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Culture and the ESL classroom in relation to learners'  
willingness to communicate (WTC) at a public  
university in Malaysia

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A thesis submitted as partial fulfilment for the requirement for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education

Moray House School of Education  
The University of Edinburgh

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This study investigates the influence of culture on learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English as the second language in (ESL) classrooms at a public university in Malaysia. In the literature, culture in language teaching is generally related to nations and ethnicities (large cultures). This study explores the emergent and the interaction between the 'large culture' and the 'small culture' on learners WTC. This work is situated in Malaysia where English is regarded as an important second language towards contemporary needs of academic and professional advancement. An instrumental case study involving 7 ESL classrooms at a public university was chosen. Non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and participant classroom observations were conducted for data collection. Findings revealed that learners' WTC was often linked to the powerful explicit of large culture narratives around identity and the subtle small culture influences of family and community, institutions and classroom. Findings also linked technology and the use of social networking sites (SNS) as providing influences to learners WTC. This study suggests that ESL learners' WTC at a public university is even more complex than anticipated conditioned by large and small culture influences in unique ways.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my father Abdul Wahid bin Mukhari, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my mother Mashooji Salbiah Binti Noordin, who taught me that even the largest task could be accomplished if it is done one-step at a time.

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## ABSTRACT

### **Abstract: Culture and the ESL Classroom in relation to learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) at a public university in Malaysia**

This study investigates the influence of culture on WTC in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms in a public university in Malaysia. In the literature, culture in language teaching is generally treated as relating to major groupings such as nations and ethnicities. An alternative perspective to this “large culture” is proposed by Holliday (1999) who rejects the notion of “large” culture and focuses instead on the emerging “small” culture of each ESL classroom. Holliday’s idea is attractive, but given the officially sanctioned identification of Malaysians as belonging to the Malay, Chinese or Indian ethnicity, this research explores the interaction of large and small cultures on learners WTC. This work was situated in Malaysia, a post-colonial context where English has retained a significance as a subject area and also, quite frequently as an important second language towards contemporary needs of academic and professional advancement at local and international level.

An instrumental case study of ESL classrooms at a university was chosen as the research approach and involved seven ESL classes (100 ESL learners) for non-participant classroom observations and participant classroom observations and for 30 ESL learners’ semi-structured interviews. Participants were the third year undergraduates enrolled in various courses and taking English as an obligatory subject for the undergraduates’ program at the university. Findings revealed that despite the prevalent benefits of the target language use, learners’ lack of WTC in the language was often linked to the powerful explicit large culture influences around identity and

the subtle salience of small culture influences, especially the family and community, and the higher educational institution. The impact of a highly structured education system, paired with negative learning experiences in ESL, created highly vulnerable language learners lacking confidence and affecting their WTC. Globalization and the internationalization of HEIs had strengthened the positioning of English in higher education, but some learners were disadvantaged by the system, particularly those with low exposure to the target language at a younger age. Findings linked to technology and social networking sites (SNS) suggested positive and negative influences on learners WTC providing additional decontextualized digital narratives with increasing influence. This study suggests that ESL learners WTC at a public university is even more complex than anticipated conditioned by large and small culture influences in unique ways.



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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.0 Introduction

For the past 20 years, the connection between culture and the English as a Second Language (ESL) learning has been a topic of interest among educators, theorists and researchers (Atkinson, 1999). This has especially been the case as English has developed into a major teaching industry across the world. Accordingly, McKay (2002) suggests that the reason behind the elevated status of English as an International Language is not due to the number of its speakers but to the increasing number of people who believe in the benefits of acquiring the language. In particular, the present dominance of English internationally, along with historical position as language imperialism with post-colonial influence (Gill & Kirkpatrick; Phan, Kho & Chng, 2013) has led to some countries and systems building ESL into the curriculum as an integral part of the educational experience of young people. The strong link between efficacy in English and future employment and societal aspirations within some post-colonial contexts may produce a strong pressure on individuals to develop skills and understanding in this subject (Lee, 2003; Hanapiah, 2004; Foo & Richards, 2004; Darmi & Albion, 2013).

In a post-colonial country like Malaysia, it has generally been known for several decades that English brings social, political and economic benefits (Omar, 1982; Lee, Gill, 2013; Foo & Richards, 2004; Darus, 2013; How, Chan, and Abdullah, 2015) and

that Malaysia has continued to benefit from English in its global standing (Pandian, 2002). In Malaysia, apart from becoming a language subject in schools, English language courses are compulsory at the university level as a requirement for graduation. In fact, the English entrance examination known as *Malaysian University English Test (MUET)* is obligatory for university candidates enrolling in degree courses at public universities in Malaysia. The Malaysian Examination Council (Ministry of Education, 2019) mentions that MUET measures learners' pre-university proficiency level when proceeding to the tertiary education level.

Such an emphasis on this target language and the strong link between efficacy in English and future employment and societal aspirations within some post-colonial contexts may produce a strong pressure on individuals to develop skills and understanding in this subject. It was pointed out by Darus & Subramaniam (2009) that proficiency in English among graduates is considered crucial, particularly in order to pursue higher education and professional level. There has, however, been an alarming concern over the standard of English proficiency among Malaysian students. Pennycook (1994) argues that with the increased status of English in “many educational systems around the world, it has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion and exclusion from further education, employment or social positions” (p. 14). Numerous studies in second language learning in Malaysia have exposed ESL learners' struggles in embracing the target language, particularly in oral communication. This is especially true when the functions of English remain instrumental, as it is not used as an everyday language. The L1, Bahasa Malaysia (BM), on the other hand, is extensively used by the various ethnicities in Malaysia (Malaya, Chinese and Indians) as a national and everyday language.

For a multi-ethnic nation like Malaysia, the national language serves as one aspect of national identity as people identify themselves with the country, speak BM and accept the constitution. (Asiaweek, 2000). In some cases, when the frequency of using English is low in everyday communication, English could be perceived as a foreign language rather than a legitimate L2 as promoted through the second language policy. ESL learners, particularly from a non-English speaking background and whose English is almost non-existent at home, will face difficulty in tackling the target language (Rajaretnam and Nalliah, 1999).

In Malaysia, although it is not commonly used in everyday communication, English is widespread, particularly in the professional and educational domains, and so the use and the position of the target language within the culturally diverse community is complex and challenging. Generally, a prevalent concern among graduates is often related to the lack of communicative ability in the target language. In one of the local newspapers, multinational companies recruiting undergraduates report that:

*Recently a cooperative training programme was mounted between local universities and a few multi-national companies like Shell, IBM, HSBC, AIA and AIG, coordinated and managed by Setia Haruman Sdn Bhd in Cyberjaya. The aim of the project was to ensure that selected final year students from these universities would be assured of jobs in those companies upon their graduation. It was discovered that the main problem faced by these students was the lack of proficiency and communication skills and therefore, confidence in operating in the English language.*

*(Malaysia Kini, 2015)*

It needs to be pointed out that Malaysian ESL learners are of various ethnicities, religion and educational backgrounds and the differentials in teachers' quality and the

respective school environments they come from potentially become substantial factors to further influence their abilities and capabilities in the learning of the target language. This leads to great variation in the fluency of students across the various ethnic groups.

While globalization has led to the acceleration and intensification of English as an international language and as a language of commerce and science, Malaysia has witnessed an increasing tide of nationalism and a need for people to embrace a sense of belonging within the state, drawing on 'essentialist' notions of culture. Essentialist approaches to culture focus on the stereotyping of groups of people into an essential characterization. According to Holliday (1998), in the essentialist view, 'culture' would normally attempt to fit the behaviour of people into pre-conceived and constraining structures. The world-wide-web, expanding technology and the increased mobility of people, have extended the notion of culture beyond a stable and constrained national language and religion towards a dynamic, heterogeneous, multi-layered and elemental sense of culture (Atkinson, 1999; Levy, 2007). Lee (2003) points out that culture has the capability to change from static concept or notion to acquiring new characteristics and forms. In other words, it is dynamic and malleable in the face of global shifts. However, most anthropologists believe that culture is "still composed of socially shared elements, socially shared norms, codes of behaviour, values, and assumptions about the world that clearly distinguish one socio-cultural group from the other (Trueba, 1993, p.34).

Considering the diverse concepts of culture, I believe it is important to consider the concept of 'hybridity' where the post-modernist concept of cultures can be seen as

being characterised by what Holliday (1999) calls a ‘small culture’ approach which contrasts with the powerful concept of the essentialist notion of culture, termed ‘large culture’. Holliday (1998) argues that ‘small culture’ attaches culture to “small social groupings of activities whenever there is cohesive behaviour, and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national or international stereotyping” (p. 237). Holliday adds that small cultures are used to understand emergent behaviour rather than using the prescribed ethnic, national and international differences (1998, p. 237).

However, by suggesting the use of the term ‘hybridity’, I mean that the dominance of ‘large’ cultures and reliant subcultures in key aspects of life, may play particularly strong roles in shaping the ‘small cultures’ of the ESL classroom in Malaysia. Apart from having different ethnicities and cultural beliefs, members may also bring along the culture of multiple social groupings that shape their behaviour, perceptions and a wide range of learning styles.

## **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Malaysian ESL learners in tertiary education are categorized as ‘limited users’ and ‘very limited users’ of English in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET); 48 percent of the employers, reject candidates due to the inability to use English (Sani, 2015, p. 1). The Malaysian government published a study on graduate employability in 2012 and presented survey findings from Malaysian employers that state that the most common problems among graduates seeking jobs are poor command of the English language (55.8%), followed by poor character/attitude or personality (37.4%)



and unrealistic salary/benefits (33%) (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012). Studies in Malaysia indicate that even with 11 to 12 years of English in primary and secondary school, learners experience difficulties with regard to English competency even at tertiary level (Badiozaman, 2012).

In recent decades, the main aim of teaching English in Malaysia has shifted from mastering the linguistic features of the language to achieve the ability to use it for communicative purposes; Malaysia aims for its learners to be bilingual in BM and English (Chan & Abdullah, 2015). In fact, for university students in Malaysia, apart from their academic achievement, competency and proficiency in English are also regarded as highly desirable skills, particularly for working in multi-national companies and for studying abroad. Participants in a study at a public university in Malaysia significantly agreed that speaking skills were the most crucial skills to master prior to graduation and finding jobs (Singh, 2014).

Recent news in Malaysia has reported the declining standards of English among graduates despite the official stress and emphasis the target language. The 'New Straits Times Online' (2 November 2017) reported that the mastery of English language among school leavers was deemed unsatisfactory despite 13 years of formal English learning in school. Moreover, 'The Malay Mail Online', (12 August 2011) asserted that;

*It is said that Malaysia, which just a few generations ago, produced a host of English language proficient and articulate workers, technocrats, professionals, diplomats and leaders, should now be*

*struggling with a generation unable to communicate their thoughts, ideas and feelings coherently, clearly and competently in that very language.*

Aziz (2017) reported that learners across the country in government secondary schools and public and private universities were either unable or unwilling to speak in English, and this has been a long-standing issue. Relatedly, at HEI's "universities often find that some students are unable to use basic interpersonal language and therefore need to improve their ability before they can move on to the more demanding aspects of academic English." (Mustafa, 2018, p. 2)

Commenting on this issue, an earlier study conducted by the Central Bank of Malaysia (2002) also finds that Malaysian graduates are less skilled in terms of technical skills, problem-solving skills and communication skills, especially in English. Even though Malaysian citizens have acquaintance with the English language, poor proficiency in the target language is the primary cause of unemployment among fresh graduates (Nik, Azmi, Rusyda et al., 2012; Lim, Rich, and Harries, 2008; Heng & Tan, 2006).

The deteriorating standard of competence in English among undergraduates, particularly in speaking skills, is worrying despite the heightened importance of speaking skills among graduates at higher institutions. In 2016 Salary Surveys by Malaysia Employers' Federation (MEF), over 90% of respondents acknowledge the need for improvement of candidates' English capability in order for them to be employable (The Star Online, 2017). The consequence of poor proficiency in the target language among the younger generation potentially places them at a disadvantage end

of the system and in fear of being left behind by globalization. If increasing learners' proficiency is an important goal in L2 language teaching, then it is important for ESL teachers to be able to identify factors that influence learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) as a way to help improve learners' English language capability (Yousef, Jamil & Razak, 2013).

Unwillingness to communicate is viewed as a great concern among Malaysian public university undergraduates. In general, lack of WTC does not promote active participation in class discussion and interaction. Besides that, lack of WTC is often associated with failure to secure a job after graduating as it impedes active communication during job interviews, constricting the voluntary expression of ideas, opinions and critical judgement. In addition, upon graduating, poor proficiency limits learners' chances of joining multi-national companies or working abroad where English is used as the primary medium of communication. Similarly, national companies highly regard bilingual candidates, as they are often exposed to and interact with non-native or English speakers of other nationalities.

Kang argues (2005), generating WTC among learners will not only produce second language learners who are able to communicate in class but will create active language learners who are able to use the language in authentic situations outside of the classroom. Kang (2005) also points out that generating WTC would create autonomous language learners who are able to use the language in authentic situations and who can extend their language-learning efforts without the help of the teacher. Hence, this research specifically addresses the issue of ESL learners' WTC in the target language in relation to 'culture'.

## **1.2 Research Aim**

To explore English as a second language (ESL) learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the context of a Malaysian public university's English classrooms, in light of large and small culture influences.

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

To understand the varying socio-cultural influences on Malaysian university ESL learners' sense of self and how this may affect WTC in the classroom.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How do Malaysian university ESL students construct their sense of self in terms of cultural narratives: societal familial, institutional and classroom?
2. In what ways, if any, do the above narratives influences the students' WTC in a Malaysian university ESL classroom?

## **1.5 Scope of the study**

In order to answer these questions, the research utilizes qualitative research methods and uses an instrumental case study as the research design. Classroom non-participant observation, classroom participant observation and semi-structured interviews are the

primary qualitative research data triangulated and used to investigate the cultural influences on ESL learners' WTC. The participants in this study consisted of 100 ESL undergraduates in a public university in Malaysia who were of various ethnicities such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and indigenous Malay. They were in their third year of undergraduate study and were enrolled in various faculties such as the Faculty of Civil Engineering (FKA), the Faculty of Electrical Engineering (FKE), the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering (FKM), the Faculty of Chemical and Energy Engineering (FKT), the Faculty of Computing (FC), the Faculty of Management (FM) and the Faculty of Education (FP).

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

The following are the significance of the study;

1. Investigating the complexity of large and small culture influences on students' sense of self and their engagement with ESL within a post-colonial context. This contrasts with previous work from Holliday (1998) which was carried out in TESOL environments in the UK (English speaking country) where students came from disparate countries.
2. Generating a new conceptual framework that moves away from notions of essentialist large cultures and the significance of the small culture of the classroom. Here a complex interplay of large and small culture concepts helps to

inform our understanding of the ways in which diverse students engage with and challenge WTC within a post-colonial context.

## **1.7 Outline of the Thesis**

### **1.7.1 Chapter 2 and Chapter 3**

Chapters 2 and 3 provide a review of key literature and are presented as ‘Contextualization of the Study’ and the ‘Conceptualization of the Study’. These two chapters, record what has been discussed and accomplished by previous research studies in order to see how the focal issues have been investigated and what still needs to be investigated. The contextualization of the chapter begins with a discussion of Malaysia in terms of its national policies, ethnicities and national identity, historical post-colonial and cultural values which may influence the active formation of a unifying national culture and identity. Chapter 2 features WTC in L2 and discusses a model by MacIntyre et al., (1998) known as the *Heuristic Model of WTC*, as well as existing research on factors and antecedents of L2 WTC. The concepts of culture generally treated as relating to major groupings or known as the ‘large’ culture, is explained in contrast to the concept of ‘small’ culture. This section posits the complex interconnection of cultural influences as presented in an existing ‘Small Culture Formation’ model by Holliday (1999) and Holliday’s ‘Host Culture Complex’ (1994). This discussion is then followed by the researcher’s hybridized conceptual framework based on the literature review, which is used as the rationale of the research methodology. It is worth noting that the conceptual framework built at this stage is

considered as an intermediate model and that a revised hybrid model is introduced in Chapter 7.

### **1.7.2 Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

To investigate WTC within this framework, the focus is to examine the influences of the large and small cultures within their context, which is the ESL classroom at a public university. This chapter outlines the research questions, gives an overview of the research design and the sampling and provides relevant backgrounds about the participants and the research instruments used in the study. Research triangulation, data collection procedures, and data analysis based on deductive and inductive analysis are outlined drawing from non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and classroom participant observations. The final section of this chapter considers important ethical issues related to the proposed research methods.

### **1.7.3 Chapter 5 and Chapter 6**

Chapter 5 (Findings 1) and Chapter 6 (Findings 2) describe the findings of the study. The presentation of the findings is organised around the literature-driven and data-supported conceptual framework developed for this study. Divided into two chapters, the findings focus on findings around ‘large’ culture (Findings 1) and ‘small’ culture (Findings 2). This organization was adopted to give readers a clearer understanding of the outcomes of the data analysis (‘large’ and ‘small’ culture influences), however, in

reality, the ‘large’ and ‘small’ culture concepts posit complex interactions which are discussed in the discussion chapters.

#### **1.7.4 Chapter 7: Discussion Part A and Chapter 8: Discussion Part B**

Chapter 6 (Discussion – Part A) and Chapter 7 (Discussion- Part B) discuss the dynamics of ‘large’ and ‘small’ culture influences towards learners’ WTC in L2 within the ESL classroom. Part A provides highlights of participants’ narratives in relation to their willingness to communicate and various participants exemplifying this. These profiles significantly contribute to the understanding of the newly developed ‘nested’ model of the ESL classroom and the large and small culture influences to learners’ WTC in English. Part B presents an in-depth discussion of the dynamics of the large and small culture influences believed to be impacting learners’ WTC in this context, both positively and negatively.

#### **1.7.5 Chapter 9: Conclusion and Recommendation**

Chapter 7 (Conclusion and Recommendation), is the final chapter which summarizes the findings that address all the research questions. This chapter emphasises how the findings from this study make an original contribution to the research in L2 WTC and the ESL teaching and learning in Malaysian ESL classes at a public university in Malaysia. Finally, this chapter discusses issues, which need further exploration, as well as limitations in the current study.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

English language learning in Malaysia has been shaped by its colonial histories, local politics and cultural traditions. The widespread use of English worldwide and the promotion of English assumed to be fundamental in education and in the professional domains raises complex issues involving different ethnic and social groups. Part A in this chapter highlights the context of the study, which focusses on English as a second language (ESL) learning at a public university and on specific national policies, national histories, ethnic and cultural issues.

#### **Part A: Context of Malaysia**

##### **2.1 Background of the context**

Malaysia is a developing country located in the Southeast Asian region which is populated by over 26 million people, represented by an ethnically diverse community consisting of Malays, Chinese, Indians and other non-Malay indigenous people residing in East Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. At present, Malays, who are mainly Muslims, make up the largest ethnic group, which constitutes 67.4 per cent of the

population, while 24.6 per cent are Chinese and 7.3 per cent are Indians (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2016).

Malaysian multi-culturalism specifically refers to ethnicity and religious plurality (Zaid, 2007). Apart from being ethnically diverse, it is also worth noting that Malaysia's rich cultural diversity was partly inherited through the extensive history of colonial occupancy which began with the Portuguese (1511) and continued with the Dutch (1641), the British (1824) and the Japanese (1941-1945). The British, however, ruled Malaysia the longest (almost 133 years) before and after the surrender of the Japanese occupation. They brought about vast transformation to Malaysia's economy, society, education and politics. The influx of migrants from China and India through the colonial economic agenda formed a complex socio-political landscape, which resulted a pluralistic society. This has led to structures and institutions that underpin the country's current economy, politics, social institutions and education system.

ESL classrooms at tertiary level, particularly in the context of this study, may potentially serve as a unique context as the typical classroom is generally made up of three distinct ethnicities (i.e. Malays, Chinese and Indian). Other minor ethnicities, which may also constitute the average ESL classroom, would potentially be the non-Malay indigenous people from the East Malaysian regions of Sabah and Sarawak. In most cases, learners are often identified according to their ethnicity as well as their names, age and gender in class registers.

Within the ESL classroom, learners will have the experience of learning English connected with other Malaysians within the political vision policy, which emphasizes national identity. They are likely, however, to have been influenced by the differentiation inherent in national strategies and the ideas of ‘large culture’ associated with it. These issues, particularly the ideas of large culture, will be further discussed in the following sub-sections. First, it is important to note that British colonialism not only influenced but also transformed and revolutionized Malaysia (known as Malaya before independence).

### **2.1.1 Colonialism and neo-colonialism**

The British brought about vast transformation to the Malaysian economy, social institutions, education and politics. An influx of labourers from China and India restructured the make-up of Malaysia’s population, making it multi-ethnic. British colonial economic policies and strategies steered a migration of a huge number of Chinese and Indians to work as labourers. It is possible that different ethnic groups were brought in in order “to practise ‘divide and rule’ policies that sowed fear and mistrust among the Malay, Chinese and Indian populations (Abraham, 1977, 1983; Cham, 1977; Loh, 1975; Stenson, 1980, as cited in Hirschman 1986). The Chinese originated mainly from southern China to work in the mining industries, while the Indians, from the north and south of India, (David and McLellan, 2014) worked as estate workers in rubber plantations, especially during the creation of the export economy by Chinese and European capitalists (Wong, 1965; Jackson, 1968, as cited in Hirschman, 1986). During the economic boom, the migration of the Chinese and Indian labourers almost outnumbered the total population of Malays in the west coast

states (Jackson, 1964, as cited in Hirschman, 1986). At the time of independence in 1957, the size of the non-Malay, population reached almost 3.5 million (Von Der Meheden, 1987).

The British colonials implemented a ‘divide and rule’ policy to maintain control over the multi-ethnic population, which resulted in a severe socioeconomic imbalance between the three major ethnic groups. Apparently, this imbalance, as it became the central concern in the governance of the state after independence and led to a government policy focused on a coherent national culture as part of the creation of a unified country. In general, the ‘divide and rule’ strategy resulted in ethnic groups living in their own neighbourhoods, following different occupations, practising their own religions and languages, operating their own schools and forming their own political organizations. The economic imbalance was what led to severe tension among the three major ethnicities.

*But colonial policies created an economy where occupations were closely associated with race. Chinese Malaysians dominated most of commerce, construction and industrial employment. The Malays were largely confined to farming and after independence to the civil service, security and uniformed services, especially the police and the military. The Indians provided the labour for the plantations. In 1969 this situation would lead to riots that traumatized the country and ushered in policies to eliminate the connection between occupation and race.*

(Tharoor, 2017, para. 10)

At this point, it is crucial to note that the *Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra* policy mentioned later in the following section tells a critical story of the ‘divide and rule’

concept of governance by the British authorities. Politically, after independence, rising concerns over the imbalance of the country's economic pie led the government to impose the *Bumiputra* (Malays and non-Malays indigenous group) and the *non-Bumiputra* (Chinese, Indians and others) policy to differentiate the *Bumiputra* from the other ethnic group as the 'sons-of-soil' (native) through the New Economic Policy (NEP). In fact, this strategy was viewed as necessary by the British as a way of curbing labour strikes and, most importantly, to ensure business continuity. (Hefner, 2001). Strategically, the British colonials made the Chinese in the city work in tin mining and commerce, and the Indians work on rubber estates while Malays were to remain in rural areas to continue working as fisherman and farmers. Essentially, it was reported "the British saw a need to accommodate sentiments related to mother tongue use" (Chan & Wong, 2004), perhaps to avoid unification that might challenge British colonialism. Consequently, this led to a segregation of communities according to economic function and to limited social interaction between ethnicities, which was often confined only to interactions in buying, and selling (functional purposes) (Ibrahim, 2007).

In fact, it was reported that the British colonialists purposely divided Malays into two groups: the elites who were educated and worked alongside the British colonials and those placed in rural settings who were segregated from any form of development. It was pointed out that;

*The children of the rural Malay families attended government-funded schools, which provided only four years of basic elementary education in the Malay language and the children of the Malay ruling elite generally attended the expensive English medium schools together with the children of the Europeans. Foremost among these was the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar, founded in*

*1905, which was administered along the lines of an English public school, and aimed to prepare the sons of privileged families for future government service. Chinese and Tamil vernacular language also began to grow in number in line with the increase in the Chinese and Indian school-aged children. While the vernacular school system served to reinforce the group identity of the different ethnic communities, attendance at English schools tended to weaken the traditional cultural loyalties.*

(Tharoor, 2017)

Malay elites were created to assist the British colonials in administering ‘Malaya’, typically to persuade other Malayan country-dwellers to exploit the country’s natural resources. This policy was also aimed at limiting any form of nationalism and unification among the group members, and at the same time could develop mistrust against the local elites by members of the group (Jamie Haji Jamil, 2005). Being the ‘native’ ethnicity in Malaya, the Malays in the rural areas began to fall behind in economy and education as compared to the Chinese who had direct opportunities in commerce within the economy; they, therefore, began to feel exploited by the British system of governance. It is known that, a grave racial riot took place on 13 May 1969, which highlighted the need to counter such imbalances. Consequently, “Malaysia pursued the model of dominant conformity stridently after the Sino-Malay riots of May 1969, believing that a dominant ethnic identity, Malay, could constitute the basis of national identity” (Lian, 1997).

### 2.1.2 Ethnicity and Identity

“National identity in Malaysia is defined by Malay culture and politically associated with ethno-nationalism whose goal is material advancement of Bumiputra in general and Malay-Bumiputra in particular” (Balasubramaniam, 2007). The New Economic Policy (NEP) aimed at restructuring Malaysian society to create a better economic balance; to reduce and eliminate race identification based on economic activity (Khairul Anwar, Jessica & Ahmad, 2015) which has taken place as the result of British colonisation. According to the Malaysian Constitution, Article 153 (Figure 2.1) below, explains the special position of the *Bumiputra*:

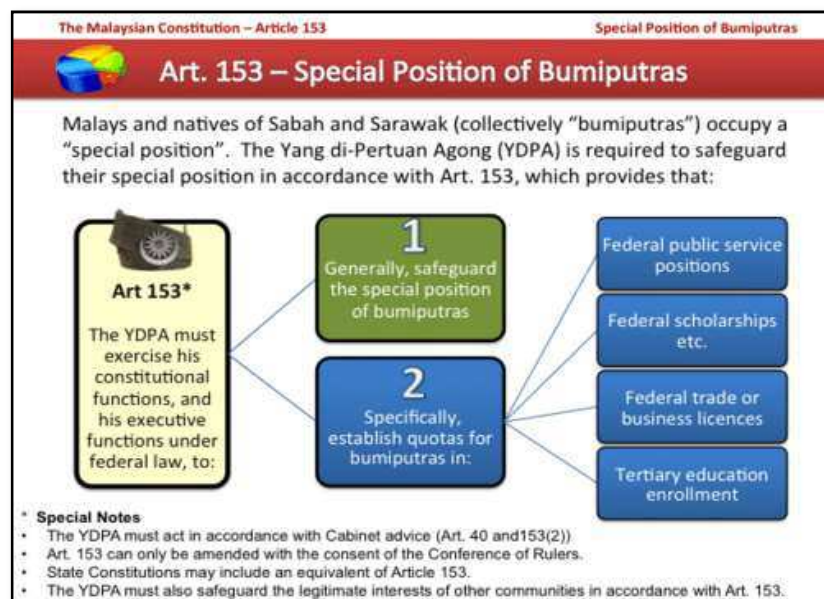


Figure 2.1 The Malaysian Constitution- Article 153

Source: Malaysia (2009). Constitution of Malaysia. Percetakan Malaysia Berhad: Kuala Lumpur

With protected rights for the *Bumiputra*, the rights of other ethnicities were placed within a smaller number of quotas in ‘federal public services positions’, ‘federal

scholarships’, ‘federal trade and business licenses’ and ‘tertiary education enrolment’. In other words, the policy gives preferential treatment to the *Bumiputra* in “access to public sector jobs, business licenses, rent opportunities, government contracts, educational scholarships and admission to public universities through the race-based quota system” (Balasubramaniam, 2007, p.35) Specific to rights in education, include scholarships, educational subsidies and loans, quotas, and exclusive admission to specific educational institutions (Pong, 1995).

The idea of national culture as socially-constructed by nationalism in order to create national unity, seems to have been aligned to the strategies taken by Malaysia in enforcing the identification of ethnicities by institutionalizing BM as the national language and Islam as the official religion of the country. Concurrently, it was also argued that the *Bumiputra* differentiated policy would also be viewed as reinforcing ethnic identification within the plural society where the Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak had protected rights over the other ethnicities. This protection of rights often creates tension between the *Bumiputra* and the *Non-Bumiputra*. Ibrahim (2007) asserts that Malaysian intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic issues related to *Bumiputra* and *Non-Bumiputra* remain the centre of debate and dissatisfaction within the multi-ethnic Malaysia.

For the government, the *Bumiputra* and *Non-Bumiputra* ethnic divide is viewed as crucial yet considered as delicate in the ‘authority-defined social reality’ (dominated by the *Bumiputra*) and in the ‘everyday social reality’ (the *Non-Bumiputra*) in the country (Shamsul & Daud (2006, p. 134). The “*Bumiputra*- defined cultural principle



that has privileged many aspects of *Bumiputra* culture as the ‘core’ of the Malaysian ‘national’ identity while recognizing, if peripherally, the cultural symbols of other ethnic groups” (Shamsul & Daud, 2006, p. 134). The concept of *Bumiputra* culture lies at the core of the Malaysian identity, with BM as the national language and Islam as the official religion (Ibrahim, Nazri and Buang, 2011, p. 1004). Other languages are also spoken in the country: Mandarin, Tamil, Punjabi and other non-Malay indigenous languages.

Arguably, although the concept of *Bumiputra* generally aims to promote a single national identity for the multi-ethnic society, the differentiated citizenship policy indirectly reinforces divisions between ethnicities, as the interests of the other ethnic groups appear to be undermined. Essentially this has led to distinct descriptions of each ethnicity alongside their interests and needs, prioritizing some but disadvantaging others in order to fulfil the government aims. Admittedly, these special privileges inevitably have forced wider divisions in ethnic identity in the nation-state. “NEP had been proven its success in reducing the economic difference, but there is still a lack in promoting better ethnic relationship between *Bumiputra* and *Non-Bumiputra*” (Shamsuddin, Ong and Ridzwan, 2015). Up until the present, their ethnicity remains an important identity for the multi-ethnic Malaysians. Tan (2008) believes that “the characteristics of Malaysian society, and its social and cultural groups, exist side by side in the same political domain and still maintain their distinctive cultures and traditions” (p.105). Tan (2000, p. 464) also notes “in Malaysia, it is not sufficient to be a Malaysian, one has to have an ethnic identity”.

## **Part B: English Language Development in Malaysia**

### **2.2 British Colonisation and English Language Development**

To fully understand how English has developed in Malaysia, it is important to trace the development of English language use in schools in Malaysia as a subject and as the frequent medium of instruction. The dominance of English as a second language in multi-ethnic Malaysia dates back to the era of British colonialism. Modern day Malaysia inherited their education system from the pre-independence period of British colonialism.

History suggests that, as early as the nineteenth century, the arrival of the British Empire was marked by the expansion of British colonisation in search of gold, glory and the propagation of the Christian gospel to South East Asia, including Malaysia (Hanapiah, 2004). The growing interests of the European imperialist expansion began in Southeast Asia and soon became focused on Malaya (known as Malaysia after Independence) due to its tin and later rubber industries (Hirschman, 1986). This created an economic boom around the Straits Settlement (Melaka, Penang and Singapore).

Increased use of the English language was evident as the British colonials gradually intervened and took control of administrative affairs in the traditional Malay states (Hanapiah, 2004). Understandably, this take over was eventually used as a subterfuge to take over the actual governance of these states. Hirschman (1986) points out that by “the fiction of assigning British advisors to the Malay Sultans, the colonial government

established direct administration over virtually all aspects of the government” (p.336).

British advances resulted immediate expansion within the local administrations.

In addition, the recruitment of locals in the collection of revenues, in road construction and in the supervisions of mines further established the presence of English language in Malaya as British officials communicated their orders in English to the local workers. (Hanapiah, 2004). Local Malays who could communicate in simple everyday English were also recruited to work with the British (Plat & Weber, 1980 in Hanapiah, 2004). The expansion of trade and commerce towards other ports such as Malacca and Singapore witnessed the arrival of traders from different parts of the world, forcing an increase in English usage as a common language for trading purposes. English was then officially established as the language of trade and commerce in Malaya after rules and regulations pertaining to trading activities were regulated by the British colonialists (Hanapiah, 2004). Consequently, these regulations inevitably replaced the Malay language (now known as Bahasa Malaysia), which had been used as the primary means of communication in earlier trading between the locals and foreign merchants.

Beyond doubt, to date, Malaysia has been striving towards becoming an independent Malaysia, free from the colonial imprints and standing for its own national identity. However, traces of the English colonial legacy remain, and the “authoritarian approach in British ruling is seen as setting the precedent to the political situation in contemporary Malaysia” (Case, 2004, p. 30). At present, modern-day educational development, in relation to English language teaching and learning in Malaysia, continues to be the government’s priority (Ho, 2003; MOE, 2012). Selvaraj (2010)

claims that English language development in Malaysia is often linked to the role of English as seen in relation to the implementation of the national language (BM) and the challenges of the implementation of policies, which often witness changes.

While BM remains the undisputable national language, English language has been linked to an instrumental value, in particular, to nation-building (Gill 2014; Hall, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2014). Fishman (1973 cited in Kirkpatrick, 2014) suggests that “Malay language provided the village road maps while English provided global ones” The subsections below discuss the major milestones to the implementation and development of education linked to English language teaching and learning which have been taking place in Malaysia.

### **2.2.1 Pre-Independence**

As mentioned earlier, the arrival of British companies in Penang, Melaka and Singapore to set up ports for business purposes, resulted in a switch from the Malay language to English as commercial transactions as activities gradually took place. In fact, by the 1950s many schools were opened as the commercial and business sector expanded. However, the education system established what was known as the ‘fragmented education system’ (Ahmad, 1998) as a consequence of the ‘divide and rule’ economic division of the British governing strategy. As mentioned earlier, the ‘divide and rule’ political strategy was purposely established to create distance between different ethnic groups and manifested itself in separate schooling for the three major ethnic groups: the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

Malay schools, attended by Malay families who were mostly farmers (i.e. paddy planters) (Darus, 2009) and fisherman, were largely located within the rural areas. Malay schools were typically orientated to a form of religious school known as ‘*Sekolah pondok*’, learning took place in ‘*surau*’ (small houses where Muslims perform daily prayers collectively) where children learnt basic living skills and the religious practices of being a Muslim (Koh, 2014). During colonialism, the British emphasis was more on primary education, as measures were introduced to prevent locals contesting the British administrative policy and system. As Maxwell (1921, p. 13, cited in Koh, 2014) states:

*..the aim of the government is not to turn out a few well educated youths, nor number of less well educated boys: rather it is to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been, and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his own lot in life fits with the scheme of life around him (p.107).*

Understandably, educating the locals was not the British agenda as it could pose a potential threat to the British powers. Unlike the Malays being left in the rural areas, the Chinese immigrants who were brought in by the British from China to be involved in mining and trade were strategically placed in urban or town areas. In addition to being funded by the Chinese associations from China, the school syllabus of these new Chinese schools established in Malaya modelled existing schools in China and taught Chinese classics in ancestral halls, temple precincts, or residences of a local leader. Modern Chinese school were established later as China went through reformation and modernisation (Koh, 2014).

At present most Chinese in Malaysia are bilingual, Chinese and English language are used interchangeably as their first language. On the other hand, Tamil schools, which were mainly located in rubber estates, had no financial aid to fund their schools as compared to Chinese schools. It was much later that they received funds from the Anglo-Tamil Christian missionary schools (Koh, 2014). Even though Indians were unable to attend English schools due to economic disparity (Darmi & Albion 2013), it was assumed the Indians' ability in speaking English then and now were much influenced by the Anglo-Tamil missionaries' interventions.

The Chinese and the Indian schools' curricula and teachers were from China and India, respectively (Sivapalan et al., 2015). Subsequently, the influx of Chinese and Indian economic migrants who began to establish their own schools, operated in their mother tongue, and neither reflected the standardized English curriculum (Foo & Richards 2004) nor any standardized objectives. Nonetheless, the aims of the English education system were purely to mobilize business and trade at the time of colonisation. As noted by Hirschman (1986), "the primary imperial interest was the maintenance of their trading position, both regionally and on the route to China" (p.333).

English schools (i.e. high schools and convents), set up by the British colonials, provided secular education with reference books specifically imported from the United Kingdom (Hanapiah, 2004). This became the primary reason for Malay families, particularly from less developed areas, to feel reluctant for their children to be educated there, fearing the influence of another faith (Christianity), since most of the English schools were run by missionaries (Koh, 2014). Students who did attend the English

schools were mainly Chinese and Malay elites (children of royal families, businessman and aristocrats) and the majority of them lived in the urban city areas (Darus, 2009). The British were reluctant to “teach English indiscriminately” (Loh, 1975, p. 15, as cited in Koh, 2014) as they feared more people would be “educated and discontented with their labouring lives” (Koh, 2014, p.99). As mentioned earlier, the sole purpose of English education and schools was mainly and crucially to assist the expansion of commercial and business activities. The number of English schools multiplied as commercial activities progressed and expanded.

Another expansion in English education which had a great impact on current English education in Malaysia was the introduction of the ‘Queen’s Scholarship’ in 1886. The scholarship was also offered to support a ‘pro-Malay’ policy and to encourage overseas higher education. Upon graduation, scholars embraced higher key positions working for the Malaysian civil services (Koh, 2014). Two ‘Queen’s Scholarships’ were awarded annually for the Malay elites (from English medium schools) to study abroad at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge (Malayan Union, 1947 in Koh, 2014).

In addition to assisting the British in administrative activities, in 1893, a leading English school known as the Victoria Institute (VI) was established to this end, with the intention of preparing students for jobs as educated clerks and at the same time preparing ‘elites’ for further education in England, to later hold positions in the administration upon graduation (Koh, 2014). With regard to this, Jomo (1991, cited in Hanapiah, 2004, p. 107) noted “English education was developed to train a workforce who are recognized by the British in view of the expanding capitalist sector.” In

addition to the expansion of British rule, in 1905, the ‘Malay College of Kuala Kangsar’ (MCKK), which was modelled on English schools, was built primarily for the Malay aristocrats with the prior aims to “build character and understanding of the important ideas of the English middle class, ways and habits of Englishmen as preparation of students’ future careers with British counterparts” (Koh, 2014). Apparently, the creation of the Malays educated governing class, and bureaucrats was important to mitigate between British administrations and roles not undertaken by the British.

Following the increase in number of English schools, the British faced growing demand in recruiting competent teachers who could serve in the English schools. Regarded as a ‘short term emergency’, it was found to be cheaper to recruit teachers from the locals and, in 1852, the British sent 300 Malayan English teachers to ‘Kirkby Teacher Training College’ near Liverpool to be trained. Significantly, it was reported that the program had “institutionalised the importance and the legitimacy of British-style education (acquired by teacher trainers) and subsequently transplanted into Malaysia’s education system” as most of the Kirkby educated teachers took up key positions in Malaysia’s education system upon independence (Koh, 2014, p. 113).

Near independence, the English subject was made compulsory in both Primary and Secondary education, except for vernacular schools (Malay, Chinese and Indian Schools), due to the lack of competent English teachers in the latter (Course of Studies Regulations 1956, II in Foo & Richards, 2013). Apart from being the language of administration, English became the language of instruction for these schools. As



reported, “it became the *lingua franca* for the educated: at that time a first- grade secondary certificate could only be obtained with the prerequisite of passing the English course” (Chan & Wong, 2004, p.34).

