



**THE EFFECTS OF LOWER PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH TOWARDS SENIOR
SECONDARY STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

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APPROVAL SHEET

This research paper attached hereto, entitled The Effects Of Lower Proficiency In English Towards Senior Secondary Students' Academic Performance prepared and submitted by Grace Liew Thing Yi in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) English Education is hereby accepted.



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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the effects of lower proficiency in English towards senior secondary students' academic performance. Academic performance is highly looked up in Malaysia's education system however many students are failing in English language although they have been going through at 11 years of English lesson. In this study, a total of 50 senior middle-class students in a Chinese Independent School participated in a survey. The survey consisted 15 questions about the challenges faced by students in learning English and the reason of low proficiency in English which were answered through Five-Point Likert scale. It was distributed to the students through Zoom due to the pandemic. The major findings from the survey displayed the main challenges and main reasons that students faced in learning English and low proficiency in English respectively. The main challenges for students were to write English academic essays, read English passages and speak proper English to another person. On the other hand, the main reason of students' low proficiency in English were because of their hesitation in speaking English with others, unfamiliarity with English words and lack of chances in speaking in class. The findings suggested that importance should be placed on students' exposure to English languages as well as avoid giving negative feedback to students especially on their speaking ability. Teachers should encourage students to motivate them to learn. The study had its limitation as researcher was unable to meet with participants face to face during pandemic time and too little of a sample size. Future researchers should increase their sample size and adopt different research instruments as to provide better insight about students' attitude in learning English. In conclusion, the research objective was fulfilled as the findings provided a clearer view about students' understanding and approach to English language.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Apart from Mandarin and Spanish, English is the most frequently spoken language (Naj, 2017). According to Noack and Gamio (2015), English is the most popular language and is spoken in 101 countries among 195 countries of the world. The reason that English is one of the most widespread languages among the world may be due to the colonization of the nations (Noack & Gamio, 2015). Malaysia, under the influence of the British during the past colonization period, has unconsciously made English the second language of the country as it is so widely spoken among the citizens (Study Malaysia, 2015). Despite being widely spoken, according to Aziz (2018), Malaysia dropped significantly from 13th to 22nd in the survey of EF English Proficiency Index (EP EPI). While other countries like Singapore and Philippines advanced to a higher level, Malaysia's rank dropped greatly even though English is widely used in daily conversation. English language proficiency can be defined as the ability of a person to converse or make meaning in speaking and writing in English (USQ, nd).

Malaysia's education system is divided into preschool, primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education. Primary education of 6 years is compulsory for all students. According to Clark (2014), although it is not compulsory to attend secondary education, Malaysia has a 98.8 percent enrollment rate in the lower secondary. The compulsory schooling years were extended from six to eleven years but yet Malaysia is still facing challenges of falling behind other countries in terms of education (Clark, 2014).

Clark (2014), stated that the lack of teacher training and recruitment is one of the reasons that leads to the decrease of education quality. According to Yahaya et al. (2011), Malaysia education relies heavily on book-based teaching and is very teacher centered, hence, only auditory learners would benefit most in such a classroom. Visual and verbal learners would have a more difficult time learning as they rely on visuals such as pictures, videos and taking notes respectively. Furthermore, lacking in confidence would affect students' communicative skills which further jeopardize them as they perceive that English is a difficult subject to learn (Yahaya et al, 2011). Not only that, D'Silva (2019) too also stated that weaker students are afraid of making mistakes and thus they reduce their talking in class which would lead to difficulties in improving the language.

As the senior secondary school students would soon have to further their studies in universities, English would be the main language used for teaching and conversing. Hence, it is important to find out the reason students have low English proficiency and the effects it brings to students' academic performance.

1.1 Background of study

Education is always an ongoing progress and English plays a huge role in Malaysian education (Zain et al., 2017). Despite the ever changing and evolving education system, there is one thing that will not change in the near future is how the English language is a compulsory subject taught in the classroom (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013). According to Darmi and Albion (2013), English language has switched from Malay to become the lingua franca for communication purposes during pre-independence time. During post-independence, the English language was still not abandoned and was even declared as the second most important language in

Malaysia. However, slowly over time, Malay language was used as a medium of teaching in school. Hence, students' exposure towards the English language declined (Darmi & Albion, 2013).

According to Martin (2017), there is an increasing demand for an autonomous or self-learning experience among students as the education system in Malaysia has slowly changed from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. Especially during the pandemic time, there is only so much a teacher can do. Hence, it relies heavily on students whether they are disciplined in learning or not. Unmotivated students will not participate in classroom teaching and hence would affect the academic performances (Martin, 2017).

Furthermore, Musa (2017) stated that students have problems conversing in English even though suitable teaching has been made. Kashinathan and Aziz (2021) further stated that the forcing of students to communicate in English before they are ready would result in poor English-speaking performances. Also, due to several factors, teachers are forced back into teacher-centered learning as they have to prepare the students for exams which would reduce students' participation in class.

1.2 Problem Statement

Academic performance is highly looked up to in Malaysia as that usually guarantees getting into better universities. Since Malaysia has lesser vocational schools, trying to get into a good university after graduating secondary school is most of what students want. However, the lower proficiency in English is affecting students' academic performance. Students are too dependent on teachers in conveying English knowledge and they seldom try to learn on their own (Beltran, 2019). Hence, the practice of student-centered learning is not working in Malaysia as students hardly attempt to learn the language on their own.

Besides, according to Beltran, (2019), students kept on approaching teachers to the extent that students will automatically look for teachers when facing a question that they didn't know the answer to instead of trying to solve it on their own first. Therefore, Beltran (2019) stated that if teachers always give students answers every time they ask instead of letting them think of the answer on their own, it would be a problem as overtime, students would only rely on teachers more.

Moreover, D'Silva (2019) stated that although students have been going through 11 to 13 years of English lessons, many students are not confident in speaking in English and may turn to Manglish (Wrong form of English with Malaysian slang) when speaking with their friends. Students are often worried about what their peers think of them so they are reluctant to speak and practice English speaking (D'Silva, 2019). Learning English is definitely not easy but that does not mean we can stop learning.

Furthermore, according to Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013), students might not be good in English because Malaysia's education system is too teaching-oriented or that teachers are just inadequate. Therefore, students only listen in class without being able to practice high level thinking skills and set aside the traditional spoon-fed methods. Besides, some teachers only focus on preparing students for examinations but not develop their soft skills (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013).

Hence, it is necessary for this research to be carried out as this research would address this problem as this research explores the effects of lower proficiency in English towards students' academic performance as well as the challenges students face in English classes.

1.3 Objectives /aims of the research

This study focuses on examining the effects of lower proficiency in English towards students' academic performance. In relation to the problems stated in 1.2 Problem Statement, the two research objectives that were formed for the purpose of this research:

1. What are the challenges faced by students in learning the English language?
2. What is the reason for the low proficiency in English language?

