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**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS IN
JOHOR BAHRU**

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ABSTRACT

There has been an ongoing debate about the importance of the English language. Employers are lamenting that new graduates these days lack communicative proficiency in English. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors which contribute to English proficiency in Chinese students in Johor Bahru. Investigating the factors that contribute to English proficiency might partially explain the occurrence of underachievement in the learning English. The study was conducted with a self-reported questionnaire as an instrument. Data was collected from a sample of 119 students from Southern College, a Chinese community run college based in Johor Bahru. Data was analyzed using the SPSS version 11.5. Descriptive statistics showed that respondents have interest in the language but lack confidence and motivation in using English. The independent variables which were hypothesized factors were correlated with the dependent variables. Findings showed that although parents and close significant others do have influence on the respondents' attitude and perception towards the English language, their English proficiency grades were not influenced by them. In conclusion, socializing factors such as family members and significant others are not significant contributors to English proficiency in Chinese students in Johor Bahru but they do contribute to the positive attitude and perception towards English that many of the respondents have.

ABSTRAK

Kepentingan Bahasa Inggeris sentiasa di bentang sebagai topic perbincangan dan biasa menjadi buah mulut di kalangan orang ramai kebelakangan ini. Ramai majikan yang berungut tentang kelemahan kegunaan Bahasa Inggeris oleh remaja masa kini. Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk mengkaji faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kelemahan berbahasa Inggeris di kalangan remaja berbangsa Cina di Johor Bahru. Kajian faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kelemahan ini mungkin akan menunjukkan kelemahan pembelajaran dan pengajaran di kalangan murid-murid. Data kajian diperolehi dari 119 responden dari Southern College, sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi swasta yang dibiayai oleh komuniti Cina di Johor Bahru. Statistik diskriptif menunjukkan pencapaian Bahasa Inggeris di taraf C dan D dan kecenderungan murid Cina terhadap mata pelajaran Inggeris ialah tidak menggalakkan. Statistik inferensi pula menunjukkan tidak terdapat hubungan signifikan diantara pencapaian Bahasa Inggeris dengan pertalian keluarga dan orang-orang signifikan seperti rakan dan guru. Tetapi, kajian menunjukkan terdapat hubungan diantara persepsi terhadap Bahasa Inggeris dengan hubungan keluarga dan orang-orang signifikan. Lain kata orang-orang signifikan tidak mempengaruhi pencapaian remaja Cina dalam pencapaian Bahasa Inggeris tetapi boleh mempengaruhi persepsi mereka terhadap Bahasa tersebut.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

As Malaysians move towards globalization and become increasingly international, the need becomes greater for our children to learn more than one language, in addition to their mother tongue. A bilingual speaker is a person who uses two languages that differ in speech, sounds, vocabulary and syntax. The bilingual's native language is referred to as the first language (L1) and the non-native language is the second language (L2). In Malaysia, the national language is Bahasa Malaysia. However, the different ethnic races have their own first language (L1). For example, to the Chinese, their first language or language used at home could be Mandarin or one of the many Chinese dialects and to the Indians, their home language could be Tamil, Urdu or one of the dialects. The language in Chinese schools and Tamil schools are Mandarin and Tamil respectively.

All Malaysian students have to acquire a second language (L2) either Bahasa Malaysia or English. They need to learn a language not their mother tongue from the age of seven when they enter primary school. Many start earlier. Students in national schools where the language of teaching is Bahasa Malaysia start learning English in Year One. Students in vernacular schools however learn Bahasa Malaysia as the second language in Year One. Many vernacular schools start teaching English as an

additional subject also in Year One but some schools may start English only in Year Three. Evidence for second language learning ability declining with age is controversial. It was assumed that there is a critical period for language acquisition (Lenneberg, 1967). Recent studies (Mayberry & Lock, 2003) have recognized that certain aspects of second language learning may be affected by age but older learners do have certain advantages.