During the British colonisation period, changes of perceptions towards the position of the English language in the country, especially among the nationalists, were eventually stimulated right after the period of Japanese occupation in Malaya between 1942-1945. At this point, Malay nationalists felt the urge to be free from any form of colonialism. It was stated that;

*..when Japanese conquered Malaya in 1942 use of English was sidestepped, and it did not regain a similar footing even when the Japanese surrendered. After 1945, towards the end of World War 2, when the Japanese surrendered, the country faced severe political, economic and social trials as the Japanese took over the country from the British aggressively by force as the British were not ready for war. These Malayan nationalists questioned the need for colonial language, especially in the context of self-determinism that had become the new tune for progress.*

(Chan & Wong, 2004)

The impact of the Japanese occupation in Malaya ignited nationalism among the locals who began to look forward to an independent nation. British education was fragmented as to uphold the divide and rule policy, while Japanese education was propagating “love and loyalty towards the Japanese emperor” (Selvaraj, Anbalagan & Azlin, 2014). It was reported that the Japanese occupation had indirectly fostered hatred between the Malay and Chinese communities. As Cheah (1981, p. 108) reports,

*The greatest overall change produced by the Japanese administration was in the area of race relations. Although the Japanese did not deliberately foster racial conflicts between Malays and Chinese, their policies had this effect. Repressive measures against the Chinese lead to formation of a Chinese-dominated resistance movement: the 'pro-Malay' policy of the Japanese created an undercurrent of resentment and distrust among Chinese towards Malays.*

Tension between the Japanese and the Chinese can be traced back to Japan and China's political bonds. According to Akashi (1970, p. 88),

*..because the Chinese were loyal to China and friendly with Britain and generally hostile to Japan, as evidenced by their long record of anti-Japanese movement and boycott and wartime subversive activities, the military's view of the Chinese hardened.*

Consequently, economic, political and social progress were affected as ethnic tensions arose as the result of Japanese interventions. Within the unstable state of the nation, the British recognized the potential of educational and language policies as a means to foster unity (Ozog, 1993 cited in Phan, Kho & Chng, 2013). Following some nationalist movements, several scholarly measures were developed towards moulding national identity through the implementation of a common language for uniting the multi-ethnic citizens.

Later in 1956, The 'Razak Report' proposed by the late Tun Abdul Razak (Minister of Education in the Federation of Malaya interim Government) was formulated, responding to the urgent need to create a 'sense of identity through a society loyal to a nation, sharing common goals and aspiration' (Rajaretnam and Nalliah 1999 in Foo &

Richards, 2013). ‘The Razak Report’-1956) (The Razak Report 1956, p.3) underpinned Malaysia’s present education system through;

- the setting up of national schools with Malay as the medium of instruction and the ‘national-type school which could use either English, Chinese or Tamil as the medium of instruction.’
- the teaching of Malay and English as compulsory subjects,
- the introduction of Malay as the national language (language of unity),
- the use of English as a functional language for future employment and higher education,
- the introduction of a Common content syllabus leading to common examinations
- the stipulation that National Education Policy would be implemented within a period of 10 years

After more than 180 years of British colonisation, English was transformed from being the language of trade, towards being the language or medium of instruction in English medium schools. It became rooted and practised in various aspects of everyday rituals and norms. A significant number of local people communicated in English as employees in British companies. Substantial Malay elites also underwent experiences in an English education system either locally or abroad. Despite the belief that English led to economic and educational progress, English was also positioned and conceptualized as a symbol of European power. The vision the British colonialists had about themselves was that “they saw themselves as superior to the Asians, not only in economic terms but also in their unique capabilities to bring progress-politically, economically and ethically-to the world” (Hirschman, 1986, p. 347). This led to a nationalist move to be free from colonialism. In addition, the identification of schools

by ethnic group, the separate use of different mediums of instruction, the diverse curricula and distinct geographical locations in accordance with economic divisions critically led to unequal divisions within society between ethnicities (i.e. Malay, Chinese and Indian) at an early stage prior to independence. Consequently, such division and diversity of ethnicities continue to exist as the cause of disagreement in every national area, especially within the development of national language policy and national education policy.

### **2.2.2 Post-Independence**

Malaysia gained its independence from Britain in 1957. By the time of independence, it was recorded that the population of Malaya was 50 per cent Malay, 38 per cent Chinese and 11 per cent Indian and other minor indigenous groups (Phan Le Ha, Kho & Chng, 2013). *Bahasa Malaysia* was then announced as the official national language as a measure to “reduce the role and status of English and select one autochthonous language” (Gill, 2005, p.241). In 1960, the late Abdul Rahman Talib (first Minister of Education) set up a review committee known as the ‘Rahman Talib Report’ aimed at improving the implementations of the ‘The Razak Report’ (mentioned earlier) which set the foundation of the National Education Policy. The ‘Rahman Talib Report’ recommended the use of Bahasa Melayu (now Bahasa Malaysia) and English as the medium of instruction in schools in the hope that this would help unite the different races in Malaysia.

Both the Razak Report and the 'Rahman Talib Report formed the basis of the Educational Act 1961 (Foo & Richards, 2013). The Act spelt out the principal framework of education in Malaysia by defining schools, each of which used different mediums of instruction in Malaysia. Such schools were Malay medium schools, which were designated as national schools (public schools), vernacular (Chinese and Indians) schools and English medium schools designated as national-type schools (Foo & Richards 2014, p. 231).

Other provisions highlighted within the 1961 Educational Act were the implementation of a common curriculum and the administration of common public exams for schools (Ales, 2010). At this stage, despite the role given to Bahasa Malaysia as the national language, English was logically used as the second most important language and proclaimed as the language of administration and the medium of instruction for schools located in urban areas (i.e. English-medium schools) (Darus, 2009).

Eventually, in 1969, Malaysia experienced a severe inter-ethnic riot (known as the 13 May riot) which marked a progressive change within the education system. All English national-type schools were gradually converted to national schools (Malay medium) with all subjects to be taught in BM to further reinforce integration and unity among the three different ethnicities.

At university level, the transition to Bahasa Malaysia (BM) as the medium of instruction took place in 1983. English, would be taught only as a second language

(L2) subject in schools. A year later, English was officially accorded the status of the second language (L2) through the 'National Language Policy' (Darus, 2009). It was stated by Omar (1994), "the philosophy that underpins the language planning status in Malaysia was based on the notion of nationalism and 'nationism'. While nationalism attends to the national aspiration to a united race, 'nationism', supported by proficiency in the English language, is essential in Malaysia's rise to becoming a developing and industrial nation and to taking its place in internationalism" (p. 71).

#### **2.2.2.1 English in relation to the national policies**

As was discussed earlier, independence from Britain in 1957 offered freedom to the locals but the problems facing the new self-ruling government were challenging and demanding. Major concerns surfaced as to how to build a nation (politically, economically and socially) which was ethnically divided after the British colonials had skilfully enforced the divide-and-rule strategy to maintain control of the diverse ethnicities working for different economic functions. As for the current independent scenario, the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities live within their own neighbourhoods with Malays in villages, Chinese in towns and Indians in plantations. In addition to being geographically divided, the gaps between ethnicities are further reinforced by the use of different native languages, customs and religions and education systems. The effect of such strategic segregation is so detrimental that the socioeconomic status of each ethnicity differs to such an extent that it could be labelled and stereotyped, Chinese as rich businessmen, Malays as poor farmers and Indians as poor estate workers (Hirschman, 1986).

The ultimate measure to unite this segmented society was through the establishment of a national language policy. The language policy in Malaysia was said to be influenced by two different stages, each having different concerns: by the nationalist period which was “the post-independence period of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and the knowledge economy period of the 1990s and the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Gill and Kirkpatrick, 2013, p.83).

Critics agreed that BM as the medium of instruction was meant mainly to protect the ethnic Malay as the natives in Malaysia (Gill and Kirkpatrick, 2013; Phan, Kho and Chng, 2013, Gill, 2012, 2005). In addition, such a measure was critically viewed as a step “to provide Malays with the linguistic capital and greater economic opportunity” (Gill and Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 55). On the other hand, “it also meant the elimination of advantage that urban schools, which had mainly Chinese students and used English as the medium of instruction had over rural schools, which used Bahasa Malaysia, and were populated by Malay students” (Gill and Kirkpatrick, 2013, 55). Grave concern was expressed by the nationalists for the Malay community, as they were isolated in the village areas and were poor as compared to the Chinese who were mainly residing in the urban states to work as labourers in mining industries and as entrepreneurs (as discussed in the earlier section).

The Ministry of Education ‘language-in-education policy’ officially established BM as the medium of instruction in schools and higher institutions. University Malaya, the oldest university in Malaysia, which used English as its medium of instruction, took 18 years to be completely monolingual (Gill, 2005). Indeed, the use of English was

viewed as placing the national unity at stake. The move to institutionalize BM as the national language helped to uplift the status of the Malay community undermined during British colonisation. The current political situation, Bahasa Malaysia (BM) or the national language is still used as part of political agenda or propaganda to gain supporters. One of the most recent political party 'Pakatan Harapan- PH political manifesto during 2016 the national voting promised that;

*We reiterate our pledge as stated in the Pakatan Harapan Promise (9 January 2016) that we will:*

*Uphold the position and roles of our Constitutional Monarchy.*

*Uplift the status and usage of the Malay language in line with Article 152 of the Federal Constitution and to champion the Malay language as a language of knowledge and regional lingua franca; defend and strengthen the usage of mother tongue languages; and improve English proficiency to guarantee Malaysia's international competitiveness*

*Uphold the Federal Constitution; Islam as a religion of the Federation and other religions can be professed freely and harmoniously in line with Article 3; and champion the special position of the Malays and the Bumiputra of Sabah and Sarawak as well as the legitimate rights of all citizens in line with Article 153. 12*

*(Buku Harapan, pg. 11-12)*

The role of English needs to be discussed in conjunction with economic development. The next phase of national vision was to overcome ethnic divisions and become an economically developed country through the introduction of the NEP in 1971 in the light of national development implemented from 1971 to 1990. Other than economic development, the NEP's other immediate intention was to foster unity between the severely divided ethnicities, especially after the inter-ethnic tragedy on 13th May 1969, as mentioned earlier.



The second stage of economic development was known as the ‘National Development Policy’ (NDP), implemented from 1991-2000 to sustain the aims and efforts taken by the NEP, which proved rewarding, with numerous developments. However, at the same time, it devotedly strove to make Malaysia a fully developed and industrialized nation by 2020 through the ‘*Wawasan 2020*’ (Vision 2020) approach.

The third stage of the Malaysia succession plan towards fostering national development was ‘The National Vision’ (NVP) to be implemented between 2001-2020 and focusing on realizing the goals of Vision 2020 whilst at the same time building a resilient and competitive nation (Economic Planning Unit, 2013). World globalization had positioned Science and Technology as the primary indicator of advancement and modernization. In line with this, Malaysia had expressed a great acknowledgement of the importance of Science and Technology in parallel with globalization via all the national development policies mentioned above.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in eradicating poverty and eliminating race-based occupations through the NEP, there were two significant linguistic changes worth highlighting, which later brought major transformation to Malaysia’s English language policy. The first was the implementation of BM as the medium of instruction (MOI) to be used at all primary and secondary schools and eventually at universities. Secondly was the establishment of the *Bumiputra* policy to support Malays who were described as poor and disadvantaged. “Malays were to be lawyers and engineers, not just farmers and fisherman” (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p.6).

Through education, the government introduced the quota system mentioned in the earlier section, to open wider passages for the Malays to be enrolled at government-funded universities. The policy was successful, as more Malays could be recruited in the government services. From 1960-1990, the civil service was the largest employer of graduates from the public universities (Gill, 2005).

Conversely, this policy also resulted in an adverse effect, where some 40,000 graduates were left unemployed after the government restricted its employment of public university graduates (Mustapha, 2002 cited in Gill, 2005). The effect continued to be grave as most of the public university graduates were monolingual and their English proficiency level was poor since their medium of instruction was in BM, which, therefore, precluded them from being hired by private companies.

It is noted in Thirusanku and Melor (2012) that English has become the main mode of communication in Malaysia, as the language of business, since numerous firms are owned by the Chinese and Indians. Even though non-Malays face restrictions and limitations (due to the quota system) to join the public universities to pursue their education, graduating from private institutions where English is the medium of instruction has brought them (*Non-Bumiputra*) into the limelight as they are more competent in English and thus preferentially hired by the private companies. This is because the Chinese community has continued the use of the English language ever since British colonisation and because now English has maintained its importance in the private sector, (Phan, Kho & Chng, 2013, p. 64) aided by the global recognition of

the English language. As for the Malaysian government, the private sector played a key role in national development.

Another aspect that marks the lower competency in English level of the *Bumiputra* compared to the *Non-Bumiputra* was related to the socioeconomic status of the graduates. It was a common belief that undergraduates enrolled in the publicly-funded universities were from middle to lower class families as opposed to the upper-class families of private university undergraduates in which the use of English for communicative purposes was more prevalent (Phan, Kho & Chng, 2013).

#### **2.2.2.2 English in relation to Science and Technology**

Such milestones in determining language policy proved complex for a multi-ethnic Malaysia. Eventually, drastic measures were taken by the government to combat the insufficient degree of *Bumiputra* involvement in commerce and the economic domain. Concerns over the English language achievements of graduates in public universities (Malay-dominated) have frequently been announced. Recently former Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin expressed his deep concerns over the poor achievement of public university graduates who have gone through extended years of learning English. In one local newspaper, Subramaniam (2014) reports the former Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin stated:

*KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 9 — Something must be wrong with the education system if students are still struggling to communicate in English, despite nearly two decades of learning the subject, Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said. Puzzled by the poor grasp of the language among graduates, Muhyiddin, who is*

*also deputy prime minister, said upon graduating from universities, students "should not have a problem" with the basics. "I am baffled on why our children after completing pre-school, primary school, secondary school and tertiary education still cannot converse in English," he said at a dialogue on the Malaysia Education Blueprint on higher education today. "They start learning English at pre-schools, and then they move on to primary and secondary schools... they should have the basic knowledge, and they continue learning the language in universities... that is another four to five years... there should not be a problem," said Muhyiddin. When students move on to higher learning institutions, the focus should be on "upscaling, polishing and improving" the command of the language, he said. "I don't think the number of hours is insufficient if you take into account the 18 to 19 years of learning process," he said. "Something is not right," added the deputy prime minister.*

(The Malay Mail, 2014)

Gill (2006) notes that the government felt the urge to mend the policy by up scaling the *Bumiputra* in public universities with appropriate English competency so that they could be employed by the private sector and not be left behind. The implication of this policy to help the Malays to gain equal social and economic status resulted in various unexpected complexities.

The reintroduction of Science and Mathematics in English (ETeMs) in 2002 was considered one of the drastic measures announced by the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammed with a view to help the Malays after the problem of unemployment climaxed in 2002 (Gill, 2005). As mentioned before, the economic crisis resulted in a huge number (almost 40,000) of public university graduates being left unemployed. Private companies were in favour of employing undergraduates from private higher learning institutions, as they were more proficient in English.

However, the ETeMs policy was short-lived and was reversed after studies on the effectiveness of ETeMS, among other findings, revealed deleterious implications to learners from the rural areas, who were mostly Malays (Gill, 2012). Apparently, Malays residing in the rural areas generally possessed a lower English competency level compared to the urban school learners.

It was clear that, the reversion to BM as the MOI in Science and Mathematics, however, received a mixed response from political parties, academics, scholars, and the community in general. The step was crucial as it was viewed as protecting the dominant ethnic group-the Malays. To comply with the preference of the private sector, the use of English as the medium of instruction at university level was highly regarded in all fields and courses.

At this stage, it is clear that the establishment of a language policy in Malaysia circles around the preservation of the Malay identity and development (Kirkpatrick, 2010) and of Malay empowerment to administer the nation. Lowe and Khattab, (2003, p. 219) expressed the complexity of the English and BM situational conflict as follows:

*Globalization was to pose a dilemma for policy planners. The success in having a national language resulted in the Malays-the race it was designed help- being disadvantaged. The current policy, therefore, had to be substituted with one which in fact was directly opposed to the earlier policy. English is now to be propagated amongst the population schooled only in Malay and with a vested interest in its continued dominance (p. 88-89).*

The Malay ethnic group felt disadvantaged, and in some cases, the Chinese observed such initiative as politically challenging (Tan, 2010). The medium of instruction in

English as viewed by the nationalists, was potentially capable of erasing the Chinese education system (Gill, 2006). The move towards the medium of instruction in English has never been an easy task for the Malaysian government to balance in order to fulfil the needs of its multi-ethnic nation.

Ever since independence, the education sector has been the major driving force towards unity and nation-building. It was reported that “as early as 1980, the Malaysian federal government’s expenditures on primary and secondary education, as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), was the highest in East Asia, being on par with or higher than top-performing systems like Singapore, Japan and South Korea” (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3). Given the need for national development and to adhere to globalization trends, the NEP, NDP and NVP positioned English as having a critical role to play leading towards Malaysia’s progress and development. Since the 1980s, it was reported that Malaysia, through its multinational companies, had managed to attract foreign investors for whom English was the medium of communication (Puteh, 2010 in Phan, Kho & Chng, 2013).

Corresponding to such positive foreign participation, Malaysia introduced the Education Act of 1996, allowing the use of English as the MOI specifically for technical subjects on post-secondary courses (Phan, Kho & Chng, 2013). Prime Minister Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad stated;

*We have to trade with Europeans and Americans more and more.  
We need to communicate effectively with them. If we can only speak  
Bahasa Malaysia, who is going to ever understand us?*

(The Star, 26 June 1990 cited in Pennycook, 1994, p. 202)

The above trend clearly suggests that English carries an instrumental function in Malaysia in view of world-class national development, thus allowing it to become the second most important language in Malaysia. Such a trend was adopted at Malaysia HEIs through its policies and approaches and will be discussed in the section: '*Institutional Identity*' in the following chapter. Malaysia 'Vision 2020' (national development plan) strategically upholds Science and Technology as one of its nine goals or challenges yet to be addressed. Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammad stated (1991, para. 5);

*By the year 2020, Malaysia can be a united nation, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient.*

From the linguistic aspect, the challenge to establish a scientific society was addressed via the reintroduction of teaching Science and Mathematics at primary and secondary levels. The government in 2003 also viewed the urgency to teach the Science and Mathematics subjects in English, as a method of equipping learners with scientific and technical terminology and the transfer of scientific and technical knowledge.

This measure was found crucial due to reports of lack of interest towards Science and Mathematics reflected by learners in public schools. According to Lee (1999), because students at the secondary school level can choose their subjects, most of them show a greater tendency towards the subjects in the social sciences as compared to pure science subjects. "The ratio of students who opted for science subjects to those who chose non-science subjects has dropped to an all-time low of 22:78 in 1993" (Ministry

of Education, 1994). The government was concerned that such circumstances might threaten Vision 2020 by creating a shortage of scientific and technical experts, thus the science subject was reintroduced into the primary school curriculum in 1993 as a separate and distinct subject. Under the KBSR curriculum, Science was taught by a multidisciplinary approach via the subject called *Alam dan Manusia (Man and His Environment)* (Lee, 1999).

In 1995, the Ministry of Education announced that the English paper for the SPM examination (which is the equivalent of O-level) would be upgraded by increasing its level of difficulty through the incorporation of some elements from another more advanced English paper. At tertiary level, the education system played a huge role in supplying human resources for economic growth (Lee, 1999). As Omar (1995, as cited in Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003) reported, it was proposed by the Malaysian government that English language should be used, rather than BM, as the medium of instructions in university courses in scientific and technical subjects. In their efforts to accelerate measures towards achieving a fully developed nation in 2020, the government proactively introduced the Government Transformation Programme (GTP), which targeted specific areas that required immediate measures to achieve development by 2014 including the education sector. The GTP underlined:

*In 2014, the GTP continued to deliver in areas that mattered most to Malaysians, such as improving the living standards for all, elevating lives in the rural areas through the provision of basic infrastructure and economic opportunities, assuring quality education for our children, improving the accessibility and connectivity of our urban public transport infrastructure for better commuting, creating a safe environment for all, and promoting accountability and ethical practice, as well as openness to greater accountability and transparency in Government institutions.*



*(Economic Planning Unit, 2014, p.36)*

Eventually, Malaysia was reported to have progressed tremendously since the announcement of Vision 2020 in 1991.

*During the period 1991-2008, the Malaysian economy grew at an average rate of 6.2% p.a. We perform better than many developed economies such as the European Union, Japan and the United States of America. (GTP Roadmap, 2010, p.9).*

The use of English as the second language runs parallel with the progress of Malaysia's economic progress, and currently, English is viewed as the language of progress. English has been segmented into various domains such as English for technical purposes, English for international communicative purposes, and for trade. English has also been viewed as the language being promoted for the window of technology and development. These different domains of English have been implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education (HEIs) as important tools towards development, be it at national or international level. Some of the significant domains in the use of English in Malaysia interlock with the domains of business, employment, education, politics, tourism, law, media and translation (Hanapiah, 2004, p. 108).

Through this section, we can see that, through Vision 2020, the education system has been given an important task to play in supplying professional, skilled, and technically and scientifically up-to-date human resources for future economic growth. In reflection of Malaysia's willingness to be a part of global competitiveness, much support for English for economic development reasons has been provided, especially

through the educational platform, from as early as primary education level to tertiary education level. The government has implemented the language-in-education strategy as the primary means of promoting the national language-Malay (unifying tool) and English (development) (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003). It is fair to say that English has played an integral part in Malaysia's nation-building process. This process was undoubtedly challenging and perplexing, while at the same time inspiring.

### **2.2.2.3 English in relation to public higher education in Malaysia (PHEIs)**

The transition to the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed major transformations within the education system through the effects of globalization, in order to produce the nation's human capital that could work in the world job market. English has become an essential mechanism by which to communicate and access information. The far-reaching implication of globalization observed that the education system was no longer viewed as a form of public service, but regarded as a "commodity to be bought and sold for profit" (Kassim, 2013, p. 47); hence the internationalization of education by the public and private higher institutions became imperative for Malaysia's expanding economy (Kassim, 2013).

The 2007 National Strategic Plan for Higher Education (NSPH) of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) defined the internationalization of HEIs through accelerating the quality of education, in order to function as an international hub for education within the region of South-East Asia (MOHE, 2007). Measures taken by most HEIs to realize the mission are by producing compatible graduates who are able

to work at local and international level, increasing the intake of international students and staff, and building networks with universities abroad for research and teaching and learning purposes. Statistics published by UNESCO show that in 2014 Malaysia was in 12<sup>th</sup> place in the world for attracting international students. Up to 2014, as many as 63,621 international students registered themselves in Malaysian universities, overtaking South Korea and Singapore (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2014).

Apart from the increasing number of foreign students in local universities, foreign university branches were also established as measures towards the internationalization of education. As of now, Malaysia has been acknowledged as an international education hub for the region of South-East Asia (Selvaraj, Anbalagan and Azlin, 2014). Despite the growing interest in moving towards the internationalization of education and English as the medium of instruction, the move could to a certain degree potentially discriminate against or disadvantage certain Malaysian learners, particularly those with very little exposure to the target language.

To date, Malaysia HEIs consist of 20 public universities, 33 polytechnics, 91 public community colleges, 70 private universities, 410 private colleges, 34 private university colleges, 5 foreign university branch campuses and 15 Higher Institution Centre's for Excellence (HiCOE) (Ministry of Education, 2015) and are expected to grow even further. Apart from that, various higher institutions from the US, the UK, Australia, France, Germany, New Zealand and Canada have offered twinning and franchised degree programs via partnerships with Malaysian universities and colleges (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009). The growing number of higher institutions, colleges and

degrees offered reflects the imperative role HEIs play in Malaysian socioeconomic development, while at the same time suggesting the prevalent measures Malaysia is adopting are geared towards a developed and fully industrialized nation. With such educational transformation, the ESL classroom inevitably embraces the changing nature of the linguistic demands of the English language and the arrival of learners of diverse cultures.

As mentioned before, Malaysian Higher Institutions (HEIs) have played a critical role in nation-building. The Third Malaysia Plan, which was implemented from 1976 to 1980, stated that “Bahasa Malaysia is the basis of national integration” and, at the same time, stated that “measures will be taken to ensure that English is taught as a strong second language” (Government of Malaysia 1876, p. 386). It is well acknowledged that modernization and scientific and technological advancement run parallel with globalization, in which English has monopolised the means of world communication transfer. The identity of Malaysian Higher Institutions (HEIs) has been greatly transformed from a form of education for the elites, towards education for business and global competition (Grapragasem, Krishnan and Mansor, 2014).

Conforming to this scenario, English has reclaimed its status and prestige as the medium of instruction over BM (as the MOI at schools and HEIs) at HEIs through changes of policies and strategies adopted to cope with the demanding global economic revolution. Having to announce the goals of ‘Vision 2020’ in 1991, HEIs, which had been determiners in the country’s development, were empowered with a greater role as key players in realizing Malaysia’s aspiration to become a fully

industrialized nation in 2020 and beyond. Thus, it was crucial for HEIs to be able to produce a highly-skilled, knowledgeable and competent English-speaking human capital to take part in the world's knowledge economy (k-economy) era which emerged at the beginning of 1990's and the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century (Gill, 2006).

Apart from globalization, it is worth mentioning that the upscaling of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in Malaysia HEIs and around the globe was connected to the high potential ability of HEIs as a 'money-making' industry (Gill and Kirkpatrick, 2013). Indeed, English is a crucial component to support the HEI's transformation into an international educational hub, attracting international students and staff. Additionally, the importance of being published and cited internationally also requires very competent use of English. In short, not only does English play a major role within the world economy, but it has also transformed the education platform into a profit-making industry. Lee (2004) asserts that while "universities are placing emphasis on the production of knowledge as a marketable good and saleable commodity, universities are engaged with market-related activities" (p. 36-37). Thus, education no longer serves only its traditional role as transmitting knowledge.

As of now, Malaysia has been recognized as an international education hub for the region of South-East Asia (Grapragasem, Krishnan, Mansor, 2014). In achieving this, English language is deemed to be confirmed as the primary means of communication within the Malaysia higher education. Statistics from UNESCO show that in 2014, among all places around the globe, Malaysia was in 12<sup>th</sup> place for attracting international students. Up to 2014, as many as 63,621 international students had

registered themselves in Malaysian universities, ahead of their South Korean and Singapore (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2014). As reported in Gill (2004, 2013), Malaysia was one of the earliest Asian countries to “develop transnational private higher education opportunities for its citizens and to develop the nation as a regional hub for education” (p. 140).

The k-economy period of the 1990’s and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Vision 2020 and the establishment of Malaysia HEIs as an international education hub, have enforced the transformation of public universities towards English as the medium of instruction (EMI) (Gill, 2006). It took more than 30 years of enormous effort and resources for BM to be accepted and established as the language of education, especially in the field of science and technology (Gill, 2006). Despite the efforts, the shift towards EMI in HEIs was viewed positively from the perspectives of ‘knowledge-driven nationalism’ and ‘development-oriented nationalism’ proposed by Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammed. He mentioned that:

*We need to move from the extreme form the nationalism which concentrates on being a language nationalist only, not a knowledge nationalist, not a development-oriented nationalist. I feel that we should be a development-oriented nationalist. We want our people to succeed, to be able to stand tall, to be respected by the rest of the world. Not to be people with no knowledge of science and technology, very poor, very backwards, working as servants to other people. If we have no knowledge, we will be servants to those with knowledge.*

*(personal communication with Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammed cited in Gill 2012, p.53)*

Without doubt, the switch to EMI was confronted by numerous challenges, especially by nationalists who strongly perceived English as a threat to the Malay language and

culture and national unity. However, globalization, internationalization and the rapid advancement of science and technology have made it impossible for HEIs and the government in general to ignore the force. Indeed, on a more positive note, it was suggested that BM could be positioned as the language of ‘strategic neutrality’ as Malaysians are able to promote the usage of the language with the global community (Wee, 2010 as cited in Phan, Kho and Chng, 2013). To further justify the action, the Ministry of Education (2012) also suggested that English language should not be a threat as EMI could be the selling point in promoting Malaysian universities and colleges as an international education hub. BM will continue to be developed as an intellectual language at par with the advancement of science and technology (Gill, 2006).

Drawing attention to the reconceptualization of HEIs mentioned earlier, Grapragasem, Krishnan, Mansor’s (2014) studies have demonstrated an overview of the current trends in Malaysia HEI policy and practice which has further illustrated the status and role of English. Among the current trends involved in the reconceptualization of the HEIs in Malaysia are *Globalization, Teaching and Learning, Governance* and *Knowledge-Based Society*.

*Globalization* clearly suggests that all HEIs were largely driven to produce graduates who were not only high in quality, equipped with the right skills and naturally competitive at national and international level but equally importantly, must possess an overall proficiency in English. Significantly, it was reported by experts that in addition other factors (i.e. lack of professional etiquette, poor problem- solving

abilities and specific job skills) a poor command of English as a communication ability was the stumbling block to graduates in being employed. (Grapragasem, Krishnan, Mansor, 2014).

The second trend suggests that *teaching and learning* at HEIs are adopting the latest techniques and technology, (Grapragasem, Krishnan, Mansor, 2014) and English as the medium for instruction, especially for courses in the field of Science and Technology (Gill, 2006). The switch to EMI was unclear to begin with, as there was no written documentation to support that directive from the government. The reason behind this was that it was generally assumed that an official written document that records the change of policy to the use of English as the medium of instruction was “an act of betrayal” (Gill, 2006) to the National Language Policy which reinstated Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction for primary, secondary and tertiary level education. Even though the change of policy to EMI was unclear to start off with, gradual changes to the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English were taking place. For instance, ‘Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia’ began to implement the teaching of science and mathematics courses in English through six gradual stages beginning in 2004/2005 until 2009/2010 (Gill, 2006).

*Governance* as the third trend describes the efforts made by the government through the Ministry of Education (MOE) in encouraging the setting up of private universities and colleges while at the same time needing to adhere to the needs and aspiration of the government. Lee (2004) notes, globalization has forced the government to cut costs in many of its expenditures including the education sector as a means of “retrench(ing)



the welfare state” (p.32) in order to promote international economic competitiveness. This was another reason that knowledge was viewed as a commodity (as noted earlier).

HEIs are consistently being commercialized and privatized as one of the measures to generate revenues. Public universities such as *Universiti Malaya*, *Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*, *Universiti Sains Malaysia*, *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* and *Universiti Putra Malaysia* were also given full autonomy by 2015 (Grapragasem, Krishnan, Mansor, 2014). On the other side of the coin, such measures reinforce the establishment of highly competitive and high quality HEIs to fit the era of internationalization and globalization. Thus, comprehensive use of the English language in teaching, learning, publications and research activities has become the prevalent means of instruction and communication to address such demands and to compete with other countries.

Subsequently, Malaysia shifted from the p-economy (production-oriented economy) to the k-economy. (Grapragasem, Krishnan, Mansor, 2014) A *knowledge-based society* (fourth trend) embraces the idea of producing ‘skilled and knowledgeable human capital’ through, for example, the use of ICT, collaborations with industries and self-directed (i.e. online) learning strategies. “The P-Economy demands a brawn-intensive, disciplined workforce. The K-economy demands a brain-intensive, thinking, creative, innovative and disciplined workforce.” (A report on the National Brains Trust on Education, 2002, p. 1, as cited in Gill, 2005, p. 251).

In describing the world k-economy, Groddol (2006) demonstrates how shifts within the world economy have taken place through research and development (R&D) by

‘Business Process Outsourcing’ BPO (the outsourcing of services to countries with cheaper labour fees). Malaysia has been in the top three countries for BPO after India and China. With regard to English, the international outsourcing of services has brought about, and reinforced English as the medium of communication as most of the offshore contracts come from English speaking corporations.

*R&D is among the highest value-added activities undertaken by firms. Its internationalization affects the allocation of knowledge and human resources across countries and creates links between domestic actors and the R&D activities of TNCs. It deepens technology transfer— from simply transferring the results of innovation to transferring the innovation process itself.*

(UNCTAD, 2005, p. 179)

It is expected that learners in HEIs are proficient in English in order to access books and articles written in English. “There are over 100,000 scientific journals in the world, and this number is increasing at the rate of 5000 articles per day adding to the 30 million existing” (Martel, 2001, p.51 cited in Gill, 2005 p. 252). As Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammad, the previous Prime Minister insightfully said:

*Education is for the purpose of acquiring knowledge. The most important thing is the acquisition of knowledge. If you have to use a language which makes the knowledge more easily accessible, you should use the language. Historically, the Europeans learnt Arabic in order to access the knowledge of the Arabs [...] but because their work they also learnt Greek in order to access the language and knowledge [...], so if you want knowledge you have to acquire the language in which the knowledge is available. Our education system is like any other education system. It’s meant to enable us to acquire knowledge. If we have the knowledge available in the national language, by all means, go ahead, but the fact is that in science, the research that is being done is moving at a very fast pace. Everyday literally, thousands of papers on research are being published, and practically all of them are in English. To translate English into Bahasa would require a person with three skills. Skills in the two languages and skills in the subject that is to be translated and we don’t have many people who are qualified to do that or wished to do that. That is why it is easier if you learn English, and the students*

*can have direct access to all the knowledge that is available in English”.*

(Interview conducted by Gill, 16 June 2005 cited in Gill 2007, p 109).

This view of the importance of English to the nation, at a time of globalization and internationalization, has become the driving factor towards the reconceptualization of HEIs in Malaysia; the role of English is undeniably predominant and vital for the nation in order to become a fully industrialized nation by 2020. As of now, vision 2020 has been revised to Vision 2025 after revamping several policies (The Star, 2018). At this stage, it is also relatively acceptable to assume that to bring about such a new identity of HEIs in Malaysia, the English language has become the central agenda to be infused through the implementation of EMI in teaching and learning activities and through research and development and publications.

English at HEIs also accelerates learners’ ability to have a good grasp of ICT in doing research and assignments, while at the same time being able to attract a greater number of international students. Universities are placing greater emphasis on ‘academia’ (the academic community) where not only are knowledgeable and competent staff important but also where efforts in research and development (R&D) are crucial.

In 2020, it was stipulated that Malaysia is in need of 493, 830 workers, comprising researchers, engineers and scientists (Grapragasem, Krishnan and Mansor, 2014). With this in mind, it is wise to consider English at higher institutions as echoing Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammed’s concept of ‘knowledge-driven nationalism’

and ‘development-oriented nationalism’, as mentioned earlier. “The importance of English gives one added prestige as well as a means of personal advancement in the professional and academic field” (Omar, 1982, p. 9).

At a more micro-level, the aims of ESL at tertiary education are to enable students to communicate effectively in their professions and to be employed by reputable companies, perhaps multinational companies, upon graduation, while the national perspective aims at learners being able to compete in the global market and contributing to and generating the country’s economic development as a long term investment. (Pandian, 2014)

At this point, ESL teachers not only function as traditional teachers in the ESL classroom but, most importantly, as curriculum planners, organizers and researchers to meet the missions and visions of the country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The roles of higher institutions and ESL teachers are far more complex than language policy planners might have originally imagined, as they have to create a new language classroom environment where learners are able to acknowledge diversity in global spaces, foster innovative culture and be able to think critically.

Current research in English at higher institutions reveals that more effort is needed to improve English language teaching to enable students to fulfil tasks being performed at workplaces, which require a high degree of speaking ability (Talif and Noor, 2009). The research emphasizes the existing gap and the mismatch between workplace communication needs and the English being taught at HEIs. It suggests that industries

require more productive skills from their employees, such as speaking, in order to speak to local or foreign managers, clients and colleagues. HEIs are placing too much emphasis on other language skills, such as reading skills, which were found unnecessary for workplace or industrial purposes (Talif and Noor, 2009).

Another study also suggested that English teachers, particularly those teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should collaborate with subject content teachers who could provide knowledge and skills valuable to the learners (Horn, Stoller and Robinson, 2008). It is highly recommended that individuals working in different contexts in the workplace require different sets of English. (Lethonen and Karjailainen, 2008, as cited in Mohamed, Kassim, Radzuan et al., 2014, p.6).

On the other hand, it could be argued the much use of English at HEIs have been observed as a site of linguistic contestation. Learners of various backgrounds may feel pressured by the increased importance attached to English language learning at HEIs, and thus some may find it difficult and challenging and their urge to excel in the language may be affected, resulting in a feeling of defeat and isolation from other students or by a desire to give up, especially when lacking the opportunities to be exposed more to the language reference. This particularly applies to those who face English language anxiety and reticence while learning the target language (Darmi and Albion, 2013).

Much credit should be given especially to the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammad who during his two decades of governance, has been able to transform

Malaysia from an underdeveloped country which first achieved developing country status and later aimed at becoming a fully developed nation in 2020. Dato' Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, the third prime minister commented;

*Malaysia has been a successful developing country and is forging ahead to become a developed nation in its own mould. In order to be more successful, our nation has to be managed effectively, and its weaknesses and shortcomings have to be overcome. A major challenge it has to address in this endeavour is the strengthening of ethics and integrity.*

(National Integrity Plan, 2008)

Despite English being highly valued in the country's development, this trend masked underlying conflicts and dilemmas in relation to ethnicity and identity, particularly among the dominant ethnicity, the Malays (Rajadurai, 2010). Omar (2010) pointed out that linguistic identity of a Malay community very much lies in the use of the Malay language, in contrast to the Chinese and Indians who prefer English for its instrumental value, prestige and perceived neutrality. The following section seeks to highlight the role of English in relation to ethnicity and identity within the neo-independence era.

#### **2.2.2.4 English in relation to ethnicity and identity**

Theoretically, the make-up of the ESL classroom at Malaysia's HEIs idealistically reflects the composition of Malaysian society, which is diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, customs and norms. The pluralistic nature of Malaysian society comprises three clearly distinct ethnicities: which are the Malays, Chinese and Indians. The indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak and the indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia are also part of Malaysia's pluralistic society. The indigenous people of

Peninsular Malaysia include the '*Orang Asli*' from the tribes of *Mah Meri*, *Jakuns* and *Semai*, who claim to have been residing in the Peninsula Malaysia far longer than the Malays (David and McLellan, 2014). Sabah indigenous people consist of a majority of *Kadazandusun* and *Bajau* while the *Iban* and *Bidayuh* are settled in Sarawak.

The British colonial economic policies and strategies initiated the migration of a huge number of Chinese and Indians to work as labourers. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese were brought to work in the mining industries while the Indians were brought (David and McLellan, 2014) to work as estate workers in rubber plantations (Wong, 1965; Jackson; 1968 cited in Hirschman, 1986).

At present, after more than fifty years of independence, Malays, who are mainly Muslims, make up the largest ethnic group, which constitutes 67.4 per cent of the population, while 24.6 per cent are Chinese and 7.3 per cent are Indians (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2016). According to Shamsul (2015), the concept of diversity in Malaysia could be viewed from the three viewpoints: positive, negative and moderate. The positive viewpoints celebrate diversity in aesthetic and commercial terms (in tourism), while the negative viewpoints expose the socio-political differences between the different ethnicities. The moderate viewpoint, however, is viewed as an idealistic ideology expressing the aspiration of becoming 'one country, one nation and one language' (p. 4). A study by Husin (2011) on the concept of '1 Malaysia' reveals that 'deep-rooted ethnic sentiments' and findings suggest that fostering unity among the people of this country is not easy to realize (p.233).

