



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**MALAY STUDENTS IN CHINESE-MEDIUM SCHOOL:
REASONS, CHALLENGES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

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REASONS, CHALLENGES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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A Project entitled Malay Students in Chinese Medium School: Reasons, Challenges and Academic Performance was written by Izat Ussaly Bin Jemat and submitted to the Centre for Language Studies in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Education with Honours (English As Second Language)

It is hereby confirmed that the students has done all the necessary amendments of the projects for acceptance.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BM	-	Bahasa Malaysia
CMS	-	Chinese-Medium School
GCSE	-	General Certificate of Secondary Education
KTO	-	Kéttannyelvu Oktatás
L1	-	First Language
LCE	-	Lower Certificate of Education
MP	-	Malay Parents
MS	-	Malay Students
MQA	-	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
PMR	-	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
SJK (C)	-	Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina
SPM	-	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
STPM	-	Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia
UPSR	-	Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah

Abstract

Malay Students in Chinese Medium School: Reasons, Challenges and Academic Performance

Izat Ussaly Bin Jemat

Education is a form of long term investment by parents to their children. So, it is wise for the parents to ensure their children are getting the best education which are universal and beneficial for their future. In relation to that, the study was intended to discover the reasons why Malay parents send their children to Chinese-medium school. In addition to that, the study also sought to discover the challenges faced by these students studying in Chinese-Medium school and also how are they performing academically. A total of 20 Malay parents and their children were involved in this study. They were all interviewed during their free time. Data was collected through extensive interviews with parents and their children. The research found that there are several reasons why Malay parents send their children to Chinese-medium school: They are

- 1) Convenient Factor
- 2) Economy Factor
- 3) Language Factor and
- 4) Maintaining Identity Factor

The study also revealed the challenges faced by these Malay students studying in Chinese-medium school. Among those challenges are:

- 1) Academic Challenges
- 2) Social Challenges and
- 3) Other Challenges

In addition the study had also looked at the academic performance of these Malay students in the UPSR. The analysis of the students UPSR results show that these students are not doing well in most of the subjects they took with exception of Bahasa Malaysia Paper.

Abstrak

Pelajar Melayu di Sekolah Aliran Cina: Sebab, Cabaran dan Pencapaian Akademik

Izat Ussaly Bin Jemat

Pendidikan merupakan satu bentuk pelaburan jangka panjang oleh ibu bapa kepada anak-anak. Oleh yang demikian wajarlah sekiranya anak-anak mendapat satu bentuk pendidikan yang bersifat universal dan bermanfaat untuk masa depan mereka. Sehubungan dengan itu, kajian ini bertujuan mengenalpasti apakah sebab dan alasan ibu bapa Melayu menghantar anak-anak mereka ke sekolah aliran Cina. Selain itu juga kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti cabaran-cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pelajar-pelajar Melayu yang bersekolah di sekolah aliran Cina. Lanjutan itu, prestasi akademik mereka akan dilihat melalui analisa pencapaian mereka di dalam Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah rendah (UPSR). Seramai 20 orang ibu bapa dan anak mereka terlibat didalam memberikan maklumbalas terhadap temubual separa struktur. Mereka dipilih berdasarkan kritiria yang ditetapkan iaitu ibu bapa Melayu ayng menghantar anak mereka ke sekolah aliran Cina. Data yang telah diperolehi telah dianalisa dan diletakkan ke dalam beberapa kategori tertentu dan kemudiannya dibincangkan secara teliti dalam bentuk peratusan sepanjang perbincangan. Kajian mendapati ibu bapa Melayu menghantar anak-anak mereka ke sekolah aliran Cina kerana beberapa sebab seperti faktor geografi, ekonomi bahasa dan pengekalan identiti. Selain itu kajian ini juga mendedahkan masalah-masalah yang dihadapi oleh pelajar Melayu bersekolah di sekolah aliran Cina. Lanjutan itu juga prestasi akademik mereka telah dianalisa dan menunjukkan pelajar ini sangat lemah didalam UPSR.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter will provide the general overview of the study which covers background information of the study on the education system in Malaysia. Next, the chapter provides information on the scope of the study and problem statement pertaining to the study. The chapter will then explain the aims of the study and the significance of the study. Lastly, the chapter provides definition of terms used in the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The Malaysia Education System is by large, affected by the colonization of the British (Abd. Rahim Abd. Rashid, 2002). It has undergone various changes and tribulations from the pre-independence era till now.