1.4 Research Objectives

Two research questions were formulated based on the research objectives:

1. To identify the main challenges faced by Malaysian students in learning the English language.
2. To analyze the main reasons for low proficiency in English language.

1.5 Significance of Study

The primary mission of this study is to determine the main challenges that were faced by Malaysian students in learning English and the reason behind low English proficiency among students. It is important to know the challenges faced so that suitable measures can be taken to improve students' English proficiency. The findings of this study stand to provide valuable data and to address to schools, teachers, parents and even to the students.

Being able to understand the reason behind low English proficiency can provide great advantages in improving students' proficiency level. The Ministry of Education (MOE) can aid the students by making English language SPM paper a compulsory pass subject in order to gain

their SPM certificate. By doing so, students would feel motivated to learn English. The Ministry should make sure that every school has a performing principal whose purpose is to help students improve both academic and nonacademic. The ministry can also provide support by providing extra funding so that school management can use it to purchase lesson teaching tools such as projector and computer.

The school can hire more competent teachers which are able to cater to different students' needs. Also, the school can make suitable adjustments such as inviting experienced speakers or revise programs so that students would be motivated to learn. The school can make suitable changes after knowing the challenges faced by students in learning English. For example, a teacher might not be able to fully concentrate on all the students in a class. Hence, the school can either recruit more teachers or divide the students into different classes.

Furthermore, teachers should go for training if needed. Teachers should go for training programs after knowing the cause of low proficiency in students so that teachers are able to keep up to date to the current teaching as well as information and communications technology (ICT) information that can be used in classroom teaching to make lessons more interesting. As the world advances, teachers should not be limited to traditional teaching but can opt for teaching in a more creative way to nurture creative individuals. Also, teachers should not pick up past teaching habits. For example, teachers should not teach English in other languages. Although some students might not be able to fully understand lessons taught purely in English, they should not be using grammar translation methods as students would heavily rely on their mother tongue.

Next, parents should also shoulder the responsibility and work together with the school to make sure that their child is actually learning. Parents should spend more time caring for their

children's school life. Besides going for report card day, parents can take part in PTA to voice out their opinion on how school can improve from the comments of their children.

Lastly, students should also be responsible for their own learning. After identifying the challenges and reason behind the low proficiency in English, they should change their old habits and be more disciplined in learning. Although schools, teachers and parents can help, students must help themselves in acquiring knowledge and are eager to learn more.

1.6 Scope and limitation of study

This study will focus on gathering data via surveys. Only senior secondary school students will be selected at random according to their age and class. Then, questionnaires will be filtered for potentially dishonest answers. Thirty samples from the senior secondary school students will be selected based on age, gender as well as the cultural background.

The limitation of this study that will possibly be faced by the researcher is slow data collection. Due to the pandemic outbreak, the collection of data would be harder as it would be conducted online. The participants might interpret the questions wrongly and give different answers based on their own understanding of the questions.

Also, the participants of this study will consist of students in a private Chinese secondary school. Hence, the data collected may only apply to that particular school. Limited participant groups may result in the data collected to be biased and not generalizable. Hence, this study may hardly apply to classrooms worldwide.

1.7 Operational Definition of terms

In this part of study, the terms that were used in the study were defined as below:

1.7.1 Secondary School:

Senior secondary school is for students at the age of 15-18 years old. After students' complete junior middle class, they can choose to enter senior secondary class or go to vocational secondary school. Senior secondary usually lasts for 3 years in China (Scholaro Pro, n.d.).

On the other hand, Malaysia public secondary schools consist of 5 years where in the first 3 years, students receive general education and later choose to go into science or art stream according to their personal preference (Scholaro Pro, n.d.).

Based on the definitions, the definition that will be used in this study is "senior secondary" as it is relatable to the private Chinese secondary school involved in the study.

1.7.2 English Language Proficiency

English language proficiency can be defined as the ability of students to comprehend English at a sufficient level in both spoken and written form. It meant that the students have full command of language skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing skills (Law Insider, n.d.) According to Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), proficiency can be defined as having great skill and experience in something.

Based on the definitions, the definition that will be used in this study is the one taken from Law Insider (n.d.) that students understand and are able to use English language in all four aspects of the language skills correctly.

1.7.3 Academic Performance

According to Ballopedia (n.d.), academic performance is the assessment of student achievement among different academic subjects. Such performances are usually measured from classroom performance, examination and standardized tests that are tested by teachers or officials of education.

The definition from Ballopedia (n.d.) is used in this study as students' achievements are usually focused in terms of examination, and test in Malaysia education.

Conclusion

This chapter explained about the background of study, statement of problem, objectives and aims of research as well as the research objectives. Furthermore, it calls attention to the significance of study, scope and limitation of study, together with the operational definition of several terms. The following chapter will be stressing on the literature review and related theory.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is going to look into the theory used in this study, and the past studies in order to act as a guideline, or issues that are to be further improved in this study. The main focus of this study would be on the effects of lower proficiency in English, students' current academic performance in secondary school, students' learning experience, challenges that students faced in learning and the importance of having good English proficiency.

2.1 The effects of lower proficiency in English

English has become the international language for communication with it being privileged as the language of the world in many prominent fields such as diplomacy, international business and science (Bani-Khair & Al-Khawaldeh, 2016). English has become an important language to master as it is linked with the future career possibility (Azuar, 2020). Azuar (2020), stated that from the Job Outlook report of Jobstreet in 2019, one of the top reasons that fresh graduates are unable to be employed is because of the low proficiency in English language. Fellow employers are looking for fresh graduates who have good communication skills and have good command of the English language when they are seeking employees (Azuar, 2020). Also, Azuar (2020), stated that Malaysia's English proficiency had dropped tremendously over the years according to international standards. It decreased from 22nd place (2018) to 26th place (2019) according to the annual Education First English Proficiency Index.

The effects of low English proficiency do not only show during job hunting. McLean (2013) stated that poor command of English language affects the development of learners' communication and information-handling skills. Hence, they rarely participate in classroom activities and seldom approach their teachers for doubts clarification (McLean, 2013).

2.2 Students' academic performances

The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013), recorded that socio-economic status is a frequent problem that affects students' academic performance. Besides, the blueprint also stated that teachers are one of the most important determinants of students' academic performances as the quality of teaching directly affects the student's ability to understand lessons taught in class.

According to Yahaya et al (2011), students have better academic performance when their parents are involved in their child's education compared to those parents who are less involved. Although parental involvement consumes much of parents' time, it does help in their child's academic performance. From the research, students are not satisfied with their current English language level and found school's academic task to be quite hard (Yahaya et al, 2011).

Zukiflei and Said (2020) stated that 72% of the Malaysian students are not able to meet the minimum requirement to pass the achievement of English subject despite learning it for 11 years in both primary and secondary school. They stated that attitude plays an important role for students to learn English as negative and positive attitude each plays a different role in students' English language learning.