The post-colonial administrative government, as mentioned earlier, through the National Economic Policy (NEP), introduced the *Bumiputra and Non-Bumiputra* classification in an effort to eradicate the economic labelling accorded to ethnicities and to eradicate poverty after the British established an economic system that created a sharp division of wealth between the Chinese, Malay and Indians. The socioeconomic settings meant that the Chinese, who mainly resided in the urban areas, worked in the mining industries and took part in commerce. They were wealthy while the majority of the Malays were poor and mostly resided in rural areas as farmers. Similarly, the Indians work on sugarcane, coffee and rubber plantations

*In the development of human resources, we cannot afford to neglect half the population, i.e. the Bumiputra. If they are not brought into the mainstream, if their potentials are not fully developed, if they are allowed to be a millstone around the national neck, then our progress is going to be retarded by that much. No nation can achieve full progress with only half its human resources harnessed. What may be considered a burden now, can with the correct attitude and management be the force that lightens our burden and hastens our progress. The Bumiputras must play their part fully in the achievement of the national goal.*

*(Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammed, 1991)*

While aiming to eliminate racism and division, the NEP was argued to have further deepened the social divisions among different ethnicities within Malaysian society. Hirschman (1987, p.570) stated that “although many of the outward forms of racist thinking have been eliminated from census classification in the post-independence era, the residue of racial ideology continues to haunt contemporary Malaysia” (p.100).

With regard to racial challenges, racial stereotypes, which were recorded to have been made as early as the beginning of British colonisation has impacted the country up to



the present day. Hirschman (1986) claims that “direct colonial rule brought European racial theory and constructed a social and economic order structured by race” (p.330). The Malays were conceived of and portrayed as lazy and uninterested in economic gain. It was said that “the Malays could be described as carefree or indolent, contented or unambitious, pleasure-loving or idle. To some extent, all of this would be true” (Slimming, 1969, p. 7, cited in Hirschman, 1986).

On the other hand, the Chinese were viewed with grudging admiration for their entrepreneurism (Hirschman, 1986, p. 346) along with the description of their race (Chinese) as “civilization of the highest kind” (Walter Adamson in Kratoska, 1983, p. 76-77 cited in Hirschman, 1986, p. 346). However, resentment was also expressed against the Chinese as they were viewed as opportunists and described as “the bees who suck the honey from every profitable undertaking” (Hirschman, 1986, p. 346). The Indians, however, were compared to the Chinese and viewed as a source of cheap and docile labour (Hirschman, 1986, p. 347). Over time the dominant ideology or stereotyping against Malay, Chinese and Indians proposed by the British colonials was legitimized and influenced the way each group viewed each other. (Hirschman, 1986, p. 347).

It was argued that the presence of differences and gaps between the three major races was further narrowed or widened by the “structure of constraints and opportunities shaped by the colonial rules” (Hirschman, 1986, p. 348). For example, the British colonials were also reported to have no initiatives towards integration and harmony among ethnic groups. Instead, the British infused the belief that the Chinese were not

part of Malayan citizenship. According to Hirschman (1986), the Chinese and Indians were denied access to agriculture through the land policies and only the Malay aristocrats, with their colonial advisors, had access to politics and governance. This has led to the generalization and impression that the Chinese were “transients with no real attachment to the country”. The implications of such “colonial ideology have intensified and generalized as whole set of stereotypes, based on ethnics and racial criteria, which inculcated the feelings of superiority and inferiority among and between groups” (Abraham, 1983, p. 20 cited in Koh, 2014, p. 101). Tan (2000) states;

*Chinese often talk about Malay dominance and their perception of discrimination in the government sector, including statutory bodies and universities. The talk of such ethnic discrimination against the Chinese as the quotas for acquiring taxi licenses and entrance to universities, discriminations and promotion, and the almost total Malay occupation in decision making positions (such as head of departments) in the government and statutory bodies. The Malay still thinks of the Chinese as economically dominant, and generally, want the affirmative policy to continue.*

(Tan, 2000, p. 464)

At present, ethnicity remains an important identity for the multi-ethnic Malaysians.

Tan (2000, p. 463- 464) explains:

*..ethnic identification is reinforced by the nature of Malaysian society, where politics is ethnically organized. Each political party is ethnically-based, articulating the interests of one or more ethnic groups. In such a society, where socioeconomic opportunities are also competed for or seen to be competed for between ethnic groups, ethnicity, ethnic identification, and ethnic feelings are very strong. In fact, the worldview has become so ethnicized that it is not sufficient to narrate an event about people without mentioning their ethnic status.*

Tan (2000) further believes that the story of a person who has drowned would not be complete without mentioning the ethnicity (i.e. Malay, Chinese or Indian) of the victim. Newspaper reports also took pride in mentioning the ethnicities of the victims of accident cases or of any individuals involved in their reports and stories. In addition to the predetermined cultural system, Tan (2000) adds that in Malaysia, one's ethnic identity will be recorded on the birth certificate. By representing and protecting the rights and interest of each ethnicity by these ethnically organized political parties, further divisions within the multi-ethnic society were established.

At this point, we can claim that such historical narratives of British effort in generating the stereotypes between the races have evolved and are assumed to dominate the large culture picture of particular ethnicities as well as everyday practices in contemporary Malaysia. In the context of Malaysia HEIs, in education and the practice in any classroom, 'race' or ethnicity and religion became an important piece of information to be recorded within the education system. Analysis of academic achievements between Malay, Chinese and Indians has become essential as the belief in differences and diversity is deeply rooted.

In terms of English language learning, comparative studies between ethnicities are also a norm and an acceptable academic discipline as a way to work on each other's diversities, strengths and weaknesses. An ethnic-based study was carried out by Abdullah and Wong (2006), who surveyed 331 undergraduates and secondary school students from different ethnic groups in Malaysia to examine how their attitudes towards learning English and towards the language itself relate to their sense of ethnic and national identity. Findings suggest that Chinese and Indians are believed to speak

English better than Malays do. Further findings suggest Indian students have the most positive attitude towards the English language and learning the language.

Lee (2003) claims that Malay students might be more uncomfortable and distant when learning the English language. Many still feel that when they speak in English, fellow Malays may see them as being too westernized or as trying to show off. Such a perception could also be due to the resentment that some Malays have towards British colonisation in the past. Lee (2003, p. 145) adds that the fact that some Malays feel “the resentment from certain sectors is because the English language is associated with religion, which means that when using it, one is not being a good Muslim”. To communicate in English, one could be labelled as boasting, become marginalized, and even feel the need to switch identity to fit into the general community (Lee, 2003). Strong cultural influences are deemed to influence most aspects of the learning activities taking place in the ESL classroom, affecting the classroom culture as well as the dynamics of the ESL classroom.

The act of speaking is always interconnected to the cultural rules of society, and the Malays traditionally value indirectness in speaking in order to save face and to maintain harmony within society (Maros, 2006). Within any typical ESL classroom, Malay, Chinese and Indian co-exist. It is the norm that Malaysians identify themselves not as Malaysians but as either Malay, Chinese or Indians. Despite Malaysia having diverse cultures, certain values appear to be common to all Malaysians (Merriam and Mohammad, 2000). Abdullah (1996, p. 3) claims culture is the “glue that holds its members together through a common language, dressing, food, religion, beliefs

aspirations and challenges”. Meriam and Mohammad (2005) identify five common values shared between the ethnic groups, which are 1) collectivist 2) hierarchical 3) relationship-oriented 4) face and 5) religious values. In the context of my work, the generalized, essentialist culture characteristics are necessary to generate hypotheses in this study.

*Collectivist* is defined as” identity determined by the ‘collectively’ or group to which one belongs, not by individual characteristics” (Merriam and Mohammad, 2000). Abdullah (1996) reports that the identity of a Malay person is often generalized to the identity of the Malay group instead of to his own characteristics. This is also true for Chinese and Indians. Their identity is determined by what the community projects. As noted earlier by Kim et al. (1999), Asian families bond so strongly that they will prioritize the needs for others before themselves.

Studies on the Malay culture reveal that Malays are ‘mindful’ in their actions. This notion suggests that Malays are very careful to ensure that their actions do not hurt others (Kennedy, 2002). They are keen on relationship building (Lim, 1998 cited in Yeoh and Yeoh, 2105) and take pride in the concept of ‘*tolong menolong*’ (mutual support) (Chee, 1997 cited in Yeoh and Yeoh, 2015). Burhanuddeen (2006) relates the Malay practice of *gotong royong* (practice of doing community events together) to mutually bind people together as it promotes the value of ‘*kekitaan*’ (*esprit de corps*). The traditional Malay village consists of the ‘*penghulu*’ (village headman) whose role to lead and protect the village is well respected. Burhanuddeen (2006) claims that such a practice helps the Malay community to be able to work in groups.

Fung (2010) notes that Malaysian students demonstrates deep sense of loyalty and responsibility towards family, trying to fulfil family obligation. At school, Yong (2010) added, students often “strive to achieve what teachers advocate” (p. 482). With relevance to the ESL class, Haron et al. (2012), in their study, find that participants prefer to work in groups to develop their English speaking skills.

Abdullah (1996) refers *hierarchical* as the values relate to respecting the elders and those who in authority. Being diverse and connected, it is typical for learners of other ethnicities to have great respect for teachers or elders. At home, learners are educated to obey elders and treat them as superiors, while at schools, teachers are treated as experts (Fung, 2010). Cortazzi and Jin (1996) mentioned that passivity and reticence are possible indications of respect towards teachers. Social norms expect learners to listen and not to ask teachers challenging questions as a sign of recognition to the teachers’ authority. “The teacher is the ‘Guru’, a term derived from the Sanskrit word for “weighty” or “honourable” which in India and Indonesia is, in fact, what a teacher is called” (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Malaysian teachers are also apparently called ‘Guru’. The Chinese generally build their culture based on Confucianism which strongly holds great respect towards authority. Both Chinese and Malay learners tend to be silent and passive in the ESL classroom as an act of obedience and respect towards the teacher (Ku & Lohr, 2009).

In relation to this, Abdullah (1996, p. 25) in his findings states that Malays are found to be hesitant to give negative feedback and speak up openly against elders. Likewise, the Chinese also would avoid any form of argument even though members of the group

might be mistaken (Xiao, 2009). Such values are assumed to create a passive ESL learning environment where interaction between teacher and learners is suppressed through cultural expectations. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) noted that the quality of ones' academic achievements greatly rely on the excellence of the teacher.

In addition to this concept, the above- mentioned values could also be related to the concept *relationship-oriented*, as their lives very much circle around families, village, country and social groups where mutual understandings, obligations are clearly understood and acted upon (Burhanuddeen, 2006). Studies conducted by Maesin (2006) on learners' study preferences identify that students, regardless of location (urban or rural) generally prefer group learning. In a classroom, if learners speak up, it is in the name of the group, and they normally only speak up if they are personally addressed by the teacher. Apart from that, due to the Malaysian community being heterogeneous in nature, learners will have a tendency to form sub-groups in accordance with their race or ethnic group (Hosftede and Hosftede, 2005). In the language classroom, this scenario definitely suggests challenges for ESL teachers to form groups with mixed abilities as otherwise they will be 'glued' to their own race or ethnics. Similarly, it is Chinese practice to form associations and maintain positive relationships and guilds among members of the same clan (known as 'guanxi'), dialect or educational group (Sendut, Mdson & Thong, 1990).

For Malaysians, *face* is also known as "maintaining a person's dignity by not embarrassing or humiliating him in front of others" (Abdullah, 1996, p.106). Malaysian students at tertiary levels are often reserved about voicing their opinion.

Students believed that open argumentation is a form of embarrassment (Fung, 2010). Confrontations and conflicts should be avoided so that no one will get hurt or lose face. The Malays, according to Zamani (2003 as cited in Maros, 2006) are known for their non-confrontational behaviour and would prefer to be subtle and indirect with the intention of avoiding conflict or offending others. In the context of Chinese cultural system, the giving of 'face' refers to '*mianzi*', which projects the idea of enhancing someone's social status and of optimizing a commitment to the concept of '*guanxi*'. In addition, Indians also place great emphasis on 'face-saving acts' (Abdullah and Low, 2001). Relevant to Hall's (1986) theory of 'high-context culture' and 'low-context culture', people of a high-context culture will experience difficulty in breaking the norms by becoming too vocal or too open in their speech as the community holds strongly to the concept of 'group harmony'. Thus, it is expected to see ESL learners being implicit, indirect and cautious in their speech in order to avoid misunderstandings or arguments and to maintain peace.

In connection to maintaining *face*, the Malays are often believed to value humility (Maros, 2006). In this regard, humility in communication refers to the socio-cultural convention of avoiding self-praise, which is manifested through making understatements rather than overstatements. Thus, in the context of an ESL classroom, there are possibilities for learners to make understatements about their linguistic ability in language classes to avoid misunderstanding. In addition, Teo (1996, as cited in Maros, 2006) found that making overstatements about oneself would potentially be viewed as arrogant or simply being proud of oneself. Such feelings should be avoided. At a public university, the Malays, being the majority in the ESL class, would simply retain a harmonious relationship with other ethnic groups as they hold to these values.



Having a religion and being religious is also a common characteristic among most Malaysian learners of the three major ethnic groups. Malaysia is officially a Muslim country, and the 60 per cent of Malays who are Muslims believe that they are obliged to learn to be better than the others so that they can help those in need (Merriam and Mohammad, 2005). Malays who are Muslims accept fate as being unchangeable and final (Sulaiman, 2000), and this is relevant to the concept of *redha*. *Redha* can be defined as wholeheartedly accepting what that has been decreed by *Allah the Almighty* (Abdul Halim, 2017). In contrast to Malays, Lim (2001) reports that the Chinese culture believes that religion can be manipulated in pursuit of one's goals where negotiation of fate can be conducted along with appropriate sacrifices to the gods.

Subsequently, the contrast of attitudes suggests different types of behaviour in ESL classrooms. Malay learners are usually portrayed as polite and self-effacing and easy-going (Crouch, 1996 cited in Yeoh and Yeoh, 2015) while Chinese are usually more acquisitive, highly inspired by financial rewards and driven by goals (Lim, 2001). Such attitudes are also closely associated to the notion of 'immigrant psyche' where the immigrants initially and continuously look for material security in the business environment (Pye, 1985, p. 250 cited in Yeoh and Yeoh, 2015).

It could also be suggested that the preferential policies (i.e. *Bumiputra policy*) given to a specific ethnic group (i.e. Malays and the indigenous people) has intensified their commitment towards self-improvement. Some have argued that Malays have become over-dependent on the privileges offered by the policy (Lim, 2001). In view of classroom orientation, such behaviour is generally replicated by the Malay and

Chinese learners. Mastor, Jin & Cooper (2000) claim that the Chinese possess more self-confidence, aggression and entrepreneurial ambition compared to the Malays who are more easy-going (Pye, 1985, p. 250, as cited in Yeoh and Yeoh, 2015). Findings in a study by Yeoh and Yeoh, (2015) among the undergraduates in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) reveal that Chinese learners who “emerged as a group of people who had to compete from this disadvantageous position, and hence have grown accustomed to competing, making competition an enjoyable behaviour”. The Indians, on the other hand, being the minority among the two major ethnicities, has less research on cultural attributes as compared to significant numbers of Malays and Chinese (p.19).

#### **2.2.2.5 Implication of cultural values to ESL classroom**

The general descriptions of the Malaysian learners synchronize with several research studies and with relevant literature, which identify reticence and passiveness as common behaviour, especially among Asian ESL learners, specifically East Asian learners. Jones (1999); Cortazzi and Jin, (1996); and Tsui, (1996) report that these learners were alleged to lack participation in-class activities, to be unwilling to contribute in classroom discourse, not to ask questions and to be overly dependent on teachers. Braddock et al., (1995) reveal that 60 per cent of the staff at the Macquarie University in Sydney felt Asian students were quiet and inactive in class. Such findings were later supported by Cortazzi and Jin (1996) studies in Chinese Universities. They report that Western teachers find Chinese students inactive, shy and passive in class and unwilling to work in groups.

Ferris and Tagg, (1996) who studied teachers' / professors' views of Asian ESL students, find that Asian students are considered to possess cultural inhibition, which later has detrimental effect on oral participation in language classroom activities. In conjunction with this finding, Flowerdew and Miller, (1995) who recorded similar findings, agree that Asian learners' behaviour is affected by the local and academic cultures in which they live. Littlewood (1999), who has carried out research into the socio-cultural aspects of Asian societies, concludes that Asian students will avoid engaging in an argumentative discourse, as they are always concerned about the group's harmony. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) mention passivity and reticence are an indication of respect for a teacher. Social norms expect learners to listen and not to ask teachers challenging questions, as a sign of recognition of the teachers' authority. In another study by Jackson and Liu (2009), learners' passive attitudes may also be related to anxiety or, more specifically, learners may fear being evaluated negatively by the people surrounding them. Both studies suggest that such a phenomenon was strongly associated with the Asian culture; desire to be right and fear of losing face.

Parallel to this, research carried out by Ohata, (2005) among Japanese students studying in U. S colleges identifies 'fear of losing face in front of others' and 'cultural influence' to be a potential source of anxiety in L2 or foreign language learning. Ohata, (2005), in his study, noted that learners face great difficulties having to change and fit themselves into American cultural standards. Such conditions are bound to happen since learners' behaviour has been shaped by their cultural norms and expectations.

In contrast, Cheng, (2000), in his study, claims that there is no clear evidence that learners' second language anxiety is related to learners' local cultural inhibition and

strongly opposes the idea. He claims that local cultures are the cause of students' reticence in class, yet he does not deny the existence of perceived cultural differences in all learners. In fact, Cheng (2000) strongly believes other factors (e.g. teaching methods, environment) must also be taken into consideration in an ESL /EFL classroom. Most of the research mentioned above was carried out in China, Japan and Hong Kong. At this point it is crucial to note that these generalized, essentialist notion of culture captured from the previous research will be used to generate hypotheses in this study and to be discussed further in the 'Discussion' section.

#### **2.2.2.6 English in relation to family and community**

The colonial legacy has also allowed some families, particularly Chinese families who were merchants, and the Malay elites, to be exposed to the English language through British education. By the end of the colonial era in the 1950's English had become the language of the more prestigious and prosperous, English-educated families (Lowenberg, 1992, as cited in Rajadurai, 2011). Ever since independence, some English- educated parents have continued to educate and raise their children in the target language since the language has become the language of 'economic opportunity and social mobility' (Gill, 2005, p. 246). Apparently, those with economic advantage will have greater opportunity to study in private institutes, locally or abroad, and those who mainly stay around urban areas will have early exposure and opportunities in English. In this case, English will become the lingua franca between ethnic groups, especially between Chinese and Indians for whom it has become the first language (Omar, 1987, as cited in Rajadurai, 2011).

Nowadays, globalisation and the repositioning of English as an important second language have far reaching effects on the ways children are now educated. Instead of being construed as a threat to the national language and to ethnic group identity, English is sometimes spoken by family members and children are exposed to English-medium schools at an early age and to English resources. With the advent of globalization, the repositioning of English in a modern and pluralistic society like Malaysia has shown that English, to some extent, is likely to be perceived as a neutral mode of communication and as a language that belongs to everyone.

Such positive reactions have been constructed potentially through families' upbringing and the communities to which they belong. Rajadurai (2011) notes that language learners crucially depend on opportunities to use the language, as well as on the communities in which the learner could participate in using the language. The majority of ESL learners do not use English at home, especially if they originate from a rural or underdeveloped area (Mohd Nawi and Yew, 2010). This has made acquiring the language a difficult task as it is not spoken in the home environment or the community (Musa et al., 2012).

However, any move to prioritize English by family members is very relevant to future attainments, especially in view of the relevance of increased value accorded to English in light of globalization. Ultimately, because the target language is only strongly recognized for its prestige, instrumental purposes and perceived neutrality, learners' perceptions and behaviour towards the target language greatly rely on families and the community role in supporting learners with the target language.

In general, findings in these comparative studies suggest that elements of cultural systems, such as values, beliefs and norms of each ethnic group, are associated with learners' character, learning styles or behaviour and with their participation in and perceptions towards the learning of English. The lists of comparative studies among academicians and scholars remain numerous and on-going. In general, most studies aim at identifying similarities, differences and the visible diversities associated by individual cultural systems in view of learning the second language. Essentially, the tendency to study ethnic boundaries in relation to the learning of the English language reinforces the essentialist ideas of culture situated in the context of Malaysia.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

In the context of Malaysian ESL classrooms, theoretically, the main ethnic groups, which are likely to constitute the ESL classroom at public HEIs, are Malays, Chinese and Indians. Other minor ethnic groups, which might also constitute the ESL classroom, would be people from East Malaysia in *Sabah* and *Sarawak* such as the *Melanau*, *Iban*, *Bidayuh*, *Dusun*, *Kadazan* and other areas. Indeed, a multicultural nation has become the fundamental identity of Malaysia, albeit with a unified vision and differential citizenship. This differential citizenship is part of the governing structure established by a particular group as the privileged group (Malays). As mentioned earlier, the religion, language and culture of the nation strongly reflects that of the Malays, and they are given preferential treatment in terms of education and jobs.

Despite the government stressing the importance of national integration and harmony, ethnic boundaries are very much a concern. As a consequence of the preferential education policies, the make-up of classrooms at PHEIs defined by *Bumiputra* and *Non-Bumiputra* differentiated citizenship is most likely to favour the Malays and the indigenous ethnic groups as compared with other ethnicities at the PHEIs.

It is important to note that Malaysian contemporary pluralistic society began with the arrival of British colonisation, which opened the path and liberal citizenship to economic immigrants from China, India and surrounding islands. History positioned English language in the Malay nation, which has subsequently regained its supremacy, ever since the ideas of internationalization and globalization came into being. Despite the pressure towards modernization and globalization, Malays, Chinese, Indians and perhaps other indigenous people have continued to practice their individual ideologies and identities, manifested in their daily norms, customs, behaviour, language and in the cultural system in which they live.

However, efforts made by the government to integrate the different ethnicities eventually built up further gaps as the needs and interests of specific ethnic groups were vocalized and addressed. It is clear that the aforementioned cultural system has strong influences on ESL learners' perceptions and ways of learning the second language. This is not to 'essentialize' the Malaysian culture, but literature and findings of other studies suggest the political and the cultural system of each ethnicity that dominates the setting of modern Malaysia is in favour of Malaysia's' large culture while not denying other cultures that exists within the nation. In the case of the ESL

classroom, the discourse on culture is assumed to be ongoing, and the discussion above could form the building blocks of the ESL classroom.

The following chapter describes the conceptualization of the study which focuses on learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the target language with regard to the concept of culture and learners' WTC in English. The following chapter will also address the provisional conceptual framework, which takes account of both WTC theories and the socio-cultural and historical context that may influence learners' approaches to their WTC in the target language.





## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter begins with the concepts of English language learning (ELL) in Malaysia. In this chapter, I intend to explore the concept of learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in ESL lessons in Malaysia and how this is connected to the concepts of 'large culture' and 'small culture. This will be seen having first established the post-colonial nature of Malaysia and the prominence of English as a key subject for study, in order to enhance social and economic mobility.

#### **3.1 English Language Learning (ELL) in Malaysia**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the British colonials introduced English Language Teaching (ELT) in schools during the nineteenth century (Foo & Richards, 2004) and efforts to improve the teaching and learning of ELT have taken place. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the education system in Malaya before independence was a 'fragmented education system' (Education in Malaya, 1989, p. 2, as cited in Foo & Richards, 2004; Ahmad, 1998) where schools were set up based on ethnic groupings and where the English curriculum was not yet standardized. Post-independence, political and economic disparities within the country have instigated the Malaysian government to gradually phase out the English language as the medium

of instruction (MOI) and replace it with the Malay language, with the intention of creating a sense of identity with common aspirations and goals (Rajaretnam and Nalliah, 1999). The National Education Policy, 1961, (in the Education Act, 1961), established the Malay language as the MOI in schools, and English as an important second language in the country. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the national-type English schools too saw total conversion to national schools. (Foo & Richards, 2004).

During the period from 1970-1990, at the stage of implementing the National Education Policy, a common content syllabus for English was introduced in primary and secondary schools which would lead to a common examination around the country. This meant “the fact that pupils would be sitting for a common examination ensured that the content of their syllabus would be similar. It was felt that a common syllabus was absolutely necessary for the development and unity of the newly independent nation” (Gaudart, 1987).) An *ad-hoc* committee was set up for the purpose of introducing several types of syllabus according to the different stages of education and the different types of school according to stages of education (Foo & Richards, 2004).

Table 3.1: Type of Syllabus

Source: Foo & Richards (2004, p.232-233)

| Stage                                                                                                                                               | Type of Syllabus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary 1- 6<br><br><i>The English Syllabus for use in Standard One to Standard Six of the Post 1970 National Primary Schools (1971)</i>            | Structural-Situational syllabus (language teaching and oral method) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First to be used in West Malaysia</li> <li>• Introduced at Standard/ Primary Three in national type Chinese and Tamil Primary schools</li> </ul> |
| Lower Secondary (Secondary1-3)<br><br><i>The English Syllabus for Tingkatan/ Form One to Form Three of the Secondary Schools in Malaysia (1973)</i> | Structural-Situational syllabus (Secondary 1-3, lower secondary)                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Upper Secondary (Secondary 4-5)<br><br><i>The English Language Syllabus in Malaysia Schools Tingkatan 4- Tingkatan Lima (1980)</i>                  | Task-oriented situational approach' (Secondary 4-5, upper secondary)<br><br>Also known as;<br><br>The Malaysian Communicational Syllabus (Asiah Abu Samah, 1983 cited in Foo & Richards, 2004)                                                                |

In 1974, as specified in' the 'Third Malaysian Plan (TPM)', the Malaysian government began to recognize the role of English in international trade and commerce as well its role as the medium of instruction in science and technology. This has led to the introduction of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) based syllabus within the upper secondary level. The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), as the task force, developed the CLT syllabus with the aim of fulfilling the needs of the nation's

workforce (who were fluent in English), while at the same time moving towards the communicative approach in higher education (Richards & Rodger, 2001 cited in Foo & Richards, 2004). As the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) declared, in accordance with the Third Malaysia Plan (TPM):

*While the government will vigorously implement the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia, measures will be taken to teach English as a strong second language. This is important if Malaysia is to keep abreast with the scientific and technological developments in the world and participate meaningfully in the international trade and commerce (2013, p. 397).*

The CLT based syllabus was also believed to be in line with the needs of the tourism industry, which relies on a linguistically competent workforce to promote the industry at an international level (Darmi & Albion, 2013). As Malaysia recognized the role of English as an international language in business and trade, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach aimed to prepare learners to use the language orally and in written form via a variety of contexts (Lewis, 2002, p. 40).

### **3.1.1 The Communicative Teaching (CLT) Approach**

The changes in the English syllabus within the Malaysian Education system have been divided into three stages. In stage 1 (1957-1970) *The Grammar Translation Method*, *the Direct Method* and the *Situational Approach* were used at different phases. Stage 2 (1970-1990), was the communicative approach. The last stage (1990 onwards) implemented was the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum to suit current and global changes. CLT was implemented in 1980 with the introduction of the *Upper*

*Secondary English Syllabus (1980)* (Pandian, 2001, as cited in Pandian, 2002). In supporting the shift from grammar teaching to the communicative approach, the MOE sent teachers in teacher collages for training in the overt teaching of grammar through CLT (Abdullah and Mohd Shah, 2015). According to Raissi et al. (2013) and Mustapha and Yahaya (2012), CLT introduced within the assigned curriculum (KBSM) was aimed at learner centred language teaching, where authentic materials, introducing language in context, are used in developing learners' communicative skills in English. It was mentioned that the earlier CLT version adopted in Malaysia was the functional-notional syllabus where a learner-centred classroom environment was created later to promote good command of communication in class.

However, the implementation of CLT faced challenges as the shift from the structural-situational approach to CLT created problems for teachers and learners (Pandian, 2002). It was reported that learners had difficulty in adjusting from rote learning of language structures to communication. Teachers were also facing difficulties in transforming grammar content lessons into communicative-based activities (Pandian, 2002). It was found that learning the structures of grammar would not necessarily lead to communicative competence (Pandian, 2002; Darus, 2009).

Other shortcomings with CLT in Malaysian classrooms include large class size and teachers not being well-versed in teaching CLT (Abdullah and Mohd Shah, 2015). Students were also reported to possess low motivation and poor attitude towards CLT. The environment where students live, especially the rural areas, do not support the use of English whilst, at the same time, communication with friends was typically in the

mother tongue. Resistance from learners became a crucial problem for teachers in the implementation of the communicative approach (Abdullah and Mohd Shah, 2015).

In 1979, the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) took measures to revamp the education system in accordance with the national aspirations (Pandian, 2002). According to Lee (2002), the immediate reasons for the introduction of the communicative approach by the MOE was because “of dissatisfaction with the old curriculum which was thought to be too subject-content based, too much emphasis on rote learning, too exam oriented and excessive dependence on textbooks” (p.12).

Pursuing the aim to equip learners with communicative competence, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), through the CDC, introduced CLT into a new curriculum known as the *New Primary School Syllabus (Kurikulum Sekolah Rendah-KBSR)* in 1983 and the *Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah- KBSM)* in 1989. The new syllabus focused on students’ four major skills, namely speaking, reading, writing & listening, as well as the language systems: grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, through communication in the classroom.

After six years in education through KBSR, learners proceed with the KBSM syllabus. The KBSM syllabus advocates the communicative approach through the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, and stipulates that these skills should not be taught in isolation. The KBSM aimed at providing ample communicative platforms such as discussion and activities simulating real-life contexts. The integration of moral values,

knowledge from other subjects and language content was another important aspect of the KBSM syllabus (Pandian, 2002).

In 1990, an improved version of KBSM was introduced, identified as the *Integrated Primary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah- KBSM)* in an effort to redress several glaring shortcomings of the earlier version of KBSR (Pandian, 2002). The KBSR and KBSM were fully implemented by the year 2000 (Foo & Richards, 2013). The new ELT syllabus integrates ICT skills, thinking skills, moral values and citizenship education. (Foo & Richards, 2004).

“The actual position of the communicative approach in the KBSR/KBSM classroom is rather difficult to pinpoint” (Pandian, 2002, p. 42). Research by the MOE revealed that teachers at primary school level basically focused on reading comprehension, writing, grammar and vocabulary skills as these skills were tested in the *Primary Schools Assessment Test* at the end of Primary 6. Listening and speaking skills were often neglected, as they were not part of the components tested in the assessment (Berita Kurikulum, 1999 cited in Pandian, 2002). The main aim of English education in Malaysia, in preparing learners for “daily conversation, accessing information and responding to literary works” (Foo & Richards, 2013, p. 237) was overshadowed by an intense focus on examinations (Pandian, 2002).



### 3.1.2 Approaches towards communicative competency

Malaysia has undergone numerous shifts and transformations of curricula and syllabus as a sign of a serious commitment towards national development and the development of a unifying national identity, as well as, in light of the increasing influence of English as a key business language, science and diplomatic language.

*Fundamentally, Bahasa Melayu was accepted to unite the culturally multilingual society of Malaysians: on the other hand, English language has a functional role because of its use as an international language of communication in the economy, thus demonstrating its pervasive influence through its role in education (Darmi & Albion, 2013, p. 7).*

The need for English in the quest of effective global participation and development in business, commerce, engineering and ICT motivated the MOE in 1999 to introduce *English for Science and Technology (EST)* at the secondary school level. Implicitly, it was reported that the Ministry of Education's efforts to reintroduce English as the medium of instruction (Foo & Richards, 2013) was due to grave concern about the reported decrease in English exposure, (Foo & Richards, 2002) after BM was made the medium of instruction in the education system and English was relegated to subject status. EST was proposed as an elective subject for upper secondary science stream students. To distinguish between English and the Science subjects, the EST syllabus clearly sought to;

*..lay the foundation in the use of English in the fields of science and technology not only for the present but also for further studies at the tertiary level. This program does not aim to teach the subject matter of science, rather, it is designed to help students develop the ability to grasp basic concepts and ideas in science and to understand methods of scientific and technical discourse. The knowledge gained will not only enhance personal learning but also enable learners to think critically of issues in science and technology. (Bahasa Inggeris untuk Sains dan Teknologi, 2001, p.1-2)*

With the advent of a perceived ‘globalization’, apart from subject and language-oriented input and knowledge, the government also acknowledged the importance of developing learners’ spiritual and emotional growth (learners’ holistic growth). For this reason, the Literature component was introduced in stages as part of the KBSM syllabus between the years 2000 and 2002, beginning with Form 1 classes. The literature component not only aimed to have learners’ engagement towards a wider range of readings (Malaysian, British, European, Australian, American and African works), but at the same time it was expected to develop learners’ ability to express ideas, thoughts, beliefs and feelings creatively and appreciate other people’s culture, traditions and beliefs. (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2000).

Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Bin Mohamad proposed that English be used in the teaching of Science and Mathematics. *The teaching and learning of science and mathematics in English* (EteMeS) or known as *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris (PPSMI)* is a government policy aimed at improving the command of the English language among pupils at primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. Such measures were in line with Vision 2020 in which Malaysia aimed to become a fully developed nation. Vision 2020 captured the idea of Science, Technology and Innovation. The Prime Minister wished to see English as a mechanism for accessing the global market and research communities but, in doing this, he tried to remove it from its contentious past as a colonial imposition. Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammad commented that;

*..it is not about trying to learn English. It is not about trying to learn Malay. It is simply an acknowledgement of the fact that today’s knowledge comes to us in the English language. Today the knowledge is with the people who write in English. And for that*

*reason, we want to learn English to acquire knowledge, not learn English language for itself. It is important that we use English to study the Science and Maths.*

(Malaysia Today, 2011)

However, the teaching of Science and Mathematics via English was short-lived, as opponents, especially Malay nationalists, felt that teaching of Science and Mathematics in English downgraded BM as the national language and the native Malay culture (Darus, 2009). Opponents of the move were also sceptical of teachers' competency and ability to teach the subjects through the English language (Darus, 2009).

Another form of opposition that arose was associated with the Chinese political movement in Malaysia, who believed that the students from Chinese schools had long been recognized as well-trained in mathematics and science and saw no reason to use English as the language of instruction for subjects traditionally viewed as core strengths in their school curriculum (Chan & Helen, 2008). In 2012, the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English was completely phased out as the government was totally convinced that it was not working well, as based on a one-year assessment (Darus, 2009). The phasing out of English as the medium of instruction in Science and Mathematics signalled the nation's complex dilemma in establishing a national identity within the pluralistic, multi-ethnic and diverse nature of Malaysian society, as left behind by the colonial legacy.

Essentially, quite recently in 2015, in the Tenth Malaysian Economic Plan, the Malaysian government reinforced the use of English as the global lingua franca and as a necessary language in order to be globally competitive, but at the same time, they decided to retain the use of BM as a means of reinforcing unity and harmony.

The policy implemented throughout the nation was known as ‘*Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening the English Language (MBMMBI)*’. The entire message was to strike a balance between empowering English and the national language, BM. It clearly pointed out that;

*Bahasa Malaysia will remain the medium of instruction in National schools, including for Science and Mathematics. For National-type school, Chinese language and Tamil will remain the medium of instruction”.*

(Malaysian Educational Blueprint, 2012).

Among efforts made to intensify the use of BM as the language of knowledge were strategies to translate research and key terminology into BM by academic bodies like ‘*Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia*’ and also by the training of more teachers to teach and promote BM locally and abroad (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2012, p. 112).

Efforts in strengthening English language learning were done through the testing and upskilling of all English language teachers, based on Cambridge Placement Tests and the language proficiency test known as the ‘*Aptis Test*’. Based on their achievement (in the test) these teachers were then sent for suitable training and workshops to strengthen the delivery of English lessons via the ‘Oral Proficiency in English language for Secondary Schools’ (OPS English), the introduction to the ‘LINUS 2.0’ with an extended scope to address English language literacy (through a comprehensive English literacy remedial support programme for learners who struggle with English) and by making it compulsory for students to pass the English language subject paper at SPM from 2016 onwards (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 115-116).

It was noted that at university level, although BM has been accorded the role of the medium of instruction since 1983, the use of English at public and private university level, especially in the Science, Engineering and Medical courses, was very much encouraged to help meet the demand by the MOE of globalization. 21<sup>st</sup> century ESL learners at higher learning institutions (HEI) are currently learning English as the language of knowledge and globalization.

The dilemma and challenges for language policymakers was to sustain BM in respect of national identity and unity and at the same time to promote its status as an international language. In the context of English at HEIs, ESL teachers at HEIs faced linguistic challenges since they also had to teach English for specific purposes (ESP), which can entail the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), so as to foster their language skills and equip learners with the ability to communicate, access knowledge and participate in the fast-growing economy in Malaysia and, beyond the Malaysian boundaries, towards a global platform.

English began as an imposed language but now has evolved to become an important second language in the country by allowing greater opportunities for learners to obtain distinct academic and professional advantage. However, before English took on its present role, the reversion towards BM in the teachings of all subjects had reported a sharp decline in English performance due to linguistic challenges as the exposure to English decreased (Darmi & Albion, 2013). At university level, “competence in English among learners has been on the decline since a change in language policy was enforced from that of English to Bahasa Malaysia in 1970” (Chan & Wong, 2004, p.1).

Reports from the public sector also mentioned that university graduates failed to be employed due to poor proficiency in English language and this tremendously affected their communicative ability during job interviews (Chan & Helen, 2006, p. 309). In 2002 some 44,000 graduates were unemployed (Lee, 2004 cited in Chan & Helen, 2006, p. 309). Despite eleven years of learning English in the mainstream education, Malaysian ESL learners' English literacy was below satisfaction (Naginder, 2006; Jalalludin, Mat Awal and Abu Bakar, 2008).

It is to keep in mind that English in Malaysia primarily carries functional role, especially for career advancement and for Malaysians to be globally competitive. Bahasa Malaysia on the other hand, plays a key political role in unifying the multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. It is mentioned that, the expression of English being the 'second language' in Malaysia, is used in a non-technical sense. Politically, English is only second in importance to Bahasa Malaysia, and not a second language as defined in applied linguistics (Zarina, 2009; Chitravelu et al, 1995). Secondly, the given status to English is connected to the fact that English is the first foreign language often learnt after the mother tongue (Chitravelu, 1995). On top of other factors, depending on where the students are from, English may be regarded as first language, second language, while some regard English as foreign language (EFL) (Zarina, 2009). In this regards, English could be considered as the second language in places where English is used most (e.g. urban areas) while treated as a foreign language when only learnt in schools but rarely used in the surrounding environment learners lived in (e.g. rural areas).

In 1993, the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Bin Mohammad, announced that English would be used in Science, Technology and Mathematics subjects at public HEIs. This change in policy sought to amend the situation by placing English once more as a language of instruction in HEIs in Malaysia, in order to try to enhance communicative competence and to achieve the national aspiration for Malaysia. In order to achieve the latter, it is important to explore one of the perceived weaknesses of ELL in Malaysia—a lack of willingness to communicate.

It is within this socio-cultural, historical and policy context that this research specifically focuses on ESL learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), by drawing attention to the cultures as potentially influencing the ESL classroom. Learners at tertiary level have been found to be very nervous about communicating in the target language, facing difficulty in expressing themselves in English (Abdul Aziz, 2007). A number of relevant studies indicate that learners in higher education face language anxiety, which stems from the learners themselves because of social and cultural influences and school instructional practices, which result in a lack of language use (Abdul Aziz, 2007; Ismail, 2008). The following section illustrates the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) in the second language, the issues of culture and the conceptual framework used in this study.

