EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVETALK ENGLISH PROFICIENCY PROGRAMME AMONG FRANCHISORS, PARENTS, TEACHERS AND STUDENT IN SELANGOR, MALAYSIA

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ASIA e UNIVERSITY

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NG THIAM HUAT

A Thesis Submitted to Asia e University in
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ABSTRACT

The issue of English language proficiency for children born with different mother tongue has long been a focus of educational research and a recurring debate in public education systems. It is also related to the underpinning theory of learning English as a second language for Malaysian children because of the country's historical roots under British colonial rule and its multiracial and multilingual population of Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnic East Malaysia communities. Public schooling systems, that is, government schools are not be able to meet the demand requirement of students of various ethnic and different income groups for English language classes due to limited resources and tight schooling-time schedule. Hence, the demand to fulfil need for private tuition or delivery of English language classes fell into the language-franchise operators throughout the country. Specially, the purpose of the study is to examine the way to fill the demand gap to better prepare mother tongue-need children to learn and acquire the English language proficiency through the Selangor ***Activetalk English*** in Malaysia, as the pioneering initiative before its subsequent expansion into other Malaysia states. The target population and sample in this qualitative approach are focused on children and adolescence between the ages of 3 to 17 years old. The interview questionnaire and the respondent-participants therefrom provided the finding-results feedback for content analysis, thematic analysis and conclusion synthesis based on responses from the ***Activetalk English*** Centre franchiser, its franchisee-license managers, teachers, students and parents from the current total of 7-active ***Activetalk English*** Centres throughout the State of Selangor. Overall, the result-outputs suggest that ***Activetalk English*** so far is performing well, with a reasonable steady income stream of committed teachers who are satisfied with their remuneration package based on their ***Activetalk*** teaching materials, the latter having positive feedback from parents and children who have successfully and competitively engaged in term-end or year-end pubic-speaking contests in public places such as popular and new commercial complexes of Shopping-Malls. The output-outcome suggests that the potential for promoting more subscribers (as parental-children-clients or franchisee-investors) to ***Activetalk English*** is yet fully unexplored. In this direction, future plans include a new ***Activetalk English*** Centre to be located within the premises of a Subang Jaya international university building to capture the market segmentation in this resident-commercial area in the State of Selangor.

Keywords: Language proficiency, franchiser, demand gap, adolescence mother-tongue (3-17 years old), customer satisfaction

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

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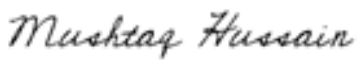

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the DBA degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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Signature of Candidate: **Date**: 20 December 2023

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Language proficiency is normatively associated with one' mother tongue, commonly spoken among members of a racial or ethnic community in their own indigenous world of formal and informal communications of diverse productive, economic and social interactions. Basically, it refers to the dialects or symbolic gestures and signage, comprehensible and understood only among the members themselves. Remnants of anthropological heritage communities, once cut-off and distant from so-called civilized or developing and developed communities, such as the transitional tribal, forest and hillside communities today gradually corroded and reformed by the penetrating encroachment of technological and related spinoffs influences, were the norm of some form of languages and language proficiency peculiar to their existence. These languages and language proficiency are interpreted as indigenous communication agility whose messages and its fathomable meanings are the hallmark of so-called 'lost-surviving civilization of humanity.

The point of this historical and heritage recall serves to raise the peculiarity, exclusivity and transmutability of different forms, symbols and signage, expressions or articulations of a plural diversity of racial and ethnic communities (that is, human communities and societies) whose inclusive languages, diluted by various change-intensity in temporal, geographical and migratory dimensions, have been contributory to a shared network of supporting and reinforcing the development, acceptance and proliferation of a lingua franca for international and global communication. And, admittedly, notwithstanding the circumstances of historical politics of conquest and

subjugation, variously known as colonization and imperialism among others, the English Language has become the premier preference (by circumstances or by choice) the international or global language of commercial, trade, business and socio-cultural interactions and engagements.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the context of education, training and professional engagements today, language proficiency refers to the *lingua franca* or international English Language used widely for domestic, regional, international and global trade and commerce exchanges, and also for diplomatic engagements. This does not belittle the importance or sanctity of national languages in individual countries that speak and write in their official medium or declared mother tongue. In other words, the adoption and practice of communication in the English Language, both in oral and written forms, only serve to facilitate and expedite interactive formal and informal engagements between individuals, groups of individuals, organizations and consortiums of shared interests to achieve common objectives and goals in fulfilment of private and public motives economically, politically, socially and professionally.

Specifically, language proficiency in the limited parameters of schooling at the pre-school, kindergarten, day-care-centre levels of operations normally refers to the use of English as a medium of instruction and learning for children, adolescence, youth and peer groups whose mother tongue is not English, with some exceptions for those whose mixed parentage or lineage provide them the life-long premise for home-English communication and thereon their language facility if not proficiency too. These exceptions to the rule fall in the wake of the promotion and usage of the National Language (Bahasa Melayu) and Mandarin (or Tamil) in National and National-type schools respectively where English language proficiency, tempered with a

combination of Bahasa Melayu or Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Cina or Mandarin, has reduced the efficacy of English communication (including written expressions and compositions) among bi-lingual and trilingual students respectively.

