

Investigating the Attributes of Chinese Primary School Adoption among the Malay Community in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

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Around 100,000 non-Chinese students are studying in Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJKC) schools every year in Malaysia. Most of them are Malays and Bumiputeras. Although there is some research on non-Chinese students in SJKCs, no research has taken place in Selangor. This study aims to investigate why Malay parents sent their children to SJKC and their expectations for their children's education in SJKC. This study also explored the academic achievement patterns and factors that affected students' learning outcomes. A total of 113 Malay students and 111 teachers from 5 selected SJKCs in Klang, Selangor, participated in this study. The data collection method used in this study included surveys, interviews, and content analysis. Descriptive statistics and qualitative approaches were used to analyse the data collected. The reason Malay parents in Klang sent their children to SJKC was more inclined to instrumental motivational factors. Malay parents wanted their children to master the Chinese language because of its high economic value, leading to better prospects in the future. The overall academic achievement of the Malay students in this study is less satisfactory. Lastly, the factors affecting students' Chinese language acquisition included students' academic ability, attitude and motivation. The external factors are the family's lack of a Chinese language environment, parents having low expectations, and a lack of spiritual and material support. The findings of this research will help Malay parents and teachers in SJKCs to have a better understanding of the learning situation of Malay students in SJKCs in Klang. Malay parents should give more attention and support their children's learning process in SJKCs, as early as possible.

1. INTRODUCTION

The interest by non-Chinese students to study in Chinese national-type primary school or Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJKC) seems to be on an increasing trend. According to the report by the Ministry of Education, the number of non-Chinese students in SJKCs increased from 11.84% in 2010 to 19.75% in 2020. The current Minister of Education, Mohd Radzi Md Jidin, mentioned that the number of Chinese students studying in SJKC decreased from 88.16% in 2010 to 80.25% in 2020. The Minister also pointed out that in 2020, the breakdown of the SJKC's non-Chinese student proportion is as follows: Malay 15.33%, Indian 2.75%, and other races 1.67%, in total 19.75% (New Strait Times, 11 Nov 2020). Table 1 shows the statistics of non-Chinese students in all SJKCs in Malaysia from 1989 to 2020, while Figure 1 shows the trend of the numbers of non-Chinese students in SJKCs.

Table 1. Statistics of Non-Chinese Students in SJKC

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Number of Students</i>	<i>Number of Non-Chinese Students</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
1989	567,803	17,309	3.1
1994	583,825	32,203	5.5
1998	601,155	52,043	8.7
1999	609,673	65,000	10.7
2010	603,192	71,418	11.8
2014	559,157	87,463	15.3
2016	540,290	97,252	18.0
2020	509,589	100,644	19.75

Source: The Ministry of Education, Malaysia; Jiao Zong, 2018; Enanyang, 2020; New Strait Times, 2020.

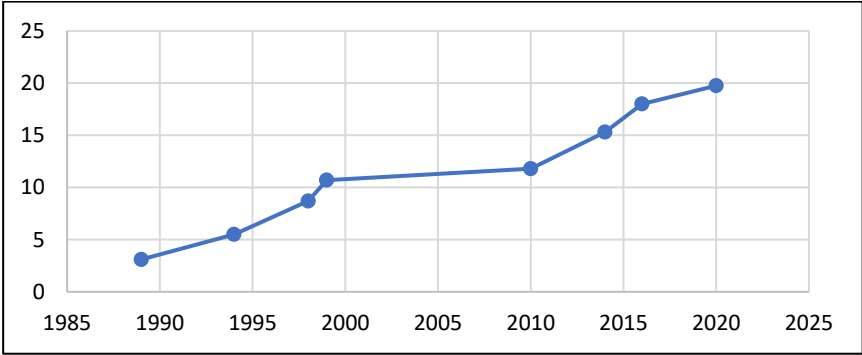


Figure 1. Trend of Non-Chinese Students Enrolment in SJKCs from 1989 - 2020

Figure 2 shows the comparison between the total number of students and the number of non-Chinese students in SJKCs from 2009 to 2020. Figure 2 shows that non-Chinese students have increased while the total number has decreased since 2014. The total number of students in SJKCs have dropped from 603,192 in 2010 to 559,157 in 2014, then to 509,589 in 2020 (see Table 1). According to the 2018 report by the Chinese School Teachers’ Association of Malaysia (Jiao Zong), the decreasing trend of the total number of students is due to the decreasing birth rate of the Chinese population in Malaysia. Besides, many Chinese parents sent their children to private and international schools, which provided better English education. In this case, an unusual phenomenon has occurred whereby the total number of students in SJKCs has decreased, but there is a drastic increase in the number of non-Chinese students. There are a few possibilities of why this could be happening. The first possibility could be the rise of China’s economy, which prompted the parents to send their children to SJKCs to learn

the Chinese language. The second possibility could be that the quality of education in SJKCs is attractive to Malay parents. The third possibility could be because there are geographical advantages of the SJKCs. This study aims to study the Malay parents' intention to send their children to SJKCs in Klang, Selangor.