### **3.2 Willingness to Communicate (WTC)**

Willingness to communicate is considered as the immediate determinant for L2 use (Clément, Baker, MacIntyre, 2003). It is considered as a state of mind, the intention

to speak or to remain silent with a specific person at a given time. The concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) was originally introduced by McCroskey and Bear (1985) when they referred to “the individuals’ tendency to initiate communication when they are free to do so” (p. 8) among L1 speakers of English. This was based on Burgoon’s (1976) work on learners’ Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) in L1. The conceptualization of WTC in L1 is essentially seen as a personality trait (McCroskey and Baer, 1985). McCroskey and Bear (1985, p. 546) regard personality traits like self-esteem and introversion, communication competence, communication apprehension, and cultural diversity as the determining factors which lead to WTC.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) and their work on the *Heuristic Model of WTC in L2* (Figure 3.1) came after extended work by MacIntyre and Churos (1996) in attitudes, motivation, perceived competence and anxiety in predicting success in second language learning and communication. In McIntyre et al. (1998), L2 WTC is conceptualized “as the readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using L2” (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998, p. 547). The initial notion of WTC was introduced as a trait-like predisposition (McCroskey and Richmond, 1991) because the intention to initiate communicative behaviour is often linked to actual behaviour (McIntyre, 1994).

MacIntyre et al. (1998), proposed a conceptual treatment of WTC in L2 as situational and introduced the WTC heuristic model. In classroom reality, L2 learners display different levels of WTC, and they can be perceived positively or negatively by their teachers and peers. It is therefore important to describe and measure the construct of



WTC as situated in L2 classrooms. The trait WTC and the situational WTC have been found to complement each other. WTC as a trait means individuals have the tendency to place themselves in situations where communication is expected while situational WTC influences the decision to initiate communication in particular situations (Cao and Philp, 2006; MacIntyre et al., 1999).

### **3.2.1 Heuristic model of WTC in L2**

The Heuristic Model of WTC in L2 (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998) has emerged as a construct to explore why some learners are less willing to communicate compared to others. This model is reported to be the most comprehensive and widely-used theoretical framework of variables influencing WTC in L2 (Zarrinabadi and Tanbakooei, 2016). The proposed model is conceptualized by situation based variables representing intention to communicate at specific times with specific persons when given the opportunity to do so. L2 WTC is defined as a “readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2” (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 547).

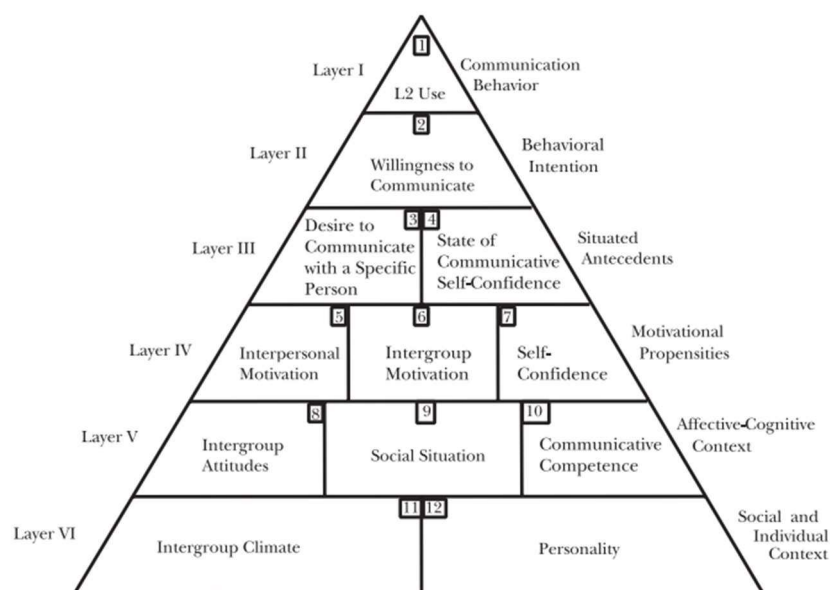


Figure 3.1 MacIntyre et al. (1998) Heuristic Model of WTC in L2

As shown in Figure 3.1, the model is illustrated through six layers of a pyramid, which takes account of individual and contextual influences and proposes the interaction between cognitive and affective variables and social factors as influencing WTC in L2. The pyramid presents proximal and distal factors, which could exert potential influences on initiating an L2 communication, and the layers from the top to the bottom represent a move from the most immediate, situation-based contexts to the more stable, enduring influences. The first three layers (*Communication Behavior*, *Behavioral Intention*, and *Situational Antecedents*) portray situational influences while the following three layers consisting of *Motivational Propensities*, *Affective-Cognitive Context*, and *Social and Individual Context* are seen as the enduring influences towards WTC. WTC is regarded as an immediate variable that determines the use of L2.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) regard situational influence to be rather transient and dependent and specific to the context the person is speaking in. In other words, it refers to

situation-specific influences at a given moment. L2 use is the ultimate goal in language learning, and thus, it is placed at the top of the pyramid (Layer1) and referred to as *Communication Behaviour*. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), “a program that fails to produce students who are willing to use the language is simply a failed course” (p. 547). The notion of communicative behaviour includes speaking up in class, reading L2 novels, watching L2 movies or using L2 at work (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

*Behavioural Intention* relates to learners’ development of WTC in L2. The position of WTC in the second layer is because it is regarded as an important variable, which determines learners’ L2 use. “WTC strongly implies a behavioural intention such as; I plan to speak up, given the opportunity” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). Without willingness to communicate, L2 use will never be achieved. MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 547) contend that a student who raises his hand to answer a question a teacher asks in class has indicated that he is willing to communicate if called upon or given the opportunity, although the communication act is a non-verbal one.

*Situated antecedents* consist of two variables: 1] desire to communicate with a specific person and 2] state of self-confidence. These two variables are considered as a predecessor to learners’ WTC (layer 2). Desire to communicate with a specific person can be defined as:

*affiliation often occurs with persons who are physically nearby, persons who are encountered frequently, physically attractive persons and those who are similar to us in a variety of ways” (Lippa, 1994, as cited in MacIntyre et al. 1998, p. 548-549).*

The state of communication self-confidence or, in other words, a momentary state of confidence (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 549) is closely related to one's a) perceived competence and b) a lack of anxiety (Clement, 1980 cited in MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 549). MacIntyre et al. (1998) add that it is likely that learners will endure different levels of confidence, depending on their prior L2 experiences. The state of perceived competence is subject to the feeling that one has the capability of communicating effectively at any given moment (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 549), while anxiety is an obstacle to self-confidence (Clément in MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 549).

The fourth, fifth and sixth layers of the model illustrate *Motivational Propensities, Affective-Cognitive Context and Social and Individual Context* which are regarded as *enduring influences* (MacIntyre et al., 1998) on learners' WTC and represent stable and long- term properties of the environment or of a person, relevant to any situation. In addition, these *enduring influences* (MacIntyre et al., 1998) could justify why people are consistent or not in their communication over time and across different situations (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 588).

In the attempt to investigate the influence of culture on learners' WTC, it could be argued that these *enduring influences* (MacIntyre et al., 1998) to some extent potentially include cultural elements, which shape learners' perceptions and behaviour towards the learning of the target language. In this regard, it could be said that the influence of culture, although not explicitly mentioned in the model, appears to be prevalent. For instance, when examining these, these long- term properties clearly entail and connect to learners' backgrounds, educational experiences, family, friends

and community experiences, which very much construct and influence particular values, beliefs and behaviour towards willingness to communicate in L2. Communication in L2 often evokes “cultural, political, social, identity, motivational, pedagogical and other issues that learners must navigate on the fly” MacIntyre & Legatto (2010, p.149). The following presentation of the variables from the enduring influences describes the potential presence of culture, evident throughout the variables in the bottom three layers of the model.

#### **Layer IV: Motivational Propensities**

Table 3.2: Layer IV: Motivational Propensities

Source: Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and Affiliation (MacIntyre et al., 2005, p.547-549).

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>[5] Interpersonal Motivation</b> | Specific to individual. Constitutes affective aspects of motivation to communicate. Motivation is linked to the amount of interest in establishing relationship with? L2 speakers and also L2.                                                                                              |
| <b>[6] Intergroup Motivation</b>    | Constitutes social aspects of motivation to communicate. The motivation to speak is related to means of maintaining and reinforcing social positions and to establish or maintain rapport with other groups.                                                                                |
| <b>[7] Self-confidence</b>          | Influenced by the learners’ ability (communication competence) with the L2 skills and communication experiences such as language anxiety. It is also related to speakers’ personality, intergroup context, judgements of proficiency, ethnicity and identity and intercultural adaptations. |

With reference to Table 3.2 (*Layer IV: Motivational Propensities*), the variables that underpin this layer are 1] interpersonal motivation, 2] intergroup motivation, and 3] L2 confidence. MacIntyre et al. (1998) contend that this layer is a pivotal stage to L2 learners as the class context and the affiliation to members of the class play a

significant role in learners' WTC. In addition, the motivational propensities are grounded in the affective and cognitive contexts and eventually will lead to a state of self-confidence and a desire to speak with a particular person. MacIntyre (2005) argues that interpersonal motives stem from the social roles that one adopts within the group and the desire to maintain that relationship with the other members of the group, while intergroup motivation originates from one's sense of belonging to a particular group. He adds that L2 self-confidence as a variable is very much related to learners' personality, intergroup context, judgements of proficiency, ethnicity and identity and intercultural adaptations.

Essentially these variables mirror the cultural ideas specifically related to learners' ethnicity and identity, which have been discussed in the previous chapter. It has been pointed out in the previous chapter that ESL learners', when speaking the target language, will have to deal with their national identity and, at the same time, that learners' level of interest to communicate in English significantly relates to group membership as well as to rapport with the other groups. In the context of Malaysian ESL learners, motivation and attitude to learning the target language have been constructed throughout their learning experiences and evaluations about the L2 community, which significantly stem from the political, educational, socio-cultural and historical influences.

## Layer V: The Effective and Cognitive Context

Table 3.3 Layer IV: The Effective and Cognitive Context

Source: Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 Confidence and Affiliation (MacIntyre et al., 2005, p.547-549).

|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>[8] Intergroup Attitude</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrativeness- Positive attitude or desire to be part of the L2 community. As a factor that could enhance less social distance or promote relations between different ethnic groups. This could facilitate communication in L2</li> <li>• Fear of assimilation-fear of losing one identity (L1 linguistic and cultural heritage) and engagement with the L1 community if L2 is spoken. This could make learners resist communication in L2.</li> <li>• Motivation- Positive attitude to learn the language which could be developed from positive learning experiences and positive evaluation about L2 community.</li> </ul>                                           |
| <b>[9] Social Situation</b>          | <p>Social setting which carries appropriate sets of verbal and behavioural standards.</p> <p>Factors comprising of social settings are <i>participants (age, gender and social class), settings (place, time and context), purpose (goals of discourse), topic (expertise and familiarity) and medium of communication (speaking or writing).</i></p> <p>Communication experience in one setting may be different to the other settings thus may generate different levels of WTC.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>[10] Communicative Competence</b> | <p>Significant effect of learners' level of L2 proficiency to WTC. Five constructs which make up communicative language abilities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic competence: syntactic, morphological, lexical, phonological rules</li> <li>• Discourse competence: Selecting, sequencing, arranging words, structures and sentences</li> <li>• Actional competence: Speech acts like giving commands or making requests</li> <li>• Socio-cultural competence: knowledge on how to communicate effectively within different social and cultural contexts.</li> <li>• Strategic Competence: Knowledge on communication strategies by using verbal or non-verbal strategies</li> </ul> |

Drawing on Table 3.3, *Layer V (The Effective and Cognitive Context)* contains 1] intergroup attitudes, 2] social situation, and 3] communicative competence. *Intergroup attitudes* denote L2 students' "positive attitude towards the L2 community, a desire to

affiliate with members of the L2 community without the desire to be like members of the L2 community” (MacIntyre, 2005, p.562). Like the intergroup attitude, the literature discussed in the previous chapter has explained that communicating in the target language could either promote social distance, or promote relations between different ethnic groups, which could facilitate communication in L2. Negative intergroup attitude relates to resistance to L2 for fear of losing one’s identity (L1 linguistic and cultural heritage) if the L2 is spoken and similarly echoes the context of ESL learners in Malaysia in which it is reported that it is the “*non-use* rather than the use of the English language that enhances conformity and acceptance” (Lee, 2003, p. 9).

The variable labelled *social situation* implies the appropriate sets of verbal and behavioural standards which would influence learners’ experiences in communicating in L2 and hence, learners’ WTC (MacIntyre et al. 1998). Verbal and behavioural standards very much signal the socio-cultural values and norms of a community. It is reported in the previous chapter that numerous studies among ESL learners have revealed that learners’ behaviour in class is culture-bound and, among other standard types of behaviour, ‘shyness’ is often observed among Asian ESL learners. This is potentially linked to the notion of respect for those higher in the hierarchy (i.e. teacher) (Yazdi and Bakar, 2014).

The role of culture is also evident in the *communicative competence* variable, one of whose constructs is socio-cultural competence, which, along with the other components of *communicative competence*, has the capacity to influence one’s level



of proficiency, which in turn can significantly affect one's degree of willingness to communicate. These variables are related to cultural ideas and knowledge of how to communicate effectively within different socio-cultural contexts. It could be argued that all three variables in this layer of the pyramid suggest the significant influence of historical, national, educational, familial and societal aspirations. Learners' beliefs and behaviour very much affect members of the group and society that surround them.

## Layer VI: Social and Individual Context

Table 3.4 Layer V1: Social and Individual Context

Source: Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 Confidence and Affiliation (MacIntyre et al., 2005, p.547-549).

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>[11] Intergroup Climate</b> | <p>Intergroup climate is conditioned by the structural characteristics of the community and their perceptual, affective correlates. Not all groups members react in the same way to another group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural characteristics: Represented by L1 and L2 community in relation ethnolinguistic vitality. Preferences over the L2 may surface depending on how much the language L1 or L2 is used throughout the social institutions.</li> <li>• Perceptual affective correlates: "Attitudes and values regarding L2 community and the motivation to adapt and reduce social distance between ethnic groups" (p.556). Intergroup tension may be as a result of prejudice towards the L2 community. Family and social environment has great influence on ethnic development.</li> </ul> |
| <b>[12] Personality</b>        | <p>Personality (e.g. extroversion) plays a big role in how open one is towards members of the other group, either facilitating learning or not. Traits and profiles of group members may also set the stage in which language learning occurs.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

Table 3.4 (Layer V1: Societal and Individual Context) consists 2 variables. 1] Intergroup Climate and 2] Personality. MacIntyre (2005, p. 555) explains that the

intergroup climate refers to one's attitudes and the value that one attaches towards the L2 community and is conditioned by the group's relative representation of the L1 and L2 communities. MacIntyre (2005) elaborates that the intergroup climate may be influenced by ethnolinguistic vitality and personal communication networks which could provide the opportunities for the use of L2 and, at the same time, have the capacity to either favour or not to favour the use of L2 (p.555). In fact, the ideas of prejudice and discriminatory attitudes towards members of the other group could be cultivated by members of the L1 community, such as parents and peers (p. 556).

In this regard, the notion of the intergroup climate significantly echoes the cultural ideas of a particular community. Drawing on this idea, in the previous chapter, it was reported that post-independence Malaysia faces conflicting challenges to unite the multi-ethnic nation. The national language plays a prevalent role in the unification of the divided nation. English, on the other hand, despite being the colonial language, now plays a great role in the development of the nation through trade and commerce on the international platform.

*Personality* is conceptualized to have an indirect impact on WTC through such affective variables as attitude, motivation, and confidence. It is argued that an ethnocentric group of people will have the tendency to believe that one's own ethnic group is not only preferable but also superior to another ethnic group. Thus, it is believed that such groups will likely have less interest in interaction in the language belonging to the respective ethnic groups of others (MacIntyre, 2005, p.557).

In countries such as Malaysia where, for example, one group is reputed to have greater facility in ELL than others (e.g. Chinese), any mixed classes of ELL is likely to create a temporary community where additional layers of complexity operate as a result of ethnic, linguistic identity, and as a result of ethnic positionality in relation to the target language. In actual fact, such a description reflects the role of culture in which family and community narratives are strong determinants of learners' behaviour within the ESL class.

Hence, the intergroup climate and individual differences or group traits within a broader social climate could become a strong influence on one's WTC. In general, it could be argued that MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model, particularly the 'enduring influences which are termed as the 'long term properties of the environment' carries with it the elements of culturally oriented factors. These elements reflect the influences of one's ethnicity and identity, educational experiences, family, community and historical narratives, in particular towards learners' perceptions and willingness to communicate in the target language. For these reasons, I am keen to suggest that the variables presented in the model very much embrace profound cultural influences. In fact, it was noted by MacIntyre (1998) that L2 use does carry various intergroup issues with political and social implications (p.546).

With relevance to the study of learners' WTC in Asian countries, Wen and Clément, (2003), who carried out research among Chinese participants in China argue that the heuristic model of WTC is based on research primarily conducted in Western (English speaking) countries, thus this does not closely reflect situations found in other

countries, particularly Asian countries. Faced with a powerful notion of national culture, historical resistance and nationalism, national language, ethnic language and identity, I find it worthwhile to explore Malaysian ESL learners' WTC in relation to these elements which I refer to as 'culture' as a potentially powerful influence on willingness to communicate.

The context of this study aims to investigate the influence of culture on ESL learners' WTC in English, and the findings of McIntyre et al. (1998) suggests the potential presence of culturally oriented factors. Although the present model does not specifically address culture as one of the variables influencing learners' WTC, it could be argued that the enduring influences (*Motivational Propensities, Affective-Cognitive Context, and Social and Individual Context*) of the present model very much mirror cultural ideas, which have been narrated in the previous chapter.

### **3.2.2 Methodological Approaches towards L2 WTC**

Methodological approaches to investigate learners' WTC have included quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. The quantitative approach has usually utilized questionnaires as the main tool to investigate the relationship between WTC and other variables. The questions were in the form of Likert-type questions and were developed by McCroskey and Bear (1985) to measure WTC in four communication situations (public speaking, meetings, dyads and small groups) and with three different kinds of interlocutors (strangers, acquaintances and friends). In 1992, McCroskey made several

modifications to the above scale to produce scores that would categorize learners' level of WTC as high, low or moderate.

The second most common WTC questionnaires developed by MacIntyre et al.'s work appeared in 2000. They measured learners' WTC inside and outside the classroom. Learners' WTC within the classroom context is examined through reading, writing, listening and speaking while WTC outside the classroom is also examined through reading, writing, listening and speaking, but in real-life contexts.

By contrast, qualitative approaches allowed an in-depth description of the context and the interlocutors analysed individual views and elaborated on the unique dynamics of WTC (Kang, 2005). Qualitative approaches which have been carried out by some researchers include interviews (Kang, 2005), journals (Cao, 2011) focused essays (MacIntyre et al., 2011) and observation (Peng, 2012; Cao, 2014) and these approaches allowed more in-depth understanding of learners' preferences to communicate in the target language and of the distal to proximal influences on WTC (Zarrinabadi and Tanbakooei, 2016). A mixed methods approach from the quantitative and qualitative approach was carried out by Cao and Philips (2006) who conducted a WTC questionnaire and triangulated it with classroom observation, audio recording of group and pair work, and interviews.

### **3.2.3 Research in L2 WTC**

Empirical research into ESL classroom L2 WTC investigated learners' perceptions of their WTC in class (de Saint Léger and Storch, 2009). This study among 32 students who study French as L2 concludes that the students' perception of the speaking activities, and of themselves as learners, affected their willingness to communicate in a range of ways. In the classroom context, situational WTC was found to be under the influence of situational variables including the class interactional pattern (teacher-fronted situation, small group and dyad), interlocutor participation, task type and topic (Cao and Philp, 2006; Cao, 2006).

The relationship between biological variables was researched by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan (2002, 2003) who researched variables such as sex, age and gender. Findings found that gender and age greatly influenced learners' WTC in different ways. In similar studies, Donovan and MacIntyre (2005) found that males' WTC increases as they grow older in contrast to the females' WTC.

A significant number of researchers have begun to focus on psychological constructs such as motivation, anxiety and identity in L2 WTC. Hashimoto (2002) and Peng (2007) found that integrative motivation is closely related to L2 WTC. Moreover, studies by Baker and MacIntyre, (2000), MacIntyre et al., (2001) and McCroskey and Richmond, (1991) found perceived communicative competence and communication anxiety to be a strong predictor of L2 WTC. In addition, Yashima (2002) found that language proficiency, attitudes towards learning the target language and attitudes

towards the international community among the Japanese learners strongly influence their WTC.

Other scholars have researched the influence of instructional and educational settings on learners' L2 WTC. MacIntyre et al. (2003), for instance, found that language learners instructed through an immersion program show greater WTC as compared to those who joined the non-immersion program. In general, considerable research has been conducted on situational factors influencing L2 WTC. However, many areas such as different linguistic, psychological, contextual and social factors are in need of further exploration (Zarrinabadi and Tanbakooei, 2016).

From the above examples of research findings, it could be said that WTC is a complex scenario and influences or variables which support L2 WTC vary over time and across situations. This study investigates the influences of culture on learners' L2 WTC.

#### **3.2.4 WTC and Culture**

Several key studies on factors underpinning ESL learners' WTC in second language learning deal with self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) (McCroskey, 1982), communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1996), motivation (MacIntyre et al., 2001), personality (Centinkaya, 2005), gender and age (Donovan and MacIntyre, 2004) and content and context (Kang, 2005).

However, in the case of culture as an influence on WTC, very few studies were found, and they were limited in scope. The role of culture in influencing learners' WTC was mentioned in Wen and Clément (2003), Peng (2007), Yousef et al. (2012). Yazid and Bakar (2004) and Ahmed Fahim and Mogana Dhamotharan's (2016) research suggested significant gaps in the research.

Wen and Clément (2003) investigated WTC among Chinese learners in China and argue that culture plays a critical role in determining learners' WTC. They proposed two factors which restrain learners' WTC, which are *Other-directed self* and *Submissive way of learning*.

The Other-directed self is associated with face-saving and group relatedness. In this instance, learners are concerned with how others will evaluate them when they speak the target language in class. The *Submissive way of learning*, on the other hand, highlights the Confucian philosophy which emphasizes the silent way of learning and that knowledge is to be transmitted through the teacher. Wen and Clément propose that WTC among those Chinese learners was a psychological process that operates along a continuum (Figure 3.2) which begins with *Desire to Communicate* (DC) but may or may not end with WTC. Learners' WTC depends on four culturally-oriented factors, which are *Societal Context*, *Personality*, *Motivational Motivation* and *Affective Perception*. Wen and Clément mention that WTC will be potentially high if the four factors are promoted by the teacher.



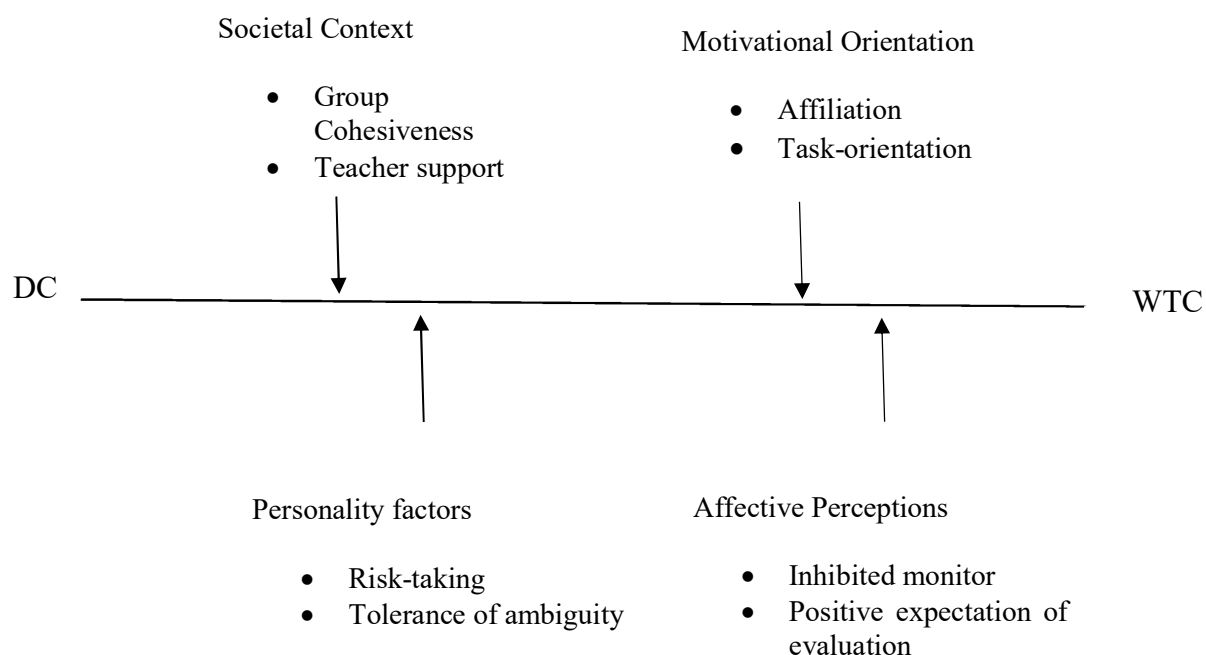


Figure 3.2 Wen and Clément (2003) Model of variables moderating the relation between DC and WTC in a Chinese EFL Classroom in China

Note: “A Chinese conceptualization of willingness to communicate in ESL” by W.P Wen and R. Clement, 2003, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 16, p. 25.

Wen and Clément add that Chinese students’ unwillingness to communicate in English in front of others was part of the cultural traditions, which had shaped relationships between students and teachers within this ethnic group for many years. Studies by Peng (2007) also centre on cultural perspectives in relation to learners’ WTC, which are connected with the *Individual* and *Social Context*. The *Individual* category involved factors such as communicative competence, language anxiety, learners’ beliefs and language anxiety while the *Social Context* category consists of teacher support, group cohesiveness, classroom climate and classroom organization. The culturally-oriented factors are closely linked to learners’ beliefs: their doubts about the usefulness of learning the target language, and their concerns about being labelled as showing off when speaking or dominating the communication in the target language

in the classroom. At this point it is important to note that although Wen and Clément's (2003) model clearly points out the factors related to cultural values, for the purpose of this research, MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) *Heuristic Model of WTC in L2* (Figure 3.1) will be adopted as it posits a more holistic exploration of individual and contextual factors in relation to learners WTC. Wen and Clément (2003) model is mainly focusing onto psychological constructs in relation to learners WTC.

In the context of Malaysia, research which focuses on culture as one of the dominating forces to influence ESL learners' willingness to communicate was by Yazdi and Bakar (2014) who studied willingness to communicate among four pairs of female Iranian and Malaysian students at a private university in Kuala Lumpur. He observed their dialogic behaviour as they were asked to take part in fifteen writing tasks collaboratively. The researcher encouraged them to discuss the activities in English and as far as they could, not to use their mother tongue. The researcher wrote observation notes while the students were engaged in collaborative writing, focusing on the participants' usage of their L1 and how they were willing to communicate with the researcher.

Through their observation, the researcher found that switching to their mother tongue was quite frequent among Iranians as compared to the Malaysian participants. The researcher argued that the reason for this code-switching could be due to the students' difficulty in expressing the meanings in English. Similarly, the second pair of Iranian dyads tended to switch to their mother tongue, especially while discussing grammatical issues in order to convey the meaning more accurately. They found it useless, boring

and time- consuming to talk about grammar in English. However, a noticeable level of shyness was observed among the Malaysian participants that could be related to Asian culture, specifically in showing a great deal of respect and silence towards a person with higher status (in this case the researcher), unless they were asked to talk.

Doctoral research by Lee (2001, 2003) was aimed at investigating the impact of English language learning on the construction of socio-cultural identities of a group of ESL learners in Malaysia. Utilizing qualitative research methods, 14 ESL learners were interviewed using a critical ethnography approach, personal narratives and a questionnaire. The findings exposed the fact that, in a post-colonial setting such as Malaysia, identity issues were complex and multi-layered. Lee claims that identity shifts take place in a strategic and a non-strategic manner. Learners adopted various identities depending on the context and the reference groups they were interacting with, in order to be accepted and fit in. Another significant finding shows that the use of English with certain groups of people may ignite anger and resentment and bring out marginalization, hostility and also alienation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, English in a post-colonial context may be perceived as a threat to national identity.

Another piece of culture-oriented research with regard to learners' willingness to communicate was conducted by Fahim and Dhamotharan (2016) who investigated 230 trainee teachers at the Faculty of Education in a private university in Malaysia. Learners' willingness to communicate was studied in terms of gender, nationality, ethnic group, course and years of study.

Findings in this study revealed that learners prefer to initiate communication with friends rather than with others. Male participants are more willing to communicate as compared to females, and the learners who are ethnically Indian are more willing to communicate as compared to Chinese and Malays. It was also revealed that learners from English courses are more willing to communicate as compared to other courses.

Thus, she suggests that learners are highly aware of not just when and how to use the target language but also when not to use the language. These results indicate the extent to which culture and individual factors may play a role in L2 communication and reinforce the importance of culture as it affects learners' WTC in English as a second language. In the next section, I will consider more fully the evolving ideas around the nature of culture.

### **3.3 Shifting Definitions of Culture**

Culture can be characterized as covering a broad spectrum of learners' lives, including language, ethnicity, religion and customs. It could be argued that research on culture is significantly approached from 'anthropological' perspectives. Culture in this sense is regarded as customs, worldview, language, kinship system, social organization and the day- to- day practices of a particular group, which gives them a distinct identity from another group (Scollon and Scollon, 1995, p. 126). According to Hinkel (1999), in general, culture has always been viewed as;

*a way of life, the social constructs that evolved within a group, the ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and behaving that are imparted to members of a group in the socializing process" (p. 2).*

In the context of Malaysian ESL learners, for instance, it is common to relate specific behaviour to being either Malay, Chinese or Indian. In fact, in most cases, we tend to talk about the determining effects of learners' cultural values in terms of beliefs, norms, values, languages, history and geographical location and on communication and language proficiency.

In my own teaching experience, for example, I tend to generalize that Malay learners who will not speak up are doing so to save 'face', which is an important aspect of the Malay culture. This would lead also to the idea that Chinese learners will have the tendency not to ask so many questions in class as a show of respect to a teacher, as taught through the Confucian education approach.

In these circumstances, I would agree with Scollon and Scollon (1995) that by focusing on common traits, learners' differences from the members of similar groups' and between groups may be overlooked. Indeed, Hofstede (2001) argues "stereotypes always reflect the mind set of those judging but at the same time something real about those being judged. Stereotypes are at best half-truths" (p. 14). McCroskey & Richmond (1990) believe that the categorization of cultural values between different groups is only seen as distinct if used to compare with other groups. The characterization of the groups may well represent the majority of its members:

*Communication norms are highly variable as a function of culture. Thus, one's communication norms and competencies are culture-bound. Although we commonly think of a person's personality as being composed of 'individual differences' between that person and others around them, people in a given culture may well have more group similarities than individual differences, and only when placed in contrast to other cultural groups are the groups characteristics*

*brought into sharp contrast. Hence, a person seen as very talkative when compared to other people in the same culture may be seen as somewhat withdrawn when compared to people in another culture.*

(Richmond, 1990, p. 72-77)

To summarize, generalizing aspects of the learners' culture-specific patterns, in relation to communication, would be undermining the learners' differences and the newly emerging cultures. This reinforces further gaps and miscommunication between members of the same and different groups. Significant to the context of the Malaysian classroom, where various ethnicities (e.g. Malays, Indians, and Chinese) exist, such an act would not encourage cross-cultural communication. Nevertheless, studies have also confirmed that the categorization of culture could be a convenient tool to understand learners' differences in values and beliefs. These are still widely cited in business and organisation management studies and applied in intercultural training (Zhu, 2011, p. 3). As a teacher I would agree with this statement, as the understanding of learners' values and beliefs, to a certain extent, would promote a better understanding of learners' communicative behaviour and, thus, the development of conducive language teaching approaches.

According to Zhu (2011), a renowned scholar in intercultural communication, in the early 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, a significant number of research studies with the objective of understanding learners' communicative behaviour by people of different cultures, have been conducted through the categorization of national cultures consisting of beliefs and value systems which are often referred to as a 'cultural dimension' or 'values orientation'. Essentially, recent studies on communication

behaviour have been replaced by studies on cultures from the perspective of a *post-modernist* view of culture, as a result of criticism which indicated that the traditional views of culture had led to ‘*essentialization*’ and generalization of members of the same culture group as sharing the same definable characteristics.

In the post-modernist view of culture, the notion of culture is no longer attached to the essentialist notion of culture; it allows culture to be viewed in a much broader way. Culture is rather seen as a process, which emerges throughout the learning process, particularly within intercultural communication domains. In a recent study by Baker (2015) on English as a lingua franca, he sees culture “as a shared but constantly changing and negotiated, set of beliefs, values, ideologies, discourse and practice” (p.12). He also comments that language and culture is best approached as situated, and emergent as foreign language users “draw on, construct, and move between global, national, and local orientations towards cultural characterization” (p.9). The characterization of culture has now been revised from one predominantly cantered on nation-states or reduced to language, ethnicities and values, to one that is fluid and dynamic with the capacity to change. The concept of intercultural communication (ICC) will be further explained in section 3.4.3.

### **3.4 Approaches to teaching culture in ESL**

In the context of English as Second Language (ESL) Learning, a number of second language theorists have examined the concept of culture and have confirmed the role of learners’ culture in the learning of English language as a second language. Kramsh

(2001) points out that language and culture are intertwined and go hand in hand with each other. She notes that:

*People who identify themselves as members of a social group (family, neighbourhood, professional or ethnic affiliation, and nation) acquire common ways of viewing the world through their interactions with other members of the same group...Common attitudes, beliefs and values are reflected in the way members of the group use language, for example, what they choose to say or not to say and how they say it (p.6)*

In the same vein, the significance of learners' culture as part of their being is described in this way; "learners cannot simply shake off their own culture and step into another..their culture is part of themselves and created them as social beings. Learners are committed to their culture and to deny any part of it is to deny something within their own being" (Byram 1989, p.111-13, as cited in Byram and Morgan (1994, p. 43).

The relationship between language and culture is also summarized by Brown, (2000, p.177): "A language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture". A significant number of studies have pointed out that many aspects of second language learning are affected by learners' own cultures (Moerman, 1988; de Bot, Ginsberg, & Kramsh, 1991, as cited in Hinkel, 1999, p. 6). ESL research in Malaysia by Bakar, Hamid, Awal and Jallaluddin (2011) have also pointed out that cultural factors such as learners' ethnicity, demographic area and socioeconomic status among others, are significant factors that bind the acquisition of the target language.



A study by Atkinson (2002) points out that cognition of a language interplays with experiences, cultural knowledge, emotions and social identity. Work by Trueba (1987, 1988) points out the close relationship between language, culture and cognition. The data from the research suggests culture affects processes of acquiring knowledge and information processing, regardless of learners' histories. Trueba (1988) argues that effective learning will take place when learners' cultures are addressed and recognized in the learning settings. Attempts should be made to integrate home and school cultures into teaching approaches. Trueba also asserts that cultural conflicts happen; they should not be ignored but carefully resolved instead.

Trueba and Zou (1994) carried out a study on undergraduate students on cultural identity. These students were members of the minority group in China known as the *Miao*, and they studied in an institution dominated by a majority known as the Han Chinese. Despite coming from a remote area and from an impoverished background, this study reveals that learners were driven by the desire to succeed in learning the second language so they could repay and improve the family socioeconomic status. This study suggests that despite being in a different or a new environment, learners did not need to forsake their cultural identity. In fact, being a *Miao* had given them a sense of empowerment to succeed.

Studies on the effects of first (learners') culture in second language learning began in the 1980's when much focus was placed on 'culturally defined behaviour' like the effects of body language, eye contact, behaviour and other communicative standards (Morain, 1986 cited in Hinkel, 1999, p. 4). According to Hinkel, the outcome of such

research has influenced second language teachers, instructors and researchers to come up with teaching methodologies, which address cultural behaviour.

Along the same lines, an earlier study by Tsui (1995) also suggests that learners' interactions in class are guided by what they believed is appropriate classroom behaviour as reflected in their cultural norms. Earlier work by Damen (1987 cited in Hinkel, 1999) urges second or foreign language teachers also to become ethnographers of their students' culture in order to gain insights into learners' knowledge and expectations, as he recognizes the significant influence learners' cultural values, beliefs and assumptions can have on their experiences in the language classroom. Damen states that cultural values "bring affective force to beliefs" and centre on ideas of "good, proper and positive, or the opposite" (p.191). In discussing culture-specific patterns and communication norms, a number of studies have also associated learners' native culture with the challenges and the complexities of communicating in the target language (O'Neil, 2005; Fengyan, 2002).

In conclusion, the findings in the earlier research suggest that in the language classroom, languages and cultures (both of the target language and the mother tongues) meet each other, creating a unique context for the negotiation of language and cultural stances.

### **3.4.1 Culture as a content subject**

Dubreil (2006) explains that, until the 1960s, culture in L2 education was mainly taught through literature found in textbooks. Educators, however were advised to regard the target language's culture as expressed through lifestyles or everyday habits. The earlier methods of teaching language and culture centred around two approaches, namely 'teaching culture as content' (i.e. literature) and the 'integrated approach' (i.e. culture as another dimension of language learning apart from listening, speaking, writing, grammar).

In general, both approaches aimed at producing learners who could 'pass as native speakers' (Zhu, 2014, p. 7). However, it was argued that the tendency for the target culture to undermine learners' native culture is prevalent (Zhu, 2014, p. 7). In the new millennium, culture should take on more fluid definitions as L2 education places increasing emphasis on learning a target language in a communicative and meaningful context (Larson-Freeman, 2000). It was asserted that "the relationship between culture and language teaching has become even more complex due to the fact that the purposes of learning foreign languages have evolved from linguistic through communicative competence to intercultural and intercultural communicative competence" (Scarino, 2010, p. 22).

### 3.4.2 Communicative Competence (CC)

Communicative competence, Hymes has stated that “there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” (2001, p. 60). Hymes (2001, p. 16) also defined communicative competence as “the tacit knowledge” of the language and points out on “the ability to use it for the communication”. Hymes (2001) mentioned that communicative competence represents both, grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence. Canale and Swain (1980, p. 30) point out that there are four main competencies, which make up the construct of communicative competence which are:

- i) *Grammatical Competence*, associated to providing learners with the knowledge of language accuracy
- ii) *Discourse Competence*, which refers to learners’ ability to make meaningful sentences
- iii) *Social-linguistic Competence*, which refers to the socio-cultural knowledge of the language with an emphasis on the understanding of the roles of the speaker, the topic, setting, the norms of the communication and the appropriate attitude
- iv) *Strategic Competence* which highlights the strategies learners use to sustain communication in the form of verbal and non-verbal.

Hinkel (2013, p. 3) notes that to become a proficient L2 speaker, learners not only need to be linguistically competent but also to attain L2 socio-cultural competence such as

when and how often to say *thank you*. Hinkel further explains that learners have the tendency to apply the standards of their native language (L1) communities in communicating in L2. Hinkel points out that L2 learners' socio-cultural frameworks are culture-bound as they have been developed through socialization which has been translated into beliefs, assumptions and behaviour. In addition, Scollon and Scollon (2001) elaborate that some culturally acceptable concepts such as what is appropriate or acceptable behaviour may never be separated from learners' identity as it has been developed through socialization.

ESL learners learn not only the linguistic aspects of the target language and the development of skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) but also carry with them the culture they live in and the culture of the target language as they communicate in L2. In an ESL class, for example, when learners considered (an attitude they bring with them) that speaking up and commenting on others' ideas is an impolite action, such a notion would affect the ways others observe them. If speaking up was considered as inappropriate behaviour, ESL teachers would have difficulties in encouraging speaking between learners.