To a large extent, as the maturing bi-lingual and tri-lingual children adolescent youth progress into the college and university levels of education, and thereafter as graduates into professional work-based training circumstances, their command of the English Language and its proficiency therein may or may not have improved, but the respectability accorded to them largely depend on how they conduct themselves in their vocational, professional and entrepreneurial engagements. And there are in many instances, amazingly noticeable among captains of industries and titled business leaders, these bi-lingual and tri-lingual people have demonstrated a praiseworthy level of English language proficiency that add and create values for their businesses. The latter, however, becomes their goal, no longer the level of language proficiency that facilitated their successful interactive communication with similar multi-lingual business counterparts whose level of English language proficiency may or may not parallel their communication facility or agility in the English language.

Nevertheless, the shifts from West (USA and Europe) to East (China) today is tilting the balance of English as the *lingua franca* of international commerce and global trading to a preference for Mandarin which, at one time, was preceded by the advocacy of the French and Spanish languages, wittingly or unwittingly. But this fluid situation has not really displaced the Queen's (since her recent demise or is it now the King's) English which has remained steadfastly consistent among non-Mandarin, non-French or non-Spanish speaking communities. However, the reality suggests, as it has been increasingly evident in the past decades too, that a second-language proficiency other than the English Language is a necessary asset for the generation Y and Generation Z

(the millennials) whose future outlooks require them to be more multi-lingual versatile and multi-task agile in their preparations for more vocational-changing and entrepreneurial-evolving professions and businesses respectively as a consequence of current, emerging and future technological applications that require more technical-specific and techno-centric languages agility than pure linguistic English language proficiency to be productively efficient and effective.

Regardless of the emerging scenario for an alternative to learning English as a lingua franca, the issue remains that learning another language apart from one's mother tongue requires an assessment of the proficiency level of mother-tongue speakers. In this regard, issues related to language-proficiency assessment of non-English native speakers are important to evaluate, after an immersion in English (or other languages) training courses, short-term or long-term, if the mother-tongue speakers have achieved specified or targeted levels of language proficiency orally or/and in writing.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The basic issue is not whether the English Language or its proficiency thereon will disappear or the level of its proficiency to achieve desired target results and outcomes will diminish over time. It is still an inexhaustible area of establishing how fundamental communication with intended messages between exchange-engaging persons or parties are clearly relayed, comprehended and reacted favourable or unfavourable, positively or negatively, or even an atrophied indifference! In essence, language proficiency as a fundamental agile element of vivid and explicit expression of intent, purpose, objectives, goals, results and outcomes of two-way (or more than two-way) communications, in whatever forms or formats, that can be disrupted by natural and artificial interventions which tend to corrupt, corrode and enervate the

efficacy of language use and thus hinder and limit its efficient applications for productive enterprises.

In this regard, a basic problem in this study is related to the cause-effect of corrosive forces and disruptive challenges that enervate the efficacy of prevailing English language use and applications today. On the one hand, among the corrosive forces are the disturbing change of political-will influences manifested in the West-European conflict-tending warfare confrontation, and also the USA-China one-sided tug-of-war (rather tug-of-will) tension-explosive show of power-supremacy by vociferous war-inclined American Government over an economic-diffused Road-and Belt (infrastructure development) domination of surreptitious construction-driven China Government. The former illustrates the prolific and blatant English language proficiency of the affront-diplomacy of the West over the 4-tone subtle versatility of the Chinese (Mandarin) Language inclusiveness of the reclusive-diplomacy of China. Under both circumstances or situations, the issue of language proficiency (be it the English Language or the Chinese Language – Mandarin) becomes a mere parlay of heated exchanges lost in communication transition wherein the meaning of continuous expressions or bombardment of emotive outbursts and gestations are more important than the mannerism of language proficiency, including the outbursts of language profanity at its worst if detected at all!

On the other hand, among the disruptions of natural and artificial interventions that can negatively affect the proficiency of language delivery in the supply chain of economic productivity and productive enterprises, are two obvious happenings. Firstly, a natural intervention is associated with the prevailing circumstances and repeated seminar-conference engagements of how climate change has caused irreparable disasters and damages to the environment, life, living, livelihood and

lifestyles worldwide. World Bodies or Organizations like the United Nations (UN) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), over a span of several decades and numerous bilateral and multi-lateral dialogs, symposiums and catalogues of Action Agenda Resolutions, in as many conceivable languages as in the domineering English Language, have yet to achieve, among others, strategic climate-turnaround, environment-restorative and human-dignified life-health living conditions especially in the backwaters of so-called developing and pockets of still under-developed countries. The point here is related to the issue of the presence of expressive and repeated clarity of vehement declaration of language proficiency on the need for climate and environment reforms, but productive result-outcome intent of proficient language articulation remains questionable. In essence, expressive language proficiency without a parallel ***content-form result-outcome*** achievements is never enough a welcomed attestation of proficient language success. Hence, the importance of a standard assessment of the efficacy or effective of oral or/and written language learning methods.

Secondly, among the artificial interventions, that can endanger the use and application of a particular language and its proficiency, is the state of the political will, that is, the government of the day. The more racist and ethnocentric the ruling party is on the prohibition in the use of English as the *lingua franca*, domestically and externally, the more the preponderance it is to obviate the said language in favour of promoting its national language - whatever the language of the majority race is. In this frightful spasm of indigenous nationalism (and obsession), a means or medium of effective communication long-established over time (minus the historical recall of colonist imperialism and conquests) is lost in transition. A generation – the Generation X in Malaysia for example, proficient and agile in both oral and written English and,