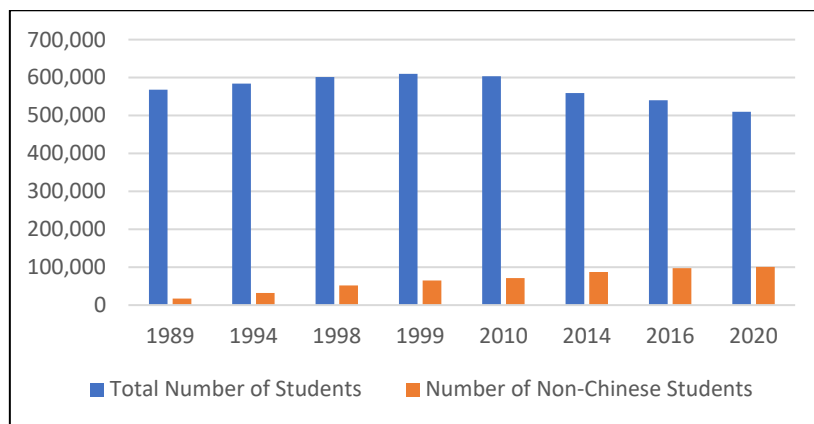


Figure 2. Comparison between Total Students and Non-Chinese Students in SJKCs

There is a need for research on the learning situation of non-Chinese students in SJKCs. As shown in Table 1, in 2020, over 100,000 non-Chinese students are studying in SJKCs all over Malaysia, and most of them are Malays and Bumiputeras (indigenous people). To date, there has been minimal research done on the learning situation of non-Chinese students in SJKC. One of the earliest relevant research was by Heng and Neo (2005), in which they researched the learning situation of the Malay students in 7 SJKCs in Kelantan. Neo and Heng investigated the intention of the Malay parents in sending their children to study in SJKC. Through their findings, they have identified problems faced in the children's learning process. Ten years later, Tan (2015) did similar research on 14 SJKCs in Kelantan. Other researchers had conducted other research topics on non-Chinese or Malay students in SJKCs in various states in Malaysia. Some of them also looked into the intentions and reasons of Malay parents sending their children to study in SJKC, and these included three relevant research in Johor (Asmahani, 2009; Tay, 2006; Yahaya & Abd Hamid, 2003), and three in Perak, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan (Zeng, 2017; Lin, 2009; Tan, Ngu & Chew, 2017). On the other hand, Zaki (2017) and Muhammad Fikri (2017) researched the religious studies of the SJKC Malay students in Johor Bahru, Johor. Marimun and Ahmad (2019) examined the history subject of Malay students. Researches were also done in East Malaysia, Sarawak (Tay 2012; Ngien & Ching, 2016) and Sabah (Cui, 2011; Bi, 2019).

Numerous researches were conducted on non-Chinese students in SJKCs, but no such research has taken place in Selangor. Therefore, the researchers have decided to focus on Klang's selected SJKCs with many Malay students for this study. The main purposes of this study are: (1) to identify the intentions of the Malay parents sending their children to Klang's SJKC; (2) to study the Chinese language performance of Malay students in Klang's SJKC; (3) to study the factors that affect the learning of Chinese language among Malay students in Klang's SJKC. It is hoped that the findings of this research will benefit the public significantly to help Malay parents and teachers in SJKCs to have a better understanding of the learning situation of Malay students in Klang's SJKC. This study provided some suggestions to parents, teachers and schools on improving Malay students' learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section mainly discusses past research on why non-Chinese parents send their children to SJKCs and the learning progress of non-Chinese students in SJKCs. Past studies have found that the primary purpose of non-Chinese parents sending their children to SJKCs is to allow them to master three languages. In addition to Malay and English, these parents want their children to learn Chinese well (Heng & Neo, 2005; Tan, 2015; Tan et al., 2017; Yahaya et al., 2003; Zeng, 2017). A study by Heng and Neo (2005) reported that Malay parents sent their children to SJKCs to master three languages or acquire the Chinese language. Still, they were also motivated by other factors, notably the education quality of SJKCs. These parents believed that in SJKC, the discipline is better, teachers are more diligent, it is easier to cultivate children's learning attitude, the mathematics education quality is relatively high. The academic competition atmosphere is relatively strong. Other minor considerations included meeting parents' wishes, wanting to learn more about Chinese culture and traditions, and having family members of Chinese descent. Tan (2015) also conducted a similar survey on 300 Malay parents in 14 SJKCs in Kelantan to determine the factors for sending their children to SJKCs. The survey showed the main reason was for their children's future and personality shaping. Indeed, the quality of education, administration and learning environment were also among the main attractions. Parents expected their children to have a better future by getting educated in Chinese schools. In addition, Zeng (2017) also reported about non-Chinese students attending Chinese primary schools in SJKC Ping Min Pundut, Lumut. The study found that parents favour Chinese primary schools because they were aware of the importance of Chinese and wanted their children to master a different language to enhance their competitiveness in future.

