

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE LACK OF ENGLISH ORAL PROFICIENCY
AMONG THE BIDAYUH STUDENTS IN RURAL
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KUCHING AND
SAMARAHAN DIVISIONS OF SARAWAK**

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for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out the causes that lead to lack of English oral proficiency among the Bidayuh rural school students in Sarawak. The study also aims to find out how much exposure and opportunity Bidayuh students have to speak the English language, inside and outside the classrooms. One hundred form four Bidayuh students of SMK Tae, SMK Tebakang, SMK Dragon and SMK Siburan in Samarahan and Kuching Divisions of Sarawak are the samples of the study. 25 Bidayuh students were selected at random from each school. Form 4 Bidayuh students were selected as target group as they had spent their three years in lower secondary and this time is the most appropriate time to look into their oral proficiency level. Two English teachers from each school were also involved in this study. English teachers were selected as respondents as they had better insight understanding toward students' oral proficiency level. The data for this study were collected through two sets of questionnaire; Students and teachers as respondents. The first set of questionnaires was based on students' perspective while the other set was based on teachers' perspective. The selection of the four schools was done on the basis of their rural locality. The findings revealed that rural secondary school Bidayuh students in the two Divisions (Kuching and Samarahan) have a very low level of English proficiency due to certain reasons: poor socio-economic background, minimal exposure to English at home since childhood, preference for their mother tongue to English when conversing with their classmates even during English lessons and a lack of initiative to upgrade their oral skills by involving themselves in language activities or competition. On the other hand, English teachers did not take this problem (lack of English proficiency) seriously. Teachers tended to focus on students' performances in examination; drilled students with exam formats and techniques of answering questions. Besides that, teachers did not use English even during English lessons. Therefore, in most cases where students and teachers were concerned, 'Oral Proficiency' has been neglected. The results of the study indicate that the Bidayuh rural secondary schools students in Sarawak as well as their teachers do not take English oral proficiency problem seriously but focus on students' performance in written examination.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This topic has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any other degree or qualification.

In the event that my thesis be found to violate the conditions mentioned above, I voluntarily waive the right of conferment of my degree and agree be subjected to the disciplinary rules and regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Antel anak Set', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

30 April 2009

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Oral proficiency in general is “.... the ability to speak the language in a skilled way based on several components which are categorized under communicative competence.” (Young 1995). Communicative competence according to Sheng (2000) is a knowledge that the students have to acquire in order to be proficient in the language. Gaudart (2003) defines oral proficiency as the ability to handle with confidence, accuracy clarity and precision a large number of communicative tasks; to participate in most informal and formal exchanges on a variety of concrete and familiar topics, to narrate and describe in all major uses. Jernigan (2007) clearly defines oral proficiency as the ability of a speaker to use the language appropriately in given contexts for spoken communication. It is an accurate use of structural and phonological component of language in application and holistic competency in all areas of communication. So, Students who are in the higher level of oral proficiency have the ability to use the language in more interactive way. In contrast, low levels of oral proficiency students speak the language minimally. Therefore, in the learning of English as a second language, oral proficiency is essential in order to overcome the low standard of English oral proficiency among rural school students in Malaysia.

The use of English in this country can be traced back to the British Colonial rule in Malaya (Public education MOE: A Historical Review 1996). When the National Language Act was passed after the country independence, English became the second language. Despite being the second language, English is widely used in the business, academic, professional and recreational fields. It is a means of communication in everyday life (Sarah Kaur 2006). From the educational point of view, English is being taught as a second language both primary and secondary levels. The STAR (2002) stated that the standard of English is not what it was ten or fifteen years ago. This has been proved by the previous UPSR, PMR and SPM English oral and English results.