As the adult workplace become increasingly international, the need is greater than ever for children to learn one or more languages in addition to their first language. Exposure to a second language (L2) in early childhood is very important. Generally, early exposure to L2 appears to be important for mastering pronunciation, especially if the L2 is very different from the mother tongue. (Y.K. Au, Knightly, Jun & Oh, 2002; Neville & Bavelier, 2001) It also appears that learning a second language facilitates achievement in other academic areas. (Daiz 1983; Reich 1986) Instructions in a foreign language sensitize young children to the international and multicultural nature of the world. Students who have L2 express more positive attitudes towards school work and are more independent learners. (Reich, 1986)

Research reveals clear advantages to being bilingual. When children are truly fluent in both languages, they tend to perform better on tasks requiring complex cognitive functioning. They also appear to have greater metalinguistic awareness. (Bialystok, 2001; Daiz & Klinger, 1991; Gracia, 1994; CE Moran & Hakuta, 1995) Bilingualism also has social benefits. Long's interaction hypothesis proposes that language acquisition is strongly facilitated by the use of the target language in interaction. The negotiation of meaning has been shown to contribute greatly to the acquisition of vocabulary (Long, 1990). The use of words in contexts will stimulate a deeper understanding of their meaning (Nation, 2000).

One of the ways to increase students' achievement in learning is to involve their families (Chavkin, 1993; Kenderson & Berla, 1994). Parents who do not have a

second language need to be aware of the factors that have contributed to second language failure. With the knowledge that parents have from their own experiences in life, their children's learning can be enhanced. Parents of bilingual children foster a sense of community and promote a richer education (Moll, 1994). Some bilingual children have been raised in families where two languages are spoken regularly. Others learn a second language in school.

In this study, we look at the Malaysian Chinese children acquiring English as the second language. Young Malaysian Chinese children usually get acquainted with English when they go to kindergarten. English is generally taught using the translation method where nouns and vocabulary are translated from the mother tongue. Very few children learn English by the total immersion method where they hear and speak only English in the classroom. There is evidence that the total immersion method helps students become proficient quickly. (Collier, 1992; Cunningham & Graham, 2000; Krashen, 1996) However, there is a fear that the immersion method might lead to the loss of the first language. This is the first fear of the Malaysian Chinese community.

1.2 Background of Problem

English was widely used before Malaysian independence 50 year ago. Back then, a sizable group of Malaysian Chinese speak English as a first language. It was something carried over from the British colonial days. They speak English at home and made it a point to immerse and educate their children in the English language. Most of these English-educated Chinese were unable to read and write in Chinese. Many of them are now in their 60s and have retired.

The Malaysian Chinese community has gone through a lot of changes

through the years. Many of the young Chinese are third generation Malaysians or more. Malaysian Chinese maintain a distinct communal identity as an ethnic, cultural and political people. Mandarin is the lingua franca in most Chinese homes in Johor Bahru in recent years while the older generation converse in one of the many Chinese dialects (Asmah, 2004). Although they consider themselves as fully Malaysians, they hold on very firmly to their culture and traditions especially now when they perceived that they are being ‘threatened’.

In the 1970s, English as a language of instruction in schools was phased out in favor of Bahasa Malaysia. The Chinese then actually fought to preserve their culture, heritage and education. The United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia, known as Dong Jiao Zong believed that the government of Malaysia will eventually eradicate vernacular education in order to achieve national unity ([http:// thestar.com](http://thestar.com)). Lim Lian Giok, the former president of Chinese education maintained that “One’s culture is the soul of one’s ethnic, its value as important as our lives” (Chinese Independent High School). As such, he advocated that Chinese parents send their children to Chinese schools to inherit Chinese cultural heritage. In fact, the Malaysian Chinese are said to be more Chinese than China Chinese in terms of culture and traditions (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). The emphasis on ethnicity and culture has not helped the learning of English as a second language especially as it is not compulsory to pass English in major exams. Bahasa Malaysia is compulsory.