Based on the above studies, it was found that non-Chinese and Malay parents sent their children to SJKCs to receive Chinese education mainly due to the economic value of the Chinese language. Parents realised that the economic value of the Chinese language is getting higher. They hoped their children would master this language to strengthen their competitiveness in the workplace, have more job offers and better prospects in the future. Of course, non-Chinese parents also sent their children to SJKCs for SJKCs' quality of education. In addition to exploring why non-Chinese parents send their children to SJKCs, there are also a lot of papers on Chinese language acquisition among non-Chinese students in SJKCs in Malaysia. Heng and Neo (2005) found that Malay students faced fewer difficulties in listening and speaking the Chinese language but encountered problems identifying and writing Chinese characters after regurgitation from memory. Therefore, they did not perform well in writing and understanding Chinese; and they also experienced some difficulties in reading Chinese. Thus, their results in Chinese writing and reading were slightly weaker compared to listening and speaking.

In a study by Tay (2012), it was found that the learning outcome was less effective if the first language teaching method was used with non-Chinese students. Tay's research focused on the Chinese language teaching and acquisition of non-Chinese students in SJKCs in Sarawak. The study also found that Chinese language acquisition was abnormal among non-Chinese students. None of the teachers surveyed was satisfied with the results of non-Chinese students in the Chinese language. They believed that non-Chinese students did not perform as well as Chinese students as 45% of the students surveyed failed their Chinese language with a score of fewer than 39 marks. Tay believes that SJKC is not an ideal learning environment for non-Chinese students to master the Chinese language. On the other hand, Bi (2019) studied the academic performance of non-Chinese students in SJKC Yuk Yin, Sabah. The research focused on analysing the influences of teachers' teaching mode, teaching materials used, teachers' teaching concept and family environment on the academic performance of non-Chinese students in SJKC Yuk Yin, Sabah. The study found that the academic performance of non-Chinese students in

SJKC Yuk Yin differed significantly from Chinese students. Non-Chinese students were lowly motivated and had difficulty in maintaining learning motivation. The study also found that factors such as shortage of teachers, improper teaching patterns, and the external environment of the language were not conducive for learning. They had significant impacts on the academic performance of non-Chinese students. The external environment factor of not being conducive to learning the language included non-Chinese students having limited exposure to the Chinese language due to environmental factors, non-Chinese parents having lower expectations on their children's achievement in the Chinese language, and non-Chinese parents not understanding Chinese. Therefore, they found it difficult to help with their children's homework. Thus, non-Chinese students' exposure to the Chinese language was limited to only school learning time. There were many non-Chinese students in SJKC Yuk Yin, much more than the number of Chinese students. Bi believed that this environment is not conducive for non-Chinese students to master the Chinese language.

Based on the above studies, it can be concluded that most non-Chinese students do not perform well in Chinese (Bi, 2019; Heng & Neo, 2005; Ngien & Ching, 2016; Tan, 2015; Tay, 2012; Zeng, 2017). Some of the significant factors that affect children's learning outcomes are teachers' teaching methods (Bi, 2019; Tay, 2012), language environment at home, and parents' expectations and support (Bi, 2019; Heng & Neo, 2005; Tan, 2015).

3. METHOD

Five SJKCs in Klang, Selangor, were selected as samples of this study. The five SJKCs included small, medium, and large-sized schools with general to excellent academic achievements. However, these schools were chosen because the number of Malay students in these five SJKCs is relatively large compared to other SJKCs. Teachers, Malay students and their parents from these 5 SJKCs were selected as participants of this study. These five SJKCs were labelled as School A, School B, School C, School D and School E. A total of 111 teachers, 113 Malay students and their parents participated in this research. For this study, students selected were from upper-primary classes. They were Year 4 and Year 5 students (Year 6 students who had to prepare for UPSR were not allowed to participate in this survey). There were two reasons for choosing Year 4 and Year 5 students as the samples of this study. Firstly, it would be more difficult for lower-primary students to answer the questionnaire accurately because some of the contexts in the questionnaire were beyond their ability to understand. Secondly, upper-primary students have been studying in the school for some time, and thus their parents and teachers would have a better understanding of their learning situation in school. Therefore, the study would obtain more reliable and objective information.

