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THE VOYAGE OF ESL LEARNERS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE ERA OF POST-COLONIALISM: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The journey of learning English language could be quite challenging for some people due to various factors and reasonings. Previously in the era of British colonisation, English language is to be considered as the official language. It is needless to say that the generation before independence is more exposed to English language better with the existence of English schools as the main platform for social status upgrade and windows for job opportunities. After independence, we are no longer tied to the colonisation of British and the must to at least acknowledge English language. However, being free from colonisation does not make us to totally ignore the importance of English language especially in today's era with the rise of globalisation and technology. Hence, this study, which is in give to the suggestions and sharing experiences aforementioned, sets out to discover the journey and experiences of English language learning among ESL learners in the era of post-colonialism. The findings have figured that; a. Family Influence, b. Mass Media Influence, c. Peer Pressure and Teachers Influence, d. Technology Invasion, and e. The external Force has become the factors for the ESL learners to learn English language in the era of post-colonialism.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the journey of ESL learners' English language learning in the era of post colonialism since they were little. This study has shown the crucial role of English language even after British colonialism in the context of Malaysia.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Gill (2002) English is placed as a second language in Malaysia and in line with education policy; English is taught as a second language. Research has shown that Malaysian students in today's world have realised the importance of English for their future efforts (Hashim, Yunus, & Hashim, 2018) and students are motivated by various factors such as the desire to get good grades, opportunities to continue their studies and career advancement to improve their English. Learning a language is a complex process and it takes thorough steps in learning a language especially English language. Strategies and methods are crucial to be taken into consideration when it comes to language learning. Different learners have different preferences in their learning styles and strategies of learning English language. Learning strategies employed can affect the quality of learning in the language. It was found that the participants used most of the learning strategies outlined by Oxford (1990) and there were also strategies which were not used such as memory strategies. Nevertheless, there were new strategies employed that was called, "Program Use Strategies" in Vincent and Hah (1996) which were either modifications or expansions of the learning strategies as outlined by Oxford (1990) for instance "Using resources for learning" and "Use of the hand cursor to trace words". As mentioned by O' Malley and Chamot (1990) "The literature on learning strategies in second language acquisition emerged from a concern for identifying the characteristics of effective learners".

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After Malaysia gained its independence in 1957, English language has played a role as the official language of the country (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2014). Language becomes more significant when the Government comes with three concrete plans for the future development of the nation (Gill. & Shaari, 2019). These plans are the development of Malaysia into an industrial country that is in line with the vision of 2020, the establishment of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and the establishment of Malaysia as a regional education center. The plan has implications for changes in language policy because Malaysia needs a population that is proficient in English and needs to allow the English language to play a more dominant role (Mansor, 1997). In addition to that, globalisation has also lead today's younger generations to acquire English language and to be proficient at it. The era of technology has driven the government to implement multiple strategies and provide more exposure towards English language.

Malaysia is a real multi-ethnic country. In terms of territory, it is divided by the South China Sea with Peninsular Malaysia on the west and Sabah and Sarawak on the east on Borneo Island. In both Peninsular and Borneo Malaysia, with a population of about 13 million people, there are altogether no less than 70 languages spoken. During pre-colonial era, English language was the language of the government in the colonial days (Loo, 2019). Malay language was used to to a limited extent on certain areas. However, public notices use mainly four languages which are Malay, English, Tamil and Mandarin in four different scripts. At that time, there were no single uniform education system. There were four types of schools using different languages as the medium and also different sets of curricula. Back in colonial days, English language is the main language used. The English school was a passport to social mobility and it has opened a wide chance to an unlimited professions. After independence, National Language Policy is constructed in Article 152 of the Constitution. The policy established Malay language as the sole national language of the country. Regardless, English language is still used and standing still among the community in official use, also for education purposes. Due to that, English language in today's era has become a necessity even though Malaysia is no longer under British colonisation (Yaccob & Yunus, 2019).