2.3 Students' learning experience

According to Sulaiman et al. (2017), teaching styles in the 21st century should focus more on student centeredness as well as independent learning of students so that students will be able to develop higher order thinking skills (HOTS). Hence, teachers should incorporate more tasks such as project-based activities, problem solving activities and discussions to help students' cognitive development process. Besides, due to the pandemic, students are forced to use e-learning. According to Cheok et al. (2017), school leaders are unable to provide great support due to their lack of technological knowledge. Hence, teachers are not effective in transferring knowledge from physical class to online class. Furthermore, experienced teachers are worried to incorporate technology in their classroom as they are fearful of situations they cannot control (Cheok et al., 2017). As a result, teachers simply choose not to use technologies in their classroom teaching.

2.4 Challenges that students faced in learning

Although online learning does have some of its benefits, it can be a challenge to students who have limited accessibility to learning online (Selvanathan et al., 2020). They stated that the limited accessibility had caused a dropout problem as some students require interaction with teachers during learning time. In addition, students face a hard time in learning as they lack motivation when they have poor internet connections and poor computer skills (Selvanathan et al., 2020).

Ghabool (2012) argues that one of the challenges that students face in learning is first language interference. Being a multiracial country, Malaysians have different first languages be it Malay, Mandarin or Tamil. Hence, Ghabool (2012) stated that first language interference causes writing errors and grammatical mistakes in writing tasks. Students often misuse articles, subject-

verb agreements and verb to-be in writing. Also, “bahasa rojak” is widely used in Malaysia and students find it hard to differentiate the correct English from it (Azuar, 2020).

In addition, students' vocabulary of English is limited and they are lacking understanding of the English language (Yacob & Md, 2019). They also stated that students feel that learning English is harder as they think that they can only learn English through memorization of words and grammatical rules. Hence, students lose motivation in learning when they have a negative mindset towards learning English (Yacob & Md, 2019). Ella (2014) also agrees that motivation and learning attitude determines if students are able to achieve good linguistic performances as positive attitude helps in the process of learning. Similarly, Wijsman et al. (2016) stated that in order to perform well academically, students must be motivated to learn.

2.5 Importance of having good English proficiency

Putra (2020), stated that the importance of having good English proficiency does not only show while communicating but it helps us in adjusting to a new environment in present and future time. Good English proficiency means that one has unlimited access to information and communications technology (ICT) as well as many other fields of the modern world (Putra, 2020). Having said that, good English proficiency increases one's competence in the global job market and increases your chance in getting a job (British Study Centres, n.d.). Likewise, Azuar (2020), stated that in order to gain a huge advantage in the job market, one has to be fluent in English.

2.6 Past Studies

Souriyavongsa et al. (2013), had conducted research about factors that cause students to have low English language learning. The research was conducted to find out the reasons that

impact students to have poor English performances. It also looked into students-teachers' weakness towards the English language. The participants chosen were 30 English students-teachers, each of whom listed their view on why students were poor in performing in English. After completing the research, Souriyagongsa et al. (2013), discovered that English teachers do not have the proper skill to teach as they were not well-trained and students themselves lack the foundation of English language and also confidence to use English as they are afraid of making mistakes. Also, they stated that students are not motivated to learn English and the class environment is not suitable for teaching pedagogy.

Next, Ahmad (2011) carried out a study about the preferred learning style of low English proficiency (LEP) students in a tertiary institution. He stated that if the teacher's teaching style and students' preferred learning style were matched, the process of language learning would be more successful. However, if the teaching style and learning style were not match, LEP students would be demotivated and fail in learning the language effectively (Ahmad, 2011). There were 252 LEP students at a tertiary institution involved in the research and a Likert-scale response format was used to identify the students learning styles namely visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group and or individual. The research concludes with advice for teachers to make every possible effort to improve students' confidence as well as motivation to make the learning process smoother (Ahmad, 2011).

Lastly, narrowing down the reasons Malaysian undergraduates' students have low English-speaking proficiency, Rusli et al. (2018) conducted a research that identified the reason for it. The researchers used a mixed-method research design to conduct the study. Questionnaires and interviews were employed, involving 20 undergraduates who were in the last year of their study. Their results showed that teacher, peer influence as well as psychology had a role that

contributed to the low speaking proficiency of English (Rusli et al., (2018). They suggested that both lecturers and undergraduates should do their own part in making the learning process more successful.

Many of the past studies were focused on tertiary level students. Hence, it is necessary to shift the focus on secondary school students so that such problems can be curb sooner rather than later. To understand more about the challenges faced by secondary students, there is a need in this research to identify the challenges and analyze the reason behind low English language proficiency in secondary students.

Conclusion

To conclude, English plays a huge role in learners' current life and also their work life. Teachers are one of the determinants of students' academic performances. Parents and school leaders are also crucial in students' learning as they will affect students' motivation and learning experience. Students who are motivated to learn and have a positive learning attitude will experience higher chances to excel academically.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the methodology of the study which consists of research design, research methodology, research instruments, sampling and sampling techniques, plan for data collection, and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This study will concentrate on quantitative research methods. The reason that quantitative method is chosen is because quantitative research methods analyze variables for data, which is in line with the research objectives. According to Apuke (2017), a quantitative research method utilizes and analyzes numerical data to look for the cause and effect or for making predictions. The subject group studied would be larger than using a qualitative method. Hence, the data collected is more suitable to be generalized and it can reflect to wider society or populations (Daniel, 2016).

In this study, a quantitative survey will be given to 80 senior middle-class students in a Chinese Independent Secondary School regarding their challenges faced in learning the English language and the reason behind low proficiency in English language.

3.2 Research Methodology

The survey would consist of questions revolving around challenges or issues faced in English language classes. The questions in the survey are selected and adapted from a research paper similar to this study. Several modifications are made to make sure that the questions meet

the needs of this research. The survey would consist of a brief instruction and two sections. The instruction would consist of the aims of the research, their rights and assurance of confidentiality, and the contact info of the researcher. The first section would gather the demographic information of the participants such as age, gender and race. The second section focuses on the challenges or issues faced in learning English. The questions asked would be answered based on a Five-Point Likert scale. The survey would be created and distributed by using Google Forms and given to the participants via link. The questionnaire would take up to 8 to 10 minutes to fill.

3.3 Research Instrument

In this study, a survey which consists of 15 questions will be given to students and later used for data collection. The participants will have to answer the 15 questions through Five-Point Likert Scale. The Five-Point Likert Scale is chosen because it gives participants a choice to express the degree of their opinions rather than just giving a yes or no answer (McLeod, 2019). Besides, quantitative methods such as surveys provide anonymity when answering the questions so it will reduce the social pressure on the participants when they answer the question and hence, reduce the biases of social desirability (McLeod, 2019). Below are the survey questions adopt and adapted from Nor et al. (2019):

1. I hesitate in speaking English with my teachers and friends in and/or outside the classroom.
2. I felt self-conscious about my speaking proficiency.
3. I mix other languages with English while having a conversation with someone.
4. I am unable to fully comprehend what the teacher teaches in class.
5. I am unable to keep up with part of a discussion with my classmates.