The data collection method used in this study are mainly surveys, interviews, and content analysis. The researchers conducted a questionnaire survey on teachers, students and their parents. The questionnaire constructed for students and parents consisted of three parts. The first part was to investigate their family background and the second part was to examine the parents' intention of sending their children to SJKCs. Parents answered both parts of the questionnaire. In contrast, the third part investigated the problems faced by Malay students when studying in SJKCs. A specific form was prepared to collect and analyse the students' academic performance based on the students' performance reports provided by each school. The objective was to explore the features of their learning achievement. Students' questionnaires were administered face-to-face at the selected schools. Although the researchers assumed that the upper-primary students could answer the questionnaire by themselves, the researchers were there for any enquiry to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the responses to the questionnaire. The first and second parts of the questionnaire, which were the parents'

background and their intention on sending their children to SJKC, were taken home by students to be answered by their parents. The answered questionnaire was returned to the teacher in charge the next day and collected by the researchers.

The teachers' questionnaire (in a Google Form) was sent to teachers via WhatsApp groups. The questionnaire contained 17 questions, mainly to collect teachers' views on the Malay students' Chinese language acquisition and gather their teaching experience. The survey data were analysed by using the SPSS 21.0 statistical programme. Descriptive statistics in terms of frequency counts and percentages were used to obtain patterns of occurrences. Interviews were also conducted to get insight into factors that affected student learning and for triangulation purposes. Interview sessions were conducted with 2-3 Chinese language teachers from each school. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The content analysis method was used to analyse students' academic performance based on the reports provided by each school. The Chinese language performance is discussed under Research Question 2. The following data analysis is a combination of data from surveys, report analysis, and interviews.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 144 student questionnaires were sent out in this study, and 133 were returned. After removing the incomplete ones, only 113 completed questionnaires were left for analysis. Table 2 shows the profile of the student participants. Table 2 shows the student participants' profiles. Of the 113 students from five different SJKCs in Klang, 53 (46.9%) were year 4 students, and 60 (53.1%) were year 5 students.

Table 2. Profile of Participants

Name of SJKC	Year 4	Year 5	Total
School A	8	8	16
School B	16	14	30
School C	11	16	27
School D	12	9	21
School E	6	13	19
Total	53	60	113
Percentage	(46.9%)	(53.1%)	(100.0%)

The background information of the students' parents, such as education level, occupation and household income, show the socio-economic status of these groups of parents. In total, 47.7% of the parents are college-educated, while 52.3% of the parents are primary and secondary school educated. In terms of occupation, only 18.3% are professionals, 30.4% semi-professionals, 10.7% non-professionals, 21.8% self-employed and 18.8% unemployed. In terms of household income, since this study began its fieldwork in early 2019, the household income category was following those established by the government in 2016. Those with a monthly household income of less than RM3,000 are categorized as B40; those with a monthly household income of between RM 3,001 – RM 13,148 as M40; and those with a monthly household income of RM 13,148 or more as T20. According to this classification, 46.8% of the Malay students are from the B40 group, and 44.2% are from the M40 group. Only 9.0% of the students are from the T20 high household income group. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the majority of the Malay students in this study are from middle and lower-class families. What are the intentions of these Malay parents sending their children to study in SJKCs? What do they expect their children to gain through Chinese education? Does the children's performance meet the parents' expectations? The following report will answer these questions.

4.1 Why do Malay Parents Send Their Children to SJKCs in Klang?

This section discusses Malay parents' intention to send their children to SJKCs based on the survey data from students and parents. Table 3 shows that the primary purpose of Malay parents sending their children to SJKC was for their children to master three languages, namely Malay, English and Chinese (M=4.62, S.D.=0.60). Other than Malay and English, parents wished their children would be able to read and write Chinese characters (M=4.49, S.D.=0.64) and also communicate in Mandarin (M=4.44, S.D.=0.65) because they believed that the Chinese language's economic value was increasing (M=4.03, S.D.=0.79). Parents thought that when their children could listen, speak, read and write in Chinese, they would have better employment opportunities in the future (M=4.4, S.D.=0.79). Perhaps many Malay parents were well aware that the communication between people and countries was becoming more frequent. They understood that being multilingual and multicultural was vital, making them more competitive and more adaptive in the future. Therefore, some far-sighted Malay parents sent their children to study in SJKCs instead of the National Schools (SK), which lacked a trilingual learning environment.

