. Another important outcome resulting from this migration of foreign workers was the existence of a diversity of languages, religions and cultures which was 'superimposed' on this new multiethnic and multilingual society in Malaysia.

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