### **3.4.3 Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)**

The move towards ICC stresses the need to acquire knowledge of the target language (Byram, 1997). Such knowledge of other people's culture may be attained via the underlined sub-components of the ICC, which are:

*'attitudes' (curiosity and openness), 'knowledge' (knowledge of social groups), 'skills of interpreting and relating' (interpret a*

*document or event of another country and relate), 'skills of discovering and interactions' (ability to acquire and operate new knowledge within real-time interaction) and 'critical cultural awareness culture' (ability to evaluate critically of the perspectives, practices, and products of others and own culture) (Byram, 2002, p. 11-13).*

The development towards ICC demonstrates the important role that culture plays within the domains of foreign language teaching and learning. Research in the field of intercultural competence emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness in learning English as a second language in the cross-cultural context.

Unlike communicative competence, intercultural communicative competence takes account of learners' native cultural background and aims at producing 'intercultural speakers' who can "mediate between different cultures and different viewpoints" via the learners' native language. (Zhu, 2014, p.7). In other words, intercultural competence promotes cultural behaviour in cross-cultural communication. Unlike in traditional language classrooms, second or foreign language teachers nowadays are required to possess the knowledge of ICC ranging from knowledge to skills, awareness to attitudes and theory to practice (Zhu, 2014).

#### **3.4.3.1 'Small culture' conceptualization of culture**

The post-modernist notion of *small culture*, (Figure 3.3) introduced by Holliday in 1999, has been cited primarily in the field of intercultural communication (ICC). Holliday (1999) argues that, rather than the earlier conceptualization of culture, the more dynamic model of culture emerging from postmodernism is far more relevant in the context of globalization: "the small culture approach was most appropriate for the

world which is increasingly multi-cultural at every level” (p. 1). Holliday (1999, p. 39) recognizes a more “flexible view of culture in which the social world is made up of a seamless mélange of social groupings” rather than appearing as large coherent geographical entities. In contrast, the term ‘large culture’, referring to the earlier conceptualizations of culture reduces culture to the essentialist approach, which tends to link into stereotypical descriptors like ethnicity, and national and international group.

Holliday argues that this essentialized notion of culture has been used to manage power relations between the dominant and the dominated group. He strongly disagrees with the concept of one nation and one culture and rejects equating large groups with homogenous ideas of culture. To him, such concepts deny the ability of its members to change, to bring changes or any means of evolution to the current national culture. For Holliday, the large culture ideas tend to ‘essentialize’ culture. He notes that essentialized notions of culture have been used by the government as a nationalist discourse and political tool in managing power relations (p.243). Consequently, such an approach to culture focuses on differences and exaggerated social practices and then stereotyping such differences becomes natural and institutionalized.

On the other hand, the *small culture* approach foresees culture to be found in all types of social groupings wherever there is “cohesive behaviour in activities within any social groupings” (Holliday, 1999, p. 241). Such an approach is used to understand and interpret emerging behaviour of group members liberated from the large notion of culture.

### 3.4.3.2 'Large Culture' conceptualization of culture

The term 'large culture' and the *essentialized* notion of culture, resonates with the earlier discussion in the previous chapter on Malaysia's system of governance, particularly in terms of its national identity. At this stage, it would be possible to suggest that strong 'large culture' ideas, where national identity is seen as an essential unifying mechanism, help to reinforce a large culture perspective. By 'large culture' is meant the powerful notion of national ideas, customs and language, which suggest a distinctive identity is used to organize a sense of cohesion and membership of a group. As mentioned earlier, the 'large culture' concept is also characterized as 'essentialist' by Holliday (1999) as he argues that it reduces culture to 'essential' features of national groups to ethnic or homogeneous ideas of culture.

Looking at Malaysia, parallel to this discussion, it is argued by Lian (1997) that the "Malays, have gradually essentialized their identity (*bangsa*) in reaction to their marginalization, first in a colonial society and later in an ex-colonial society in the face of escalating Chinese economic dominance" (p.3). Chun (1996, p. 70, cited in Lian, 1997, p. 2), states that nation-building requires the state to essentialize and totalize.

Lian (1997) explains that:

*To essentialize means to reduce something to its supposed pure form and to treat it as if it exists in reality. Newly independent states in Southeast Asia often essentialize ethnicity by assuming that ethnic groups possess inherently different cultural or behavioural characteristics; these are then used to distinguish them for the purpose of government. The state essentializes "Chineseness" in Singapore as much as "Malayness" in Malaysia. To totalize is to apply such essentialist categories to as many of the local population as possible in order to facilitate government" (p. 20).*



In addition, crucially for the governing state, the citizenship model (*Bumiputra and Non-Bumiputra*) used, privileges some ethnic groups over others and ethnic identity is a key means of managing a form of differentiated citizenship identification of ethnicity. This showcases the manifestation of the essentialist notion of culture as crucial elements in the make-up of multi-ethnic Malaysia, where ethnicity forms sharp identifiers even when it comes to national identity.

Essentially, it is worthwhile to note that the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad stressed that the nation had to hold strongly to religious and ethnic values despite the pressuring wave of globalization (Ibrahim, 2007). This, again, implicitly emphasizes the essentialist notion of Malaysian identity. In general, the static views of national and ethnic identities may lead to one taking an essentialist view of culture with regard to Malaysia. As a part of national culture, the *Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra* citizenship policy has remained legitimate (still in use) and intact for 60 years after gaining independence despite the aggravating tensions among other ethnicities.

The ‘small culture’ paradigm promotes the idea that culture is somewhat dynamic and changing, rather than static, whereas *large culture* often reduces culture the essential features of ethnicity, nationality, religion, certain social practices and patterns and any homogeneous ideas of culture. Holliday (1998) adds that the large culture emphasis on differences in ‘culture’, like behaviour, results in stereotyping. Eventually, stereotypes are naturalized and institutionalized, leading to overgeneralization or otherization of foreign cultures. In the context of Malaysia, the *Bumiputra* and the

*Non-Bumiputra* differentiated policy has induced gaps between ethnic groups by reinforcing differences among the different ethnicities.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight that the ‘small culture’ paradigm, proposed by Holliday, (1999), was underpinning the “foreign language or postgraduate English language education groups carried out in Britain where there were multiple nationalities which are common in Britain” (p. 249). Hence, such a paradigm would not be entirely applicable in the context of Malaysia’s ESL classes, particularly at a public university where the majority of classes are dominated by the *Bumiputra* (Malays and the indigenous groups)

Differing from the context of international English classes set in Britain much has been said in the previous chapter about the strong presence of national cultures in Malaysia which has materialized throughout its political, educational and differentiated citizenship policies exists as a dominant culture which influences learners’ sense of identity, security and belonging.

The researcher intends to utilize the concept of *small culture* introduced by Holliday (1999), as well as the concept of *large cultures* to help shape the research in the context of HEI ESL classrooms in Malaysia. The large and small cultures are conceived as potentially fluid and dynamic influences at the heart of learners’ willingness to communicate (WTC) as participation is negotiated between individuals and classrooms. Zhu, a scholar in ICC, notes that studies following large cultures are still widely cited in “business and organization management, applied linguistics and

intercultural training” (2011, p. 3). In other words, despite the shift to viewing intercultural encounters as a newly emerging set of cultural values and identities in modern studies, the traditional view of culture remains as a convenient tool in order to study people’s interactions and decisions.

### **3.5 Conceptualization of the ‘Small Culture’ Paradigm**

If we use Holliday’s (1999, p. 249) work on *small culture* to consider the ESL classroom in the context of this study, it is helpful to illustrate the framework of ‘small culture’ (Figure 3.3) that the author has proposed. The ‘small culture’ approach involves four main factors, which are:

- 1) Need for group cohesion: *recipe, convention, discourse, identity, expression, exclusivity*
- 2) Cultural residues and influences; *family, nation, region, peers, profession, institution etc.*
- 3) Social constructions: *routinization, institutionalization, naturalization*
- 4) Products: *artefacts, arts, literature values, discourse of and about culture”*.

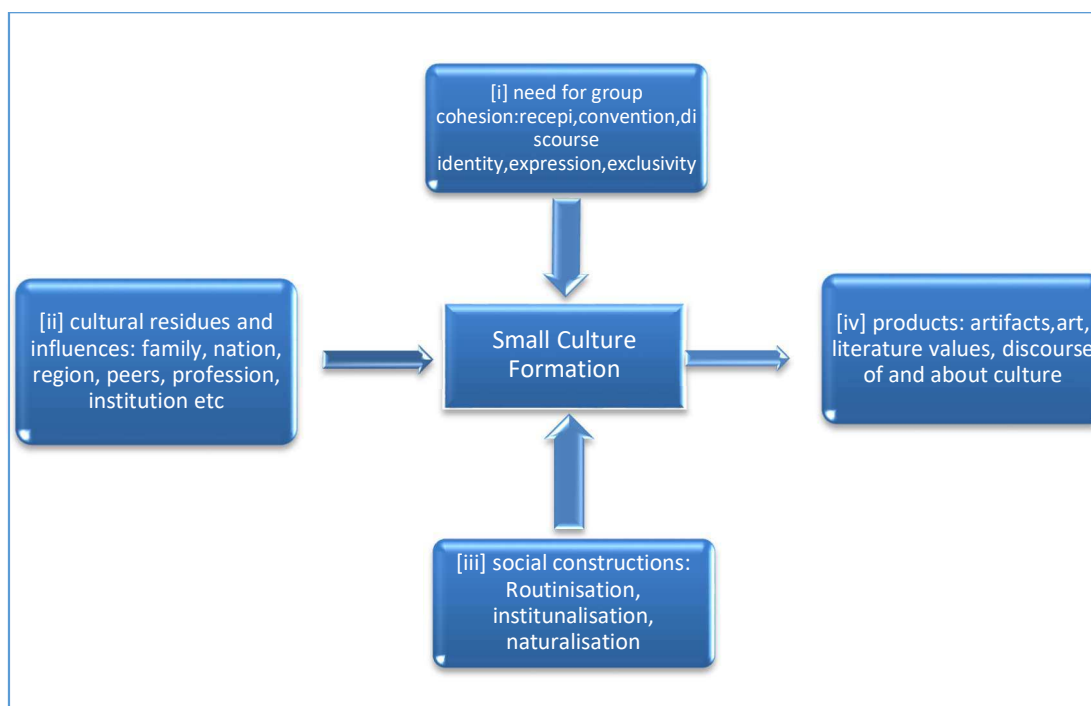


Figure 3.3 Small Culture Formation reprinted from *Small Cultures* (p.249) by Holliday (1999). *Small Cultures*. Oxford University Press. *Applied Linguistics* 2012:237-264

Essentially, ‘small culture’ is rooted in the activities taking place within the group rather than the nature of the group (Holliday, 1999). As explained by Holliday (1999), “the small culture paradigm attaches culture to the small social groupings and activities wherever there is cohesive behaviour” (p.1). The ‘small culture’ concept functions as a platform for understanding emergent behaviour rather than relying on the prescribed ethnic differences or sets of behaviour as the primary descriptors.

According to Holliday (1999, p. 248), section [i] represents the basic social and psychological function of culture as a process, and section [ii] represents social continuity which needs to be remembered although small culture is formed rapidly. It was noted by Holliday (1999, p. 248) that numbers [i] and [ii] do not necessarily happen before any of the others. Holliday (1999) adds that in newly- formed small cultures of the classroom, members will bring along *cultural residues* and influences

from *family, nation, region, peers, profession and institution*. Holliday (1999) points out that since small culture formation closely refers to an international foreign language or postgraduate English language education in Britain, cultural *residues* will be brought from many national and ethnic experiences; “but commonalities of educational, classroom, collegial and peer experience will be the building blocks for the new small culture” (p.249). In contrast, in the context of Malaysia, I would argue that learners bring powerful influences rather than ‘residues’ as they illuminate strong national and ethnic cultural stories of belonging that play an important role in helping to shape a sense of self.

Section [iii] highlights the fact that ‘small culture’ notes on behaviour, which is socially constructed for the sake of group cohesion, becomes a routine. Holliday (1998, p.251) suggests that any activities which are carried out within a newly- formed group may become *routinized, institutionalized* and perhaps *naturalized* “making a social construction normal and taken for granted”.

Section [iv] represents products of the small culture that could be in the form of *artefacts, arts, literature values and discourse of and about culture*. In this regard, Holliday (1999) believes that, rather than talking about one’s prescribed culture, “culture should be seen as products or artefacts, expressing how they socially construct their image of their own culture” (p.253). In the context of Malaysia, as discussed in the earlier chapter, learners are constructing their identities through their native cultures. It is not to say that Holliday’s small culture concept of behaviour is entirely

misleading, but the dominant culture that learners live in needs to be considered as it brings powerful influence in shaping learners' behaviour and attitudes in the L2 class.

Prior to his work on 'small culture', Holliday (1994) earlier offers a general description of the complex influences of an ESL classroom, which also contribute to the area of this study. In this concept, "the ESL classroom is placed as a culture within a wider complex of cultures, between which there are many complex channels of influence" (Holliday, 1994, p. 15). Holliday adds that everything that happens in the classroom is a reflection of the world outside. He (1994) contends that that classroom is situated in the host institution, which could be a school, language institute, university or college. The host institution, which is located within the boundaries of the host educational environment, is greatly influenced by parents, employers, the local community and perhaps a world-wide community. This complex interconnection of influences within the classroom is illustrated in Figure 3.4 below:

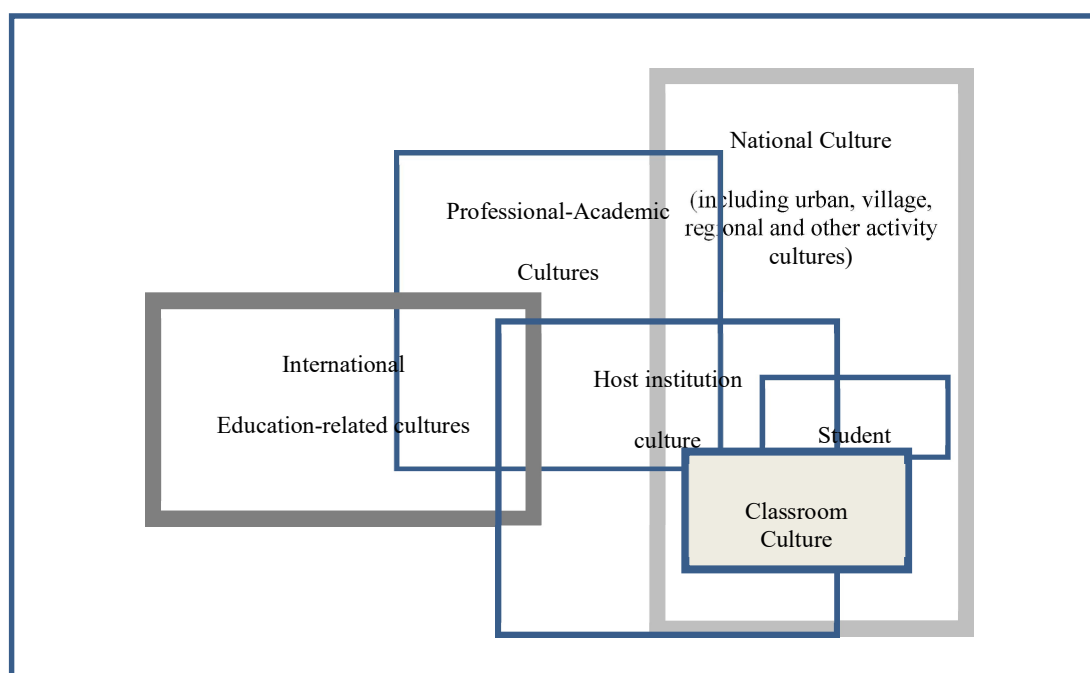


Figure 3.4 Host Culture Complex reprinted from *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context* (p.29) by Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Figure 3.4 shows that although that the national culture is the major overriding influence in the ESL classroom, the professional-academic culture influences may have had a profound influence on institutional culture and classroom culture. In addition, the professional academic-related culture partially transcends the national academic boundaries, at the same time being influenced by the international education-related culture. At the heart of the complex influences, the host educational environment is observed as influenced by student cultures, national cultures, professional-academic cultures and international education-related culture. Holliday (1999) presents the idea that the classroom culture is considered as temporary, with no definite membership and no long histories and traditions.

However, in the context of this study, I would argue that Malaysian ESL classrooms reflect a strong *large culture* imagery, which illuminates the national culture in terms of the presence of national and native languages and ethnic identification. This dominant culture will very much govern learners' perceptions and behaviour within the ESL classroom and, hence, WTC.

Earlier research has agreed that there are differences in terms of learning behaviour between overseas students in the country where the target language is spoken and students in their own countries (Adam et al., 1991; Harrison, 1990; British Council, 1980). As in the work on the *small culture* paradigm (1999), Holliday's' research on ESL classroom culture (1994) also tends to disagree with the notion of culture being reduced to ethnic and national cultures which then prescribe learners' specific behavioural patterns.

Both of Holliday's (1999, 1994) ideas on *small culture* and the classroom culture as a set of complex influences contribute to the work of this study. The dominant national culture learners live in and the *small culture* influences, which see culture as an emergent process within the group, are both potential influences to learners' WTC.

### **3.5.1 Conceptualizing the ESL Classroom is a Public University in Malaysia**

ESL classes at a higher education level in Malaysia normally take place in public or private universities or colleges, matriculation centres and polytechnics. English classes are compulsory and taken throughout primary and secondary education, and as an



obligatory course to take and to pass at tertiary education system, due to its pervasive role in the country's development.

With regard to the English language classes where research takes place, the majority of the learners registered in ESL classes belong to the same undergraduate courses they first registered in. Learners of the same course background (i.e. Electrical Engineering course) will generally be grouped together within the new ESL class; however, they may differ in terms of mother tongue language, ethnicity, religion, education and family upbringing. Usually, ESL classes are physically dynamic in nature, and there are on-going group processes undertaken as the classes operate within specific semesters. Undergraduates normally register themselves in three English language classes throughout their period of study. Teachers and learners of a particular ESL class meet up approximately for one semester for each English class, before continuing to the next class during the following semester.

Central to their nature, it is quite clear these ESL classes will have sets of shared objectives, activities and discourses that strongly bind group cohesion, resonating the 'small culture' paradigm. In addition, because learners are also members of other groupings (i.e. engineering society, football club or the Indian and Chinese club) consisting of their own members, activities and discourses, this leads to a complex multi-layered network of cultures. Teachers may perhaps find the multiple cultures of the learners' ethnicities, courses (e.g. engineering) and previous educational experiences challenging and complex.

In light of the large culture ideas that form essential narratives of self in relation to Malaysian national identity (discussed earlier in Chapter 2), the ESL classroom is conceptualized here as a unique and dynamic space made up of three distinct ethnicities: Malays, Chinese and Indians. Other minority ethnicities, which might also constitute the ESL classroom, would be the non- Malay indigenous people from East Malaysia in Sabah and Sarawak such as the *Melanau*, *Iban*, *Bidayuh*, *Dusun*, *Kadazan*.

However, because the ethnic Malay and indigenous groups make up the ‘Bumiputra’ (as noted earlier in Chapter 1) larger quotas of intake were provided for the Malays and indigenous groups of learners to enter public higher institutions (PHEI’s). For that reason, the make-up of an ESL classroom at a publicly funded university or college will be dominated by Malays and indigenous groups with some Chinese and Indians. For instance, the average intake for PHEIs in 2008 demonstrated that *Bumiputra* took up 84.8 per cent, followed by 9.7 per cent Chinese, 2.8 per cent Indians and 2.6 per cent others (Mukhrajee et al., 2017). At this point, we could say the Malays are treated with some element of privilege in being accepted at the publicly funded universities. Hence, to certain extent this impact on the classroom culture.

However, as of the present, the issue remains an important debate between the three major ethnic groups. The newly elected political party urges the government to be clean and transparent with the quota system (The Star, 26 April 2019). The polarization of ethnicities on different courses varies - for instance, an ESL classroom in the Faculty of Management may comprise more Chinese as compared to Malays, depending on

the course enrolment, but the general make-up of a public university will consist of larger numbers of Malays as compared to others, due to the merit system.

In the context of English proficiency, for example, Chinese undergraduates have been reported to be favoured by employers, especially in the private sector, due to perceived better proficiency in English language as compared to the Malays. This was reported in a local news (The Star, 7 March 2019).

*PETALING JAYA: Despite sharing the same qualifications, language skills and experience, a job applicant's race still plays a major factor in employment, a study has found. The study - conducted by Centre for Governance and Political Studies (Cent-GPS) - found that the resumes of Indians and Malays are the least likely to receive call-backs from employers in the private sector. On the other hand, the resumes of Chinese candidates dominated the call-back by a huge margin, according to the centre in a statement Thursday (March 7). Over the past few months, Cent-GPS said it sent 3,829 job applications to more than 500 jobs. In each of these 500 jobs, seven nearly identical resumes were submitted but represented by different fictitious ethnic group candidates - three Malays, two Chinese, and two Indians. The study ensured that all of the seven resumes had the same qualifications, experience, language ability (Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mandarin) but differed in religious beliefs. Out of the seven, Nicola Yeoh and Gabriel Liew, both ethnic Chinese, fared the best with 240 and 179 call-backs, respectively.*

It is argued that racial or ethnic essentialism has been institutionalized and made real for Malaysians through everyday life processes (Tan, 2000). The differentiated citizenship of *Bumiputra* and *Non-Bumiputra* preferential policies remains a sensitive subject to disagree with. As Tan (2000) notes, “the structural conflict at group level is carefully avoided at the interpersonal level so that when a Chinese-Malay interacts with Malays, they generally avoid talking about Malay dominance or about ethnic discrimination” (p.464). In English classroom group projects, pair work and classroom

spirit are often expressed and integrated through the teaching and learning activities. Teachers, as much as the learners themselves, promote harmony to avoid racial tensions.

It is crucial to point out that in the context of the study, the culture of the ESL classroom will not be characterized by generalizing or profiling ESL learners by the dominant ethnic culture present in the classroom, but will also consider other small culture influences, which may take place within the ESL classroom. The quality of teaching and learning activities has never been associated with ethnicities but instead to achieve general goals for all. *Vision 2020* and *Global Transformation Programme 1.0 and 2.0* policies have clearly set goals and measures towards narrowing the cultural gap according to ethnicity through the government '1 Malaysia' concept. The government states:

*Building 1 Malaysia, creating oneness or unity within a multi-religious and multi-cultural nation is challenging. Malaysia has chosen a unique route – that of unity in diversity and inclusiveness while ensuring fairness to all and remaining anchored in our Constitution. This means that we embrace our diversity of ethnicity, religions and beliefs and, by being inclusive, build mutual respect and acceptance into a solid foundation of trust and cohesiveness. This has historically been the path that we have taken as a nation and is now encapsulated by the principle of 1Malaysia. Inherent in every human society or relationship are polarities, more so in a plural society. A polarity is the existence of two views, conditions or demands that are opposite to each other. Unlike a technical or mechanical problem that can have a simple, straightforward solution, a polarity usually requires a trade-off that needs to be managed and managed well. Embracing inclusiveness is one – perhaps even the best – approach to managing polarities.*

(PEMANDU, 2014, p.11)

As stated in the earlier sections, social and economic divisions were initiated by the colonialists, and this led to imposed gaps, encouraged divisions and reinforced the identification of ethnic identity. Efforts were made to secure the nation's identity via the national language, to foster solidarity in terms of national identity and pride, despite disparities felt by other ethnic groups as other native languages are sacrificed. Significant studies undertaken among Malaysian ESL learners have identified learners' socio-cultural identity and the use of the English language as deeply influenced by experiences throughout the colonial administration resulting in a complicated link between socio-cultural meanings and socio-cultural identity.

Lee (2003) a distinguished Professor who studies socio-cultural identity, formerly teaching in University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) mentions that, in the post-colonial era, the issue of ethnicity and identity remains complex and multi-layered.

Lee, in her above study, reveals that learners' identity constructions are dependent upon their local context and the group they are interacting with. In some cases, Lee (2003) points out that the *non-use* of English would enhance group acceptance rather than the use of English as English is sometimes perceived as a threat to one's identity. Learners are often shifting identity in a *strategic* and a *non-strategic* way in order to fit in or to belong to a group they are interacting with. Lee adds that the use of English, where there is resentment towards the target language, may bring out hostility, marginalization and to some extent, alienation. In her study, she reports that in a post-colonial setting like Malaysia, an effective user of English may newly be defined as "someone who knows not just *how and when to use it* but also when NOT to use it"

(p.9). Such conflict and dilemma in using English for the learner may, to some extent, cause total withdrawal from the communication in order to reduce the risk of being negatively judged by members of the group. Lee (2003) notes that;

*Understanding learners' struggles in learning the English language involves not just his/her difficulties in the classroom but also awareness of how sociocultural meanings are linked in complicated ways to sociocultural identities. Teachers and practitioners should be aware that the classroom is not a neat self-contained mini-society isolated from outside world but an integral part of the larger society where the reproduction of many forms of domination and resistance based on gender, ethnicity, class, race, religion and language is a daily event (p. 9).*

Apart from the fact that the use of English potentially impacts on learners' identity, research by Lee (2003) also finds that speaking English suggests a sense of 'neutrality', freeing the speakers from any cultural and moral stance of the speakers' native culture, while, at the same time, allowing one to feel more 'open-minded', allowing freedom of expression, access to alternative views and facilitating a critical attitude towards one's own culture (p.9).

Omar (1998), Professor Emeritus at the Academy of Malay Studies (AMS), University of Malaya (UM) earlier notes the perceived neutrality of the target language by explaining that English does not possess a first language speech community and thus, experiences in speaking the language is without cultural constraints. Omar (1998), through her previous findings among 12 respondents among 3 ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indians), whom she interviewed and 83 students who answered a questionnaire survey, has pointed out that learners' linguistic identity building is constructed through nurture rather than nature. Omar (1998) highlights that identity

“changes with the individual’s development, environment and situation of language use” (p.21). She continues that the Malays are prone to use Malay, due to the indigeneity factor, as the national language and the language used in schools. For the minority group, there seems to be a preference towards English, which produces higher prestige, and English seems prevalent in the global context. English in Malaysia, although regarded as the language of the colonials, also became the language for the elites towards the end of the colonial era (Rajadurai, 2010) and that could be why learners would possibly adopt changes in their linguistic identity. It is obvious at this point, that identity construction may well be strongly influenced by one’s ethnic heritage at the same time as the ways in which the learners are educated or brought up. Essentially learners could possess multiple linguistic identities, which would be projected to various degrees and strengths (Omar, 1998).

Rajadurai (2010) notes that English may be regarded as a threat to a particular ethnicity and culture like the Malays as it is perceived as a colonial language. Studies by Abdullah and Wong (2006), Mohd Asraf (2005) and Washima et al. (1996) echo such findings and observe that among other ethnicities, Malays demonstrate greater reluctance to be engaged with the target language. Promoting English, to some extent, is regarded as a threat to Malay identity and Malay dominance and the historical resistance towards British colonialism (Rajadurai, 2010a). Given that, the target language carries along with it the ‘target culture,’ conflicts and dilemma may surface among its speakers.

Lee (2003, p. 13) notes that “one’s own cultural values, the socio-cultural context, language ideology, power relations and the politics of language will impact one’s identity, causing it to be in constant state of flux, ever-changing and shifting depending on the changing context”. Despite the strong force of national identity, the equally powerful force of globalisation has resulted in most public universities thinking globally, for example, UA University “has more than 5,000 international students from more than 60 countries, the highest among other research universities in Malaysia” (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2016). Hence, the language used as the medium of instruction is inclined towards the usage of English language to meet the needs of learners of other nationalities especially at postgraduate level and to be at par with the other international universities around the globe.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, apart from its status as a lingua franca and its prominence in the worlds’ economy, the use of English is also crucial in attracting foreign learners to study at the university as an international education hub. In this respect, ESL classes at public HEIs (PHEIS) may also consist of international members, and these classes are platforms to establish English language competency among its learners to fulfil individual, national and international demand. Although English was once the language of British colonialists, the repositioning of the language as an international lingua franca might influence the courses and class identity, learners’ social groupings and learners’ interactions and negotiations which in turn would influence the ESL classroom cultures and WTC.



In short, within the ESL classroom, learners are identified within the institution according to ethnicity besides names, age and gender and will have experienced learning connected with the political vision of one nation. They are also likely to have been influenced by the differentiation inherent in that project and the idea of large culture associated with it. When investigating the ESL classroom in Malaysia, I believed it was important to consider the concept of 'hybridity' where the 'small culture' approach, as suggested by Holliday (1999), meets the powerful concept of large culture in many different aspects of students' learning experiences. By this, I mean that the dominance of 'large cultures' and reliant subcultures in key aspects of life in Malaysia means that such influences may play particularly strong roles in shaping the small cultures of the classroom. In addition to having different sets of backgrounds and beliefs, learners may also bring along the culture of multiple social groupings which have shaped their behaviour, perceptions and also a wide range of learning styles. However, from my perspective, Holliday's (1999) model does not capture sufficiently the powerful influence of large culture outside and within the students' learning experiences in PHEIs in Malaysia.

At this stage, I am suggesting an adapted version of Holliday's (1999) small culture and its significant influences, in order to reflect the key narratives at play in the ESL classroom at PHEIs in Malaysia. This provides us with the possibility of cultural hybridity as a natural part of the interactions and relationships within the ESL classroom in Malaysia. Hybridity has become a contested term. It is often used in the literature to refer to a cultural phenomenon which somehow cross borders. In this research the term is used in a new way. By cultural hybridity, I mean the possibility of

competing and perhaps sometimes contradictory or conflicting cultural imperatives that colour students' perceptions through diverse influences.

In this research, I acknowledge and at the same time examine the small cultures as conceived by Holliday in the ESL classroom, while arguing for powerful pressure on this from learners' large culture and associated subcultures. I also go further by adding influences such as family to the group of small culture influences, which was not mentioned in Holliday's small culture model. I hope to recognize the multiple influences, theorise the way they operate and support with evidence through the data. This new perspective about the ESL classroom supports the idea that we should consider the hybridization of Holliday's 'small culture' model (1999) by integrating it with elements of large cultures, a logical step to understand the dynamics of the contemporary ESL classroom in the Malaysian public university context. The following section presents the proposed preliminary conceptual framework of the ESL classroom culture, incorporating the small and large culture influences believed to influence ESL learners' WTC.

### **3.6 Conceptual framework and the hybridizing cultural influences**

For the purpose of this study, the 'small culture' model conceptualized by Holliday (1999) contributes to my work in looking into the ESL classroom in relation to learners' state of willingness to communicate (WTC). The dynamics of the Malaysian ESL public university classroom are likely to be seen through the emergence of 'small culture' (Holliday, 1999) and 'large culture' narratives. Learners' WTC in the ESL classroom is used as the platform to study culture due to the assumptions that culture

is believed to potentially govern learners' personalities and behaviour. Hinkel (1999) notes that "learners cannot simply shake off their own culture and step into another...their culture is part of themselves and created them as social beings. Learners are committed to their culture and to deny any part of it is to deny something within their own being" (p.70). Learners and the cultures that surround and submerge the learning of English as a second language should not be studied in isolation. Through hybridizing Holliday's (1999) model, I strongly feel that the best of both small culture and large culture concepts will contribute to a deeper understanding of learners' state of willingness to communicate in a second language classroom. Below is the hybridized conceptual framework that illustrates the emergence of small culture and large culture that potentially makes up the dynamics of the ESL classroom in a public university in Malaysia.

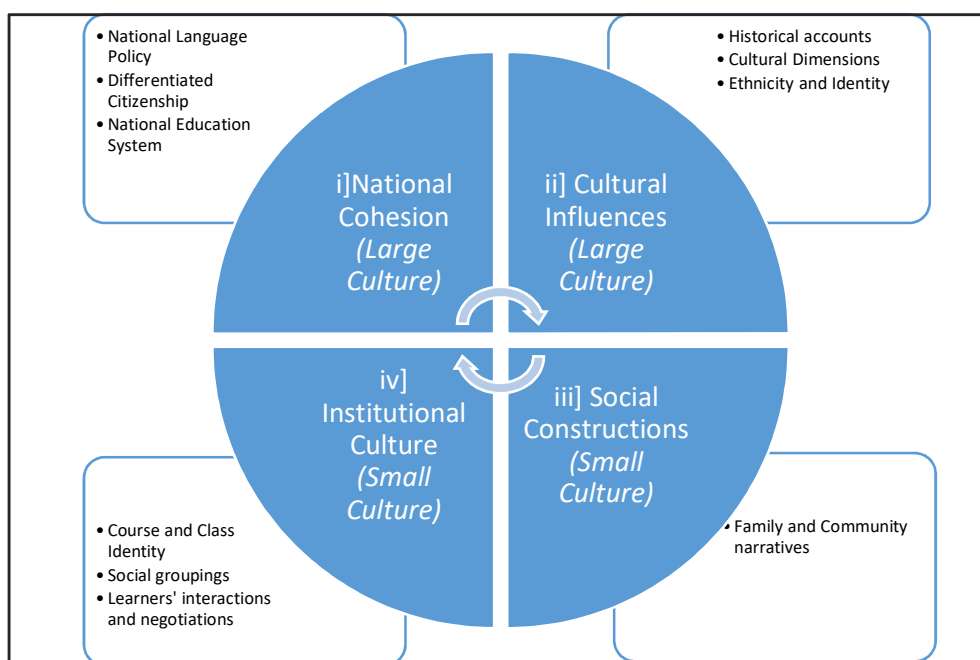


Figure 3.5 Hybridized Conceptual Framework of the ESL Classroom Culture

This conceptual framework (Figure 3.5) is informed by Holliday's small cultures framework (1999) but has been adapted as a means of capturing the potential narrative

influences on individuals within a Malaysian ESL classroom. The following pages take each of these in turn to discuss the possible elements involved, but the discrete exploration of each separately should not suggest that these influences are seen as separate from each other. Indeed, each narrative is likely to be influenced by other narratives, creating a web where some narratives may have greater influence at one point and less at another. The diagram of the '*Hybridized Conceptual Framework of the ESL Classroom Culture*' (Figure 3.5) consists of four quadrants belonging to elements of *large culture* and *small culture*. The large culture quadrants are [i] *National cohesion*, ii] *Cultural Influences* while the small culture quadrants will be the iii] *Social Constructions* and iv] *Institutional Culture*. Essentially, in the effort to make sense of the dynamics of the ESL classroom, I artificially separate the elements into different components. In reality, the components or the influences are interrelated with each other.

### **3.6.1 [i] National cohesion**

As mentioned earlier, Malaysia's national policy underlining the national vision policy concerns enhancing national cohesion, and the messages are strongly large culture. Malaysia's multicultural population positions are confined to the powerful, differentiated citizenship policy where each ethnicity is bound to provisions as underlined by the government.

The ESL classroom is perceived as a unique space as the classroom is made up of three distinct ethnicities in Malaysia. These are the Malays, Chinese, Indian and other minor

ethnicities. However, because the ethnic Malays and indigenous groups make up the ‘Bumiputra’ (as noted earlier in Chapter 1) larger quotas of intake were provided to the Malays and the indigenous group of learners to enter public universities. For that reason, the Malays and the Malay language will dominate the make-up and the environment of an ESL classroom at a publicly funded university or college, together with some Chinese and Indian. English in Malaysia is not the native language of Malaysians but was inherited as a result of history and is a legacy of the former colonial masters- the British. In modern-day Malaysia, due to its pervasive influence at international level, English is now positioned as an important second language and strongly positioned at the tertiary education level. Such a powerful large culture policy undoubtedly will influence learners’ perceptions and behaviour in the learning of English as the second language.

### **3.6.2 [ii] Cultural Influences**

Malaysian ESL classrooms theoretically reflect the multi-dimensionality of Malaysian identity; it is a multi-ethnic society in terms of ethnicity, religious customs and norms. Each ethnicity displays its own unique and distinctive cultural identities, while some may have embraced mixed ethnicities. The diversity of Malaysian society has been very much influenced not only by the existence of the main ethnicities but also by the fact that Malaysia enculturated the cultures of the colonizers such as the British, Portuguese, Dutch and Japanese. Despite cherishing the diversity and uniqueness of Malaysia’s pluralistic society, the government has taken affirmative action to confirm a single identity to unify the nation particularly through making BM as the national language and Islam as the national religion.

However, the complexity of creating one common identity has indirectly intensified the identification of other ethnicities to acknowledge each individual group's needs and preservation of cultures. Different ethnic group representatives have argued their place within the national vision policy and debated around the disadvantages different groups might have. Tension between the Malays and the Chinese continued into the post-independence period (Tan, 2000, p. 448). Hence, ethnic stereotypes and cultural ethos have evolved (as mentioned earlier Chapter 1) and have dominated the large culture picture of particular ethnicities.

### **3.6.3 [iii] Social Constructions**

Family and community narratives may be influenced by some of the large culture narratives, but some families or communities may reject some of the large culture narratives. Thus, room for idiosyncrasies or differences at the family and community level have yet to be identified. Family and community narratives may also contain individual elements that feed into small culture elements in a slightly different way than it does at the large culture stage, where it concerns the macro ideas.

At a small culture stage, it is about the individual, families and communities they came from. The kind of narratives that are told within those groupings will influence how they see themselves and how they engage at individual and group level within the

classroom. Jon-Ellis et al. (2005) described the learning, which took place in a classroom as;

*a social context to which learners bring themselves and their past experiences in which they establish certain relationships and attempt to participate and engage in tasks in ways that best fit their social needs (p. 123).*

Family and community influences may feed into learners' relationships towards the target language. In general, during British colonialism, the differences in ethnic occupation and geographical location only fostered income disparities and an education system, which split students by native language and ethnic differences. All these, to some extent, resulted in dissatisfaction and negative narratives between ethnicities and induced a further sense of protection towards one's own language, identity and ethnicity (Shamsuddin, Liaw and Ridzuan, 2015). This at the same time induced the feeling of discomfort and hatred towards the language and culture of the colonials and hence the lack of interest towards the language.

In a research study by Rajadurai (2010), learners repeatedly talk about the cold reception in their respective homes and community in their attempt to speak English. Learners described their experiences in speaking English as "being misunderstood, stared at, made fun of, judged, alienated and given the silent treatment" (p.101). Rajadurai (2010) points out that in a community that embraces collective identity, loyalty and traditional values, marginalization towards English speakers is prevalent.

### **3.6.4 [iv] Institutional Culture**

The course and class identity, the social groupings and learners' interactions and negotiations feed into the small culture concept. Negotiations of who we are as an entity or a class, within the social groupings in the class may impact on what is happening in the classroom. Apart from the learning and teaching and the interactions that occur within the ESL classroom, negotiations may also take place in class between teacher and learner and between learner and learner. Teachers and learners interact and negotiate with each other via the teaching and learning activities, forming sets of behavioural understanding, and connection between each other. On the other hand, because learners in the ESL classroom are also members of other social groupings (i.e. engineering society, football club or the Indian and Chinese club) consisting of their own members, activities and discourses, this leads to a complex multi-layered network of institutional cultures.

## **3.7 Conclusion**

In light of this research, the researcher opts to study both ESL learners' large and small culture in order to understand the issue of learners' willingness to communicate in the target language. Atkinson (2004, p. 286) suggests that teachers should try to "know their students culturally" by learning how students' membership in "different, interacting, multiple-sized" cultures influence their attitudes and participation in education setting. Without doubt, societies nowadays, throughout the world, are going through substantial changes due to interactions across borders and the expansion of information technology, but societies are also bound to cultural practices that they



were nurtured in and grew up in. The existing essentialist notions of culture may play an important role in affecting what makes students who they are and how they differ from others.