Table 3. Economic Value of Chinese Language

	Reasons	Mean (M)	S.D.	N
1.	Able to master 3 languages (Chinese, Malay, English)	4.62	0.60	112
2.	Able to read and write Chinese characters	4.49	0.64	113
3.	Able to communicate in Mandarin	4.44	0.65	113
4.	Better employment opportunities in the future	4.4	0.79	113
5.	Chinese language's economic value is increasing	4.03	0.79	113

Malay parents agreed that the education system in SJKC is better (M=4.11, S.D.=0.77). These parents believed that some good qualities attracted them to SJKC. They believed that the discipline among SJKC students was better (M=4.25, S.D.=0.75), administrative management was more systematic (M=4.0, S.D.=0.75), facilities were more up-to-date and complete (M=3.96, S.D.=0.68), student performance evaluation was more organized (M=3.87, S.D.=0.70). There was more emphasis on academics (M=3.72, S.D.=0.93). Students' homework was also more emphasized (M=3.79, S.D.=0.89). Parents also believed that the quality of education in SJKC is higher (M=3.63, S.D.=0.87), and students can obtain a better education in Science and Mathematics subjects (M=3.72, S.D.=0.73). Other than the excellent education qualities in SJKC, the teachers' quality had also attracted Malay parents to send their children to SJKC. SJKC teachers were more serious and diligent in their work (M=3.94, S.D.=0.75). Parents also believed that SJKC teachers are more professional and have better quality (M=3.7, S.D.=0.77). These are all the factors that prompted them to send their children to study at SJKCs.

Besides being attracted by SJKC's education system, the data shows that this group of Malay parents who sent their children to SJKC were relatively open-minded and more able to accept other ethnicities, languages and cultures. They hoped their children could interact with multi-ethnic friends in SJKCs (M=4.42, S.D.=0.51), and they also hoped their children could learn more about Chinese culture and traditions (M=3.65, S.D.=0.86). This intention is very encouraging. We believe that these students who completed six years of education in SJKCs will be more open-minded when they grow up. This will undoubtedly have a positive impact on our multicultural integration and multi-ethnic unity in Malaysia.

In addition, the other important factor that prompted Malay parents to send their children to study in SJKC is the geographical factor. Klang is an area with a higher density of Chinese population and therefore has more SJKCs. Some Malay parents sent their children to SJKC because of convenience and proximity to their home (M=3.80, S.D.=1.09). Thus, the geographical factor is also a reason for Malay parents to send their children to SJKCs. Finally, three other factors identified were not as significant. These include the following: (i) “I follow what the trend does”, the so-called “The Flock Effect” (M=3.14, S.D.=1.03); (ii) The blood relationship: Chinese descent (M=3.03, S.D.=1.43); (iii) Easier to obtain the benefits and help that is provided by the Parents-Teachers Association (M=2.97, S.D.=0.91).

Based on Gardner's (1985) Motivation Theory, Malay parents' motivation to want their children to learn Chinese tends to be instrumental motivation. Parents want their children to master the Chinese language because their children will have better employment opportunities and better prospects in the future. This finding is consistent with findings of Heng and Neo (2005), Tan (2015), Yahaya et al. (2003), and Zeng (2017). On top of that, with the quality of education that SJKCs offered, parents hoped to cultivate well-disciplined, academic, and competitive children. These could also be categorised as instrumental motivation. Parents' integrated motivation though it exists, is weaker. Letting their children “socialise with multi-ethnic friends” in SJKC; wanting “to understand and learn more about Chinese culture and social traditions”; having “Chinese descent,” and hoping “to blend into the Chinese society by learning the Chinese language” are the integrated motivation of parents.

4.2 The Chinese Language Performance of Malay students in SJKC

The ability to perform the four language skills of Chinese, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, were analysed. Table 4 shows the students' results for Chinese Writing. This group of students had good Chinese writing skills in Year 1 as 17.9% of students achieved grade A, 33.3% achieved grade B, and only 7.1% had not mastered or failed (grade E). In Year 2, students' performance began to decline. From this year onwards to Year 5, none of them had obtained grade A for Chinese Writing, while the number of students who achieved grade B lessened. In addition, the number of failures has also increased through the years. This shows that Malay students' Chinese writing skills have been below the required standard since Year 2. The reason students were able to get a good result in Year 1 was that they had a basic knowledge of the Chinese language due to the two years of Chinese education in kindergarten, which is sufficient as preparation for Year 1. However, as they progressed, the content and skill requirements for Chinese Writing had also increased. As a result, the Malay students underperformed. In Year 3, 56% of students failed in Chinese Writing, and the figure rose to 76.5% in Year 4 and 77.6% in Year 5. This shows an entirely unsatisfactory performance.