The journey of learning English language could be quite challenging for some people due to various factors and reasonings (Kaur & Embi, 2011). Previously in the era of British colonisation, English language is to be considered as the official language. It is needless to say that the generation before independence are more exposed to English language better with the existence of English schools as the main platform for social status upgrade and windows for job opportunities. After independence, we are no longer tied to the colonisation of British and the must to at least acknowledge English language. However, being free from colonisation does not make us to totally ignore the importance of English language especially in today's era with the rise of globalisation and technology. Hence, this study, which is in give to the suggestions and sharing experiences aforementioned, sets out to discover the journey and experiences of English language learning among ESL learners in the era of post-colonialism.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative method as the research design. A qualitative design is exploratory and seeks to explain how and why a particular phenomenon or behaviour operates as it does in a particular context. Narrative inquiry is selected as the research instrument because the researcher intended to focus on the journey and experiences of English language learning encountered by the five respondents which consists of five ESL learners. The participants of this study consist of five ESL learners. The respondents are the postgraduate students of Faculty of Education majoring in Teaching English as Secondary Language (TESL). Four of the respondents are Malaysian citizen and one respondent is an international student originally from Indonesia. The respondents are in the range of 20-25 years old female with high level of proficiency.

All of the participants are needed to write their own entries explaining their journey and experiences in acquiring English language. The entries are separated into 5 different stages in their journey of learning the language namely; a) Kindergarten b) Primary School, c) Secondary School d) Tertiary Education and lastly e) Current (Post Tertiary Education). The respondents were given a specific time to complete their entries. After the collection of the entries, researchers came out with 5 themes to categorise the respondents' learning experiences. The themes are formed by making comparisons in terms of similarities and differences observed in their learning journeys. The findings are later discussed into thematic analysis with further clarification and discussions.

3. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section highlights the participants' experiences and journey during their process of learning English as Secondary Language (ESL) under the issue of post-colonial as the big umbrella of the findings. This thematic analysis is divided into a few themes of factors namely; a. Family Influence, b. Mass Media Influence, c. Peer Pressure and Teachers Influence, d. Technology Invasion, and e. The external Force.

a. Family Influence

Based from the entries of autobiography, the findings have gathered that one of the main issues or forces towards the learning of English language is family influence and pressure. Majority of the respondents come from the background of family who acknowledge and realise the importance of education, especially in mastering English language. Hence, most of the respondents are somewhat pressured by their parents and families ensuring them to

be proficient in English language. Other than that, it can also be seen that family also plays an important role in providing motivation towards their children language learning development. Some of the respondents mentioned how they have been exposed and familiarised with English language at an early age by their family; parents especially. The exposure towards the language at an early age has helped them to be more encouraged to learn the language. This finding is parallel to the theory of Constructivism by Lev Vygotsky (Sjøberg, 2007) where constructivism believes that learning is an active and constructive process. Constructivist also believes that knowledge is constructed based on personal experiences and also the help of the environment. It is believed that their prior exposure towards English language during their childhood has helped them to link and relate to the new information or learning process throughout their lives. Quoting from one of the respondents saying *"....Mummy was the narrator in most of the stories. She introduced me to English nursery rhymes, where I engaged with the language for the first time and learned to learn in leisure. She introduced reading, where she played such a big role in maintaining our interest in learning the language. I knew that, my mummy was the factor of my inclining fascination in second language learning ever since I was four years old, ever since I learned the Little Indians song.."* She believed that her mother is her support system throughout her journey of learning English language.

b. Mass Media Influence

Majority of the respondents provided the proof of how mass media has actually helped them in their journey of English language learning. Majority of them believed that mass media do play an important role in shaping and moulding learners' development in language learning. From their childhood up until they have grown up to become adult learners, they still dependent on mass media to further improve their proficiency in English language. *"...This learning journey become more intriguing when I feasted my ears on English songs. I found joy when I could sing along to the English songs as well as understand the meaning of the lyrics. Taylor Swift's 2009 songs depict my inner younger self. As a teenage girl, I was a stubborn and always wanted to try new things regardless of the consequences. Local singers such as Zee Avi and Yunalis Zarai also influenced me to learn English better. 'The Book of Morris Johnson' and 'Rocket' have become my hums and lullabies. Internet has become my pool of resources to learn and explore the uniqueness of English language…"* The particular respondent mentioned how songs have influenced her to become more intrigued to learn English language. The exposure towards mass media has developed her personal ability to speak fluent English language. This is parallel to the idea of constructivist on how environment do play a crucial role in helping learners to develop good language learning and to be more proficient in the language. Learners learn better through practice and through the influence of environmental factors.

c. Peer and Teacher Influence

Based on the entries report, peer pressure and teacher influence both played an important role in helping a person to acquire a second language. A study led by O'Neal (2018) an assistant professor of school psychology in the University of Maryland's college of education found that the perseverance of a student's peers was twice as influential as individual grit in predicting literacy growth. Peers can elevate a person to improve so that they can be on the same level as others. Peers can be a supportive frame where a group of friends can practice among each other to speak the language. Peers influences are far more effective than just learning the language through theories and books. Through peers, not only was their English strengthened but their confidence level and motivation to learn was also increased. As quoted by one of the respondents ;