However, at the same time, as a researcher, I also believe that learners' differences should be seen, as only one aspect of the learner's self, even though they may seem to be firmly rooted in cultural values and political and ideological differences. Learners have the capability to accept, reject or make changes to their current beliefs, which should be considered in understanding ESL learners at tertiary education. Hence, the hybridized model of ESL classroom culture, integrated with elements of large and small culture, appears to be a logical step forward in exploring the dynamics of the contemporary ESL classroom in a Malaysian public university.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter begins by stating the theoretical paradigms, research strategies and methods of collection and analysis. The conceptual framework and describing the methodology by which the conceptual framework is addressed. This chapter also describes the research questions and the research design; the sampling, which includes details of the participants and the technique of selecting them; the research instruments used; research triangulation (method and data), credibility and transferability in the research process and data analysis involved. This chapter ends with a description of ethical considerations.

#### 4.1 Research Objectives and Research Questions

**Objective:** To understand the varying cultural influences on Malaysian university ESL learners' sense of self and how this may affect WTC in the classroom.

**Research Questions:**

1. How do Malaysian university ESL students construct their sense of self in terms of cultural narratives: societal, familial, institutional and classroom?

2. In what ways, if any, do the above narratives influence the students' WTC in a Malaysia university ESL classroom?

The researcher will use the conceptual framework to answer the research questions developed at the beginning of the study and to analyse the data. The purpose of such approach is to acknowledge the complexity of the issue being studied. As suggested by Hamilton and Whittier-Corbett (2013) the use of a conceptual frame will allow the researcher to talk about the subject under study with substantial information and unveil its complexity as compared to simple and straightforward descriptive information gained from the research questions. To investigate ESL classroom culture in relation to learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the English language (L2), the conceptual frame provided allows the researcher to gather comprehensive information on the key concepts, interactions between the key concepts and the implications of such concepts towards learners' WTC in the target language.

## **4.2 The conceptual framework**

"A conceptual framework is simply the current version of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated" (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014, p. 20). Guided by the theoretical constructs, the data are presented in the following findings chapters to reflect data collection and analysis procedures, which put emphasis on the inductive and deductive analysis of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and class participant observations (class activity and group discussions). Along with the deductive analysis, the researcher was always open to any emergent themes, which

were not mentioned in the conceptual framework. In this case, as the study has evolved, a revised version of the conceptual framework of the ESL classroom culture will be presented in the discussion chapter. As noted by Miles, Huberman, Saldana (2014, p. 20) "as the researcher's knowledge of the terrain improves, the map becomes correspondingly more differentiated and integrated".

However, the conceptual framework (Chapter 3, Figure 3.5) depicts the dynamics of the ESL classroom believed to contribute to learners' state of willingness to communicate in English (WTC). The conceptual framework consists of four quadrants belonging to elements of large and small culture reflecting the dynamics of an ESL classroom in relation to ESL learners' WTC in English. The large culture themes in the top part of the quadrant are classified as [i] National cohesion and [ii] Cultural influences. Meanwhile, the small culture themes in the bottom part of the quadrant are categorized as [iii] Social Constructions and [iv] Institutional Cultures.

At this point it is necessary to add a note on the term 'narrative' which is used within the revised conceptual framework in this study. For many researchers who do narrative enquiry it is either a methodology based on analysing stories or making stories out of different kinds of data. In this research, I have used 'narrative' as a term for elements of language learner's identity that are in constant interaction with each other. The analysis was partly deductive (looking for the elements in my framework) and partly inductive (allowing patterns to emerge in the data and then grouping them thematically). The term 'narrative' is not used in a technical sense but as narrative constructed from the data from the different examples given by the participants.

Perhaps the logic of using the term ‘narrative’ is that it helps to convey the fluidity of how the participants experience their language use and learning.

On top of that, to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics of the ESL classroom in relation to the learners’ WTC, it is essential to examine the issue within its original context, which is the ESL classroom at a higher institution in which learning takes place. Having focused on the context, it is also crucial to investigate the ESL learners’ view from the lens of the large and small culture elements, which form the cultures of the classroom and how these elements influence learners' state of WTC in the target language.

### **4.3 Research Methods**

This research employed a qualitative research method. The aim of such a method allowed me as a researcher to gain rich descriptions of the second language WTC by means of careful and detailed explanations, involving a natural and holistic picture of the phenomena being studied as opposed to frequencies and scorings (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

The researcher believes that the qualitative research paradigm would provide rich data, which is crucial to investigating learners’ state of WTC. This qualitative study is situated within the social constructivism theoretical paradigm. This philosophical

stance reflects the ontological assumptions that participants' view of certain situations are often negotiated through the social, historical context and cultural norms that operates in participants' lives (Creswell, 2013; Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). In terms of the epistemological assumptions, knowledge as socially constructed through interactions with others (Creswell, 2013; Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Constructivist researchers "focus on specific context in which people live and work to understand the historical and cultural settings of participants" (Creswell, 2013, p.25). In this research, the researcher interprets or make sense of what they find, shaped by their own personal, cultural and historical experiences.

As mentioned earlier (section 3.2.2), most research on WTC utilized the quantitative methods to quantify predetermined factors affecting WTC. In this study, the qualitative research methods were used to explore the large and small culture influences of the ESL classroom and their influence on learners' WTC, a kind of research non-existent in the WTC literature. Methods of qualitative inquiry adopted in this research involved non-participant and participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with the ESL learners. The incorporation of multiple methods and sources of data inquiry were used for the purpose of triangulation. "Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods" (Patton, 2002, p. 247). In case studies, multiple sources of evidence were highly regarded in terms of their quality as compare to single-source evidence (Yin, 2014).

It is crucial to highlight that this research taking a socio-cultural approach rather than a psycholinguistic approach to WTC, the latter being reflected in many previous

studies mentioned earlier in Chapter 3. The classroom observations and the semi-structured interviews methods used to collect data resonate an almost ethnographic kind of approach that aims to focus on the socio-cultural perspectives.

#### **4.4 Research Design**

This study adopted an instrumental case study methodology because the issue under study involved real life and a contemporary setting (Yin, 2014). Essentially, case study is claimed to be widely used in second language research studies (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Case study is ideally used to capture the richness and depth of a bounded unit or an aspect of the bounded unit. The bounded unit in this research is the English for Professional Purposes (EPP) (ULAB3162) course organized by a public university (UA University) in Malaysia for their third-year undergraduates, but the specific aspect of this instrumental case study being explored was student WTC. The objective of the ULAB3162 course is “to prepare students to the skills of effective communication that are necessary for them to function effectively in the workplace situations” (Language Academy, 2017). The ULAB3162 course was considered as a platform to strategically enrich ESL learners with effective oral presentation skills, to respond using appropriate language and to engage interactively in group discussions (Language Academy, 2017). EPP will be the case with the aim of exploring the cultural influences on student WTC in English language within the associated ESL classrooms.

This study, which utilized the case study approach, generated a rich source of learner-generated information and involved three phases to develop layers of the data

collected. The first phase entailed non-participant classroom observation, which used a classroom observation checklist to identify instances of learners WTC in ESL classes (ULAB 3162). Only when the instances of WTC were present within the ESL classroom, the next phase of the study could be carried out. These instances also assisted the researcher in terms of guided ideas when carrying out the participant classroom observation and semi-structured interview. The second phase involved participant classroom observation, where the researcher assumed the role of an ESL teacher (previous position of the researcher but not at the time of the study). The third phase included semi-structured interviews, which involved 30 ESL learners who volunteered from the classes the researchers had observed. The objective of the semi-structured interview was to obtain a rich and detailed understanding of the ESL learners' perceptions and feelings towards their state of willingness or lack of willingness to communicate in the target language, particularly within the ESL classroom. Having said this, with regard to the ethics, the researcher's previous position as the teacher gained learners' support, but it was kept as a professional relationship to avoid any conflicts that might arise if the relationship became too close or personal.

Multiple methods were used in the qualitative data collections, and multiple sources of evidence were utilized in the case study in order to gain a comprehensive view in investigating the ESL classroom culture in relation to learners' WTC. Figure 4.1 describes the research methods, which were carried out in stages.



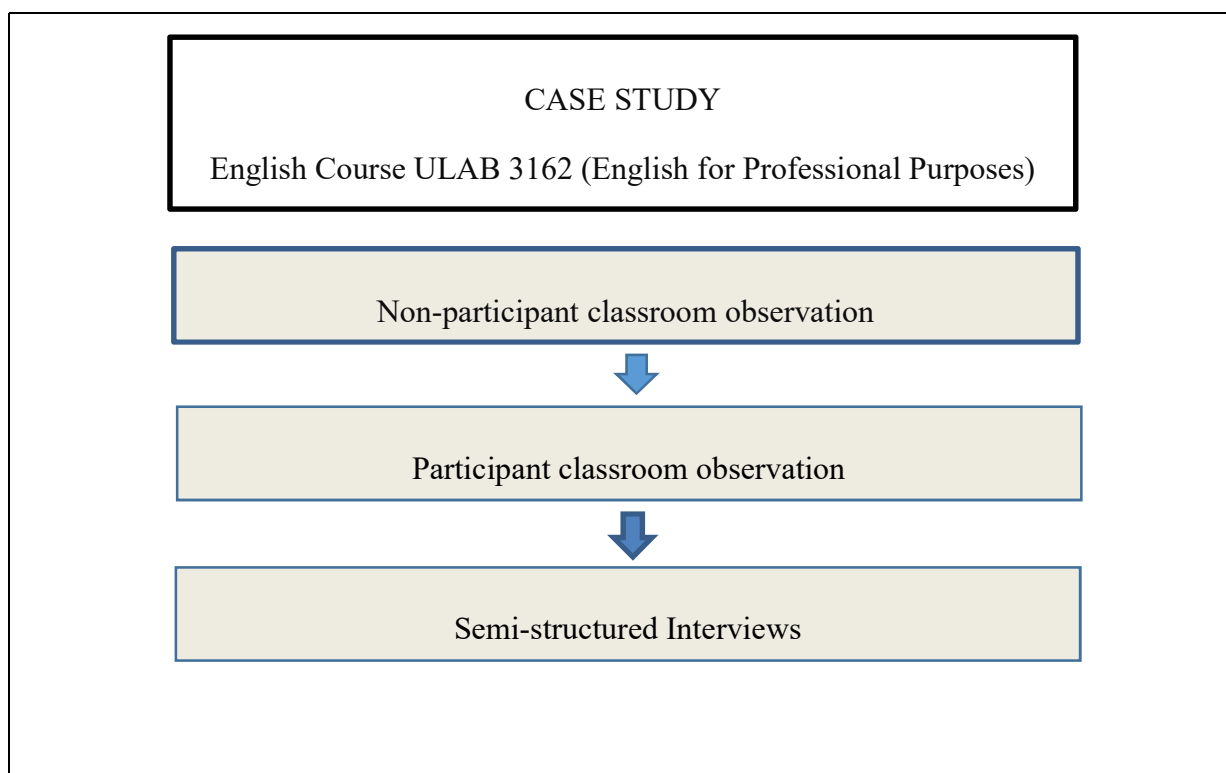


Figure 4.1 Research Methods

An instrumental case study is concerned with a particular aspect or issue of the case (Hamilton and Corbett Whittier, 2013) and in this research, the case investigated is ESL learners' WTC within the hybrid space of large and small cultures on the ULAB 3162 course. Here I am looking at an aspect of the case study (English course) in looking at WTC. Case study usually employs a number of data collection tools such as observations, interviews and journals, verbal reports, narrative accounts etc. (McKay, 2006) and attempts to view the case through the eyes of different participants. In this instance, the data collection tools being used were drawn from qualitative research tools by means of non-participant classrooms observations, participant classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. It is important to acknowledge that this case was investigated through the lens of the diverse ethnicities and socio-

cultural perspectives of the ULAB3162 ESL learners and the researcher's own outlook drawing on field notes and reflections.

Data from the research was interpreted and triangulated to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. Triangulations of the data provided a clearer and more in-depth explanation of the problem discussed.

#### **4.5 Sampling**

The sampling method employed in this study was purposeful sampling in which the participants belong to an information-rich case central to this study. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling focuses on carefully selecting a small number of information-rich participants, rather than a statistically large sample, to yield insights and in-depth understanding of the issue under study.

In this research, the researcher selected a sample from the English for Professional Purposes classes (ULAB3162) in UA University. The ULAB3162 is organized by the language faculty known as Language Academy (LA) as part of the undergraduate mainstream English course for undergraduates. Together with other ESL courses, it was compulsory for the undergraduates to attend at least three English classes. ULAB3162 is offered at year three of the undergraduate academic session; thus, participants of this study were third-year undergraduates of UA University. Table 4.1 presents the list of English courses offered in UA University for their undergraduate courses.

Table 4.1 English Undergraduates Courses

| <b>Year</b> | <b>English Course</b>                       |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Year 1      | ULAB1122: Academic English Skills           |
| Year 2      | ULAB2122: Advance Academic English Skills   |
| Year 3      | ULAB3162: English for Professional Purposes |

#### **4.5.1 ULAB 3162 Learners**

In this case study, the ESL learners in ULAB3162 belong to various majors or fields of study, FKE, FKA, FKM, FC, FKT, FM and FP. The majority of learners on the English for Professional Purposes (EPP) courses are Malays with some Chinese and Indians in accordance with the ‘merit or quota system’ by which Malays are given a larger quota allowance for entry to the public universities compared to the other ethnicities (mentioned earlier in section 2.1.2). Other minority ethnicities like Kadazan and Bidayuh from Sabah and Sarawak may also be included, reflecting the pluralistic nature of society in Malaysia. Table 4.2 summarizes the information on ESL learners from the ULAB3162 classes involved in this study, which takes account of the different ethnicities.

Table 4.2 Participants' Description

|   | Class by Major/ Faculty | No. of students     | Malays             | Chinese              | Indians |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------|
| 1 | ESL Class 1 (FKA)       | 7                   | 4<br>*1 from Sabah | 3                    | 0       |
| 2 | ESL Class 2 ( FKE)      | 15                  | 11                 | 3<br>*1 from Sabah   | 1       |
| 3 | ESL Class 3 (FKM)       | 16                  | 14                 | 2<br>*1 from Sarawak | 0       |
| 4 | ESL Class 4 (FKT)       | 17                  | 9                  | 5                    | 3       |
| 5 | ESL Class 5 (FC)        | 15                  | 12                 | 0                    | 3       |
| 6 | ESL Class 6 (FP)        | 15                  | 15                 | 0                    | 0       |
| 7 | ESL Class 7 (FM)        | 15<br>*1 from Sabah | 13                 | 0                    | 2       |
|   | TOTAL                   | <b>100</b>          | 78                 | 13                   | 9       |

#### 4.5.2 Sampling technique

Purposive sampling was utilized, and a small number of 100 participants was selected for the study. The purposive sampling techniques of this study focused on the criteria that participants are learning English as the second language with the principal aim of improving communication skills. Apart from that, the participants were selected not so much to be representative of the population, but because they were second language learners of ULAB 3162 classes, which was of additional interest to the researcher. ULAB 3162 learners were the best sample to study WTC as the course itself functions as a platform to nurture learners' communicative ability by tailoring learning activities, "using authentic workplace scenarios and opportunities to negotiate and present information through group discussions and presentations". (Language Academy, 2016). Learning activities were assumed to be communicative in nature (as per the

learning approach taken) allowing greater opportunity for learners to interact during the teaching and learning process as the course had been designed for that purpose with reading and writing skills also included.

As William (2003) claims, "individuals and settings are selected not necessarily because they are typical of a larger population, but because they have the characteristic which is of interest to the researcher in a specific way" (p. 82). The seven different classes of ULAB3162 chosen also took account of the different majors of students attending the course. This was important to the researcher as this was one of the important variables of the subject under study. As Patton (2002, p.244) comments, "there are no rules to sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done with available time and resources". Patton (2002) adds that the validity of the data is closely related to the selected information-rich case and the analytical capability of the researcher rather than the sample size.

All participants in all seven ULAB3162 classes took part in both the non-participant observation and the participant classroom observation. Learners from each ULAB3162 course were also invited to take part in an individual semi-structured interview reflecting the different classes of different majors and ethnic groups (i.e. Malays, Chinese, Indians and others). Even though the numbers for the sampling were possibly small and their responses may not be used as generalization for all ESL classes in UA university, they belong to the "information-rich cases for study in-depth"

(Patton, 2002, p.230). Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007, p. 115) note, “they may not be representative, and their comments may not be generalizable, this is not the primary concern in such sampling; rather the concern is to acquire in-depth information from those who are in the position to give it”.

#### 4.6 Methods for Data Collection

Non-participant classroom observations, participant classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews were the methods used to collect data in this study. To ensure the consistency of the data, the methods used for data collection in this study involved three phases, namely 1) non-participant classroom observations 2) participant classroom observations 3) semi-structured interviews. Table 4.3 summarizes the instruments used in this study.

Table 4.3 Research Instruments

| No | Research Questions                                                                                                 | Instruments                           |                                   |                           |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
|    |                                                                                                                    | Non-participant Classroom Observation | Participant Classroom Observation | Semi-structured Interview |
| 1. | How do learners construct their sense of self in terms of cultural, familial and societal notions?                 |                                       | /                                 | /                         |
| 2. | In what ways, if any, do the above notions influence the way students approach their WTC in the English classroom? |                                       | /                                 | /                         |

| No | Research Questions                                                                | Instruments                           |                                   |                           |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
|    |                                                                                   | Non-participant Classroom Observation | Participant Classroom Observation | Semi-structured Interview |
| 3. | What elements of the classroom and institutional culture influence students' WTC? | /                                     | /                                 | /                         |

#### 4.6.1 Non-participant classroom observation

Learner instances of WTC were observed during classroom observation. The classroom observation allowed the researcher to provide careful descriptions of learners' communicative behaviour without influencing the learning activities that learners were engaged in. Understanding of the context is crucial for the researcher to understand the process and events under study (Patton, 2002). In addition to providing first-hand experience of the research participants and settings, observation is also said to allow the exploration of data that research participants may be unwilling to talk about or be unaware of. Thus, observation allows the researcher to gather data beyond the perspective of the research participant within the natural setting of the study. During the observation, the researcher assumed the role of observer and did not engage with the students.

The aim of the non-participant classroom observation conducted with the ESL learners during the natural setting of their ESL lessons was to capture instances of learners' interactions or willingness and lack of willingness to communicate in the target language during the ULAB3162 lessons. The observation aimed to look into research participants' instances of WTC in the ESL lessons with teacher and peers. It also aimed

to investigate ESL teachers' approaches towards facilitating communication among learners, and teaching and learning approaches towards learners who are less willing to communicate. As mentioned earlier these instances not only give a clearer picture of learners WTC within the ESL class, it also closely guides the researcher in carrying out the participant classroom observation and the semi-structured interviews later.

Using a Classroom Observation Checklist (see appendix A) adapted from an unpublished doctoral study by Pattapong (2010) (see appendix B), each ULAB3162 English class was observed twice in order to capture an in-depth description of learners' WTC. Pattapong's classroom observation checklist was used and adapted, as the research was carried out in Thailand, a country believed to share some common socio-cultural structures, especially in terms of English being a high stake subject as it is essential to the country's economy (Bangkok Post, Nov. 20, 2019). The period of each ULAB3162 lesson lasted for about 50 minutes. The researcher took down notes which involved running accounts of what was happening in the class, teachers' actions (e.g. giving instructions, asking questions or prompting responses) and instances of learners' interactions (e.g. asking questions, expressing opinions) or lack of response (e.g. silence or hesitance). An example of classroom observation notes is in appendix C.

Despite the fact that "video recordings can be a powerful observations tools" (Hamilton & Whittier Corbett 2013, p. 100), the classroom observation in this study was not video recorded to avoid learners and ESL teachers feeling uncomfortable that their actions were being recorded. In fact, according to Patton (2002, p. 567), the presence of the researcher cum evaluator can affect how the programme operates as



well as its outcomes, as learners may be motivated to “show off” or act below par as a result of tension and anxiety.

The researcher used the classroom observation checklist (Appendix A) as an observation guide to note instances of students’ interactions in the target language. These data (instances of WTC) were used in conjunction with subsequent participant classroom observation and semi-structured interviews among the ESL learners in the data collection phase. As noted by Hamilton & Whittier Corbett (2013), observation measurement looking at frequencies could be limiting, and therefore the researcher included researcher narratives of teachers’ actions and learners’ interaction with teacher and peers during the ESL lesson.

#### **4.6.2 Participant Observation**

The researcher then organized and conducted an ESL classroom activity. The purpose of the activity was to observe and investigate learners’ sense of self in terms of cultural, familial and societal notions in relation to WTC in English. Being a participant observer, the researcher was “explicitly situating herself in the midst of the research process” (Hamilton & Whittier Corbett, 2013, p. 99), assuming the role as an ESL teacher (previous position of the researcher) to carry out the activity.

The activity took about 50 minutes and involved the use of a 15-minute short movie clip presenting a non-native speaker of English from the movie *‘English Vinglish’*. The film depicts how an individual’s knowledge of English influences how the society

judges that individual. The choice of *English Vinglish* was due to its portrayal of how one's cultural norm or values potentially coincide with the use of the English language in a local context. The very essence of the story was used to promote learners' engagement as they reflect on their own experience in using the target language. The use of the clip was also to prompt learners to share more of their experience in using the target language in their own context.

Working in groups, learners were given task sheets containing guided question (see Appendix G) to think about and discuss as they watched the short clips of the movie. Prior to the discussion, learners were given time to think and discuss in groups, issues highlighted in their given task such as to list some of their significant cultural values. The discussion that followed the video enabled students to reflect on their own experiences in learning English (similarities and differences as regards their culture, family, peers, society and others). The discussion's purpose was to elicit the learners' sense of self, culture, family and society and how these aspects influence the learners' willingness to communicate in the target language. The discussion was audiotaped. Participants were informed of the audio-recording, and they were allowed access to the recordings at the end of the study. Participants were also allowed to ask questions during the discussion. The medium of instruction was English, as it is an English class. However, bilingual discussion in BM and English was permitted as the researcher needed to encourage discussion, especially for learners who were reluctant in voicing their views.

#### **4.6.3 Semi-structured Interview**

A focus group interview instead of a semi-structured interview was planned at the initial stage of the study. The changes were carried out after the pilot study after noticing that participants were not comfortable speaking about their perceptions and state of willingness to communicate in English in a group. For the semi-structured interview, the researcher informed learners about the interview and explained that she was seeking participants on a voluntary basis. To ensure maximum accuracy in this study, the interview began immediately after each classroom participant observation session. Gass and Mackay (2000) argued that such practice is “better justified with only a small amount of intervening time between the event and the recall” (p.105). It is important to note that, there is no “stimulus” to the ‘recall’ involved in this study; the interviewees were not shown recordings of the classes they attended but it was hoped the short intervening time between the classroom observation and the semi-structured interview would allow the participant to be able to freshly remember (recall) the events in the classroom related to communicating in English. The medium of communication during the interview was the learners’ national language (i.e. Malay) to encourage participants who were less proficient in English language to voice their opinions. Learners of other than Malay ethnic backgrounds had no problem communicating in the Malay language as it is widely spoken within communities, at school level and in many daily transactions as it is the national language. However, learners were still given the language options in which they felt most comfortable to communicate. With the help of the hybridized conceptual framework of the ESL classroom culture (Figure 3.5), a topic guide for the interview was formulated to reflect on the key elements of the small and large cultures in relation to learners’ WTC. The

researcher recorded and took notes during the interview. The following is the topic guide.

Table 4.4 Semi-structured Interview Topic Guide

| Topic Guide                                                                                                                                      | Guided topics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>RQ 1</p> <p>Ways learners construct their sense of self in terms of cultural, familial and societal notions of self.</p>                      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learners' description of themselves in relevance to factors such as family, identity and societal notions.</li> <li>2. Perceptions and reflections towards learning English with relevance to family, identity, education, society and nation.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p>RQ 2 &amp; RQ 3</p> <p>Opinions and beliefs towards communication in English and willingness to communicate in and outside the classroom.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reflection towards learners' state of proficiencies and willingness to communicate in the target language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of family</li> <li>• Role of culture, identity and ethnicity</li> <li>• Role of previous education</li> <li>• Role of community</li> <li>• Role of social groupings</li> <li>• Role of classroom environment</li> <li>• Role of institutional culture</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

The interview was initially planned to take place in learners' ULAB3162 classes, as this would make them feel comfortable and give them a sense of familiarity with the surroundings to enhance memories they had while performing the activity, but without the presence of the teacher because of the possible impact of the unequal power relationship between the learners and the teacher. Due to some administrative issue, it took place at the researcher's office instead. The interview began with the researcher explaining the purpose of the interview, namely, to understand the role of culture in their WTC in the target language. Participants were invited to ask questions prior to the interview starting. The interview questions were translated into the BM by myself

and were checked for their accuracy by a senior Bahasa Malaysia language teacher from *School TF*, a public secondary school in Malaysia. 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with each one lasted approximately about 40 minutes.

## **4.7 Implementation of the study**

The implementation of the study is discussed in terms of the research plan, the pilot study conducted in the year 2016 and the actual study, which was carried out in 2017.

### **4.7.1 Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted between the months of November 2016 to January 2017 at different times and in different settings to suit different methods and thus is divided in 3 parts. The researcher planned a pilot study for the semi-structured interview, classroom non-participant observation (Part B) and participant classroom observations (Part C). Part A was conducted in the University of Edinburgh while it was at the planning stage and Part B and C would be piloted in the actual setting (in an ESL classroom at a public university in Malaysia).

It was therefore conducted at the last stage of the pilot study when the researcher arrived in Malaysia in January 2017 for the main study data collection. I felt that it was

important to pilot it in a similar context and with a similar group of participants to maintain the rigour of the data collection process. The pilot study aimed at testing the feasibility of the designed tools before they were implemented in the main setting.

#### **4.7.1.1 Part A: Semi-structured interview**

In the initial plan of the study, a focus group interview instead of a semi-structured interview was proposed for data collection. However, the plan was discontinued after the pilot stage as the researcher strongly felt that a change was necessary since the participants who took part in the pilot focus group interview showed reluctance to talk about their perspectives on the target language and seemed unwilling to communicate especially in the presence of other group members.

The focus group interview was carried out for 20 minutes. However, after conducting a mock focus group interview among these participants in the University of Edinburgh, the researcher observed that the participants were quite reluctant to speak about their backgrounds, mainly when there were gaps in terms of social status between themselves and the other members of the group.

Participants were also observed to show concerns when talking about their feelings towards the target language in the presence of other participants. For example, when asked about when they were exposed to the language, Participant A confidently related how she was brought up with English as her first language since her father is an engineer and her mother is a flight attendant. English was Participant A's first language at home.

Participant B was observed to lose her confidence when she said, 'my mother is only a housewife while my dad is only a lorry driver.' By stressing on the word 'only,' the researcher sensed that Participant B was already feeling inferior to Participant A. The researcher then sensed that Participant B began to feel uncomfortable talking about her lack of proficiency in the target language. Participant C seemed to be influenced by Participant B when she responded shortly by saying she was similar to Participant B in terms of social status as her parents were not university graduates. Morgan (1993) mentions that issues are more likely to occur in focus groups, especially when participants are of different levels of hierarchy and status.

According to Patton, (2002, p. 387) "those who realize that their viewpoint is a minority perspective may not be inclined to speak up and risk negative reactions". From the situation, the researcher concluded that the reasons for the participants' willingness to communicate or not could be difficult to express in the presence of others as it may be due to various personal factors, negative experiences or perceptions. With regard to this study, individual and personal accounts of what influences learners' WTC might have been confidential or too personal to be shared and discussed by others.

Patton (2002) also notes that the dynamic of the focus group interview will be more complex when participants know each other, especially when confidentiality cannot be assured. In the case of the actual study with the ULAB3162 ESL learners, most of whom were familiar with each other as they were studying the same majors and were in the same year of study, the focus-group interview was not thought to be the best

method to collect rich data on learners' WTC in relation to themselves, their family, their educational experiences and societal influences. According to Hamilton & Whittier Corbett (2013, p. 112) a mock interview functions in assisting the researcher to improve the tools being developed and to lend weight to the argument concerning the rigour of the work undertaken. Thus by considering all these factors, the researcher opted for an individual semi-structured interview instead.

The piloting of the semi-structured interview was conducted with one of the focus group interview participants. The semi-structured interview lasted for 30 minutes. The researcher used a topic guide prepared earlier. The topic guide used during the semi-structured interview (Appendix E) was a viable means to collect the data as it guided the researcher in terms of the flow of ideas of what to address and at the same time did not restrict the researcher to lists of questions. The semi-structured interview guided the interviewee to respond to the issues under discussion but provided them with the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions. This method allowed a sense of freedom whilst at the same time helping to keep the questions on track and on time.

#### **4.7.1.2 Part B: Classroom non-participant observation**

The class involved for the purpose of the pilot was second-year undergraduate ESL classes. Before these classes were observed, the researcher had entered these classes together with the ESL teacher to introduce herself and the research. The purpose was



to gain consent and build rapport among the ESL learners, which I described as quite challenging and demanding.

In general, in the first introduction sessions for most of the classes that the researcher entered, she was aware from observing the faces and the body language of the ESL learners that the majority of them were anxious and nervous about the presence of the researcher in class. Some of them showed reluctance to be observed while some were feeling shy about being observed. Some of them were concerned about committing linguistic mistakes while being observed and this therefore limited communication to some extent while the lesson was progressing. Consequently, the researcher realized that if that was the case, learners would not be able to act and interact as naturally as usual in the ESL class. The fact that someone was looking at the way they were using English made them feel unsettled and nervous. I realized that proficiency in English was a potentially sensitive issue for most students and being observed for English made them feel vulnerable. It was crucial that the researcher work on building a rapport with the participants in order to reduce the gap between the researcher and the participants, allowing them to feel more secure and less vulnerable at the researcher's presence as an observer.

The researcher decided to make a second entrance to the classes to make students feel more accustomed to researcher presence and to build trust and rapport. After some negotiation with the class teacher, in order to help reduce the anxiety of some learners, the ESL teacher involved the researcher in the class activity. For example, in one ESL class, the researcher was allowed to take over the class to conduct the group

presentations sessions. In another ESL class, the researcher was given a slot to share experiences on studying abroad. These efforts were steps to reduce anxiety and build trust towards the researcher as an observer later on. In another class, the ESL teacher allowed the researcher to take part as an audience member to debate sessions she organized among the students. Movement between non-participant classroom observation to participant classroom observation took place as the researcher felt it is important to be strongly integrated into the activity where learners reflect on their WTC with the ESL natural setting.

As "the researcher is an instrument in a qualitative inquiry", (Patton, 2002, p. 566) these sessions were helpful to observe the learners' actual state of interaction in the target language in the ESL class as it helped to build trust and rapport. Distrust and lack of rapport may result in learners feeling insecure, acting passively or withdrawn during class; this could have distorted the findings of this study. In the case of this study, all ESL learners from all classes consented and were open to the presence of the researcher as an observer.

During the pilot classroom observation, the researcher used the prepared classroom observation checklist (Appendix A) to guide her while observing students' actions in speaking in the target language. During the time of observation, the teachers' actions, teachers' verbatim notes and students' actions were noted in the classroom observation checklist. Two types of students' actions were observed in the form of interactions with the teacher and peers. The teacher's and students' interactions were observed in several situations such as actively responding to teachers each time the teacher asked

questions; extensively responding when the teacher asked questions; volunteering to answer questions; volunteering to ask the teacher questions or answering questions when called upon. It was also noted whether the interactions were carried out in English, the native language or in a bilingual manner. An example of the classroom observation notes is in appendix C.

From the pilot study, it was observed that after the three observations, patterns were observed in terms of learners' WTC in class.

- The teacher speaks mostly in English. The teacher uses some BM as a last resort to aid students' understanding during lessons.
- Interaction among peers is mostly in BM even among different ethnicities. Interaction between students and teacher was primarily in English, but some did speak in BM.
- Students spoke mostly when responding to teachers' questions. The instances of communication were either when a student's name was called, or when they responded in groups. Many of them were not really interacting in English. They returned to questions in single words like 'yes', 'no' and 'not sure'.

During the main study, the non-participant classroom observations were only conducted after entering the ESL classes on average for two sessions. This initial period for the observer and the people being observed to get to know each other increases trustworthiness which supports the credibility of the study findings (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) notes that the researcher is obligated to examine how their presence affects what is being observed. The researcher felt that on the day of the

actual classroom observations, assistance from the class teacher was crucial to remind the ESL learners that the researcher was there to observe classroom interactions and not to evaluate or judge them as individuals.

#### **4.7.1.3 Part C: Classroom participant observation**

The last pilot activity conducted was the classroom participant observation, which was conducted in two ESL undergraduate classes known as LEAP (Language Enhancement and Advancement Program). This course aims to enhance learners' communicative ability and consists of learners with low proficiency skills (Language Academy, 2016). The students enrolled for LEAP classes were notified by the respective faculties to attend these classes. The reason the class was chosen for the pilot study was in order not to interrupt lessons in the ULAB3162. The LEAP class is considered an enrichment class where no assessment or assignments are involved.

The goal of the pilot study was to assess the feasibility of using the short movie clip (*English Vinglish*) in collecting the data. In both classes, the researcher began by introducing herself, explained the purpose of the study and what students were expected to do in the activity. In the first class, after the researcher showed the movie clip, the researcher carried out a whole class discussion and at the same time recorded students' responses.

However, this method posed several challenges. Firstly, students' responses were limited as some of them seemed reluctant to talk, preferring to agree with what others

said and extending what others said, while some waited for the teacher to give a hint as to a possible 'right' answer before they were sufficiently confident to share opinions. Secondly, in-class discussion, some felt insecure that others might judge them on their opinion. Thirdly, the data (audio recordings) collected was complicated to manage due to its large size as it involved all learners from the entire class. In fact, some parts of the recordings were also of poor quality, especially when learners were speaking from the back rows or when the comments were expressed in a low tone. Lastly, because learners were reluctant to speak in a large group, hints were given by the researcher to encourage responses, and this contributed to data bias, which should be avoided. Due to this, and after discussion with supervisors, another pilot study was conducted with a change of method.

In the following stage of the pilot study, the researcher entered another LEAP class. After watching the clip, students were instructed to carry out the discussion in small groups with friends they were familiar with. Each group was given an audio recorder to record their discussion without assistance from the teacher. The discussions were conducted using the guided questions provided by the researcher for each group. This was necessary to reduce the researcher's involvement in the students' responses in order to reduce data bias. The researcher only assisted learners if they had problems regarding unclear questions.

From the pilot study, the researcher found that most of the students could relate incidents in the clip to their own experiences in using the target language. The data from the small group discussion was more productive and easier to handle as they

knew each other, and the group was smaller in number. The quality of the recordings was much clearer as they were sitting in close proximity to one another and the audio recorder.

Based on the feedback from the pilot study, a few changes were made to the research procedure before the actual implementation of the study from 20 February 2017 to 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017. The changes made were as follows:

- i. The activities in a classroom participant observation was conducted in smaller groups to allow participants to discuss views and issues comfortably and ensure audio recordings were of better quality.
- ii. The researcher, as the observer, need to play the role to facilitate discussion.
- iii. Allowing bilingualism (BM and English) during the discussion could motivate richer narratives to take place.

#### **4.7.2 Main study**

The implementation schedule and procedures for the actual research are presented in Appendix J. The table illustrates the time scale, the people involved and the data collection activities, which took place over a period of three months in a public university in Malaysia. The dates and days of the actual study were kept flexible to accommodate the teachers and learners' timetable and other schedules but still kept to the overall time frame.

The research was conducted over a period of 12 weeks during the third week of the second semester of the 2016/2017 academic semester in UA University and ended in the second week of May 2017. In week 2 of February 2017, visits to the head of Language Academy were undertaken to obtain consent for the research that would be carried out from February to May 2017. Visits to the ESL classrooms and briefings about the research were also carried out by distributing consent forms after the briefings, which were collected with the help of the ESL teachers.

From week 1 until week 4 of March 2017, the non-participant classroom observations were carried out for all seven ESL classes. The participant classroom observations began in week 3 and ended in week 4. The classes were authentic ULAB3162 classes where each class was taught with different approaches but in line with the ULAB3162 course outlines. The researcher managed to observe instances of learner interactions in class and recorded the details on the observation sheet prepared earlier. The circumstances that surrounded the interactions were also noted, such as teachers' responses, situations and types of interactions.

In April 2017, the semi-structured interview for the ESL learners was conducted for the entire month. Volunteers noted their willingness to be interviewed via *WhatsApp* and booked an appointment with the researcher. Times for the interviews ranged from 9.00 am to 6.00 pm at an academic office provided by the Language Academy instead of their classrooms. The learners' classrooms were inconvenient due to long-distance and lack of availability for after class use. Most interviewees were aware of the purpose of the interview. However, there were some who had not understood this, and so they

were briefed again. The interviewees were told the conversation would be recorded before he or she signed the consent form. Most interviewees were conscientious about the discussion, and the interviews reached a maximum of 40 minutes, generating a rich source of data.

#### 4.8 Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2013), the underlying principles of qualitative data analysis and representation involve "organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of them" (p.179). The data in this study occurred in a variety of forms, which included field notes of classroom observations, transcripts of semi-structured interviews learners and transcripts of group discussions of class activities (participant classroom observation). A summary of the data analysis is presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Summary of Data Analysis

| No. | Methodology | Instrument                                                      | Analysis                                  | Method      | Summary of total data collection |
|-----|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 1.  | Observation | Non-participant observation using a classroom observation sheet | Inductive and Deductive thematic analysis | Qualitative | 7 ESL classes field notes        |



| No. | Methodology | Instrument                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Analysis                                               | Method      | Summary of total data collection                                                     |
|-----|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |             | Participant classroom observation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movie Clip from <i>English Vinglish</i></li> <li>• Group Discussion Class Activity</li> </ul> (Audiotaped) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guided Group Discussions Questions</li> </ul> |                                                        |             | 7 ESL classes of group discussions transcripts (Each recording lasts for 20 minutes) |
| 2.  | Interview   | Semi-structured interview topic guide                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Nvivo;<br>Inductive and<br>Deductive thematic Analysis | Qualitative | Maximum 30 ESL learners interview transcripts                                        |

The observations were analysed while the interview transcripts were analysed via 'Nvivo' software to look for patterns, categories or themes using the pre-determined categories of the 'Hybridized Conceptual Framework of the ESL Classroom Culture' (Figure 3.5). Patterns, categories or themes that emerged were also coded in light of the existing conceptual ideas the researcher presented in Figure 3.5, allowing for possible revisions or development of the conceptual framework.

It is important to note that the conceptual framework was used to provide with sensitive themes to view on the data firstly, reading and rereading the data looking for patterns and distinctive elements to form raw categories which are then revised and refined to achieve themes which then are applied in the data.

The validity and dependability of the emerging findings were ensured through the triangulation of the multiple sources of instruments and of data or perspectives from different types of participants. Triangulation, in a primarily qualitative study, is viewed as the most efficient way of increasing the trustworthiness of the study and reducing any systematic bias in the research findings (Dornyei, 2007). Through non-participant and participant classroom observation and semi-structured interviews for ESL learners and teachers, a rich and holistic understanding of the aspects of the study was established.

The validity in this study was also established during the data collection stages and after the first stage of the analysis had been completed through member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the member check as an optimal means of assessing the validity of a qualitative study because the first step of many qualitative projects is to understand the participant's worldview accurately. Member checking was carried out after the observations and interview sessions were completed by reiterating the main points followed up by asking for confirmation as to its accuracy. This step was crucial to avoid any misinterpretations before finalizing the analysis (Hamilton & Whittier Corbett, 2013).

In further establishing the trustworthiness of the study, a copy of the field notes of the classroom observations and transcripts of interviews and group discussions and preliminary analysis was made available to the participants to allow them to confirm or deny the findings (Hamilton & Whittier Corbett, 2013). However, to reduce the possibility of participants' disagreements, clear guidelines were issued on the participants' information sheets (see Appendix I).