6. I am unable to catch what the speaker said while having listening activities in class.
7. I am unfamiliar with the meaning of certain words during a conversation.
8. I am unable to fully understand passages and text when reading.
9. I require longer time when reading a passage or a text.
10. I have to use up much of my time to write an essay.
11. I find myself unfamiliar with the topic given by teachers.
12. I think it is hard to write academic essays.
13. Teachers' lessons were not interactive.
14. I seldom get the chance to speak in class.
15. I find it hard to spell the correct English word.

3.4 Sampling and sampling techniques

This study will employ a probability sampling method. According to Blackstone (2012), probability sampling relies on generalizability, meaning that the target participants all have equal chance of selection in the study. The type of probability sampling method used in this study is systematic sampling as it offers the benefit of a random sample and can also avoid biases in selecting the participants (Blackstone, 2012). One can calculate a systematic sample by simply selecting every *k*th participant on the list after figuring out how many participants you wished to include in your study (Blackstone, 2012). For example, among the 160 senior class students, only 80 students are then chosen. The selection interval (*k*), is 2. To arrive 2, divide the total number of students by desired participants included. The example of the formula is shown in Figure 1.

$$\frac{\text{Total participants size (160 students)}}{\text{Chosen sample size (80 students)}} = 2(k, \text{selection interval})$$

Figure 1: Formula in Determining the Selection Interval for Systematic Sample

80 senior middle students were chosen for this research. The reason that only senior middle-class students are chosen is because they are more likely to encounter similar challenges compared with junior middle-class students as they will be facing different challenges. Junior middle-class students might not be mature enough to answer the survey questions, too. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the survey question will be given through online mediums such as Zoom and google form to smoothen the data collection process.

3.5 Plan for data collection

All students will sign a consent form before participating in taking the consent form will include the objectives of study, instructions for survey, participants responsibility and also the benefits and risk of students involved in the participation. However, no identification of students is needed, so students are protected from anonymity. Hence, they are able to answer honestly without fear of being judged.

A Zoom meeting will be held with the students so that they know what to do. Rules and important notes such as not looking at friends' answers would be told at the meeting. While the students answer the survey, the Zoom meeting would continue until the last students complete the survey. The meeting would last for the entire session so that students can ask questions for clarification about words that they do not understand.

The survey question will be distributed to the students through google form. The survey questions are divided into two sections, namely Section A and Section B. Section A would address demographic factors of participants such as age, gender, and ethnicity. In section B, students have to respond to statements on a Likert Scale with 5 options, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree(2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) to Strongly Agree (5). The Five-Point Likert Scale is used, rather than Four-Point Likert Scale because it has more accurate and better data quality to avoid missing data (Østerås et al., 2008) This study will be conducted in over a 4 weeks period across a long semester so there will be sufficient time for data analysis.

3.6 Plan for data analysis

The researcher will select 80 students from the total 160 of existing senior middle-class students by using systematic sampling. All the students involved in this quantitative methodology are from age 16 to age 18. Next, after explaining and going through the instructions, students are given 20 minutes to complete the survey. After that, the responses would be evaluated and the results would be tabulated. The data collected from the survey answered by senior middle-class students would then be tabulated and analyzed with software such as Microsoft Excel. The data will be analyzed based on the frequency to determine the most prominent challenges and reason for the decline in English proficiency among students. The gathered data will then be compared with several past studies in order to identify if a generalizable pattern is possible.

The data collected will then be presented using pie charts. Moore et al. (n.d.) stated that pie chart is a suitable way to organize data as it reveals the different components as a whole. Hence, it is easy to identify the percentage and data as it creates a visualization of information. Each pie chart consists of title, percentages of each small component to smoothen the data analyzing process.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the methodology that will be used to conduct this study and to achieve the results expected by the researcher. The methodology included details on the research design, research methodology, research instruments, sampling and sampling techniques, plan for data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter comprised the findings derived from the survey with the chosen participants. This research had explored two main aspects where it concerned on determining the effects of lower proficiency in English towards senior secondary students' academic performance. To restate, the two research objectives formed in chapter 1.4 guide the research as followed, which were to identify the main challenges faced by Malaysian students in learning the English language and to analyze the main reasons for low proficiency in English language. In this chapter then, the thorough discussions on each research question were explained employing the descriptive statistic.

4.1 Data Analysis

The survey was distributed online via Zoom. The targeted respondents were senior middle class students in a private independent Chinese secondary school in Sarawak. Before distributing the survey questions, a probability sampling method was carried out. The type of probability sampling method used in this study was systematic sampling as it offered a random sample benefit and could avoid biases in choosing participants. The survey consisted of 15 questions which relate to the challenges students faced in learning English and the reason for their low proficiency in English. Among the 15 questions, question 1 to question 9 relates to the first research objective, which is to identify the main challenges of students in learning English. On the other hand, question 10 to question 15 relates to the second objective, which is to analyze the main reason for low proficiency in English. The participants answered the questions through the Five-Point Likert Scale. A total of 50 responses were collected. The age group of the participating students were equal with 34% which is 17 students from senior middle 1 and 3 students and 32% which is 16 students from senior middle 2.

4.2 Data for First Research Objective

1. I felt self-conscious about my English speaking proficiency.

50 responses

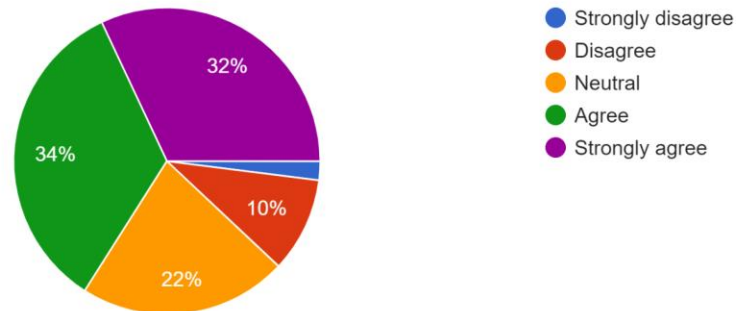


Figure 1: Students' hesitation is speaking English in and/or outside the classroom

In figure 1, the data shows the respondents' choices in regards to their hesitation of speaking English in and/or outside the classroom. 48% of respondents agreed that they hesitate in speaking , while 24% of respondents strongly agreed to the question. Only 4% of respondents strongly disagreed and 14% of respondents disagreed with the question, whereas the rest chose neutral.