The Malaysian schooling system is unique in a sense that students can choose to go to any of the three types of school which uses different medium of instruction – Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. The National school is the government school which was set up by the government, uses Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction and is fully funded by the government. Another type of school is the National Type Schools (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (SJK) for primary schools, Sekolah Menengah Jenis Kebangsaan (SMJK) for secondary schools).

In Malaysia, SJK is primarily used to refer to vernacular Chinese and Tamil primary schools. SMJK is only used for vernacular Chinese secondary schools and there are no vernacular Tamil secondary schools established in Malaysia.

Apart from that, parents also have the option of sending their children to private schools (primary or secondary) all over Malaysia. These private schools are also run using the same syllabus as the fully-funded government schools. The only difference is the number of students in a class is very small. These private schools also offer international education especially to foreign students.

1.2 Scope of the Study

Due to the current trend of the non-Chinese parents (especially the Malay) sending their children to Chinese-medium primary schools, instead of the national schools, the study sought to find out the possible reasons for their choice. Table 1.2.1 below shows the steady increase of non-Chinese students' enrolment in Chinese-medium primary schools in Malaysia.

Year	Enrolment of non-Chinese in Chinese Schools	Increment Percentage
2000	36,117 pax	5.8%
2005	45,197 pax	7.0%
2007	approximately 60,000 pax	9.0%

Table 1.2.1 : Enrolment of Non-Chinese in Chinese Schools

(Source : Ministry of Education)

In addition, the study also would like to look at what are the challenges faced by the Malay students in Chinese schools. This covers various areas of challenges in terms of social and academic aspects. Lastly, the study wanted to find out the academic performance of these Malay students based on their UPSR results. By national standard, the UPSR result is a valid and reliable indicator of how students are faring academically.

Therefore, Malay students and their parents from one of the Chinese school in Bau district are chosen. As mentioned earlier, the particular site was chosen due to the fact that the parents have the choice of sending their children to National School instead of National Type School (SJK (C)). The question lies on the reasons they decided to send their children to vernacular school.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The study would like to investigate the reasons why the Malay parents sent their children to Chinese-medium school. Therefore, it also has become the major concern of the study to find out the challenges faced by the students primarily upon underwent schooling system in a non-native language (Mandarin). Hence, the study aimed to look at the relation of their Mandarin proficiency with their overall academic performance.

1.4 Aims of the Study

The study aims to investigate the reasons for the Malay parents' decision to send their children to a Chinese-medium school. Secondly, the study wanted to find out what are the challenges faced by these Malay students in a Chinese medium school. In addition to that, the study wished to look at the overall academic performance of these Malay students by analysing their UPSR result and establish any relation with their Mandarin proficiency.

1.5 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Why do Malay parents send their children to Chinese-medium school?
2. What kind of challenges do the Malay children face in studying at Chinese-medium school?
3. How are the Malay students' academic performance in Chinese-medium school?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Taking it further, the study would like to gather empirical evidence on why Malay parents are sending their children to Chinese-medium school. Thus, the data obtained would also shed some light on how are these students are doing academically although the medium-of-instruction in the school is not their first language.

