BORANG PENGESAHAN STATUS TESIS

JUDUL: A SURVEY ON THE LANGUAGE BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH AND THE READING HABITS OF FORM TWO STUDENTS IN SMK PEREMPUAN PERAK, IPOH

Sesi Pengaunan: 1999-2003

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EVELYN LIM MEEI SUEY

(HURUF BESAR)

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A SURVEY ON THE LANGUAGE BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH AND THE READING HABITS OF FORM TWO STUDENTS IN SMK PEREMPUAN PERAK, IPOH

EVELYN LIM MEEI SUEY

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Penyelia : [Signature]
(Dr. Zubaidah Awang)

Tarikh : 30 OKTOBER 2005
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Tandatangan : [Signature]
Nama Penulis : EVELYN LIM MEEI SUEY
Tarikh : 20 OKTOBER 2003
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Upon the successful completion of my thesis, I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to the following people for contributing towards the success of this endeavour:-

My supervisor, Dr. Zubaidah Awang, for all her effort and guidance to make sure I did my best. Thank you for being patient with me and making time for me even though you had a busy schedule. Without your encouragement and support, this thesis would not have been completed on time.

Our PSM coordinator, Pn. Tina Abdullah, for her patience and dedication in seeing to all the problems we encountered along the way. Thank you for lending a listening ear, and for working so hard to ensure that our presentations went on smoothly.

My friends, Jocelyn, Marciana and Teoh, for the constant encouragement and support they have given me. Thank you for helping me, one way or another, to make sure that I will successfully complete my thesis this semester.

The school authorities of SMK Perempuan Perak, Ipoh, for allowing me to administer questionnaires for my study. Also, my thanks to the Form Two students in the same school for giving their cooperation to complete the questionnaires.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family for their support and concern. Thank you for always being there to share my joy and disappointment. Although you were physically far away, your emotional support was crucial to keep me giving my best.
ABSTRACT

The decline in the standard of English among Malaysian students has caused increasing concern among the general public. Many feel that the reason for this problem is that students do not practise good reading habits in English, and that they do not read enough English materials to help them master the language. Meanwhile, others feel that their reluctance to read might be due to the negative attitudes they have towards the language. Therefore, this descriptive study aims to identify the language background of Form Two students of SMK Perempuan Perak, their attitude towards English, as well as their reading habits. Respondents’ feedback was obtained through the administration of questionnaires. Data was then computed into the SPSS system and analysed using simple statistical procedures, namely the mean and percentage. Findings showed that the majority of respondents, who are predominantly Chinese, have a positive attitude towards English, despite the fact that they seldom use English in everyday communication. However, these students did not have good reading habits. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be done in this area to identify other factors that might influence students’ reading habits in English.
ABSTRAK

Kemerosotan tahap penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan pelajar-pelajar Malaysia telah mencetuskan keprihatinan ahli-ahli masyarakat. Ramai percaya bahawa masalah ini timbul kerana para pelajar tidak mengamalkan budaya membaca dalam Bahasa Inggeris yang baik, dan mereka tidak membaca bahan-bahan Inggeris yang mencukupi untuk membantu mereka menguasai bahasa tersebut. Sementara itu, pihak-pihak lain pula berpendapat bahawa keengganan pelajar untuk memupuk budaya membaca dalam Bahasa Inggeris yang baik adalah kerana mereka mempunyai sikap yang negatif terhadap bahasa Inggeris. Justeru itu, kajian berbentuk deskriptif ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti latar belakang bahasa, sikap terhadap Bahasa Inggeris dan budaya membaca di kalangan pelajar-pelajar Tingkatan Dua di SMK Perempuan Perak, Ipoh. Maklumbalas responden diperoleh melalui borang soal-selidik. Data yang didapati kemudian dimasukkan ke dalam sistem aplikasi SPSS dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan peratusan dan min. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan responden mempunyai sikap yang positif terhadap Bahasa Inggeris, walaupun majoriti daripada mereka adalah berbangsa Cina dan jarang menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris dalam komunikasi harian. Walau bagaimanapun, pelajar-pelajar ini masih tidak mengamalkan budaya membaca dalam Bahasa Inggeris yang baik. Dengan itu, adalah disyorkan bahawa kajian-kajian terus dijalankan dalam bidang ini untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor lain yang mungkin mempengaruhi amalan membaca pelajar dalam Bahasa Inggeris.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Problem

The Malaysian public has been increasingly concerned about the declining standard of English among our students. It is noted that “too many students begin school with little or no English proficiency and leave it 11 or 13 years later without making much progress in the language” (New Sunday Times, 2003).