Table 4. Chinese Writing

Grade	Year 1 F (%)	Year 2 F (%)	Year 3 F (%)	Year 4 F (%)	Year 5 F (%)	Total F (%)
A	15 (17.9)	0	0	0	0	15 (3.6)
B	28 (33.3)	6 (6.9)	6 (6.6)	2 (2.0)	0	42 (10.1)
C	25 (29.8)	14 (16.1)	18 (19.8)	7 (7.2)	6 (10.3)	70 (16.7)
D	10 (11.9)	20 (23.0)	16 (17.6)	14 (14.3)	7 (12.1)	67 (16.0)
E	6 (7.1)	47 (54.0)	51 (56.0)	75 (76.5)	45 (77.6)	224 (53.6)
Total	84 (100.0)	87 (100)	91 (100)	98 (100)	58 (100)	418 (100)

The result for Chinese Reading Comprehension is slightly better compared to Chinese Writing (see Table 5). Besides Year 1, some students achieved grades A and B in Year 2 and 3. But the number of students with grades A and B declined from year to year. This finding was similar for Chinese Writing. The high failure rate in the upper-primary level was worrying. The failure rate in Year 4 was 81.6% and 74.1% in Year 5. The result in Chinese Writing and the result in Chinese Reading Comprehension was about the same. Both subjects presented the same trend in the results, which is, students were able to master Chinese Writing and Reading Comprehension in Year 1 but performed poorly as they progressed to higher levels. This situation can be seen in Figure 3.

Table 5. Chinese Reading Comprehension

Grade	Year 1 F (%)	Year 2 F (%)	Year 3 F (%)	Year 4 F (%)	Year 5 F (%)	Total F (%)
A	21 (25.0)	4 (4.6)	2 (2.2)	0	1 (1.7)	28(6.7)
B	37 (44.0)	25 (28.7)	14 (15.4)	2 (2.0)	0	78(18.6)
C	18 (21.4)	26 (29.9)	22 (24.2)	3 (3.1)	7 (12.1)	76(18.2)
D	5 (6.0)	13 (14.9)	15 (16.5)	13 (13.3)	7 (12.1)	53(12.7)
E	3 (3.6)	19 (21.8)	38 (41.8)	80 (81.6)	43 (74.1)	183(43.8)
Total	84 (100)	87 (100)	91 (100)	98 (100)	58 (100)	418(100)

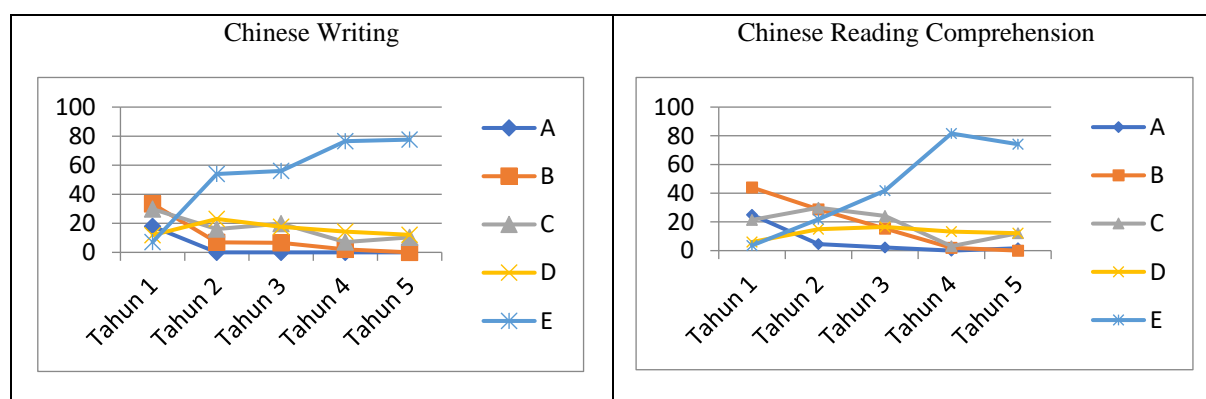


Figure 3. Students' Chinese Writing and Reading Comprehension Performance

Some of the results for Chinese Speaking and Reading were not provided by the schools. Therefore, the analysis is only based on the information obtained. The evaluation for Chinese Speaking and Reading proficiency was relatively simple, and they only evaluated the skills by assigning "mastered" and "not mastered". The overall performance of students' speaking skills was good. More than 87% of Year 1 to Year 4 students had mastered the speaking skill. For Year 5, 80% of them mastered speaking, and only 20% of the students failed to do so. The Chinese Reading results are less satisfactory than Chinese Speaking as 83% of the students had mastered Chinese Reading in Year 1, 73% of them in Year 2, 65% of them in Year 3, 69% in Year 4, and 35.4% in Year 5. The results of these two skills presented a similar trend, whereby the results declined as the students progressed to higher levels.