The findings will also affect the Malay parents' decision whether or not to send their children to Chinese-medium school. Besides that, the study could inform other parents what kind of support they should provide their children who are learning in a non-native language. The findings are also beneficial to parents who wish to send their children to school where the medium of instruction is not their native language (L1)

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

a. Malay

Malaysian Constitution defines Malay as “*...an ethnic that speak Malay language, practice Malay traditions and customs and embrace Islam as their religion.*” For this study, Malay here refers to both Malay students and parents. In addition to that, Malay students whom their father is a Malay would be considered as ‘Malay students’ as well although their mother are of other ethnics.

b. Chinese-medium school

Chinese-medium school here refers to a vernacular school, governed and monitored by the government under the Ministry of Education and the medium of instruction is Mandarin language.

c. Reasons

Longman Dictionary (2003) defines "*reasons*" as the cause of something or of somebody doing something or justifications of something. For this study reasons refer to the cause(s) or justifications on why the Malay parents sent their children to Chinese-medium school.

d. Challenges

Longman Dictionary (2003) defines "*challenges*" as difficulties that tests somebody's ability. For the purpose of this study, challenges here refers to problems and difficulties faced by the Malay (both parents and students) to undertake lesson conducted in Mandarin which is a non-native language.

e. Performance

According to longman Dictionary (2003) performance can be defined as an action or achievement in relation to how successful it is. For the purpose of this study refers to the academic achievement of the Malay students in Chinese-medium school. For the purpose of this study, students' performance are measured through their UPSR result.

1.8 Chapter Review

This chapter had discussed the background of the study, scope of the study, the study aims, its significance and definition of major terms used in the study. The following chapter will discuss related researches in the area of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter is intended to provide a general view of researches which have been conducted in the area of this study. This chapter will also provide reviews on researches which share similar background or scenario with this study. It then introduces the methodology and data collection procedure used in the study.

2.1 Schools in Malaysia

Prior to 1957, there is no proper education system assembled by the British. The British has very little or no interest at all to provide a systematic and functional education either to the indigenous (Malay) or the immigrants (Chinese and Indian) people as stated by Loh (1920) in Tan (1990). The Malay however were fortunate as the British agreed to establish Malay primary schools but the education provided were extremely rudiment. The British at that point regards schooling as no more than *“to make the son of a fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant”* (Loh,1920)

Upon achieving independence, the Malaya government set up a Committee in order to sustain the need to unify the Malay, Chinese and Indian (Hussein Hj Ahmad, 1993) The committee were formed due to Rahman Talib's

Report (1956) which study the state of Malaya education at that time. The report also had led to the formulation of Rang Undang-Undang Pelajaran 9, 1957 and National Education System.

The movement of democratizing in education can be seen in 1962 (Ministry of Education, 2006,p. 1) As soon as we gained our independence the government find the need to provide free education for all students. In response with that, the secondary school admission test was terminated. As a result in 1964, Malaya students have the opportunity to undergone free schooling for 9 years and 11 years in 1991.

In 1969, in relation with the racial riot incident, the government realized the current education system was not sufficient and formulated Rukunegara and this also had give birth to the National Education Philosophy.

Education in Malaysia broadly consists of 5 main stages which are:

- Pre-school

Attendance in a pre-school programme is not universal and generally only rich families can afford to send their children to private, for-profit pre-schools. The government has no formal pre-school curriculum except a formal mandatory training and certification for principals and teachers before they may operate a pre-school. The training covers lessons on child psychology, teaching methodologies, and other related curricula on childcare and development.

- Primary / Elementary School

Primary education consists of six years of education, referred to as Year 1 to Year 6. Year 1 to Year 3 are classified as Level One (*Tahap Satu* in Malay) while Year 4 to Year 6 are considered as Level Two (*Tahap Dua*). Primary education begins at the age of 7 and ends at 12. Students are promoted every year regardless of their

academic performance. At the end of primary education, students in national schools are required to undergo a public exam known as the *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR) or Primary School Evaluation Test. The subjects tested are Malay comprehension, Malay writing, English, Science and Mathematics. For both vernacular schools (Chinese and Tamil medium) both Mandarin and Tamil are a compulsory subjects for Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools.

- Secondary School

In public secondary schools students will study for five years from Secondary 1 to Secondary 5. Students who fare badly in their Primary Six Public exam (the UPSR) will have to undergo a year of remedial classes before being promoted to Secondary One, which only applies to students from the vernacular primary schools. At the end of their third year, students would have to sit for *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR, formerly known as Sijil Pelajaran Rendah (SRP) or Lower Certificate of Education (LCE)) or Lower Secondary Evaluation. Students' PMR performances will determine if they would major in Science or Arts.