Education is the right of every child. As children spend almost half of their day at school, it would naturally have some influence to their second language acquisition. Socialization at school with peers and teachers could also provide factors that might influence English acquisition. In recent years, large segments of Chinese in Malaysia are “Chinese educated”. Malaysia has a Chinese medium education system consisting of largely independently run high schools. Mandarin is the main language of instruction in all subjects except Bahasa Malaysia which is compulsory and English. Mother tongue education is seen to be important as it represents cultural

roots and Mandarin or Chinese is not easily learnt in the confinements of the home. It is estimated that more than ninety per cent of Chinese send their children to Chinese Primary schools (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian>). As the population at Chinese vernacular schools is mainly Chinese, students do not socialize with other races and there is little opportunity to use English to communicate.

Parenting is a complex activity that includes many specific behaviors that work individually and together to influence outcomes in children. Baumrind (1991) assumes that normal parenting revolves around issues of control. Parents may differ in how they try to control or socialize their children and the extent to which they do so. It is assumed that the primary role of all parents is to influence, teach and control their children.

Parenting styles provide indicators of children well-being across a wide spectrum of environments across diverse communities. Children are socialized first into the culture of the family and then to the community. Culture is the case of societal values, including the knowledge, rules, traditions, beliefs and values that guide behavior in a particular group of people (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Malaysian parents, trying to preserve their Chinese culture send their children to Chinese primary schools where all subjects are taught in Mandarin except Bahasa Malaysia and English.

Students from Chinese school system are often passive students who are good at memorizing and rote learning. Traditional schooling used mainly linguistic and logical teaching methods. It also uses a limited range of learning and teaching techniques. Many traditional teaching methods still rely on classroom and book-based teaching, much repetition and pressured exams for reinforcement and review. Although many Chinese students from the Chinese system produced good grades in school they seem to not do well in soft skills such as communication and expressing themselves. Students have to be active learners to learn English well.

According to Snow, Corno & Jackson,(1996) learning styles are approaches to learning and studying. Although many different learning styles have been described, one theme that unites most of the styles is differences in and surface approaches to processing information in learning situations. Some students tend to learn for the sake of learning and are less concerned about how their performance is evaluated. Some students focus on memorizing the learning materials and not on understanding them. Sometimes students, particularly students who have difficulty, prefer what is easy and comfortable as learning can be hard. Some students prefer to learn in a certain way because they have no alternatives as it is the only way they know (Woolfolk, 2004).

Laurence Steinberg and his colleagues (1998, 1996) have studied the role of parents, peers and community in school achievement. He concluded that 40 percent of students were just going through the motions of learning in class. They were not really paying attention or trying very hard to learn. Steinberg claims that this lack of investment is due in part to peer pressure. Results of his research indicate that peers provide incentives for certain activities and ridicule others which create a school culture that affects the way the teachers behave. One in five students said that their friends make fun of people who tried to do well in school.

Parents play a role in peer choice. Students who characterized their parents as authoritative were more likely to prefer well-rounded peers. They are more likely to respond to peer pressure to do well in school and less likely to be swayed by peer pressure especially if their friends also have authoritative parents (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington & Bornstein, 2000).

Some students have a good attitude towards learning English. They are self-regulated learners and are intrinsically motivated to learn. They find tasks in English interesting because they value learning and not just performing well in the

eyes of others. They are serious about getting the benefit from learning English (Woolfolk, 2004). Children learn to self-regulate at home. Parents support through modeling, encouragement, facilitation and rewarding of goal setting (Martinez-Pons, 2002). Learning English will be easy for most students if they have good models, clear instructions and the opportunities for authentic practice (Woolfolk, 2004).

Students' self-concepts influence how they attitudes and how they behave. Their self-assessments depend on how successful their actions have been in the past. They are more likely to have a positive perception towards English if they have been successful in English use (Damon, 1991; Guay et al., 2003). They believe they are likeable individuals if they have been able to make and keep friends.