Data in the tables and figures above showed that Malay students faced many problems mastering the Chinese language. In the four Chinese language skills tests, students are less likely to face difficulties with listening and speaking skills. They can listen to and speak Chinese fluently. Although the students' achievements show a declining trend as they move into upper primary, it is acceptable as the passing rate is more than 80%. As for Chinese reading skills, there was an upward trend initially, but there was a sharp drop in Year 5, with a failure rate of

65%. The data show that these students are weakest in Chinese Reading Comprehension and Chinese Writing. We can see that their overall performance is on a downward trend compared to their age, and the failure rate remained high through the years. Predictably, Malay students perform differently in Chinese listening, speaking, reading and writing skills because reading comprehension and writing skills are inherently higher-order language skills. Even among the Chinese society, some people could understand and speak Chinese but could not read nor write Chinese.

In general, Malay students from SJKCs in Klang underperformed in the Chinese language. There is still a lot of room for improvement. The data from the survey were consistent with the data from the interview. Most of the interviewed teachers pointed out that Malay students in SJKCs usually perform below satisfactory grades. There are very few students with good grades, but most of them fall into middle and lower grades. The findings of this study on the Chinese language proficiency of Malay students from SJKC in Klang are similar to those found by Heng and Neo (2005). Heng and Neo found that Malay students from SJKC in Kelantan encountered many Chinese language challenges. Among the four Chinese language proficiency tests, students were less likely to face problems with their listening and speaking skills, and they could understand and speak Chinese fluently. As for Chinese reading and writing, the overall performance of students also declined with age, and the failure rate remained high. Tan (2015) also found that Kelantanese Malay students in SJKCs had not acquired the Chinese language well. In addition, other studies have shown that many non-Chinese students from SJKCs do not perform well in the Chinese language (Bi, 2019; Ngien & Ching, 2016; Tay, 2012; Zeng, 2017).

4.3 Factors Affecting Chinese Language Acquisition Among Malay Students

This study found that Malay students' listening and speaking skills are pretty good, but their reading comprehension and writing skills are below satisfactory. It can be seen that there is an upward trend in the failure rate against the years of study. What causes this phenomenon? The researchers believe that the main reason for this phenomenon is the difficulty of mastering Chinese characters. The Chinese characters' characteristics, a combination of shapes, sound, and meaning, are complex for Malay students to master. This probably is because the Malay language is only a combination of sound and meaning. Hence it is rather challenging to incorporate the “shapes” into their learning process. Malay students could perform well in listening and speaking because they are taken off the “shape”. They have performed well in Chinese Writing and Reading Comprehension in Year 1, but their results dropped from Year 2. The number of students who could not master the subjects got higher by year. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, the language learning materials must be “slightly” higher than the learners’ current language level to be understood effectively. If the input language materials are too deep or much higher than the students’ level, this will cause difficulty or no benefit on language skill improvement (Krashen, 2013). We can see from the students’ results that they could cope well in Year 1 due to the two years of Chinese pre-school training, which provided them with basic Chinese language knowledge and conversation skills. However, starting from Year 2 and 3, the course contents become more complex and extensive. If the students do not have a strong Chinese language foundation, they will face learning difficulties in the process. It will be even more challenging when students proceed to upper-primary (Year 4-6) because the input language materials are far too difficult for their current language level, which causes difficulties in understanding and learning. This situation has led to a higher failure rate or below-satisfactory performances for Chinese Reading Comprehension and Chinese Writing results.

Besides that, external factors such as the Malay students' family background and living environment also affected their Chinese language acquisition. According to the data collected, most of the students were from lower and middle-class families (91%), of which 46.8% of their household income was less than RM3,000. The financial status may also be one of the main reasons for students not attending tuitions after school, and it was discovered that a total of 46.9% of the students did not attend tuition. The researchers also found out from the parents' survey feedback that they want their children to speak, read and write in Chinese. Still, from the interview with the Chinese teachers, we found that the parents had low expectations of their children's academic performance. From the teachers' point of view, most parents did not emphasise their children's academic performance. Students also stated that no one was home to help them with their homework when they faced problems because their family members did not understand Chinese (54%). In addition, many Malay students also stated that they did not communicate in Chinese with their family members nor community after school hours. Only 22.4% of the Malay students indicated that they spoke Chinese at home. Language-communication is an effective way to acquire and improve language proficiency. The limited possibility of applying the Chinese language in the community will affect Chinese language acquisition as well. Past studies by Bi (2019), Heng and Neo (2005), and Tan (2015) have also revealed that the family background, parental expectations, and language used at home have affected Chinese language acquisition among non-Chinese students.