At the end of fifth year in secondary school, students are required to take the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) or previously called the Malaysian Certificate of Education examination, before graduating from secondary school. The SPM was based on the old British 'School Certificate' examination before it became General Certificate of Education 'O' Levels examination, which became the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education). Students result in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia also becomes determiner whether they can pursue their study in Form 6, Matriculation or even to undertake on job training courses such as teacher colleges or nursing colleges.

Upon completing Form 5 students have the choice of either studying Form 6 or the matriculation (pre-university). If they are accepted to continue studying in Form 6, they will also take the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia or Malaysian

Higher School Certificate examination (its British equivalent is the General Certificate of Education 'A' Levels examination or internationally, the Higher School Certificate). Form 6 consists of two years of study which is known as Lower 6 (*Tingkatan Enam Rendah*) and Upper 6 (*Tingkatan Enam Atas*).

- Tertiary Education

In order for students to be able to further their study in local or foreign universities, applicants must have completed the Malaysia matriculation programme or have an STPM certificate. The classification of tertiary education in Malaysia is organized based on the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) which seeks to set up a unified system of post secondary qualifications offered on a national basis both in the vocational as well as higher educational sectors.

- Post-graduate education

Postgraduate education offers both the Master degree Program and the Doctoral Program

Public and most private universities in Malaysia offer Master Degrees and Doctor of Philosophy either through both coursework and research or coursework only.

2.2 Chinese School in Malaysia

The history of Chinese education in Malaysia is indirectly affected by the British colonization in the early 19th century. The British legacy "*divide and rule*" system left a large effect on how the Malaya (now Malaysia) perceive education as well as the current education system works (Haris Md. Jadi; 1) The British system gave birth to the early Chinese schools which are fully funded by local committee and parents' employer (Tan Liok Ee, 1997: 18)

The earliest form of schooling in the Chinese community has been recorded by Francis Light (1794) in Tan Liok Ee (1997:8) stating that ... *"have everywhere people to teach their children, and sometimes they send males to China to complete their education."*

Slowly as the Chinese community grew bigger, the demand for a systematic with proper buildings and facilities also increased. This has led to the founding of many Chinese-medium schools in Malaya.

2.3 Education System in Chinese School

The early Chinese schools in Malaya were replicas of the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911). The education system main concern is to have a basic or elementary education. The most prominent features of this schooling system was it runs by the committee or clan (Huessler R., 1985), and students of this school system were expected to recognized 1,000 to 2,000 Chinese characters for daily usage such as trading and artistic use.

The curriculum of the early Chinese schools permits students ranging from 5 or 6 to 20 years old to go to school and were taught to read and write in Chinese characters. Another orthodox approach of these early schools were memorizing and copying ancient text dating from the sixth century (Hussein Hj Ahmad, 1993, p. 22) By the year 1904, the Chinese schools were revolutionized and known as *"new-style"* schools. It was driven by the defeat of Chinese armies by the British in Opium War in China (1839 – 1842). Some advancement of these schools were having proper building and structures, well-trained teachers and regular timetables as reported in Annexe (1949) cited in Tan (1997). In 1930s more Chinese schools were built inline with the increasing demand of the Chinese community.

2.4 Teachers Education and Recruitment

The early Chinese school teachers never undergone formal education from teachers' colleges. They are either some literate people or those elite students that further their study in mother China. As discussed before the Chinese schools were run by the local committee or the parents' employer thus teachers do not get paid handsomely. They were merely paid \$20 - \$40 per month as compared to schools funded by the British government.

In 1956, followed by the Razak Report, The Education Ordinance (1956) had changed the way Chinese schools being managed and funded. For that particular event, teachers college started to take Chinese students as teacher trainees to teach in the Chinese schools. The centralized syllabus was gradually accepted by the Chinese community as the funding by the government increases year after year.