"Also, at the same time, credits must given to my classmates. We hangout together and of course TESLians being TESLians, we converse in English language all the time. That environment has made me feel comfortable using English language and at the same time made me improved on my grammar also pronunciation. (p/s: this will happen fast when you have a blunt friend who simply pointed out how wrong you are in pronouncing a few words haha but that somehow helps, for me). We somehow improved each other's English and we learnt from each other. That exact moment, I truly understand Lev Vygotsky's theory of peer scaffolding or in today's era of globalisation, we call it as 'peeragogy'. We learn best with our friends, through our friends"

Other than that, the role of the teacher represents a fundamental difference in language acquisition. Teacher should act as a designer and facilitator of learning language. Teachers need to create the conditions for students to manage their own learning processes and learn collaboratively with their peers in order to become more independent learners. Teachers also have to design projects that offer multi learning opportunities and should apply interesting approaches to attract students' interest in acquiring language. Teachers play such a crucial role that they can affect students' interest in learning because teachers are the examples that students will follow in the future. As quoted by two of the respondents, who stated how their teachers can negatively affected their interest in early stages of language learning;

"Actually, I did not really like English lessons at junior high school. For some reason, my brain was kind of unable to digest. Always as bad as each subject appears, bring it, want to skip it. For me the material was boring, heavy, and most formulas. While my teacher at that time required our English to be compliant with the existing formulas and norms (the 'killer' teacher). This is probably the main reason I did not really like it, the teacher was boring"

"Becoming an English teacher is my never-ending goal as I want to impart knowledge to my students. I want them to be intrigued to learn as English is a language that can connect people around the world. The painful flashback to my primary school grammar lesson has always been a good reminder for me as a future teacher to stay humble and open to diversities. A

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tongue has no bone but it is strong enough to leave remarks in our heart for years. Hence, I should be mindful in articulating words especially to young learners because once it is said, it can only be forgiven but barely forgotten"

Teachers are the expert advisors on language learning and they need to predict the possible needs of the students and have communicative language activities readily available to meet these needs. Instead of actively directing and controlling all activities the teacher need to aim to set up conditions for meaningful practice and then take on the role of a resource person to the students. A good teacher can determine and create a positive and supportive learning environment within the class (Ruzek et al., 2016). Students who feel safe and secure are much more willing to practise a second language. Positive experiences in the classroom can therefore lead to an excellent attitude toward language acquisition. As quoted by one of the respondents on her English teacher who are creative in language teaching processes;

"She opened my mindset about learning as well. Each class, she brought exciting materials to be learnt upon such as magazines, newspaper or stories. She assigned us to little groups and selected leaders. She encouraged games and class presentations. She took time to make sure all students had opportunity to use the language verbally rather than just participating in language exercises"

d. Technology Invasion

Based on the entries, it is reported that technology contributes second language acquisition. Technology is everywhere. It is entwined in almost every part of our culture. It affects how we live, work, play, and most importantly learn. With mobile and other wireless devices becoming an increasing requirement across every industry today, it only makes sense that the schools are also effectively deploying mobile technology in the classroom. Integrating technology into the classroom is an effective way to connect with students of all learning styles. It gives students the opportunity to enhance the interaction with their classmates and instructors by encouraging collaboration (McKnight et al., 2016). Using technology in the classroom gives teachers and other faculty members the opportunity to develop their student's digital citizenship skills. It's one thing to use mobile devices, it's a completely other thing to know how to use them correctly and responsibly.

Integrating technology in language acquisition helps students to stay engaged. Most students today have been using mobile devices like tablets and smartphones to play and learn since they could crawl. So it only seems logical to align today's classrooms with the way that the students want and are used to learning. Technology transforms the learning experience. Students have access to an incredible amount of new opportunities (De Freitas, Morgan, & Gibson, 2015). From learning how to code to learning how to better collaborate across teams and with their instructors, technology empowers students to be more creative and be more connected in learning. New technology has completely changed how a person learns a language today. As quoted by two of the respondents;

"Learning English is an easy as eating a cheesecake. So many advancements offered out there, our country is slowly catching up with other countries. Dictionaries are changed to digital ones, newspapers are read online, libraries are set online, no one will ever get lost with the help of Waze and people will never stopped to be in favour of Google. Because of Google, learning was made faster. To enrol in a class seems to be a pretty task, we do not need to queue up from 8 am in the morning and fill out many forms. MOOCs are available for everyone who have the desire to learn. You can even hire online teachers to guide you through your tasks or posts your questions online so that your groups or community can facilitate you. Online discussions, not only can be done with your classmates, but also with other students from all over the world. Knowledge transfer is made free and possible. That is what learning looks like now"