2. I mix other languages with English while having a conversation with someone.
50 responses

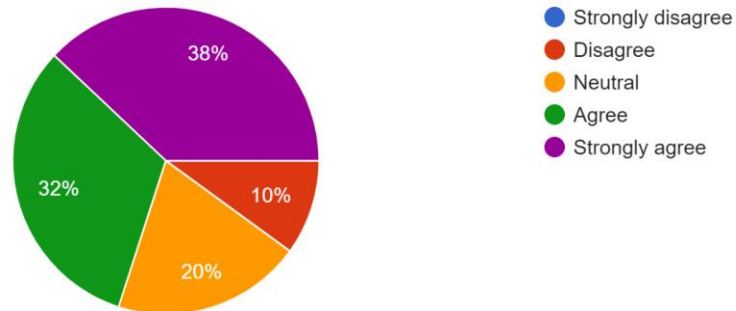


Figure 2: Students mixing other languages when having conversation with someone

In figure 2, the data shows the respondents' habits in mixing other languages while having an English conversation with someone. 38% of the respondents mixed languages when having English conversation with others and 32% of the respondents agreed as well. Only 10% of the respondents disagree with the question while 20% of the respondents chose neutral for the question.

3. I am unable to keep up with part of a English discussion with my classmates.
50 responses

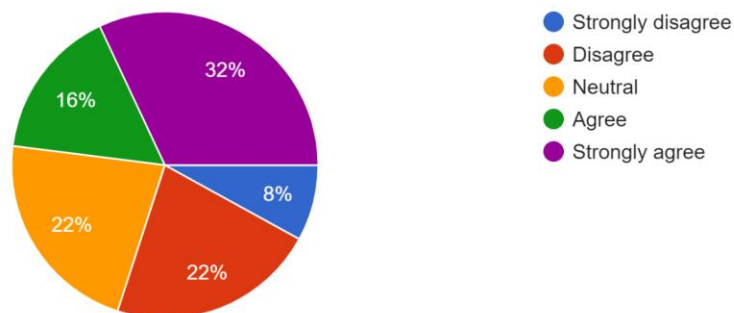


Figure 3: Students' ability to keep up with English discussion with classmates

In figure 3, the data shows the respondents' ability to keep up with a part of English discussion with their classmates. 32% of the respondents strongly agreed that they were unable to keep up with part of English discussion with classmates and 16% of the respondents agreed as well. 22% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer. On the other hand, 22% of the respondents disagreed with the question and 8% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

4. I am unable to catch what the speaker said while having English listening activities in class.

50 responses

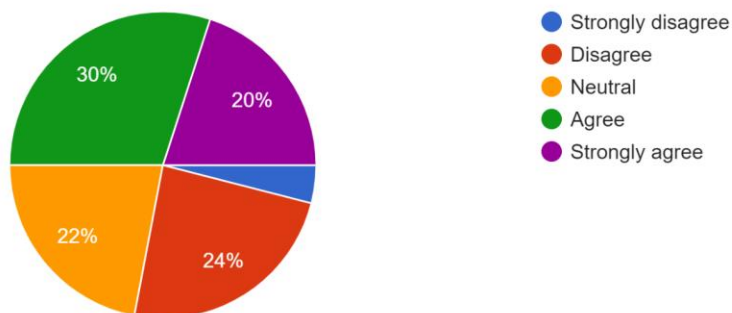


Figure 4: Students' ability to catch what speaker said while having English listening activities in class

In figure 4, the data shows the respondents' ability to understand what the speaker said while having English listening activities in class. 20% of the respondents strongly agreed that they were unable to understand what the speaker said during listening activities and 30% of the respondents agreed as well. 22% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer. On the other hand, 24% of the respondents disagreed with the question and 4% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

5. I require longer time when reading an English passage or a text.

50 responses

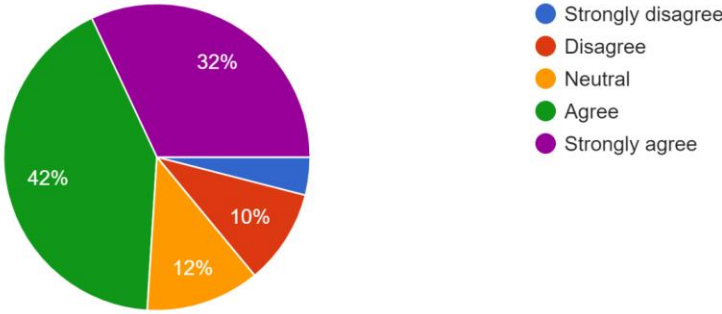


Figure 5: Time taken for students in reading an English passage or text

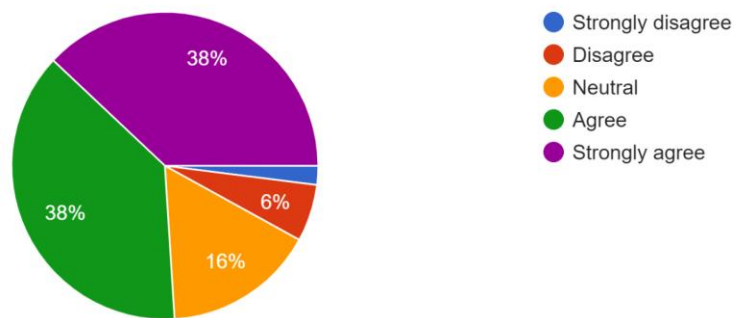
In figure 5, the data shows if the respondents require longer time when reading an English passage or text. 32% of the respondents strongly agreed that they needed longer time when reading English passages or texts and 42% of the respondents agreed as well. 12% of the respondents

selected neutral as their answer on this question. On the other hand, 10% of the respondents disagreed with the question and 4% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

Figure 6: Time taken for students in writing an English essay

6. I have to use up much of my time to write an English essay.

50 responses



In figure 6, the data shows if the respondents require longer time when writing an English essay. 38% of the respondents strongly agreed that they needed longer time when writing an English essay and 38% of the respondents agreed as well. 16% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer on this question. On the other hand, 6% of the respondents disagreed with the question and 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

7. I find myself unfamiliar with the English topic given by teachers.

50 responses

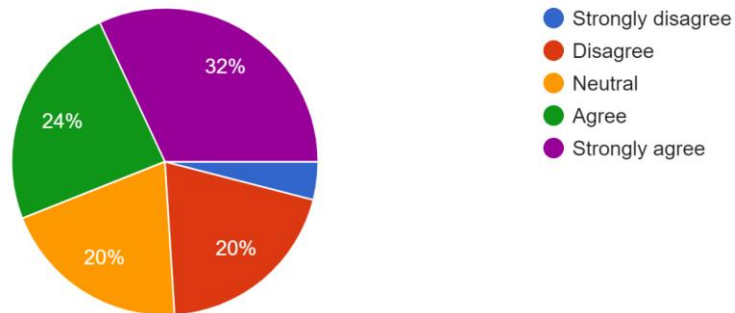


Figure 7: Students' familiarity with English topic given by teachers

In figure 7, the data shows if the respondents were familiar with the English topic given by their teacher during an English class. 32% of the respondents strongly agreed that they found themselves unfamiliar with the topic given by teachers and 24% of the respondents agreed as well. 20% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer on this question. On the other hand, 20% of the respondents disagreed with the question and 4% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