#### **4.8.1 Classroom observation**

The classroom observation was designed to collect instances of learners' interactions in English in the ESL classroom, which would be used later as authentic samples of WTC during the semi-structured interview with students. Seven classes from various faculties with different majors FKA, FKE, FKM, FKT, FC, FP and FM were involved in the classroom observation. Classroom participant observation checklists (Appendix A) adapted from Pattapong (2010) were analysed focusing on the instances of learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) with teachers and peers during the ESL class.

The concept of WTC with teachers in this study encompasses actions such as;

- Actively responding to questions when asked by the teacher,
- Extensively responding when the teacher asks questions.
- Volunteers asking questions or answering voluntarily
- Answering when their name is called.
- Others (For example like extending/ joining to answer)

Meanwhile, the concept of WTC with peers entails;

- Actively communicating in English,
- Actively communicating in Malay,
- Communicating bilingually
- Others (Extending/ joining to discuss answer).

The researcher wrote the teachers' and students' actions in a descriptive format. The data gathered were analysed and written in the form of field notes. An example of the field notes of the classroom observations is in Appendix C and D of the thesis.

#### **4.8.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The semi-structured interview aimed at the ESL learners was intended to gain insights into the individual, personal experiences of ESL learners' willingness to communicate in the target language, particularly within the ESL classroom. The open-ended responses from learners allowed the researcher to comprehend the role played by the elements of the *large cultures* and *small cultures* towards learners' WTC in English, particularly in the ESL classroom as seen by the learners. The content of the interview questions was informed by the conceptual framework (Figure 3.5), which focused on the variables of the *large cultures* and *small cultures*. The interview topic guide is in appendix E.

In addition, the researcher translated the topic guides into BM and the consistency of the translation was then rated by a senior BM language teacher. Interrater reliability

was crucial to minimize the loss of meaning during the translation process due to language differences. Lavrakas (2008) points out that “the concept of interrater reliability essentially refers to the relative consistency of the judgments that are made of the same stimulus by two or more raters.” Translation is an interpretive act and concepts in one language may be interpreted differently in another language (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, Deeg, 2010). The semi-structured questions in Bahasa Malaysia are in appendix F.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the researcher’s office instead of learners’ classroom as the latter was being used for other teaching and learning purposes. The participants mostly spoke in the BM while some were bilingual (BM and English). Participants spoke about their experiences and perceptions to learning the target language in relation to their WTC. The questions covered during the interviews were guided by topics mentioned in Table 4.4. The interviews were recorded upon the participants’ permission, which in average lasted about 40 minutes.

In situation where the researcher is fluent in the language of the participants, all the recordings were transcribed in the spoken language to ensure that the richness of the participants’ narratives were all captured. The emotional context and non-verbal communication were also included as notes in the transcripts. The researcher began the translation by reading participants narratives to familiarize the whole content. Word-for-word translations of the conversations from Malay to English were performed during the data analysis. The completed translation in English was back

translated from BM to English to note on disparities. Both versions were then observed by bilingual independent translator to ensure accurate interpretations between both versions. Silverman (2005) noted that the original and translated versions are to be revised to ensure correct interpretations.

In particular, the method of translation used reflected the conventional translation methods, which involved meaning-based translation. Interview analysis that focuses onto meaning involved coding, condensation and interpretation of meaning (Kvale, 2007). *Nvivo* software was used to help the researcher to organize, analyse and code emerging themes within thirty interview scripts. The focus of the interview data was on the narratives of the large and small culture believed to influence learners' WTC in English. Cited in Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to the qualitative data analysis as an iterative process, which involves data collection, reduction, display, conclusion drawing and verification. According to Hamilton and Whittier-Corbett (2013), an iterative process reflects the process of going back and forth across data, while reflecting critically, as patterns and themes emerge. During this iterative process, the researcher made notes on the patterns that emerged and was able to refine these into defined and well-polished categories. In achieving this, the researcher listened to the recordings and read the transcripts multiple times for keywords and key ideas and refining categories throughout the process before the coding of the data began. Besides the iterative process of going through the data, the researcher frequently revisited the research questions to renew focus and to ensure the validity of the data gathered. The interview data offered in-depth information of existing categories described in the conceptual frame while new categories also emerged from the analysis.

The main weakness identified in this study resonated to Dornyei (2007), in which he explained that interviews would be time-consuming both to set up and to conduct and crucial for the interviewer to have good communications skills. In some cases, the participants were just either too shy or too verbose.

#### **4.8.3 Classroom Participant Observations**

The researcher took part in the classroom activity, assuming the role of the ESL teacher. The direct observation of the ESL settings and learners allowed the researcher to be better able to understand the ESL classroom context within which learners interact. Patton (2002) mentions, "first-hand experience with a setting and people in the setting allows an inquirer to be open, discovery-oriented and inductive because, by being on-site, the observer has less need to rely on prior conceptualizations of setting" (p.262). The researcher-teacher made it clear the activity was for research purposes, and thus, learners have the autonomy to take part in the activity. This is to avoid any form of misinformation or deception to the learners.

The researcher's previous position as an ESL teacher where the study was researched made it easier for the learners to develop trust and rapport with her while some students already knew the researcher from an ESL class she had taught in UA University before pursuing her PhD studies. The researcher felt that being acknowledged, as a teacher they knew rather than a researcher who was a stranger was more effective for collecting data in this study and hence increased her credibility as a researcher. Learners were observed to be more relaxed when informed the researcher was also an

ESL teacher and naturally connected themselves to the activity organized and the subject of the study. For ethics purposes, the relationship was kept professional avoiding personal relationship.

The lesson then began with the teacher explaining the activity and at the same time distributing group activity sheets (Appendix G) containing guided questions to be discussed after watching a video clip. The students then watched a 20-minute movie clip from the film entitled *English Vinglish*. The clip formed the basis for initiating discussions about some of the cultural values identified in the clip. The focus of the questions then moved to the use of English within the family and community and the challenges it posed. From the issues being discussed, the discussion turned into a form of reflection on ESL learners' personal motives in learning or using the English language.

This was followed by ESL learners' personal struggles and challenges interacting in the target language, specifically within the ESL classroom. The questions led to discussions about the factors, which encourage ESL learners to communicate in the target language. The whole idea of the class activity was to provide a framework within which learners could accurately and comprehensively respond about using English specifically in the context of the ESL classroom and not beyond, for example, learners' insights into the struggles they face to communicate in the target language during English lessons.



The semi-structured interview provided a broader platform for the learners to reflect and share individual and personal experiences of WTC. This activity resulted in data exclusive to the ESL classroom environment but connected to broader narratives. Despite the questions given being written in English, the group discussions were open to either BM or English, whichever learners felt more at ease to communicate their ideas.

During the group discussions, the researcher facilitated the process and aided students when they had queries. The researcher did not get too involved with the activity to avoid biasing the data. The group discussions were recorded via an audio recorder provided by the researcher to every group. These were then transcribed, coded and analysed. Twenty scripts from five ESL classes were analysed and recurring and emerging themes were coded in terms of the large and small cultures themes as informed by the conceptual framework (Figure 3.5) believed to contribute to ESL learners' WTC in English.

#### **4.9 Ethical Consideration**

This case study was carried out in two stages. Stage 1 was the preliminary investigation, the pilot study, and stage two was the actual study. The purpose of the pilot study was to investigate whether the researcher was able to collect data from the learners to achieve the objectives of the study. The piloting helped the researcher to enhance the quality of the project. The procedure involved a small number of participants who were willing to volunteer. The actual study involved a larger number

of participants. Several ethical concerns were raised, and actions were taken by the researcher, as outlined in the following pages.

#### **4.9.1 Access to research**

The research began by gaining access to the selected research setting. This involved negotiating and obtaining permission from the gatekeepers. The gatekeepers were the university and the faculty administrations. The identity of the gatekeepers was the Language Academy (LA) in AB University, and permission for conducting research was requested before the actual study took place. The faculty administrators were informed that the study would be conducted solely for academic purposes, and the data collected would be confidential, and their details would not be exposed. An application letter to conduct research within the ULAB 3162 session 2016/2017 semester 2 classes (Appendix H) was sent to the administration of the Language Academy (LA), AB University.

The actual study began at the beginning of February 2017, in the second semester of the academic year 2016/2017. Rapport with gatekeepers was established to fully create a good relationship and understanding of the research that took place. The researcher met the Dean of the Academic unit in the Language Academy and potential ESL teachers of the classes, which would be involved in the study to seek permission to conduct the study among the English ULAB3162 learners and to go into the classes during lessons to carry out observation. The researcher also sought permission from the faculty administrator to obtain permission to use the faculty's premises to carry out

interviews. The researcher informed the teachers that the findings of the study were expected to benefit the ESL teaching and learning scenario in UA University and other higher institutions in general. The researcher ensured that the study that was carried out would have no negative impact onto the gatekeepers as the case under study involved no sensitive issues but contributed to greater understandings of the second language teaching and learning scenario in higher institutions.

#### **4.9.2 Teacher as researcher**

During the participant classroom observation, the researcher informed participants that she was previously an ESL teacher in order to gain full participation in the classroom activity for the purpose of the research. However, having told that researcher is a teacher, the teacher-student relationship often includes the assumption that within the lesson, the expectation is that students complete the tasks they are asked to do. On the other hand, as for students, one common assumptions within the lesson that it is obligatory to participate in all task assigned by teachers. In this case, it is necessary to make it clear to the learners that in research students have certain rights to take part in the activity, they have the right to say no, the right to withdraw, the right to change their mind and the right to confidentiality.

#### **4.9.3 Participants' Consent**

The second issue was the participants' consent to be involved in the study. It is important to note that the participants were aged between 19-22 years old, so parents'

consent was not applicable to this age group. Informed consent was carried out in which the participants could freely participate in full knowledge of what, when and why the study was being carried out.

Participants were informed of the purpose of research, data collection, and how the data would be used strictly for the purpose of this research study. Participants were also informed of the potential publication of the data via journals. Openness and transparency were ensured in the study as the researcher allowed questions to be asked in class or through an email address she provided. All potential participants were informed of the terms of the procedures in each part of the study.

Voluntary consent forms (Appendix I) were distributed to participants in the study who had the capacity to withdraw from the research should they feel any dissatisfaction. In addition to that, the anonymity of the participants was ensured by applying pseudonyms to the participants and concealing their real names, especially in the transcriptions and writings of the findings and discussions. In case study research, Simons (1989, p. 117) points out that using individual cases could be threatening as it promotes a close up of the individual; thus protection of identification of the participant is crucial when they are presented in the report. However, the individuals are not individual cases. Instead, this is an instrumental case study of ESL learners at a public university in Malaysia looking at WTC within the ESL classroom.

#### **4.9.4 Participants' Confidentiality**

The participants' details and the confidentiality of the data gained from the semi-structured interview was ensured, as names were not mentioned in reporting the data. Concerns can sometimes be raised about the participants' privacy as they reveal and interact with each other and the researcher, which may result in stress as the result of the intensity of the interaction (Morgan, 1993). The researcher should also be sensitive to the participants' stress levels and be prepared to intervene if necessary (Smith, 1995). There is a tendency for the topic to elicit sensitive or personal responses. In this situation, the researcher gave the participants the options not to talk about certain issues if they were personal and sensitive. Due to confidentiality issues, participants were made to understand that they were not allowed to request the copies of the recordings, as they were other participants on the recording. Prior to the interview, the researcher explained clearly the risks and benefits to the interviewee (Appendix I) in the opening interview statement.

Patton (2002) claims that confidentiality and opening statements are crucial, especially in dealing with real people as all kinds of complication could arise (p.498). The data collected from participants would be securely stored within the University of Edinburgh data store in which data can only be accessed with a password.

#### **4.9.5 Trust and trustworthiness**

Specific to the classroom observation, participants were aware they were being observed, and if they were not familiar with the researcher, they might be

uncomfortable and lack trust at first, and this affects what the researcher observes. To avoid this situation, the researcher introduced herself and allowed questions from learners to build rapport and trust. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher needed to be neutral and not evoke any ideas or judge the interviewees' responses. Patton (2002) also reminds that in the case that the interviewee expresses sadness or brings about painful memories, participants are encouraged by the researcher to seek further advice from relevant services. The researcher must be wise enough to handle such a situation. In this research, learners often brought forth negative and traumatic learning experiences in learning and speaking the target language. In this case, the researcher remained neutral and professional by not being emotionally involved but kept the interview going. After the interview, the researcher suggested other services that would give students the chance to talk through some of their issues.

#### **4.9.6 Self-reflections**

As guided by Patton (2002), the classroom participant and non-participant observation and the interview should be conducted in full capacity and interest. In fact, for the researcher who is in the position of being an ESL teacher herself, the process was natural and aligned to her passion and interest. The researcher was always interested to note down what she observed in class and what the participants said during the interviews and group discussions. The researcher strongly believes that everything that participants share is worth knowing. The participation of the classroom observation participants and interviewees was highly appreciated, and the participants were

respected and valued for having spared the time and shared their experiences to help the researcher to understand and investigate the research problems.

As Patton (2002) notes, there are times when interviews go bad. In this case, the researcher made sure that she avoided criticizing the interviewees but worked on improving her interviewing styles and questioning format instead for each respondent. The researcher made sure that her questions would facilitate open responses at the same time being sensitive to participants' emotions. With regard to this issue, Patton (2002) claims that some topics, which may be freely discussed in one country, might be a taboo in other countries. Topics such as "family matters, political views, who owns what, how people came to be in certain positions and sources of income" may be delicate to ask about especially if it is questioned by a stranger (Patton, 2002, p.481). This justifies why sharing experiences on competencies in English could be sensitive as it is potentially related to the family's educational background, family's income and social status, as demonstrated by the pilot candidates earlier.

#### **4.10 Summary**

This chapter describes the methodology of the study with the aim of answering the research questions. Various research methods within the qualitative paradigm were employed to collect data among the ESL learners at a public university in Malaysia. These methods included classroom non-participant observations, participant observations and semi-structured interviews and data from these different sources were triangulated. Inductive and deductive analysis was utilized to identify the small culture

and the large culture influences on ESL learners' willingness to communicate in English within the ESL classroom. A preliminary conceptual frame was used during the analysis, but it continued to be fluid and flexible, ready to be amended in light of data collected. The ethics consideration was developed in line with the ethical guidelines of BERA (British Educational Research Association) which was sent and approved by the Moray House Board of Ethics committee. The findings of the research will be discussed and organized around the developing conceptual framework (Figure 3.5) and will be presented in two chapters 5 (Large Cultures) and 6 (Small Cultures).



## CHAPTER 5

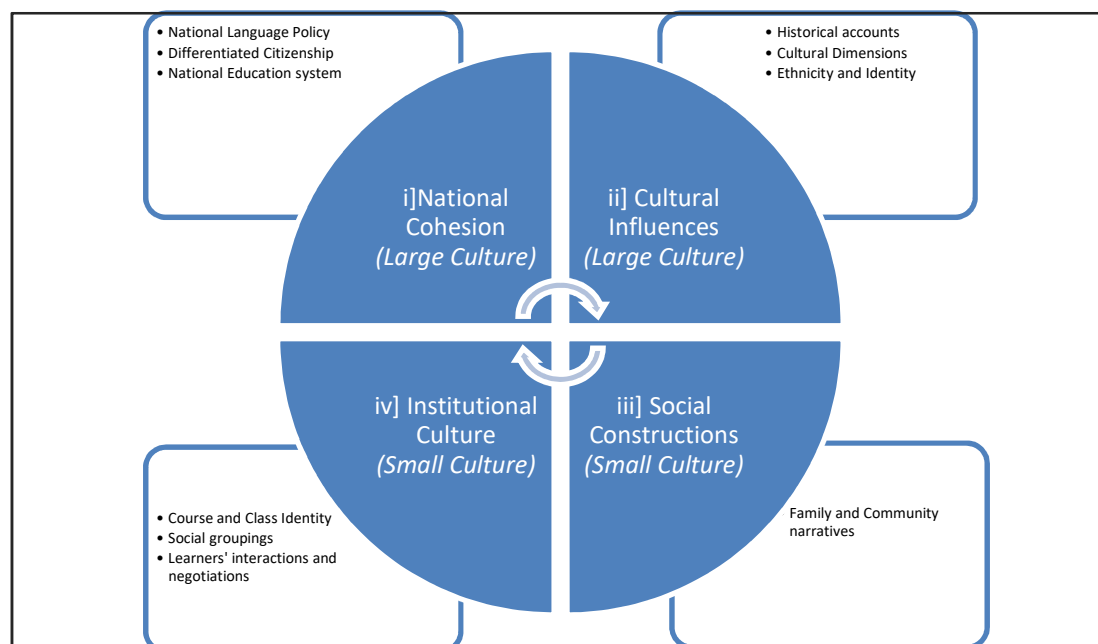
### FINDINGS 1: LARGE CULTURE

#### 5.0 Introduction

The presentation of the findings in this chapter is organised around a literature-derived conceptual framework of the Hybridized ESL Classroom Cultures (Figure 3.5) which is likely to be seen through the emergence of large culture and small culture themes. The data are also presented to reflect data collection and analysis procedures which emphasise the deductive analysis, drawing from non-participant classroom observations, participant classroom observations (class activities and group discussions) and semi-structured interviews, based on the theoretical constructs built earlier from the literature. Alongside the deductive analysis, the researcher was always open to any emergent themes (large and small culture influences), which were not mentioned, in the conceptual or theoretical framework.

The field notes and coding schemes for observational data, interview data and transcripts data from the group discussion recordings are presented and discussed. The field notes from the non-participant classroom observation focused on learners' instances of willingness to communicate (WTC) in the ESL classrooms. Meanwhile, the coding of the ESL learners' (semi-structured interview) and the group discussion data (participant classroom observation) focused on the large and small culture themes that constitutes the conceptual framework of the ESL classroom culture. To discuss

the findings around the conceptual framework, I present in this chapter again the ‘*Hybridized Conceptual Framework of the ESL classroom culture*’ as presented earlier (Chapter 3, Figure 3.5).



The conceptual framework consists of four quadrants belonging to elements of *large culture* and *small culture*. The large culture themes are categorized/ themed as [i] National cohesion and [ii] Cultural influences. Meanwhile, the small culture quadrants were classified as [iii] Family and Community and [iv] Institutional cultures. It is crucial to note that, although thematic analysis could be described as a ‘messy’ process, in order to analyse and discuss, I ensured that the categories were purposely and artificially separated. This is done as an effort to make clearer sense of, and most importantly to develop a deep understanding of the dynamics of the ESL classroom in relation to ESL learners’ WTC in English, particularly in the ESL classroom. GOA (1996) advises that categories must not overlap but must also embrace all possible data. They “must be mutually exclusive and exhaustive” (p.20). This initial framework

which consist of four quadrants is expected to be revised, once each individual category or theme is analysed and the dynamic relationship between the categories is identified through the findings.

The findings of this study are presented in three chapters under the sub-heading of *Findings 1: Large Culture* and *Findings 2: Small Cultures*, where the large culture and small culture themes are discussed in relation to ESL learners' WTC.

The discussions of each quadrants focus on how large and small culture influence learners' WTC in the target language, particularly within the ESL classroom in the public higher institution. The discussion utilised all information collected by different methods and from different sources employed in this study. The data and discussion presented in this chapter reflect the nature of qualitative research that was conducted to examine how large and small culture influence the make-up of ESL classroom culture and their roles in influencing ESL learners' WTC in the target language.

Apart from that, the researcher used the conceptual framework to analyse the data instead of using the research questions. The purpose was to acknowledge the complexity of the issue being studied, which in turn will provide answers to all research questions developed at the beginning of the research. As suggested by Hamilton and Whittier-Corbett (2013) the use of a concept frame will allow the researcher to talk about the subject under study with substantial information as compared to the simple and straightforward descriptive information gained from research questions. To investigate ESL classroom culture in relation to learners' WTC

in the target language, the concept frame provided the means for the researcher to gather comprehensive information on the key elements, interactions between the key concepts and the implications of such concepts for learners' WTC in the target language.

Using the conceptual framework established earlier in this thesis (Figure 3.5), this chapter will look at the findings through the lens of firstly the top two large culture quadrants. The bottom two small culture quadrants will be discussed in the following chapter under the heading of *Findings 2: Small Culture*.

## **5.1 Large culture Influences**

The multiple cultures in Malaysia may well be perceived through the lens of the stereotypical notions of culture in terms of what it means to be Malay, Chinese or Indian. Ethnicities and related cultures were defined by the national policy in terms of citizenship and who we are as a society. However, it is important to note that these large culture ideas, in the context of this study, were positioned as macro-level political and policy narratives that may have influenced citizens' self-perception, interactions and behaviour in general and within the immediacy of the English language classroom.

Malaysia is an independent multicultural nation with its own aspirations to become a fully developed nation by 2020. The positioning of English in Malaysia could be described as being inherited from the historical British colonisation, being influenced by the contemporary needs of globalisation and perceived economic needs. English in

Malaysia dominates the education system. The colonial heritage, combined with the modern dominance of English as an international language, positioned the English subject firmly within the primary, secondary and tertiary education system. This has led to English becoming not only a key curriculum area but beyond this. It has become a medium for instruction in certain parts of the tertiary curriculum.

Firstly, using the top two quadrants of my framework, it can be seen that essentialist notions of large cultures have dominated nation-building strategies and policies while seeking to reinforce ethnic identity and attempting to generate an all-encompassing Malaysian identity. The latter has attempted to find ways of unifying the population through one language (BM) and ways of belonging (being Malaysian-National Cohesion). However, powerful cultural, ethnic influences remain which are recognised and encouraged by the state, and are influenced by historical stories of colonisation.

Both quadrants deal with English as a key component of Malaysian citizens' educational experiences and future job prospects. This is done by placing English alongside BM at the heart of language policies. This was also established through its historical primacy during the years of colonisation. Bilingual proficiency has made English an important factor to move the nation forward, resulting in all schools and higher institutions embracing English as an international language of communication.

It is crucial to understand that since English is regarded as an important second language in Malaysia, the English subject has been pushed to the forefront at primary,

secondary and tertiary levels as an important language of acquisition which is mandated as the language of instruction at most of the higher education level. A formal English curriculum is also embraced throughout the eleven years of formal primary (6 years) to secondary (5 years) schooling. Excellence in English is vital to gain access to the academic and professional domains as well as local and international trade. English dominance over BM and other ethnic languages, reinforced by national language policy and the historical impact of English as a language of the upper echelons of society and as a lingua franca when diverse languages exist within the nation, has accelerated the status of English in the country.

However, findings suggest that learners face arduous challenges and problems with this positioning in different ways, particularly in their WTC in English in their previous and present ESL classroom settings. These problems highlighted in the findings will be discussed from the perspectives of the first half of the conceptual framework consisting of the large culture narratives of *National Cohesion* (first quadrant) through the sub-headings of *National Language*, *National Education System* and *Second Language Policy*; and *Cultural Influences* (second quadrant) through the subheadings of *Historical accounts*, *Ethnicity and Identity* and *Cultural Values*.

## **5.2 Influences of the national language**

Bahasa Malaysia (or previously known as Bahasa Melayu) is promoted as the national language to unify the diverse groups and at the same time, to create a single identity for Malaysia for the purpose of nation-building. In other words, the use of English

beyond the academic context is very much restricted for the students. The widespread use of BM as academic discourse in primary and secondary schools was for all subjects except English. Since BM is the national language and because it is compulsory for it to be spoken, taught at schools and to be passed at national examinations, most students, irrespective of ethnicities, are able to communicate in BM.

In these circumstances where BM is prevalent throughout the nation, findings revealed that students did not find the necessity to speak in English when BM could be spoken by the majority of other ESL learners. For example, Adibah, from the Faculty of Computing (FC) felt comfortable speaking in BM as it was more convenient to express herself in that language where everyone around was speaking it. She said, *“we are not used to speaking in English because in our homes and our school, we are likely to speak in Malay rather than in English”* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).

Supporting what Adibah claimed, Faizal, a third-year student from FKE, genuinely shared a similar perception. In Faizal’s statement, it can be understood that BM is a powerful language as it can be spoken by all different ethnicities. In this circumstance, the positioning of English as the second language often faces a predicament. The remarks illustrated the situation.

*Especially when you are from the major ethnicity in a country, and the country used their language as the national language, you don't put much effort to learn another language. In our country Malaysia, Malay is the largest population for a country, so we don't actually put any effort to learn a second language, such as Mandarin or Tamil. That is why we are also having problem to communicate in English because we use our language a lot and because other people from other ethnicities will speak Malay to us. So, it's kind of hard*

*for us to actually speak in English as a medium to communicate with other ethnicities. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

In short, it could be suggested in situation where BM is a powerful and dominant national language spoken across the diverse ethnicities, WTC in English becomes a huge challenge unless it is needed to communicative purposes.

Another noteworthy finding reflected that when English is spoken within the boundaries of the same ethnic groups (e.g. Malays among Malays), it made them to feel awkward or to feel a sense of distance from the rest of the members in the same group, given that they had grown up using their mother tongue. Aron, a student from FM, commented, *“most of the Malays will just speak Malay and Malay is our national language in Malaysia. So that’s why we speak Malay. For me, it’s like already a culture”* (Semi-structured interview with Aron from FM).

Hassan, who is also a student in FKM, confessed that he was more comfortable speaking in BM as it was more convenient to express himself in that language when everyone around was speaking the same language. *“Besides that, we are not used to speak in English because in our homes and our school, we speak in Malay rather than English”* (Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKM). The convenience of BM in students’ daily transactions somehow curbed learners’ WTC in the English language, unless it was deemed necessary. We will return to this issue in the section *Ethnic and Identity (section 2.2.1)* in relation to learners WTC, which will appear at the latter end of this chapter, Influence of L1 on English as L2.



The very wide use of BM in all aspects of the students' lives as the native language or national language proves to make English as a second language a demanding task. This is especially true since BM, as the learners' first language (L1) has already inhibited the students' thinking process in English. Findings revealed that the process of communication in the target language requires them to translate from their L1 to English. More often, they think in their mother tongue or native language before translating their ideas to English. Amirah, a third-year from the Faculty of Civil Engineering (FKA) claimed, *"I tend to directly translate the idea from BM to English. My brain is like a processor. It will be Malay first then English"* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). In this situation, the need to translate from L1 to L2 seems to delay speech in L2 and hence cause hesitancy in learners WTC.

Findings also revealed that the translation process or regarded among the learners as the *interference* of L1, in general, caused other challenges as students attempted to speak in the second language (L2). Siti claimed that the translation method she applied sometimes resulted in the wrong use of English words, causing further anxiety as she attempted to communicate in English.

*There are times when I speak English, I think in Malay before converting it to English, but sometimes it sounds not right. That way, each time I tried to talk, I just could not. The words do not come out* (Semi-structured interview Siti from FKE).

As anxiety proved to be a deterrent to WTC, the second example posited that the interference of one's first language might possibly cause greater challenges to learners' WTC, especially for students with poor English competency. This case was exemplified by Wanie who often felt discouraged in her attempt to communicate in

the target language due to L1 inference, incompetency in English and lack of support from peers. Wanie from FKM lamented:

*Each time I tried to speak English, my understanding is in Malay. So when I need to reply, the message does not get across. And with that funny look, we show that we are struggling, others started laughing. My confidence level has always been low with English (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

A similar problem was experienced by Mandarin language speakers while speaking with other ethnic Chinese students. Ken (FKM) commented that the direct translation method from L1 to L2 had been a daunting process for him. Findings here suggested that despite ESL learners having the intention to communicate in the target language, the process, however, was linguistically challenged by the learners' high dependency on the mother tongue in order to speak in the target language.

*I always think in Mandarin first. But sometimes I struggle because I can't find the words in English to match what I want to say. So I will think a different sentence or word that is close to what I want to say. Sometimes I cannot directly translate from Mandarin to English. Some English words cannot be found in Mandarin (Semi-structured interview with Ken from FKM).*

Apart from that, high dependency on the mother tongue knowledge to produce ideas in English somehow induced discouraging perceptions towards the target language. From the point of view of Hassan (FKM), translating from L1 to L2 was such a burdensome task; hence, he was less willing to communicate in the target language.

*English is difficult for me because I always need to translate the words in Malay to English. I don't speak much English. I guess that is why I have to translate each time I need to speak (Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKM).*

These accounts suggested that the students' mother tongue or the students' first language had a palpable role towards students' perceptions of English and the state of their WTC. Lack of proficiency in the target language and the difficulty of having to translate from L1 to L2 seemed to be a major influence in ESL learners' lack of WTC in the target language.

Relative to this matter, as explained in the literature review, Malaysian students are of diverse cultures. Most of them are bilingual in the sense that they are able to speak BM and their respective mother tongue. Educational experiences, as well as their social and socioeconomic backgrounds, may also create multilingual learners. The positioning of English in a multi-ethnic nation may be perceived differently by a learner as opposed to its status of becoming the second language in Malaysia. A comprehensive explanation to this scenario was offered by Vicky, an Indian studying in FKE:

*Actually, I've been taught English from home because my parents, they believe English is important. My mother tongue is not Tamil. It's Telegu. So my father actually forbade us to speak in Tamil because according to him, when we grow, we will eventually have friends, we will learn speaking Tamil and Malay. But Telegu is like a rare language, so he makes sure we spoke that and English because he believed that, this two, when you don't start at home, and you'll have a hard time catching up with it when you grow up, you will not learn to speak in that language. I can now speak Tamil, Telegu, Malay (BM) and English (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE).*

In most cases, students' mother tongues often functioned as the first language at home while BM as the national language functioned as the second most important language of communication used in schools and perhaps with other people in the community. In Vicky's case, it was hard to say that English was perceived as his second language.

Despite speaking Telegu at home, he received support towards using English, allowing him to feel comfortable around the target language, influencing his WTC. BM is the national language and somehow spoken in schools and within the community.

The use of English in the life of Zain's, who originated from Sabah (East coast of Malaysia) was almost non-existent as the majority of his community spoke various mother tongues, either "*Bajau, Dusun, Kadazan, Kadazan-Dusun and Bugis*" (*Semi-structured interview with Zain from FM*), placing BM as the second most important language. In a community where BM does not function as the first language, English has a greater tendency to be regarded as a foreign language as it is hardly utilized by the community. Zain described the mother tongue spoken by his family members as "*pure Sabah*" (*'Sabah pekat'*) referring to a *Malay Sabahan* dialect. In this situation, the BM language is regarded as just another language to master, which placed English even further along the line of other languages he needed to acquire.

Likewise, Aisyah from Sarawak (East coast of Malaysia) documented that the community she lived in practised distinct native languages particular to the Sarawak community, hence placing English as a foreign language. Aisyah (FC) claimed:

*Where I come from, majority are the Iban and Bidayuh. They are not like the Malays. Sometimes the Iban who are already Muslims they called this Melayu Iban [Malay Iban]. But they are not the same. A lot of Christians Iban and Bidayuh. In Kuching (capital of Sarawak) most speak Bahasa Sarawak [Sarawak languages], and if BM is spoken, it would be the Malay Sarawak language. I never hear much English spoken there. (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC).*

The under-utilization of English in the Sabah and Sarawak communities where Zain and Aisyah originated possibly positioned the target language as a foreign language, controverting the second language policy, as promoted by the government, since it was scarcely functional in the community. In a state where students are multilingual in diverse native languages, to communicate in English seemed trivial, especially when the target language held very little importance to their communities and everyday lives.

Such a reality could influence ESL learners' state of mind and influence their WTC in the target language. To be highly willing to communicate in the target language, learners need to gain other means of boosting their WTC in the target language. This case will be illustrated in other parts of the writings in this thesis where family narratives, for instance, play a role in learners' competence and in their WTC in the target language.

In relation to mother tongues and learners' WTC in the target language, another finding revealed that concerns with one's dialects affecting the pronunciation of English were also another cause of hesitance in using the target language. Azura from FKT claimed *"I think I heard my tone was like a 'Mamak' [Indian Malay dialect] speaking English. This was different from a Malay speaking English or a Chinese speaking English. So that's why sometimes I hesitate"* (Participant classroom observation class activity-group discussion). In this instance, Azura feared that her English pronunciation, which was influenced by her ethnic dialect, could sound different compared to her perceived 'Standard English' pronunciation. This was what deterred Azura's from communicating in the target language. Thus, apart from the influence of the L1 when

communicating in the target language, learners' perceptions towards what they thought was the 'right' English pronunciation had also influenced their degrees of WTC.

In summary, the national language that every Malaysian (Malay, Chinese, Indians and other ethnicities) speaks is BM, despite the diversity of ethnicities, which serve as the identification of Malaysian culture and as elements of unification between the various ethnicities. In this regard, it creates a large culture image of what it means to be Malaysians. Such powerful cultural policy has influenced ESL students' perceptions and behaviour towards the English language, particularly with regard to their WTC in the language.

The inhibition of the mother tongue has challenged the learners' WTC in the target language, especially in terms of having to translate from L1 to L2, L1 to L2 language anxiety, the imposition of other existing native languages and concern that dialect in the native language could be influencing English pronunciation to a certain extent.

English could also be regarded as a foreign language due to the prominence of BM and other mother tongues, especially in some parts of Malaysia where English is hardly functional. The dominance of BM as the national language and other native languages as the mode of communication among the ESL learners as well as the implementation of the *Second language (English) Policy* promoted by the Malaysian government has also demonstrated other challenges to the learners' WTC projected through the findings of the following section.

### 5.2.1 Second Language policy

In Malaysia, it is generally acknowledged that English language is used as the second most important language, as manifested in the *Second Language Policy*. However, the English language, which is observed to have economic significance, is used predominantly in commercial and private sectors rather than for daily communication purposes. From the data, evidence suggests that most students are aware of the policy and the importance of the English language. Hazim from FKE complied with the policy and acknowledged its importance, especially with relevance to his future undertakings.

*I believed that English is the most important second language in Malaysia and other countries. That's the reason I am learning the language. Next, it is important for my future. I think when I start working, I need to communicate to those from other countries as well and not just the Malaysians. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

Like his counterpart, Hamdi, who was also from FKE, he claimed the policy had illuminated the importance of the target language, and he believed he should comply with the policy. *"I just follow the flow, especially when it has been emphasised by the government. I believe it's hard to survive when my English is poor"* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).

On a different note, Siti who was also from the same class (FKE), had a different point of view. Despite the target language being made important and secondary to the national language, Siti was frank with her claims that she felt half-hearted in learning it. *"Honestly, I never want to learn the language, but since it's compulsory, what can I do. However, in today's world, everyone knows that English is important"*

*(Participant classroom observation-group discussion).* Siti, however, did not further explain her reluctance towards the target language.

Fortunately, similar data from other students offered potential reasons for the feeling of reluctance towards communicating in the target language, even after the second language policy was implemented. In this instance, Faiz from FKA explained that it was pointless to have such a policy when it was not fully utilized as the medium of everyday communication. Faiz compared Malaysia to the neighbouring country of Singapore, where English was the first language and primarily used in daily transactions. Singapore is a significant comparison due to its similar multicultural population consisting of Malays, Chinese and Indians, as it was historically part of Malaysia. Faiz confessed that in the situation where English was only given marginal attention in Malaysia, his interest towards the language was also minimal. Faiz noted that:

*My lack of interest because the use of English language is not widely seen in our surroundings because when we compare Malaysia to Singapore, they use English more frequently as compared to Malaysia” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

Consequent to this scenario, Kumar, an Indian ethnic from FKE, believed his shortcomings in spoken English were due to the absence of opportunities to practise the target language. *“When you never practise it, of course, you'll never be good at it” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).* Although English was pronounced as the second most important language, it was unfortunate that ESL learners could not attach a sense of meaningfulness towards the target language, as it was not utilized as the mode of communication.



Even though some had shown a lack of interest and WTC in the target language, findings disclosed that the positioning of English as the second language was also perceived positively as a neutral and functional language that bound the different ethnicities together. Aisyah from FC strongly felt that “*English is so important because Malaysia is a multiracial country. The Chinese and Indians learnt to speak Malay. So why not if we speak English when we need to communicate with them*” (Semi-structured interview Aisyah from FC). Apparently, Ana from FKA favoured the use of English when communicating with friends of other ethnicities as she found it to be convenient when she said “*it’s easier to speak English to them (Chinese) than in Malay. And everyone knows English is important. I don’t see any problem speaking in English there (in class)*” (Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA).

The convenience of the English language somehow suggested that English had long been positioned and accepted by the Malaysian community, and the implementation of the policy had become a vehicle that reinforced its status. This scenario could be linked to the historical accounts of the British colonial occupancy before Malaysia gained its independence. The inheritance of the English language will be further discussed later in this chapter in the section entitled *Historical Narratives*.

In short, the implementation of English as the second most important language in Malaysia, transcending the other native languages, suggests the government’s participation in globalisation. However, the emphasis on English stirred various perceptions among the learners and their WTC, especially when the target language was restricted to functions only within specific domains, and was not utilised in daily communication.

In these circumstances, it is fair to say that, without a meaningful and substantial platform to practise the target language, WTC in the ESL class may not be something easy to achieve for certain individuals despite the implementation of the second language policy. While some learners seemed positive and proactive towards the implementation of the policy, WTC in the classroom remained a challenging task, especially when BM as a powerful language is spoken by all ethnicities. With a limited platform for communication, it was the up to ESL learners themselves to decide on the usefulness of the target language and personally work on their WTC in the target language.

One of the government initiatives to promote the Second Language Policy is through the national education system, starting as early as primary education and being followed by secondary education. The following section discloses the findings on ESL learners' state of WTC in conjunction with this initiative.

### **5.3 Influences of the national education system**

After English was affirmed as the second most important language in Malaysia through the Second Language Policy, the target language was mandated in the national curriculum within the National education system. English is taught as a subject at all schools throughout the nation at primary (six years) and secondary levels (five years) and has to be passed in national examinations. The eleven years of formal English education have created a powerful notion of the English language as a fundamental

drive towards success. In this section, the findings reveal the impact of the education policy on ESL learners' perceptions and the state of WTC in the target language.

### **5.3.1 English as a high-stakes subject**

Results of English tests can profoundly impact on students in their current life and in years to come. This is especially true in terms of educational and career placements or admissions and advancement in any types of promotions that value English as a key skill. The emphasis on English is arguably well intentioned to ensure that Malaysian students will have a good grasp of both BM and English upon employment at local and international levels.

On a different note, the students believed that these genuine intentions of teaching English had not been well understood. According to the findings, the purpose of English being taught in school had always been unclear to them other than solely for examination purposes. Amirah, a student in FKA, remembered that she and her friends were only learning English due to it being a compulsory subject, as stated in the curriculum. She never had the idea that it would be used for communicative purposes. Amirah noted that:

*Students' do not see the importance of English. Some people are thinking for SPM [Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia - O level equivalent], some people just target to pass. To get the certificate. So they don't know the importance of English for future life. That's all (Participant classroom observation- group discussion).*

Like Amirah, Zain too had no clear understanding of the purpose of learning English. Zain accepted it as a subject. Unfortunately, for Zain, he was less willing to learn and had developed a sense of dislike towards the target language. Zain believed that such feelings had contributed to his current aversion towards the target language. He claimed that;

*I think I learnt English because I was forced to. I never understood why I needed English, and the teacher never explained the reasons why. All she did was teach us English. So I never quite liked it.  
(Semi-structured interview with Zain from FM)*

Like most schools, good achievement in English promised advancement to good education and a better career. In Malaysia, achievement in English has always provided smoother pathways towards higher education. Hashim, a student from FC, confirmed this by saying “*good results in English eases university entrance*” (Semi-structured interview with Hashim from FC) and Siti a student from FKE believed that English is “*strictly needed for finding good jobs*” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). This was further exemplified by Anna, a student from FKT. During her school years, she felt obligated to achieve an “A” as she aimed to be accepted to the “*Junior Science College [Maktab Rendah Sains Mara-MRSM]*” and later “*to be accepted into university*” (Semi-structured interview with Anna from FKT). Although English was not the only subject claimed to be central to learners’ success, failure or poor performance in English would potentially jeopardize one’s potential future, especially in terms of advancement towards higher education. In this regard, it could be suggested that such large culture ideas of on the positioning of English imposed a narrow notion of what it means to be successful.