One reason for the deterioration of English in Malaysia is due to the emphasis and change in the local linguistic policy (New Straits Times, 1991). However, newspaper journalist H. Hashim Hassan noted that there are other factors contributing to this problem as well, and among them is that students do not practice good reading habits in English. While commenting that students do not read as much English literature as they should, he is also of the opinion that students must read daily newspapers and magazines in order to excel in English (H. Hashim Hassan, 1991).

H. Hashim Hassan’s statement was not made without academic basis. Many research have suggested that extensive reading (pleasure or leisure reading in large
quantities to gain an overall understanding of the material without any follow-up
inglanguage tasks) plays a major role in language learning and acquisition, whether it is in
terms of vocabulary acquisition (Saragi et. al, 1978; Pitts et. al, 1989; Cho and Krashen,
1994), spelling skills (Polak and Krashen, 1988) or reading comprehension (Bell, 2001).
In view of this, the promotion of extensive reading or leisure reading should be
considered as a means of improving the standards of English in the Malaysian context, to
complement the formal teaching of English at all levels of education.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Realising the many advantages of extensive reading, not only in language learning
but also in propelling the nation to greater progress, the Malaysian government has spent
much time and effort to promote good reading habits among Malaysians. For example,
August has been declared as National Reading Month since 1995 (Lee, 1999), although
from 2001, National Reading Month was held in July instead (Suzieana, 2001).

However, Malaysians still show reluctance in practising extensive reading. In
fact, many academicians and government officials have commented on the poor reading
habits of Malaysians (Ambigapathy, 1997). In a survey conducted in 1996 to investigate
the reading profile of Malaysians, it was revealed that the average Malaysian adult reads
only two books per year and spends about 30 minutes a week reading newspapers,
although the literacy rate in Malaysia is 93 per cent (Lee, 1999). In other words, the
majority of Malaysians are literate, but they choose not to read, either for pleasure or for
information.

In promoting the reading habit, it is important to note that the degree to which a
child is exposed to a language, such as through the mass media, social communication
and availability of materials in that language, can have an impact on his or her interest in reading in that language (Ambigapathy, 1997). In a multiethnic country like Malaysia, a child’s native language will most likely be Malay, Chinese, Tamil, or other native languages from Sabah and Sarawak. Consequently, their exposure to these languages will be relatively more than their exposure to English, which has the status of a second language in Malaysia. Ambigapathy (1997) observed that this is especially true in the rural areas of Malaysia, where reading in English is only restricted to the classroom, and where the collection of English reading materials is scarce. However, the situation may not be the same for Malaysians living in urban areas, where English reading materials are readily available in most homes.

Even though reading materials in English are easily available, Malaysians are still reluctant to acquire English through frequent reading of English materials. This might be due to negative attitudes that they may have developed towards English or the English-speaking community. Lightbown and Spada (2000) have identified language learners’ attitude towards the second language community as one of the contributing factors to motivation in second language learning. If learners have positive attitudes towards the target language community, they will most likely desire more contact with them, thus motivating them to find ways to improve their language, and one way is by reading materials in the target language. Likewise, if the learner has a negative attitude towards the target language, he or she will prefer to avoid contact with it whenever possible.

As Malaysia moves towards the era of globalisation, students, who are the future leaders of the nation, cannot afford to avoid contact with English. Prof. Dr. Saran Kaur Gill, referring to the government’s recent decision to teach Science and Mathematics in English at the secondary level, says that “… Malaysia’s about turn with regards to English has become a necessity in order to compete and survive…” (The Star, 2003). The Prime Minister himself had said that Malaysians need English to progress (New Sunday Times, 2003). Therefore, research should be done to look into ways of improving the reading habits in English among the younger generation, including identifying factors
that may influence their reading habits, so that necessary steps can be taken to create a society that not only enjoys reading, but also one that is proficient in English.

1.3 Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to:-

i. describe the language background of the respondents.

ii. identify the respondents’ general attitude towards English.

iii. identify and describe the reading habits of the respondents, in terms of reading frequency, reading interests and reading materials.

1.4 Research Questions

The main questions that this research attempts to answer are:-

i. What language(s) do the respondents usually use:
   a) at home?
   b) in school and with friends?

ii. What language(s) are the respondents most fluent in?

iii. What are the respondents’ attitude towards English?

iv. What are the respondents’ reading habits?