2.5 Selected Related Research

Hastings, Kane and Staiger (2007) of Yale University, Harvard University and Dartmouth College conducted a study on the parental preferences of their school of choice in United States of America. The study wants to find out parents' preferences for school characteristics and their implication for demand and competition in school choice. The study was conducted on Charlotte-Mecklenburg School district parents, who children entering Grade 4 in North Carolina, United States. The study had utilized a Mixed Logit demand model using the rankings of parents' top three school choices in the first year of school choice.

The study had revealed that schools with higher academic achievement motivate parents to choose particular school for their children. Another finding of the study was most parents consider proximity factors in terms of travel distance, neighbourhood schools, and busing zones in their school choice of preference.

Stephenson, Hong Jiao and Wall (2004) of Bulverde, San Antonio, conducted a performance comparative study to investigate whether non-native and native English speaker performed differently in Stanford English Language Proficiency (Stanford ELP) test. Approximately 200 non-native and native English speaker of 70 different schools (elementary and high schools) all over United States were chosen as participants of the study. The study also aims to find out whether these two different group performances can be predicted. The results indicated that the native English speaking students performed a lot better than the non-native English speaking. There is a significant difference between these two groups of students in all 3 sub-tests (Listening, Writing and Reading Test).

In another study by Teske, Fitzpatrick, and Kaplan (2007) of University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center conducted a study on how Low-income parents select schools for their children. A total of 800 low and mid-income parents in Milwaukee, Washington, D.C and Denver were chosen as the research participants. The study aims to find out how the low and mid-income parents of Milwaukee, Washington D.C. and Denver select schools for their children with their financial state. The study used a questionnaire survey to gather all the required information

The study had disclosed that parents choice are by large affected by the level of education received by these parents. Their preference highly depends on school proximity, major ethnics/colours of the students and schools which provide the best education and safe environment.

Frodesen (2006) of University of California, Santa Barbara have conducted a study to look at immigrants students' academic performance, their major learning problems and what are the strategies these students employed attending lectures in English (non-native language). The study was conducted on 109 students of different ethnicity and education background currently studying in 7 public higher education institutions all over California. The major aspects in which the students

were tested are to find out whether the current syllabuses of various courses cater the need of students that do not speak English as their mother tongue. The research is also interested to look at the current test type and its appropriacy. Lastly, the study wants to find out whether or not the current support service provided by these higher education institution sufficient to suit the need of these immigrant students.

The study had formulated that immigrants' students faced various types of language-based problems in their study and employed different strategies although they came from different ethnicity and social background. Two major strategies these students employed were by having discussions with their fellow classmates with similar ethnic and consulting their respective lecturers for further clarifications and explanations. In another study by Johanna Kapitánffy (2005) of Hungary conducted a survey on Tánicsics Secondary General School students on the effectiveness of teaching subjects in foreign language (in this particular study a five-year bilingual programme known in Hungarian as "kétannyelvu oktatás" (KTO)) namely French, Russian and English. This survey was administered to 60 students of different Grades, ranging from Grade 9 to Grade 13. The aim of this programme is to ensure students to have a better chance of being employed by foreign companies of surrounding countries.

The survey results show that students are able to cope with the syllabuses and performed moderately in every language. The survey also formulated that, this programme requires a highly proficient and fluent teachers to teach in multilanguages. It also indicated that teacher suffers a burden of helping and coaching students as they role in the classroom are skewed toward language teachers than subject teachers.

The present study will also look at the academic performance of a non-native students (Malay) studying in Chinese-medium school whereas the medium of instruction is predominantly using Mandarin language (except for Bahasa Melayu, English, Mathematics and Science). For this study, the researcher will also look

into the reasons why do the Malay parents chose to send their children to Chinese-medium school instead of the National School. Furthermore, students UPSR result will also be analysed to see the overall academic performance of these Malay students.

2.5 Chapter Review

This chapter had presented information on education and schooling system in Malaysia, Chinese school background, history and education system. This chapter had also discussed some major related studies conducted previously in the same major of interest.

The following chapter will provide information on research methodology, research design and data collection procedures.