1.3 Problem Statement

Many employers in Malaysia complain that our graduates are not proficient in English and are thus not employable. When students graduate from secondary school after 11 years of learning English as a second language, many of them do not do well in the subject. Veteran English teacher Ibrahim Zakaria put forward that even intelligent young graduates have trouble getting ideas across in English. These students with poor command of English could score strong credits in other subjects in the SPM examination (Tan, 2005). Some students can hardly communicate when they need a second language for tertiary education or for job placement. University Malaysia Vice Chancellor Datuk Rafiah Salim claimed many law students did not have a strong command of English and are struggling in the Malaysian courts (www.tradeport.org).

Approaches to teaching English as a second language in Malaysia is a debated issue especially now when many graduates become unemployable as they

lack communicative skills. Most of the difficulties that learners face in learning English are the consequence of the degree to which their native language differs from English. A native speaker of Mandarin may face many more difficulties than a German because German is closely related to English whereas Mandarin is not. Language learners often produce errors of syntax and pronunciation resulting from the influence of their mother tongue. This is referred to as language interference. In 2002, however, the Malaysian government reintroduced English as the language of instruction for Science and Mathematics in national schools and universities to arrest the problem

There is a need to improve the level of English acquisition in Malaysian students. Students with a low level of English obviously would not have soft skills to do well when they need to communicate in the international arena. The Sultan of Pahang called for students to master the English language to enhance their skills in handling hi-tech devices in a speech recently (The Sunday Star, 10 Aug. 2008). He stated that as English is an internationally accepted medium of communication, it is vital to master the language to understand modern terminology. Those people who are fluent in English have better career opportunities.

While many factors may contribute to the Chinese students' English proficiency, the major factors point to the influences of parents and their opinion of cultural and ethnic education, teaching and learning styles in school, socialization with peers as well as students' own attitude and perception towards English. This study will attempt to confirm these factors as the major contribution to English proficiency in the Malaysian Chinese especially in Johor Bahru.

1.4 Objective

This study seeks to examine the factors that contribute to the acquisition of English as a second language in the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

The objectives are:

- (i) To determine the current level of English proficiency among Chinese students in Johor Bahru.
- (ii) To determine the factors such as parental influence, peer influence, teacher influence and personal attitude that contribute most toward English proficiency among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.
- (iii) To determine the learning style such as visual or spatial learning style, aural or auditory learning style and verbal or linguistic learning style that contribute most toward English proficiency among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.
- (iv) To determine the perception towards learning English among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.
- (v) To identify the relationship between current proficiency in English and parental income among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.
- (vi) To identify the relationships between current proficiency in English and the factors such as parental influence, peer influence, teacher influence and personal attitude among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.
- (vii) To identify the relationship between current proficiency in English and the learning styles such as visual or spatial learning style, aural or auditory learning style and verbal or linguistic learning style among the Chinese students in Johor

Bahru.

- (viii) To identify the relationship between student perception towards learning English and the factors such as parental influence, peer influence, teacher influence and personal attitude among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions are:

- (i) What is the current level of English proficiency among the Chinese students?
- (ii) What are the factors such as parental influence, peer influence, teacher influence and personal attitude that contribute most toward English proficiency among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru?
- (iii) What is the learning style such as visual or spatial learning style, aural or auditory learning style and verbal or linguistic learning style that contributes most toward English proficiency among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru?
- (iv) What is the perception towards learning English among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru?
- (v) Are there significant relationships between current proficiency in English and parental income among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

- (vi) Are there significant relationships between current proficiency in English and the factors such as parental influence, peer influence, teacher influence and personal attitude among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru?
- (vii) Are there significant relationships between current proficiency in English and the learning styles such as visual or spatial learning style, aural or auditory learning style and verbal or linguistic learning style among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.
- (viii) Are there significant relationships between student perception towards learning English and factors such as parental influence, peer influence, teacher influence and personal attitude among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6 Hypotheses

1.6.1 General Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between current proficiency in English and parental income among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.2 General Hypothesis

There are no significant relationships between current proficiency in English and the factors such as parental influence, peer influence, teacher influence and personal attitude among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.2.1 Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between current proficiency in English and parental influence among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.2.2 Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between current proficiency in English and peer influence among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.2.3 Hypothesis 4

There is no significant relationship between current proficiency in English and teacher influence among the Chinese student in Johor Bahru.