8. I think it is hard to write academic essays in English.

50 responses

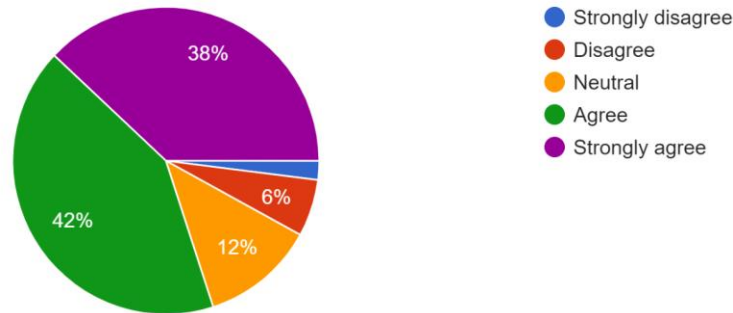


Figure 8: Students' ability in writing English academic essays

In figure 8, the data shows if the respondents find it hard to write English academic essays. 38% of the respondents strongly agreed that they thought it was hard to write academic essays in English whereas 42% of them agreed with the question. 12% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer on this question. On the other hand, 6% of the respondents disagreed with the question and 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

9. I find it hard to spell the correct English word.

50 responses

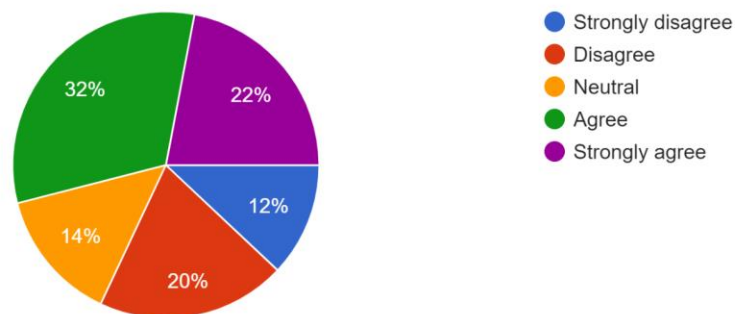


Figure 9: Students' ability in spelling the correct English word

In figure 9, the data shows the respondents' ability in spelling the correct English word. 22% of the respondents strongly agreed that they find it hard to spell the correct English word and 32% of them agreed with the question. 14% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer on this question. On the other hand, 20% of the respondents disagreed that they found it hard to spell the correct English word and 12% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

4.3 Data for Second Research Objective

10. I hesitate in speaking English with my teachers and friends in and/or outside the classroom.
50 responses

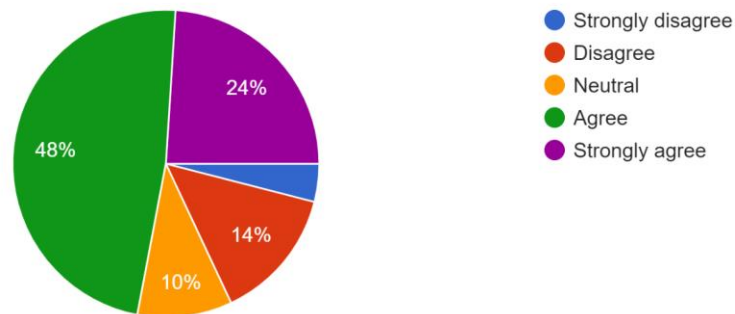


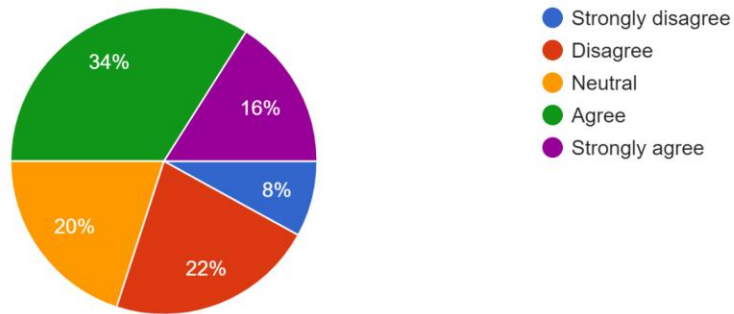
Figure 10: Students' hesitation in speaking English in and/or outside the classroom

In figure 10, the data shows the respondents' choices in regards to their hesitation of speaking English in and/or outside the classroom. 48% of respondents agreed that they hesitate in

speaking , while 24% of respondents strongly agreed to the question. Only 4% of respondents strongly disagreed and 14% of respondents disagreed with the question, whereas the rest chose neutral.

Figure 11: Students' understanding in English lesson taught in class

11. I am unable to fully comprehend what the English teacher teaches in class.
50 responses



In figure 11, the data shows the respondents' understanding in regards to what their English teacher teaches in class. According to the chart, 16% of the respondents strongly agreed that they are unable to fully comprehend what their English teacher teaches in class and 34% of the students agreed as well. 20% of the respondents chose neutral for this question. On the other hand, 8% of the respondents strongly disagreed that they are unable to fully comprehend what the teacher taught in class whereas 22% of the students disagreed with it.

12. I am unfamiliar with the meaning of certain English words during a conversation.

50 responses

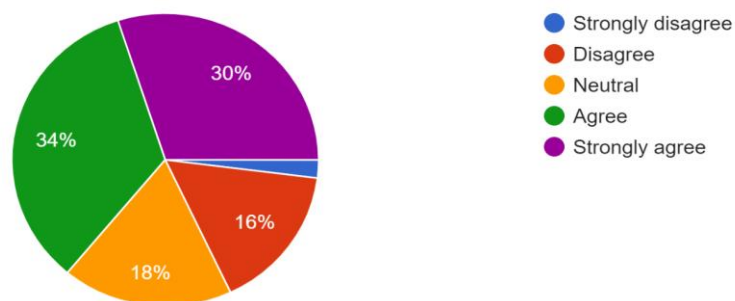


Figure 12: Students' familiarity of meaning of certain English words during a conversation

In figure 12, the data shows the respondents' familiarity of the meaning of certain English words during a conversation. 30% of the respondents strongly agreed that they were unable to understand some of the English words in a conversation and 34% of the respondents agreed as well. 18% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer. On the other hand, 16% of the respondents disagreed with the question and 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

13. I am unable to fully understand English passages and text when reading.

50 responses

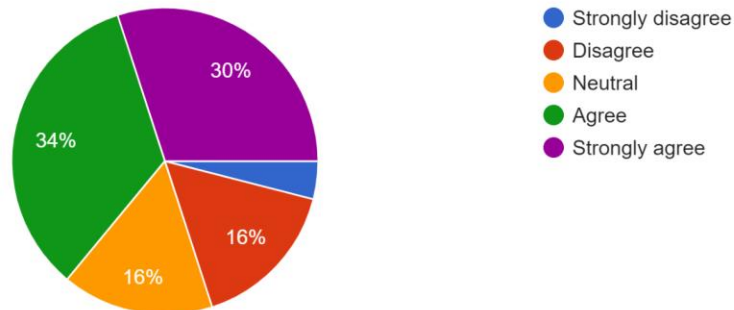


Figure 13: Students' ability to fully understand English passages and text when reading