"Internet has become my pool of resources to learn and explore the uniqueness of English language."

e. External Forces

Based on the entries, we can conclude how some of the respondents acquire English due to some external forces. Some students learn a new language more quickly and easily than others. Clearly, some language learners are successful by virtue of their sheer determination, hard work and persistence. However there are other crucial factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of the learners. External factors are those that characterize the particular language learning situation. For example, in terms of curriculum, for ESL students in particular, it is important that their educational experience is appropriate for their needs of learning. Language learning is less likely to place if students are expected to score the program without any extra assistance.

Other than that, motivation (extrinsic) is one of the external forces. Students who are given continuing and appropriate encouragement to learn by their teachers and parents will generally perform better than those who aren't (Gardner, 2007). For example, students from families that place little importance on language learning are likely to progress less quickly. Below are the quoted answers from two of the respondents where they stated how their language learning was at first for fulfilling their parents' wishes and obeying their instructions;

"Since then, I was taken aback to develop interest in learning English. I learnt English for the sake of getting an A in examination. Too jaded to be told, but frankly I learnt English because I wanted to fulfill my parents' wish to see me as the top scorer in class as well as in school. At that moment, learning English for me meant learning arrogant language of foreign people. It was easy to feel amazed when primary students could speak and write English with minor mistakes, but I did not put much effort in pulling others' attention because I have had almost zero interest for English subject."

"Enrolled to one of the foundation institution in Malaysia which located at Petaling Jaya is kind of disappointed to me. Applied there because of the course and having no choice than just obeying the elder. For sure enrolled by force by my mom but it

was the best decision I've ever done in my life. The experiences I've gained over the one and half years are uplifting, amazing and knowledgeable for life."

Moreover, access to native speakers is also an opportunity for students to support second language acquisition (Akbari, 2015). The ability and chances to interact with native speakers both within and outside of the classroom is a significant advantage. Native speakers are linguistic models and can provide appropriate feedback. Clearly, second-language learners who have no extensive access to native speakers are likely to make slower progress, particularly in the oral/aural aspects of language acquisition. One of our respondents shared that;

"Everything started to change when I was in standard 5 or 6, we have a new student joined us from other state. She is so pretty and looks so beautiful, she looks like an American girl, she got blue eyes and a cute pony tail on like every day. The only problem was she cannot speak in Bahasa fluently yet the basic only. Since most of us cannot speak in English so there's communication barrier held. She tends to keep quiet and very introvert. Since I am very talkative and really want to make friends with her. I started to learn phrases or sentences commonly used such as "what do you in your spare time", "what's your favourite movie?" and so on. When I use such questions, I am also prepared for some answered in case she would ask me the same. Then, surprisingly she is not really a shy person and we became best friend soon after. I taught her how to speak informal Bahasa and she taught me to speak with correct pronunciation. It was amazing to have a friend that were born and raised in a different country and different culture. We exchanged information and lifestyle……. She always encouraged me to speak with correct pronunciation and grammar, it was quite hard for me to follow her style of speaking, but I did my best to use the correct grammar which it did works out and reflected through my examinations scores. My English teacher congratulated me and informed my parents about it".

4. CONCLUSION

All of the journeys and experiences of English language learning shared by the ESL learners in the era of post-colonialism disclosed significant information and references. The participants are able to relate to the findings of this study by getting an overview of challenges encountered by them. Despite of all challenges, the participants are still able to keep their momentum to improve and enhance their knowledge of English from time to time. Although the participants' and current ESL learners' experiences are different in certain aspects, a lot of lessons and values still can be applied to current educational settings. The five themes derived from this thematic analysis can be a set of references for future ESL learners in order to assist them to learn English efficiently and competently.

Based on the thematic analysis of findings, it is hoped that it will help the English policymakers to improve their educational strategies. This is to ensure that all students can benefit much more significantly from their learning experiences at school because school is the strategic place to nurture the students' learning skills. Designers of English teaching and learning materials can also benefit a lot of information from this thematic analysis to design effective materials for the students. Homes and schools should be equipped with materials for teaching and learning to encourage and motivate the students to learn. Therefore, all students, parents, teachers and English policymakers should play their roles effectively in order to improve educational strategies and systems.

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