1.6.2.4 Hypothesis 5

There is no significant relationship between current proficiency in English and personal attitude among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.3 General Hypothesis

There are no significant relationships between current proficiency in English and the learning styles such as visual or spatial learning style, aural or auditory learning style and verbal or linguistic learning style among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.3.1 Hypothesis 6

There is no significant relationship between current proficiency in English and visual or spatial learning style among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.3.2 Hypothesis 7

There is no significant relationship between current proficiency in English and aural or auditory learning style among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.3.3 Hypothesis 8

There is no significant relationship between current proficiency in English and verbal or linguistic learning style among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.4 General Hypothesis

There are no significant relationships between student perception towards learning English and factors such as parental influence, peer influence, teacher influence and personal attitude among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.4.1 Hypothesis 9

There is no significant relationship between student perception towards learning English and parental influence among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.4.2 Hypothesis 10

There is no significant relationship between student perception towards English and peer influence among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.4.3 Hypothesis 11

There is no significant relationship between student perception towards English and teacher influence among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.6.4.4 Hypothesis 12

There is no significant relationship between student perception towards English and personal attitude among the Chinese students in Johor Bahru.

1.7 Significance of Study

This research could be of significant interest to the Chinese community especially those in the state of Johor. There have been many anecdotal and newspaper reports of why some students do not do well in English but few have been documented. It is clear that the proximity of Singapore has had immense influence on the Chinese community in Johor. Many Chinese living in Johor tune in to Singapore television and radio stations as they offer more popular Chinese dramas and variety shows that the locals in Johor can identify with. Thousands of Johorians also travel to Singapore daily to work. These have in no small way influenced family culture and socialization as well as the way children are brought up in Johor as the Singaporeans are mostly Chinese. Yet, proficiency in English in the Singaporeans has not influenced the Chinese in Joho to pick up English.

This study would provide parents a closer understanding of the importance of doing well in English in their children's future. Parents need to understand that proficiency in a second language would not lead to an erosion of their culture. On the contrary it would be of more benefit in preserving their culture.

This study may assist the education ministry and administrators in schools to develop programs and policies that would encourage second language acquisition especially in English the education system. It would help in better addressing students' second language needs as soft skills that would be useful for future employment.

This study may motivate young adults to learn that proficiency in a second language especially in English will be of advantage to them. Proficiency in English would help students to keep up with the changes that are happening in a world full of technological innovations. It would help them to communicate confidently and effectively with the other citizens of the global village.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the sample of the research from a private college in Johor Bahru may not be generalized to other Chinese communities in Malaysia.

Parental social capital and cultural prejudice and ethnic pride may be a sensitive subject and respondents may manipulate responses to show what they want other people to perceive themselves as.

The teaching methods in Malaysian Chinese schools have been instilled in teachers and it might not be as easy to make changes to a system that has been proven and accepted as the norm.

Socialization is subjective. Who the individual choose to socialize with are subject to their upbringing or social capital and their personality and interest. The questionnaire may not reflect the researcher's ideas perfectly and would then affect the data. It is assumed that data collected was unbiased and correct

1.9 Definition of Terms

1.9.1 The Chinese Community in Malaysia

A Malaysian Chinese is a Malaysian of Chinese origin. In Malaysia they are usually simply referred as Chinese. A large segment of the Malaysian Chinese population is Chinese speaking. Malaysian Chinese traditionally dominated the Malaysian economy. The majority of Chinese people live in cities and urban areas and are involved in business or working in the private sector. Some communities prefer smaller towns and are usually in agriculture (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2001) Whether urban or rural, the Chinese as a community are very concerned about education especially Chinese education as it is seen as a heritage that must be propagated.