In figure 13, the data shows the respondents' ability to fully understand English passages and text when reading them. 30% of the respondents strongly agreed that they were unable to fully understand English passages and text when reading and 34% of the respondents agreed as well. 16% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer. On the other hand, 16% of the respondents disagreed with the question and 4% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

14. Teachers' lessons were not interactive.

50 responses

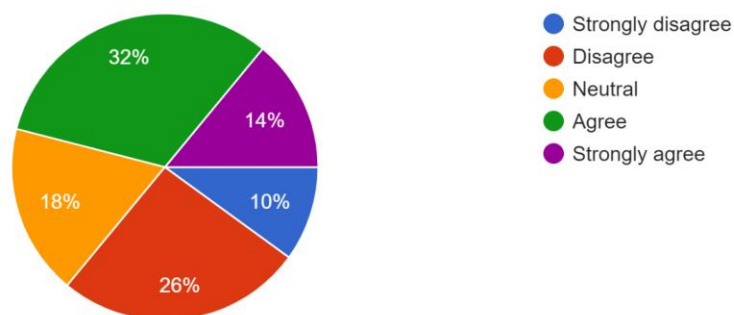


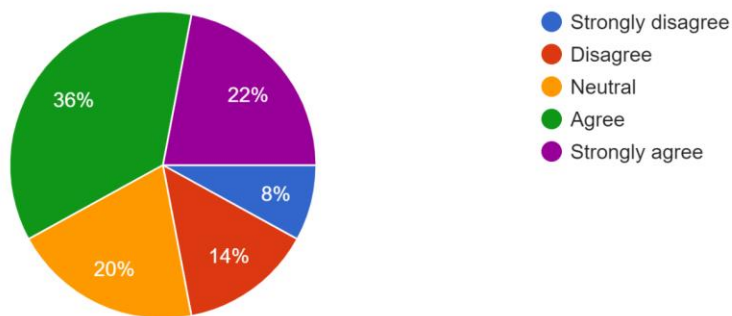
Figure 14: Students' perceptions towards English lesson

In figure 14, the data shows the perceptions of respondents whether teachers' lessons were interactive or not. 14% of the respondents strongly agreed that teachers' lessons were not interactive and 32% of them agreed with the question. 18% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer on this question. On the other hand, 26% of the respondents disagreed that teachers' lessons were not interactive and 10% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

Figure 15: Students' opportunity in speaking in English language classes

15. I seldom get the chance to speak in English language class.

50 responses



In figure 15, the data shows the respondents' opportunity to speak in English language classes. 22% of the respondents strongly agreed that teachers gave them the opportunity to speak in English classes and 36% of them agreed with the question. 20% of the respondents selected neutral as their answer on this question. On the other hand, 14% of the respondents disagreed that opportunities in speaking in English classes were given and 8% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter explained the data derived from the survey with the participants. This research had explored two main aspects where it concerned on determining the effects of lower proficiency in English towards senior secondary students' academic performance. The following chapter will provide a deeper and thorough discussion about the data gathered from the survey.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings and data from Chapter 4 will be further reviewed and discussed based on the two research questions in this study. Furthermore, this chapter focuses on the limitations of this research, implication of the research and suggestions to improve in future research as well as presenting a conclusion of the entire research.

5.1 Discussion on First Research Question

The first research objective is to identify the main challenges faced by Malaysian students in learning the English language. From the data collected, the objective has been fulfilled. The results obtained show that students find that the most challenging part in learning the English language is to write English academic essays, read English passages and speak in proper English with another person. Among the 50 participants, 40 participants agreed that it was hard for them to write English academic essays where the percentage of participants agreeing with the question reached 80%. The results are similar to the results shown in the research did by Yahaya et al (2011), as from his research, students too find it hard on completing academic works where 63.9% of the total respondents agree that writing English essays are hard and 13.4% of the total respondents strongly agree on it. Selvaraj and Aziz (2019), too agree that students struggle in English writing tasks and stated that writing is the most challenging skill among the other three skills (reading, speaking and listening) as students need to think, organize their ideas as well as summarize and analyze what they want to write. From the previous research found, to this particular study, it is supported that writing remains the hardest skill to master although more than 10 years have passed.

Besides, the participants in this study found that it is challenging for the students to read English passages or text and they have to use up much of their time when doing so. From the 50 respondents, 38 of them felt that they take up much time to read passages that are written in English, where both the percentage of the participants choosing strongly agree and agree reached 76% in total. It is understandable that the participants felt hard reading English passages as they are not familiar with the language. Their mother tongue is Mandarin and they are not exposed to the English language often. Similarly, as stated in the research done by Ghabool et al (2012), they stated that first language interference made it harder for students to read and understand certain meanings and implication of words. Hence, they have to use much more time than others in reading the same passage. Other than that, Ghabool et al (2012) also support that first language does not only interfere in reading ability but writing ability as well as students are more prone to make grammatical mistakes. Similarly, Rahmi (2018) stated that even though students have learned English for many years in school, their reading ability has not developed well. She further stated that students may find reading challenging as they do not speak English at all (Rahmi, 2018). Similarly, due to the fact that every student in this study is Chinese, they are seldom exposed to the English language which makes it harder for them to read English passages.

Furthermore, the majority of the participants agree that speaking in proper and complete English with someone is very hard to do so as they might mix in some other language when having a conversation with others. A total of 35 participants agree that they mix in some other languages when having a conversation with someone, which is 70% of the total respondents. This is a worrying problem as English proficiency is usually linked with future job opportunities (Azuar, 2020). He stated that employers usually looked for candidates or fresh graduates with the ability to speak proper English. Not only that, McLean (2013) stated that poor English skills also hinders

classroom participation and students might not approach their teachers when they want to clarify about the doubts in their mind. Nadesan and Shah (2020) also stated that most of the teachers only focused on teaching grammar and expanding students' vocabulary as those are mainly being tested in examinations. Hence, many teachers neglected students' speaking skills. Also, in Nadesan and Shah (2020) findings, they stated that students are not interested in participating in group discussion and speaking in English with their friends. As students often hang out with other students that speak the same language, they do not feel the need in learning to speak proper English with their peers which leads them to have poor command in speaking in English (Nadesan & Shah, 2020).

5.2 Discussion on Second Research Question

The second research objective is to analyze the main reasons for low proficiency in English language. From the data collected, the objective has been fulfilled. The results obtained show that students find that the main reasons for low proficiency in English language are because of their hesitation in speaking English with others, unfamiliarity with certain English words in a conversation and also lack of chances in speaking in class.