Krashen (1981, 1988) believed that the learner's motivation, characteristics, and emotional state would affect the speed and quality of language acquisition. The teachers' survey and interview data show moderate or minimal motivation and poor attitude among Malay students towards Chinese language learning. The teachers stated that many students were not interested in learning Chinese. Most of them learned Chinese to meet their parents' wishes. Krashen believes that learners with low anxiety levels tend to get more comprehensible language input in second language acquisition in students' emotional states. Students who learn in a relaxed and comfortable mood will learn better in a short time. The student survey data shows that many Malay students are learning with anxiety. This is supported by the findings from "I feel scared during the Chinese test (M=3.98, S.D.=1.15)" and "I feel stress when my Chinese score is not good (M= 3.81, S.D.=1.26)". Many students felt that "Chinese is difficult to learn (M=3.4, S.D.=1.11)", and they "always could not keep up with the teacher's teaching pace (M= 2.78, S.D.=1.04)". They "don't like to learn Chinese (M=2.59, S.D.=1.18)". These negative emotional states will undoubtedly affect the students' learning motivation and their mastering of the language.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up this study, the main reason Malay parents in Klang want their children to learn Chinese is more inclined to instrumental motivation factors. Parents saw the economic value of the Chinese language, which is gradually increasing. They wanted their children to master the Chinese language hoping for better employment opportunities in the future. In addition, parents also hoped that SJKC's education system could nurture their children to be more disciplined, academically inclined, and competitive. In terms of performance, the overall Chinese language performance of Malay students in SJKCs is not ideal. Most of the teachers interviewed also said that there were very few students with good grades, and most of them were in the lower and middle grades. The factors affecting the students' Chinese language acquisition mainly include students' academic ability, emotional attitude and motivation. External factors that influenced their achievement included the family's lack of an excellent Chinese language environment, parents having low expectations of their children's learning achievements, and a lack of spiritual and material support.

This study shows that parents' expectations towards their children's academic results will impact their children's performance in school. Parents should give more attention and support to their children's studies as early as possible. The reason being the higher-level language skills are built on fundamental knowledge and skills. If there is no proper support during the foundation period, it will be even more challenging for the students to catch up as time goes by or even worse, they might lose passion and give up on certain academic subjects. Therefore, the Malay parents who want to send their children to SJKCs should let their children receive at least two years of Chinese preschool education from mastering the basic Chinese speaking and Chinese characters writing skills. Parents who do not understand Chinese should also arrange tuition classes for their children. In addition, the Chinese language, in any case, is a second language to Malay students. Still, the Chinese subjects taught in SJKCs are based on first language teaching methodology, which may not be very suitable for Malay students. Suppose parents' expectation towards children's language skills is simply speaking Chinese and understanding simple Chinese characters. In that case, they should consider sending their children to National Schools (SK) that offer Chinese lessons. Chinese lessons conducted in SKs are taught based on second language methodology, which is more suitable for non-Chinese beginner learners.

The current study has two main implications. First, this research has enriched the study on Malay students' learning phenomenon in Chinese primary schools, as there is still a lack of study on the learning issues faced by Malay students in SJKCs in Selangor. Second, this study validates findings from previous studies on the academic performance of non-Chinese students in SJKCs. Non-Chinese students' learning performance in SJKCs is generally below the acceptable standard, making it a significant challenge for teachers in conducting their lessons, switching between first language and second language teaching approaches, fulfilling different needs in class. Malaysia Education Ministry and Jiao Zong may need to consider providing more training related to second language teaching methods and strategies for Chinese teachers servicing in SJKCs, hoping to enhance the language performance of Malay students and other non-Chinese students.

The data of this study was obtained from only teachers, Malay students and parents from five schools in the state of Selangor. Thus, this study cannot represent the learning situation of Malay students of entire SJKCs in Malaysia. As such, future research should include more schools and participants to be representative of the actual situation. The limitation of this research points towards how the topic should be addressed in the future. The following are a few suggestions for future studies: (1) A study on the overall academic performance of Malay students in SJKCs and the relationship between Chinese language proficiency and other subjects using Chinese language as a medium; (2) The challenges of classroom teaching as a consequence of the admission of Malay students to SJKCs, and how the schools and teachers address this.

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