1.9.2 Chinese Education in the Malaysian Education System

Public education is free and accessible to all Malaysians. There are three types of schools with their language of instructions in Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin or Tamil (Education Guide Malaysia, 2004). Each of these mediums of instructions signifies the three major races that exist in Malaysia. The Chinese communities, therefore, have a choice to send their children to either Chinese schools or Malay schools. About 90 per cent of Chinese children go to Mandarin-medium primary school but less than 5 per cent go to Mandarin-medium secondary schools (www.asiaone.com).

The Chinese primary schools in Malaysia are generally government funded. All subjects are taught in Mandarin except Bahasa Malaysia and English. After Independence, the government instructed all schools to be assimilated into the

normal school system. In the 1960s (Barnes Report) most of the Chinese secondary schools had received government funding and had converted to national-type secondary schools or Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan, where the language of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia. There remained some 60 Chinese Independent High Schools that are supported financially through student fees and donations from the public. Mandarin is the Main language of instruction in all subjects except Bahasa Malaysia and English.

1.9.3 English as a Second Language

English is no more complex than other languages. The rules for a language define how words should be pronounced, how meaning should be expressed and the ways the basic parts of speech should be put together to form sentences. Learners may have difficulties such as confusing items of vocabulary resulting from the influence from their mother tongue. There seem to be a great difference in these areas between Chinese and English. Another difference is in the writing. Chinese is written in block characters while English uses the alphabet.

According to Vygotsky's theory of development, children learn language by practicing it in their day to day interactions with adult and peers. Children use language to express needs and desires. Teachers and other adults promote language development through interactions that encourage children's use of language (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst & Epstein, 1994). Language differences don't have to form barriers between home and school.

Transition bilingual programs (Gracia, 1993) in the United States have been used successfully in teaching English as a second language. Transition bilingual programs use native language as an instructional aid until English becomes proficient.

Transitional programs begin with the first language and gradually develop the English skills of learners. Proponents of the program said that it make sense because it provides a smooth and humane transition of English by building on a student's first language. They argue that being able to speak two languages has both practical and learning benefits (Gracia, 1993).

When compared to the immersion program, some researchers have found that students achieve higher in math and reading and they have more positive attitudes toward school and themselves (Arias & Casanova 1993). Research has indicated that knowledge and skills in a native language is transferable to the second language (Krashen, 1996). They not only build on an existing foundation but also tell students and parents that doing well in a second language do not mean forgetting the culture of home and community.

1.9.4 Parenting Style

Parents play a significant role in the development of their children's attitudes and behaviors. Parental involvement will benefit children's learning. Parents are children's first teachers from birth and assume roles in their children's education. They model attitudes and behavior that foster achievement and direct the interest and activities of their children. Children often learn prejudice attitudes, cultural etiquette and ethical customs from their parents. Different parenting styles lead to various ways they interact with their children and are important components that shape their children's views.

Baumrind (1971) described three distinct prototypes of parental authority; permissiveness, authoritarianism and authoritativeness. The permissive parents are relatively non-controlling. They make fewer demands on their children. However they may be perceived as uninterested parents as described by De Knop (1992). Their

involvement may include only paying for tuition classes. This may create stress and anxiety for learners because there is no support or encouragement provided. Children of permissive parents may also be rebellious and aggressive. They tend to be self-indulgent, impulsive and socially inept although some may be active, outgoing and creative (Baumrind, 1975). The worst outcome is found in children of indifferent parents. When permissiveness is accompanied by hostility and lack of warmth, the child feels free to give rein to even more destructive impulses.

Authoritarian parents tend to be too strict and rigid by setting rules for acceptable behavior. Authoritarian parents value unquestioning obedience in their children and discourage verbal discussions between parent and child. They favor punitive measures to control their children. The parents may be described as over critical and they may not be satisfied with the performance of their children. Pressure to perform is a source of anxiety and stress that might further aggravate performance. As indicated by Baumrind (1972, 1975) and other researchers, authoritarian parents tend to produce withdrawn, fearful children who are dependent, moody, unassertive and irritable. Adolescents may over react to the restrictive, punishing environment in which they are reared and become rebellious and aggressive.