Among the 50 participants, 36 of the respondents (72%) agreed that they hesitate while speaking English with others. This may be caused due to lack of confidence in their pronunciation or afraid of making errors while speaking. The statement was further supported by the research done by Heriansyah (2012). In his research, he stated that students often kept quiet in class as they are not confident in speaking English and was afraid that their peers might laugh at them. Heriansyah (2012), claimed that most of the respondents are afraid of making errors which was caused by not being confident to speak and it is a cause-cycle effect. Nor et al (2019) also stated

in their study that among the 40 respondents, half of them hesitated to speak English with others as they are worried about making grammatical mistakes and are embarrassed of their low language proficiency. They felt self-conscious as they received negative responses from others so they found it difficult to speak in English (Nor et al, 2019). This has been an ongoing problem for many years yet there is no direct solution to it.

Moreover, 64% of the respondents agreed that the second reason for their low English proficiency level is due to their unfamiliarity with certain English words in a conversation. This statement is supported by research where the researcher found that students often lack familiarity with certain English words as they have limited vocabulary (Yacob & Md, 2019). They also found out that limited vocabulary would lead to demotivation of students in using the language (Yacob & Md, 2019). If students lessen their exposure to English language, it would be even harder for them to improve in the language. Besides, limited vocabulary affects student writing skills as well as some may not understand the differences between past tense and present tense which leads to grammar error (Amalia et al, 2020). It was also stated in Amalia et al (2020) research that students are too lazy to broaden their English vocabulary. Thus, they were unable to comprehend the main ideas in a passage or conversation.

In addition, the third main reason for students to have low English proficiency is because of their lack of opportunity to speak in the classroom. 36% of the students agreed and 22% of the students strongly agreed that they seldom have the chance to speak in the classroom respectively. From this, we can identify that the classroom teaching is done in a teacher-centered way where most of the time, students listen to the teacher's teaching. According to Sulaiman et al (2017), teachers should focus on student-centered classrooms so that students are able to develop higher order thinking skills. In that case, students are able to develop their cognitive process as well.

Sulaiman et al (2017), also supported that if students are able to have more control in the classroom, it will motivate them to make the right choices to learn. However, in Nor et al (2019) research, they stated that although students were constantly being encouraged to speak in class, they still couldn't improve their speaking skills due to negative experiences in the past. Hence, instead of lacking the opportunity to speak in class, students themselves often are too self-conscious of their own speaking skills which refrain them from speaking English in class (Nor et al, 2019).

5.3 Limitations of Study

Focusing on several researches done, there are several limitations of the study. The limitations identified in this study were the unavailability to meet with the participants face to face during pandemic time, the inability to break down the study to suit different students' needs, and insufficient participants. The limitations are further elaborated in the following paragraph.

The researcher was unable to meet with the participants face to face during the pandemic time. This was caused by the unpredictable period of the Covid-19 pandemic time. Due to that, the researcher used Zoom as the medium for meet up and communication. However, several of the respondents were unable to meet up at the last minute during the allocated time and had to call for another meeting. Although all responses were collected, the issues like internet connectivity raised concerns.

Furthermore, this study only focused on the students in one of the Chinese Independent Secondary Schools in Malaysia. Hence, the findings were well suited for the senior middle class students in that school only. The findings may be hard to suit students in government school or different races.

Lastly, the initial proposal of this study aims for 80 participants. However, due to the fact that many of the students graduated from the particular school, and due to the pandemic, an

insufficient amount of responses were collected. The pandemic made it impossible for the researcher to go to the school to distribute the survey physically. Hence, the total responses collected were 50, which was 30 responses less.

5.4 Implication of Study

After reviewing the data and findings collected, answers can be provided to the two guiding research objectives for this study. The first research objective looks at the main challenges faced by Malaysian students in learning the English language. The main challenges would be writing English essays, reading English passages and speaking in proper English sentences. These findings suggest that more focus should be placed on students' exposure to the English language as well as training students to analyze and organize their ideas before writing. Besides, it would benefit the students if they are able to speak with students whose mother tongue is English, so they will feel the need to learn English in order to communicate.

Furthermore, the second research objective aims to analyze the main reasons for low proficiency in English language. The main reasons for low proficiency in English are hesitation in speaking English, unfamiliar with certain English words and lack of chances in speaking in class. Hence, in order to improve students' ability in speaking, teachers must give encouragement and avoid any form of negative feedback as it will easily demotivate students to learn. From the results obtained, teachers should create a safe environment for students to try to communicate in English without the fear of making mistakes.

Moreover, this research would benefit researchers in the field of English language as it shows the main challenges students face in learning English as well as the reason behind the low proficiency in English. This research also presents a better understanding towards those who are interested to know more about the struggles of students in learning English at Chinese independent

schools. The results would raise awareness of the declining rate in English proficiency of Malaysian students. Therefore, awareness must be raised to ensure that this problem would be given importance.

5.5 Recommendations and Suggestions

From the findings of the present study, several recommendations are provided. First of all, this study focused on students who are in a Chinese Independent Secondary School in Malaysia and 50 participants from the senior middle class were recruited for this study. Therefore, the findings showing the main challenges in learning English and main reasons for the low proficiency in English were targeted to a specific group of students. It is suggested to include a larger sample size and students in different schools (government schools, private schools) in future studies.

Besides, this study does not take into consideration parental involvement in the survey question, Therefore, it is recommended to include students' viewpoint in the importance of the involvement of parents in their studies as several researches did claim that parents make significant changes in their children's studies.

Furthermore, in order to achieve better and more accurate results, it is encouraged to have a bigger sample size. A bigger sample size would provide more accurate mean values of the targeted population compared to smaller sample size. It will also provide unbiased results and can avoid inconclusive or any missed results. Hence, it is encouraged to include more Chinese Independent Schools or more participants to achieve better results.

Lastly, it is suggested that more research instruments could be used in order to find out the main challenges and reasons that students faced and thought in learning the English language respectively. In this study, only a survey was distributed to the students. It is suggested to use more

instruments such as interview and observation to know more about students' attitude in learning the English language. This would better provide insights in future studies.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was conducted to find out the main challenges faced by Malaysian students in learning the English language and to analyze the main reasons for low proficiency in English language. As English is given huge importance especially in Malaysia's education system, students must strive in order to improve their English language proficiency. The findings provided a clearer view in which aspect students find challenging in learning English and the main reason for low proficiency. When looking at the data collected, it revealed the inner thoughts and struggles of students.

From the study, we can conclude that students often struggle in many aspects of English, especially writing and speaking tasks as they are not exposed to English language as often. Also, due to the limitation of their vocabulary, they are unable to fully understand certain words in a conversation. Besides, while conversing with someone, they are self-conscious about their grammatical errors and are afraid of negative feedback given by others. This further demotivated students to converse in English which leads to reduced practices in the language.

Although the results generated based on this study have room for improvement, it brings knowledge to why students are unable to excel in English language at a certain level, especially to students in Chinese Independent School. Finally, future researchers would want to consider the suggestions provided such as having a bigger sample size which is to include more relevant schools or taking into consideration parental involvement if they were ever interested in exploring more about this field.

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