Authoritative parenting style seems to be the best fit to facilitate an enjoyable learning environment for children. Authoritative parents provide clear and firm directions for their children. Discipline clarity is moderated by warmth, reason, flexibility and verbal encouragement. There is communication between children and parents. Parents encourage their children to form their own thoughts and beliefs. They work together to form a mutual agreement when conflict arises. Authoritative parents incorporate the five dimensions' of parental behavior as described by Woolger and Power (1993): acceptance, modeling, performance expectations, reward or punishment, and directiveness. Authoritative parents pay attention to whether their children are improving and are satisfied when a new skill is learned. They encourage their children to enjoy learning and create a balance of positive and negative

criticism to motivate learning. For most children, the ideal situation appears to be authoritative parenting, in which parents provide a loving and supportive home, hold high expectations and standards of performance, are consistent and include their children in decision making. Children from authoritative homes are energetic, self-confident, show self-control, are likeable and make friends easily (Baumrind, 1989; W.A. Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington & Bornstein, 2000; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991; Rohner, 1998).

Research on parenting shows relationships between parenting styles and children's characteristics but does not necessarily indicate that certain parenting behaviours cause certain characteristics in children. Many children do well despite unhappy home conditions (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; R.A. Thompson & Wyatt, 1995). Parents may have learnt ineffective parenting skills from their own parents and may have other challenges in their lives that hamper their ability to nurture and support their children (Serbin & Karp, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1982).

1.9.5 Peers Influence

Peers are people of about the same age group outside of the family that the individual socialize with. Being a member of a peer group define who the person is. Rules within a group indicate how its members should or should not behave. When individuals are accepted into a group, their status and self-esteem rise. Students usually conform to pressure that may stem from how they should behave in order to fit in. Social norms which may be implicit, explicit or unspoken indicate how individuals are expected to behave in specific situations. Students especially teenagers are often influenced by the current standards of dress, speech and grooming from their peer group. Most people obey the norms most of the time (Baron et al., 2007).

Students attending vernacular schools are used to socializing with people from their community and have little opportunities to socialize with other races. When these students go to secondary school where there are different communities to socialize with, they either conform to the norms of their group or are referred to as outsiders. Teenagers are often sensitive to the social norms of their group and often will do a lot not to break the rules of the group. For example, verbal praise given in front of peer group for using English could cause ribald remarks from the peers. Young people would avoid performing well for fear of negative feedback from friends who might ostracize him and thus lower his standing in his peer group (Burns, 1982).

1.9.6 Teacher role

Most teachers who teach English in Malaysian schools are in fact not native speakers of English. Teaching methods vary. Some instructors lecture, others demonstrate or lead students to self-discovery. Some focus on principles and others on applications. Some emphasize memory and understanding. Both Piaget and Vygotsky (Fowler, 1994) attached importance to language and social interaction. Both recommended that teachers move beyond lecturing and telling as teaching methods and provide opportunities for students to engage in inquiry, problem solving and decision making. Teachers should strive for a balance of instructional methods. If the balance is achieved, all students will be taught in a manner they prefer, which will lead to an increased comfort level and more willingness to learn. Piaget and Vygotsky suggested that teachers provide experiences, guidance and assume a supportive role in assisting students' attempts to develop understanding (Good & Brophy, 2000)

1.9.7 Learning styles

Many people recognize that each person prefers different learning styles and techniques. Knowing and understanding their own learning style helps people to learn more effectively. In language learning, sensory or perceptual learning styles are often employed. Learning styles group common ways that people learn. Everyone has a mix of learning styles. Many students have different learning styles for learning languages. Students preferentially take in and process information in different ways. They may do so by seeing and hearing, reflecting and acting, reasoning logically and intuitively, analyzing and visualizing, and steadily or in fits and starts. When mismatch between learning styles of most students in a class and the teaching method, the students may become bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the course, the curriculum and in themselves. People will be able to capitalize on their strengths and improve their self-advocacy skills when they understand their learning style.

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