With regard to the notion of success, findings significantly revealed that good results in English examinations would not always secure a place at tertiary education level as accepted by all learners especially when students exhibited poor oral performance. This situation was manifested by Farhan who studied in FKE. Farhan recalled his experiences of being denied entry into a highly reputable public university because his English oral fluency was poor despite his overall academic achievement projecting academic excellence.

Such expectations where communication in English is highly regarded, created tension for ESL learners whose ability to communicate in English is low since it was hardly used in their daily lives or at school. Despite having good grades for English and being called for a university entrance interview, Farhan revealed his disappointment as he failed to be accepted just because the key focus was on English. Such narrow notion of success was being placed here as if speaking in English was the ‘superior’ way of operating and showing skills, knowledge and understanding. Farhan’s frustrations were illustrated by these statements:

*During the university entrance interview at UTP [Universiti Teknologi Petronas], I had a horrible experience. My mother had to prepare me an essay on how to introduce myself for me to memorize. It was easy because I am so used to memorizing. It was a piece of cake. But during the question and answer sessions, I couldn’t answer any of the questions because I couldn’t understand anything. During the group discussion, others were fluent, especially the Indians. So I kept quiet. When they asked for any suggestions, I kept thinking in Malay. Because I was so slow, I knew I would be rejected. (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE).*

It appeared that despite being successful within the Malaysian education system, these young people felt disadvantaged because they did not speak English well. And this

seemed to be the case, at least in part, because of the focus on written and exam-focused work in schools with little opportunity for English communication. Farhan stated that he felt tremendous guilt towards his parents, who had supported his intentions to further his studies at the potential university. In vain, Farhan said:

*I told my mom that I was poor in English. I told them that they don't have to send me there [interview session]. Now I feel really guilty that I failed to be accepted. We travelled really far from Kelantan to Perak [about 426 km]. We had to stay overnight in hotels. I knew the interview was in English. And all I knew was to write essays in which my sisters help me at times. I felt so bad (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE).*

It could be argued that the positioning of English over Bahasa Malaysia (BM) at tertiary settings has caused some to feel stressed and disadvantaged, as the use of English has moved beyond economic reasons especially for those who were not strongly engaged with English. Despite their current context, students have to oblige and adapt to such positioning. Emphasis on English as an important language may also suggest English is supplanting BM, the national language. *"I feel that learning English is not wrong. But what I strongly feel is why are we learning all other subjects in English? (Semi-structured interview with Fahmi from FM).* While BM is the national language used by different ethnicities in schools, daily transactions and government official affairs, Fahmi felt upset that English held an important position over BM, especially as a medium of knowledge transmission and academic discourse. This was documented by these remarks:

*What's wrong with using Malay to learn? I don't think English represents a higher standard than Malay language. If we go to Japan or Korea to study, we need to use their language. But if they come to Malaysia, they use English. That's wrong. It's Malaysia, not the UK or US. So why are we using English? (Semi-structured interview with Fahmi from FM)*

In this instance, Fahmi confessed that his overall interest in the language was not entirely negative, however conflicting. *“My heart is currently 50-50. English is first, then Mandarin. What happen to BM?”* (Semi-structured interview with Fahmi from FM). Emphasising the implementation of English as a compulsory subject underpinning the Second Language Policy has resulted in complex reactions from the ESL learners. Despite understanding the importance of the language, there seemed to be no meaningful attachment to the target language, which later impacted on the learners’ oral performance.

It would be expected that learners with little attachment to the target language display a lack of WTC. Learners with low English oral performance may be disadvantaged in the face of such a policy despite achieving excellent academic results. Findings seemed to suggest a problem area in the education system because of the expectation of fluency in the English language at higher institutions. The following section continues to disclose findings on learners’ WTC in view of the various types of schools existing within the Malaysian education system.

### **5.3.2 National schools, Vernacular school, Arabic Schools and Missionary Schools**

Despite various backgrounds, ESL learners at tertiary level originate from various schools, namely Malay-medium National Schools (*Sekolah Kebangsaan*) and non-Malay-medium vernacular schools which are divided into Chinese National-type Schools (SJK(C)), Tamil National-type Schools (SKJ(T)), Arabic Schools (equivalent

to Islamic religious schools) or Convent schools and other missionary schools inherited from the British colonial period. The findings call attention to the critical roles of schools in students' perceptions towards English and their state of WTC in the target language.

### 5.3.2.1 National Schools

As for National Schools, the prevalent use of BM as the means of communication and academic discourse has positioned English simply as a subject driven by examinations. However, the main challenge to communicate in the target language in most national schools is due to the lack of platforms to practise the target language. Communities in national schools largely consist of Malay ethnicity with some other ethnicities. Jesica, of Indian ethnicity and currently a student at FM mentioned that during her schooling years all her friends were Malays. In this context, English language seemed to be out of place. Jesica recalled that:

*My school was SMK X School. Everyone was Malay, and nobody really knows how to speak English because there was not much exposure. This continued until I completed school (Semi-structured interview with Jesica from FM).*

Satish, an Indian ethnic from FC, shared similar schooling experiences. Satish was accepted to a residential school (school-bound to the merit system) when he explained:

*So back then, 99% of the population there was Malay, and the non-Muslim was like, I think there were only three Indians in my batch. So, among the Indians, we tend to speak in our mother tongue, and of course, with Malays, we tend to speak Malay, so there weren't any opportunities to talk in English. Even during the English class, you can see people are actually struggling to speak in English by having a good conversation, especially during the oral test. I could*



*do well in English, but only written English. But when it comes to speaking, I had difficulties. (Semi-structured interview Satish from FC).*

In a National-type School, English is positioned in the back seat as the national-type schools take pride in maintaining their native languages while at the same time ensuring all learners are fluent in the national language-BM. In a diverse community like Malaysia, different types of schools promote their respective native languages. In cases like these, English could very easily be treated as a foreign language rather than the second language by the learners as the priority was learning other native languages followed by BM as the national language.

The first example was exemplified by Eman (FC), who is of Malay ethnicity. Being Malay, his mother tongue was Bahasa Malaysia (BM), but he was sent to a SKJ(C). Speaking BM at home, Eman strove to grasp Mandarin as his second most important language in school. All subjects were taught in Mandarin, with the exception of BM and the English subject. As the national language, BM became the next important language in such schools. English remained important but was limited to being a school subject. Eman expressed concern over his lack of oral ability in the target language:

*My situation is because I was from in Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina- SJK(C) [Chinese National-type School]. When I joined matriculation (pre-university level) after completing my secondary school, I found that everyone was speaking in English or Malay, but my comfort zone is talking in Chinese [Mandarin]. I tried so hard, but I still felt my English is really 'unstable' because I will sometimes blend the two languages. (Semi-structured interview with Eman from FC)*

Similarly, Aron, who is currently studying in FM, recalled his experiences going to a SJK (T), where he struggled with English. Aron's mother tongue is Tamil, which is also the primary mode of instruction in the school. However, being the national language, BM became the second most important language and is used by teachers as the medium of instruction in certain subjects. This leaves English as the third language, particularly as a subject to be taught and to pass during exams, causing Aron to undergo a shortfall of confidence in using the language. At tertiary level, coping with the need for the English language without having the courage to speak the language, was almost impossible.

*I am concerned about my speaking ability to communicate in English. I always need the courage. Because as you know, I am from a Tamil school. So it's like I didn't get to speak that much of English during that time. But when I go to my secondary school I stayed in my uncle's house and in my uncle's house, both of my cousins, they are four and three years old, they don't know how to speak Tamil. Don't know at all. So I have to try to speak English (Semi-structured interview with Aron from FM).*

Both learners from the SJK(C) and the SJK(T) claimed that communication in the target language was absent since the mode of communication between teachers and students was primarily their native languages. Loh, a Chinese ethnic studying in FKE claimed that the medium of instruction in his secondary Chinese school subjects was primarily in Mandarin, except for the History and Bahasa Melayu subjects which were conducted in the national language, BM. English remained one of the many subjects he learnt with very little opportunity and platform to communicate in the target language.

*I had to take 10 subjects in my school, including the Mandarin paper during SPM. Everything was taught in Mandarin except 'Sejarah' (History) and BM [Bahasa Malaysia]. That will be in Malay. But*

*sometimes it is bilingual [Malay and Mandarin] (Semi-structured interview with Loh from FKE).*

Findings further disclosed that the main objective of the English subject taught in schools was clearly targeting on accuracy rather than fluency, as the ultimate goal focused on examinations. *“The teacher never pushed (emphasised) me to speak English. I guess it was more for exams. Yes, it was more for exams (Semi-structured interview with Safiah from FC).* Safiah further explained that during her school days, the only platform on which she believed she could practice her oral performance was limited to the English drama and choral speaking club activities.

*When I was in my form four, I was at the top of my class. The teacher asked me whether I will be interested to join the school’s English debate. I told her I was not familiar with debate. Then she told me that she can teach me. I guess that was when I was able to use English orally. Just that (Semi-structured interview with Safiah from FC)*

With very little focus on the speaking components and the fact that English was generally taught as a subject driven by examinations, the insignificant amount of English used in schools made students feel less competent in terms of oral performance. Eman, who is studying in FC, described his English as *“unstable”* (Semi-structured interview with Eman from FC) while Aron felt he was merely relying on his *“courage”* to speak English. Both felt the schooling practices failed to help them establish a strong foundation in the target language. Since the mother tongue dominated the school settings, and English is mainly focused on academic skills in preparation for the national examinations and higher education entrances, it could be suggested that English is far from becoming the second language for the learner due to limited platforms on which to use the target language. In fact, with such limitation

and a fragile foundation in communicative skills, WTC in the target language within the ESL classroom would potentially be a huge challenge to undertake.

### 5.3.2.2 Islamic Schools

In another type of school, learners who originated from the Islamic religious schools also have faced similar scenarios; only this time, the main language of instruction in the school is Arabic. The Arabic language is used in the majority of the Islamic education subjects as the academic discourse. Similarly, to SJK (T) and SJK(C), English is treated as a subject taught and tested during examination as part of the national curriculum. In consequence, the absence of English as the mode of communication in schools caused learners like Farhan (FM) and Ainol (FM) to struggle with the target language at the tertiary level. In Farhan's case, being a Malay ethnic, BM is his first language, and it could be considered that the Arabic language had been his second most important language, leaving English purely as a subject to be passed during exams. Significant to the needs of the Islamic school, Farhan placed much of his focus on Arabic, leaving English with little attention.

*The Maahad [Arabic] School was small, and it focused on Arabic. My Arabic language was very good last time. One of my friends really hated English. I focused on Arabic, and I scored an 'A' for it while my English was a 'B'. It was okay, and I admitted that my English was poor since school. I always got scolded because of English (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FM).*

Going through similar schooling experiences, Ainol confessed that her current lukewarm attitude towards the target language was partially due to the lack of emphasis on the English language in the Arabic schools she attended during her school

years. In Ainol's case, it could be suggested that the strain to equip herself with Arabic as the most important language at that point had consequently developed a barrier in her to learning English language due to its lesser significance. Ainol cited:

*When I joined secondary school, I went to SMUA [Sekolah Menengah Ugama- an Islamic religious secondary school] in Kelantan. We used Arabic a lot. So I learnt English half-heartedly. Maybe because there was no emphasis on the language at all. In fact, I was struggling with Arabic, so that's why I didn't focus on English. Everyone was like that I think (Semi-structured interview with Ainol from FM).*

In a multicultural setting like Malaysia, students have the options to choose any type of national schools without the restriction of one's ethnicity. In any of these schools, the learners' own mother tongue and language of instruction at schools (which could be different to the learners' native language) will make learning English a much more demanding and complex task to handle.

Such complex multilingual situation was exemplified by Ana (FKA) who is a Malay ethnic in Sabah, also known as Sabahan Malay and who spoke *Bahasa Melayu Sabah*. Ana professed that what added to the complexity of learning English for her was the fact that she was sent to a SKJ(C) for her primary education, and then later went to a national secondary school, which taught the Arabic language as a compulsory subject. Ana was already competent in Mandarin after completing her primary education. During her transition to a national secondary school, she needed to work on her BM, whilst learning Arabic and English. Ana's tussles with different languages were recounted as follows:

*When I joined the national secondary school, which was when the problem started. From a Chinese school to a Malay school, and then I had to take Arabic. Do you know how traumatized I was? I just*

*don't know what happened. But luckily I liked my English teacher (Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA).*

### **5.3.2.3 Chinese National Type Medium Schools**

Another interesting instance was shared by Aron (FM), an Indian ethnic who attended a Chinese (SJK(C)) primary school. Aron revealed his dire struggles to grasp different languages. Having Tamil his mother tongue, Aron noted that he struggled with Mandarin, followed by BM as he continued his secondary education in a National School.

*I am from Nilai, Seremban. So basically I'm an Indian. I studied at a Chinese school. So far, I have four languages. Tamil, Chinese, BM and English. It was a Chinese kindergarten and primary school. So, basically, you know these schools, they encouraged you to speak Chinese rather than English. But there was an English class.*

Already striving with 4 languages (English, Tamil, Mandarin and BM), Aron claimed the little attention he paid to English left him to struggle with the target language at tertiary level. In fact, like in all types of schools, the lack of focus on fluency in the national curriculum contributed to his lack of competency, especially when his course (Human Resources and Management) dealt very much in English. Aron noted that:

*In secondary school I took accountancy, so you know, in secondary school it's always in Malay, not English. Then in Matriculation [pre-university] level, it was also in Malay. But then, I heard someone said that in university, it's all in English. Yes, it all changed to English. The accountancy, economics, everything's changed to English. Yes, I really struggled. Even though I also took accountancy like before, but the terms and the medium is English. I really struggled (Semi-structured interview with Aron from FM)*

As stated earlier, in such a multilingual context, having to deal with other native languages before English and the lack of focus on oral performance throughout the national curriculum suggested challenges towards ESL learners' WTC.

#### **5.3.2.4 English Convent Schools**

Apart from the National, SJK(T), SJK(C) and religious schools, there are also English Convent Schools, originally known as the English- medium schools. These schools were considered as innovations of the British colonial government managed by the Christian missionaries. Despite BM having the legitimate status as the national language, English Convent schools and other missionary schools in Malaysia have retained some of the English heritage by conceding to English as the medium of communication between teachers and learners. Learners from these schools are known to be fluent in English as the environmental pressures them to use the language authentically with teachers and friends. Hanan (FM) recounted her experiences with friends from such schools.

*I have many friends who are from convent schools. Most of them are fluent English speakers. But with me here they speak Malay. But when they meet Chinese friends, they immediately speak English. I always see that. So I always refer to them if I have problems with the language (Semi-structured interview with Hanan from FM)*

In this section, the findings called attention to the critical roles of schools to students' perceptions, competency and their state of WTC in the target language. ESL students in Malaysia proved to be multilingual as a product of the pluralistic nature of the

society and the different types of medium of instructions in various types of schools provided by the government. In the states where English was only taught as a subject, WTC in the target language became a huge hurdle as they had limited platforms to use the target language and hence were deficient in the communicative abilities in the target language. In light of this matter, learners' lack of WTC was closely linked to the exam-oriented culture as the focus was generally on performing in exams rather than fluency. Findings on this issue will be further presented in the following section.

### **5.3.3 Exam Culture**

The approaches used in teaching English throughout Malaysia have been driven by the national examinations which consist of the *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah*, commonly abbreviated as UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test), which is taken by all students in Malaysia at the end of their sixth year in primary school before they leave for secondary school; *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* commonly abbreviated as PMR (Lower Secondary Assessment) taken by all Form Three students in both government and private schools throughout the country; and *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*, abbreviated as SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education) taken by all students from the Malaysian public secondary schools in their final year. All examinations were set and assessed by the *Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia* (Malaysia Examinations Syndicate). However, recently, PMR has been replaced with *Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah* (PT3), a school-based assessment as opposed to centralized examinations. PT3 results would be used for entry to Form 4 as well as for applications into fully residential schools, religious secondary schools, Mara Junior Science College, technical secondary schools and vocational colleges.



Findings revealed that English in schools was narrowly taught within the context of the examination. In the case where English results were deemed to impact on students' lives in future endeavours, English teachers would ensure that English was taught specifically for the prescribed curriculum. In other words, the exam-centric education system reinforced the idea that English matters mostly in exams rather than as the medium of communication. Ken, who was majoring in computer engineering (FC), recalled that he was exposed to *"a lot of drilling"* as they headed towards the examination during secondary school years. Findings from Ken suggested that the approaches used to teach English were teacher-centred and exam-driven. Ken explained, *"normally we will read, we pronounce from one to ten then we always forget then she will practice continuously every day until we understand"*. Ken reported that even during his matriculation years (pre-university), English language classes continued to focus on accuracy in reading and writing towards the exams. *"We already have the basics, so we approach comprehension, writing and exams"*. When asked about communication platforms, Ken said there was *"less"* (Semi-structured interview with Ken from FC) communication involved.

Findings also revealed that the existing English oral assessments undertaken through the national curriculum failed to hone the learners' speaking and communicative ability as it boiled down to accuracy, results and achievements. Diana, who is currently an FKA student, clearly expressed that the only platform for her to speak in English was during English oral assessments. Diana vividly described this process as *"...I think we speak when we have to speak. This is when we are evaluated. I mean when marks are given during the oral tests"*. Diana felt the assessments were unhelpful to develop

her fluency as the “*oral speaking test is only once a year*” (*Participant classroom observation- group discussion*).

Poor English results proved to not only impact on learners’ futures but also proved to negatively influence learners’ interest towards the target language. Jessica from FM revealed “*last time in my MUET [Malaysian University English Test- university entrance exam] result, I got band 2. Then I was like, oh my god, I cannot talk English anymore*”. At present, Jessica claimed that the MUET result left her feeling very disheartened towards the target language and proved demotivating. She confessed that now in ESL class she “*doesn’t talk a lot*” (*Semi-structured interview with Jessica from FM*). In short, it could be suggested that poor results from the exam-oriented system could impact on the learners’ self-worth in comparison to the others. Regarding oneself as not good enough, could stifle efforts to communicate in the target language.

Since the purpose of learning English was to be tested and evaluated in examinations, the feeling of tension and reluctance to communicate in English in ESL classrooms was evident and highlighted through the following accounts. During the *participant classroom observation-group discussion*, students majoring in computer engineering (FC) confirmed they felt burdened each time they had to use the target language and described their state of having to speak in the language as unwilling but obligatory. Most of them articulated the following expressions to describe how they felt about communicating in the target language: Syafiq claimed he “*had to*” and Haziq felt he was “*forced and had no choice*”. Adel, Kevin and Zaki experienced anxiety as they attempted to communicate in English. Adel reflected his state of speaking as “*feeling*

*like going to the toilet and stressed” while Kevin and Zaki were in the state of hesitation when using the language. Kevin noted the words “not confident”, and Zaki mentioned the word “doubtful” in commenting on his feelings towards his ability to communicate. As findings suggested that communication in the target language is described as a ‘nerve-racking’ experience for ESL learners, Eman and Adib claimed that learners should be supported by ESL teachers. Eman and Adib’s conversation during a participant classroom observation-group discussion were as follow:*

*Eman: It is very important that we get some motivation from the teacher.*

*Adib: We already felt terrified to speak in English. Teacher then asked more spontaneous questions.*

*Eman: Terrifying.*

*Adib: When answering, we made mistakes. I know it’s a mistake. But it helps if we get some motivational words from the teacher. That won’t make us feel so ashamed. Because most of the time, that’s how we felt.*

*Eman: Yes. And sometimes when we stand to give answers, everyone in class just stares. So we end up feeling terrified and not talking. Because everyone give you the look as if they don’t understand what you are saying.*

With much focus on examinations, focus on communicative competence is ignored.

Zain (FM) believed that his incompetence in English was due to his lack of exposure to oral English in the early stages of learning English.

*I sort of regret that I decided to come here. Everyone here knows that English is important. I need it in presentations, writing reports and many more. Now I feel angry and upset that my English is so poor. Since it’s really important, it should have been developed since the early years (Semi-structured interview with Zain from FM).*

Like Zain, other students repeated that failure to have good proficiency relied greatly on the role of the school. Faiz (FKA) recorded that *“we are not fluent enough to speak in English because we are not trained to openly speak in schools. If we have been trained to speak in front of others in English, we will have no problem”* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). Amirah (FKA) asserted that the school had provided very little platform for them to authentically communicate with others (participant classroom observation-group discussion). Faiz again believed that if schools had provided a platform for them to use the language more communicatively during the eleven years of English learning, he would have had the confidence that he would be a competent speaker by now. Faiz strongly felt he lacked speaking skills, as the focus was too much on the written language. Faiz claimed *“we are lacking in terms of vocabulary and grammar when we speak. We tend to learn for writing instead of speaking* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).

#### **5.3.3.1 Rote learning**

As mentioned earlier, since methods used in learning English were very much driven towards fulfilling examination syllabus, getting the right answer was pivotal. This was especially true when John from the FKE confessed to applying the memorisation technique for his success in obtaining A's for the English paper in all the national examinations (UPSR, PMR and SPM). John claimed that he achieved this mainly by regurgitating discourses from texts or essays he had memorized earlier. However, despite his excellent achievement in the examinations, John also claimed that his methods in memorizing texts and essays had adversely affected his oral performance in the target language.

*..during the primary level national exam, UPSR and PMR were easier to memorize. But even though SPM was tougher, I managed to score an 'A' by memorizing several essays. But I still can't speak English. (Semi-structured interview with John from FKE)*

In general, students agreed that at the current tertiary education level, their daily academic activities and practices constituted extensive use and exposure to English compared to their previous learning experiences. Despite being exposed to more opportunities to communicate in English, findings revealed that students were still attached to the memorisation technique since their prime concern is accuracy. Such practices were revealed by Saiful (FKM):

*The essays I wrote was so poor, and I think the teacher gave up on me. So for the sake of the examinations, I studied past essay questions and started memorising the essays. So when I had to answer the actual exam questions, I wrote what I had memorized with some adjustments to fit with the question given. I still do that now. (Semi-structured interview with Saiful from FKM).*

At this point, it could be suggested that the negative backwash effect of exams has created learners who are constantly concerned about their linguistic accuracy and a situation where achievements are the major concern for teachers, schools, parents and learners. Being conditioned by such a system, learners are, without a doubt, hesitant to communicate through fear of making mistakes in the target language. The urge for accuracy, or the concern to say things in the most correct manner, was also evident through further data provided by Hassan (FKM):

*At university, they taught us how to produce a term paper, and it is difficult. There was a time when I needed to present the term paper by sharing it to the whole class. I got stuck. I couldn't do it. I talked a bit, then my partner continued. He talked the most. I just became quiet in front. Probably I wasn't prepared. I actually memorized it all. Maybe it was due to that. (Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKM)*

In this case, text memorization seemed to isolate the sense of meaning to what he had learnt and also his connection to others. That could be the reason why Hassan from FKM failed to continue his speech when he forgot his text. A similar scenario was mirrored by Hanan (FKM) who explicitly confessed how she had rehearsed her spoken text:

*Most of the time, I am quiet in class. If the teacher asked me to speak, I normally remain quiet. Only during presentations, I talked. It's compulsory, so I prepared the text. Then I just read out the prepared text. If it was spontaneous, I wouldn't be able to do it" (Semi-structured interview with Hanan from FKM)*

This quote illustrates the kinds of tension and frustrations that tertiary learners suffer and how they are disadvantaged by the prominence of English in the education system. The exam culture has had an impact on learners' willingness and efforts to communicate in the target language. English was learnt only to be tested in the examinations, and achievements in the target language would have impacted on learners' lives for years to come. Such a powerful large culture notion on what it meant to be successful took away the meaningfulness of the language learnt, as it was meant to be measured and not to be used for conversational purposes.

Being conditioned to focus on accuracy through rote learning, drilling, memorization and the lack of input and platforms for communication skills justified learners' state of lacking in willingness to communicate, while some are fairly willing to communicate in the target language. Inevitably, such a strong exam culture has also shaped ESL learners' negative perceptions towards the target language, as they believe English to be hard and overwhelming. The focus on examinations at school level and the expectation that students would be able to communicate through ESL at tertiary

level suggests a gap between earlier education's (primary and secondary) objectives and those at tertiary education. In the light of this issue, the following section posits findings specific to the grammar-translation approach and learners' overwhelming concerns towards accuracy in learning the target language.

#### **5.3.4 The mastery of English grammar**

The weight that examinations carry within the education system strongly shapes both teaching and learning approaches. Although speaking and listening skills are part of the English syllabus in the Malaysian education system, English language skills are focused mainly on reading, writing and grammar skills, in which accuracy becomes the primary concern. Findings revealed that achieving grammatical accuracy had become another language impediment, which hindered learners from communicating. Learners' overwhelming concerns of the technical difficulties in mastering the rules of grammar seemed to impede the learners' intention to speak.

Saiful from FKM felt self-conscious about his speaking proficiency and reported, *"I always think my English is broken. I think it's my grammar. I always worry"* (Semi-structured interview with Saiful from FKM), while Eman (FC) showed a great sense of apprehension about the grammar mistakes he made: *"I wrote a very long essay, but it turned out it had too many grammar errors"* (Participant classroom activity-group discussion). Balqis from FKT also commented that her overwhelming concerns over grammar had adversely affected her interest towards the target language, *"not feeling comfortable with the language because I keep bothering about grammar and*

*mistakes” (Participant classroom activity-group discussion)* while Kumar (FKE) summarized the English language as being *“too strict and formal” (Participant classroom activity-group discussion)*.

Years of excessive focus on grammar and accuracy have taken their toll on learners’ psychological state. Zain (FM) claimed that his incapability in mastering grammar fostered an apprehensive feeling of not wanting to be *“criticized”* by others (*Semi-structured interview with Zain from FM*). Apart from that, Zahrah, a student in FKT, expressed her disappointment in failing to master English grammar to the extent of causing her to feel frustrated with herself. This situation was reflected through Zahrah’s ESL class experience, which proved that she was not the only one who was concerned about producing linguistically correct sentences. Other class members were also keen to comment on linguistic errors. Zahrah’s frustration was illustrated by these remarks:

*One of my classmate was an English student, and he was really tall. He laughed at the mistakes I made. Mistakes made were grammar mistakes, and even the easy ones were wrong. I felt so bad now and very worried about myself. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

Too much concern over grammar threatened learners’ willingness to speak and affected their entire speaking environment. Findings disclosed that learners’ experiences of being judged for committing language errors to a certain extent triggered psychological implications on learners’ interest and confidence towards the language. Eman (FC) described that he felt *“traumatized”* towards English when he further explained:



*English is becoming more difficult. Even if I have to read out what is written on the slides, I seriously don't feel confident anymore. Even reading out the slides makes me feel terrified. (Participant classroom observation- group discussion)*

For some learners with excessive concern on the mastery of grammar, aversion towards using the target language or keeping quiet was an option especially to avoid being evaluated by others. A clear example was cited by Anna from FKT:

*For me, my biggest concern when I speak English is I will make too many grammatical errors. Then I will stutter. The others will judge me and say since I am not good with English, why bother to speak English. (Semi-structured interview with Anna from FKT)*

As mentioned in the earlier section, findings disclosed that a huge gap existed when language learning at schools focused on good English scores whilst universities were giving much attention to oral competencies as graduates were expected to be proficient in both languages in order to serve in the future workforce. Such a learning gap was genuinely described as a form of “*culture shock*” by Amirah, who is currently a third-year FKA student. *(Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*. Learners’ WTC in the target language seemed to be dampened by concerns towards speaking in a grammatically correct manner. At the same time, concerns about being evaluated and criticized for making mistakes were also expressed. In cases where ESL learners have low proficiency, they may become entirely withdrawn from communicating in the target language. In connection with ESL learners’ linguistic concerns and apprehension towards the target language, findings also called attention to the critical roles of ESL teachers in influencing learners’ state of WTC.

### 5.3.5 ESL teachers' persona and teaching approaches

Learners' experiences in school significantly contributed to their current competencies and attitudes towards English. Teachers were generally acknowledged as the most important and the most influential individuals to inspire ESL learners' motivation and interest towards the target language. Findings significantly identified that learners' state of WTC could be positively or negatively influenced by the teacher in charge of the ESL classroom.

Instead of being positive role models, learners were saddened with ESL teachers' negative and unsupportive reactions, particularly when language errors were made during English lessons. These instances, which happened during their primary and secondary school years, psychologically impacted on the learner in years to come. Farhan (FKE), for example, had been emotionally scarred by the obstructive comments made by his ESL teacher on the linguistic errors he made during his secondary school years. The incident left him feeling negative about himself for not being able to use the target language correctly. This was vividly described by Farhan from FKE:

*The teacher laughed. The teacher laughed and asked me to repeat the word. I repeated the word, and the teacher laughed again. The teacher laughed twice. The whole class laughed because the teacher laughed. The teacher is the main actor. When the teacher at the front laughed, of course, the rest will laugh. I asked myself: did I say something wrong? What did I say so wrong? How should I have said it? The teacher should have corrected my pronunciation, but she laughed instead. She continued to laugh. She asks the next student to read. She told me that I don't have to read anymore. I immediately sat down. Then I felt so sad. I felt bad at making such mistakes. (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE).*

The teacher's negative reactions consequently caused him to withdraw all efforts to use the target language after the incident. In fact, his emotional injury has lasted until now. In order to hide the disheartening experiences, Farhan put on a happy-go-lucky persona and often made jokes in class to conceal his emotional pain and trauma. *"I knew that I was poor in English. By making jokes, I managed to hide my fear"*. Farhan's story echoed the experiences of other participants in this study. Fazli, a student from FKA recounted his traumatic experiences (*Participant classroom observation- group discussion*) when he was *"slapped"* on the face for making minor linguistic mistakes and witnessed the same teacher *"put a pencil box inside the mouth"* of his friend for making similar mistakes.

Learning English in such a deleterious setting generated apprehension and at the same time, resistance towards English, *"because of that I feel much traumatized and do not like English"* (*Participant classroom observation-group discussion*). Farhan concluded that the teacher was *"very bad"* for causing hurt for mere language mistakes. Students believed that teachers' personas and the unconstructive approach of resorting to such punishment, strongly dissuaded them from favouring the learning of English.

In the light of these findings, it could be argued that teachers in this case clearly did not support the students' feeling of competence, especially when teachers laughed, punished and failed to give constructive feedback. In addition to ESL learners' negative perceptions towards the target language, such adverse experiences also impacted on the learners' self-worth and the relationship between teachers and students. This was exemplified by John's remarks:

*Sometimes I ask the question, and she (the teacher) will say like this: I will explain this in class, this, this, and this. She will yell at people. Then she will teach, but she raises the tone of her voice. I know she is emphasising on this, but then I feel sad because she is raising her voice to you, which makes you feel more inferior. (Semi-structured interview with John from FKE)*

In this case, the negative teacher-student relationship intensified the resistance towards the target language. The fact that John felt humiliated and inferior during his previous ESL class meant his WTC in the target language in the current ESL class would not be a straightforward effort.

On the contrary, students who used to study at SJK(C) believed that it was common for SJK(C) teachers to use the cane as a way of enhancing learning and some learners accepted it. SJK(C) schools were well known for upholding strict discipline in teaching and learning approaches in order to sustain good achievements. Aron from FM affirmed the case in point:

*Teachers usually used the cane to make sure we bring the right books and write essays. Maybe in one month at least one or two essays. But since the whole school consisted of Chinese students, I don't know is this stereotyping or not, but we are competitive. So when we got a lower mark, we tend to strive harder, so maybe that's the way that we are learning English much better, I think. (Semi-structured interview with Aron from FM)*

Ana, a Malay student who was also sent to a SJK(C), described her stringent experiences in learning English as similar to Aron. Ana confirmed that:

*To make sure we perform very well in Maths and English, the teacher was also fierce...very fierce. She will cane immediately when you make mistakes, or you didn't perform. She will 'pakkk' (caning sound)...cane immediately. As we all already know, all Chinese schools' emphasis on discipline (Semi-structured interview Ana from FKA)*

Despite teachers' beliefs of its effectiveness in managing the teaching and learning processes, findings also revealed the adverse effects of caning towards ESL learners' especially in negatively influencing learners' perceptions towards the target language.

The next finding proved that caning sparked a sense of remorse and psychological drawbacks towards the target language and worse, led students to shy away from the target language, deterring their WTC.

*Caning was carried out all the time at school. They will hit the hands and the legs. Other times we stand outside. Then all the students were like, "no, no, no". That will be embarrassing. So in the next class, we should do our work, even if we didn't know. We come early on the next morning and copy other people's answer, and we'll feel, "okay, we are done". There would be fear, like mentally. The mind-set of the local kids is that, if you didn't do the homework by tomorrow, you will stand outside. And that would have been very embarrassing. So because you don't want to be embarrassed, you have to do it. (Semi-structured interview with John from FKE)*

Apart from imparting the fear of being punished, learning the target language seemed meaningless for the learners. The target language was learnt because they feared punishment. John's next statement was an example of a situation in which learners had distanced themselves from the ESL teacher and the target language. John described his previous English teacher as someone who was "*stern and hard*" on them. John claimed that the lower proficiency students were always placed in the front rows. He continued that if they committed English language mistakes while the lesson was progressing, "*the teacher would yell at your face, so all of us were fearful to speak English. To speak with friends, we can't speak Malay language, so all of us just kept silent. So until now, I still feel the impact*" (Semi-structured interview with John from FKE). It appeared that teachers' authoritative and stringent approaches to teaching

and learning had a negative impact on the students' self-esteem, self-confidence and their perceptions towards the target language. In fact, with very little learner autonomy, exploration towards the target language could hardly take place, and any intention towards WTC could potentially be hampered.

In contrast, the following findings proved that teachers with good personas managed to boost learners' WTC. John affirmed that at tertiary level, his teacher was supportive, so he tried to speak in English despite the enduring fear, *"the teacher now is okay, so I tried to speak"*. (Semi-structured interview with John from FKE). Diana from FKA had also experienced both a stringent ESL teacher and a supportive ESL teacher and explained how the teachers' different approaches and personas affected her perceptions and WTC in the target language. In the case of the stringent ESL teacher, Diana noted that:

*English class is always silent. My friends are quiet. Because some English teachers will punish you to pay 10 cents each time you are caught speaking Malay language. If you end up paying so much as 10 cents, it is better not talk at all. Last time I was so quiet, so this time, I had no confidence to speak up in class" (Participant classroom observation- group discussion).*

However, at university level, Diana now felt fortunate that *"with Madam X, she allows us to be bilingual"*, and to feeling more secure that her current teacher allowed some autonomy. At this point, findings suggested that teachers' crucial roles in supporting ESL learners to build their understanding in the target language.

In this section, findings confirmed that teachers' persona and the teaching approaches adopted by them were bound to be significant determinants of ESL learners'

engagement towards the target language. Positive engagement with the target language encouraged learners to be more confident and more willing to communicate in the target language, while negative perceptions would dissuade learners from exploring the target language. Teachers' positive values could steer students' motivational drive and interests towards not only learning but also most importantly, using the language without the fear of being judged, evaluated and punished.

At this point, I would like to highlight that at some stage of the data collection, I have begun to investigate some discussions with ESL teachers to understand their perspectives on students WTC. There is some data from teachers' formal and informal discussions, but due to limited space within this thesis, it is not included. I strongly felt that to really understand learners' WTC experience, teachers' point of view is necessary. However, due to the lack of space within the study, it did raise some questions about the ways in which ESL teachers might perceived WTC in the classroom, which do not take account these socio-cultural influences. Teachers' perceptions were stressed on individuals' attributes, individual weaknesses, generation differences and not on the potential socio-cultural influences. Thus researching on ESL teachers' perceptions would greatly contribute to this field. How teachers understand this is not part of the scope of this study and to investigate why teachers are viewing WTC in a different way is intriguing but would require additional study. Clearly, students' perceptions of WTC are the core focus here, but how teachers could understand learners' state of WTC is crucial to the understanding of WTC. This point will be picked up in Chapter 9, section 9.3.2- *ESL Teacher's Trainings*.

It would be practical to suggest that ESL teachers played a critical role in delivering coherent and consistent approaches to help ESL learners to communicate in the target language. In cases where learners lacked communicative competence, teachers with negative personas and approaches could further place them at the disadvantaged end of the system.

Mixed with the colonial heritage and its global reputation in the modern world, English became an important benchmark for success in its role in the school and in the higher education curriculum. This described the large culture narratives of the national education system positioning English as an important element in schools, future education and access to reputable careers, but were, in fact, it imprinted narrow notions of success to the learners. The constant pressure on achievement through the exam-oriented system resulted in learners being vulnerable and lacking in confidence to communicate in the target language. This is combined with teachers' authoritative and stringent teaching approaches, leaving very little autonomy for the students within the learning environment. The following section illustrates the large culture narratives towards the positioning of English at higher institutions in relation to ESL learners' state of WTC, where the study was conducted.

### **5.3.6 The perception of English at Higher education institutions**

As in schools, the importance of English in higher education is strongly emphasized. In fact, the importance of the target language is further intensified by it becoming the leading language of academic discourses in many disciplines. Much focus is also given



to communication in the target language. Such a context-specific scenario that illuminates the focus of English fluency at tertiary level was illustrated as follows.

*Aron from FM;*

*You know, in our class we always use English. Our lecturers are all talking in English. Every explanation, the other speech, all this in English. Yes, everything is in English. References, notes, everything. Like more than 90% of our life now is more to English. It can be said like at the beginning of the day we go to class, some of them will speak English and you just talk to them in English then we enter our other classes - all are in English too (Semi-structured interview with Aron from FM).*

Despite BM being the official the medium of instructions in higher institutions, the mastery of English is essential to increase the employability of the graduates and fill the needs of national and international workforces. To ensure that graduates are well equipped with both languages upon graduation, English requires a mandatory pass at public universities. Although the importance of English is well accepted, learners' perceptions may vary. In the first instance, some ESL learners seem to acknowledge the target language for its functional purposes of fulfilling the university's requirement.

In this study, Maryam from FKT declared, *"I take English for my credit subject to make sure all credits are enough before we graduate. If I don't take English, I won't pass. English is a university compulsory subject (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).* Nonetheless, some learners may also treat the language with a lukewarm attitude. Anna (FKT) claimed, *"It doesn't matter if I got an A or B or C, as long as I pass"* (Participant classroom observation- group discussion). For Anna, learning English was solely for passing the university exit requirements. Maryam also

believed that most of her friends had mixed feelings about being forced to learn the target language while feeling obligated to take the subject, as graduating was her top priority. *“I think everyone is here to pass the English subject in order to graduate and not to really learn English”*. (Participant classroom observation- group discussion).

Concurrently, findings also suggest that for certain students, their awareness towards the importance of English had become clearer after enrolling in higher education. Azizul from FKM cited *“for me, I believe that English is very important in life. Basically, you have to accept that English is an international language”*. (Participant classroom observation- group discussion). This could be due to the change in approach employed in higher education, where most of the teaching and learning activities were substantially carried out in the English language. The urge to do well in the target language is high and perceived as important aligned with the global importance of English, primarily in accessing new knowledge and information. *“For me, English is very important because I can say that most of the books now are mostly in English. So, I can say the most of the sources of my knowledge are from English. So, I feel English is very important. (Semi-structured interview with Ali from FKE).* Hassan from FKM recounted that tutorials, presentations, notes, references, assessments were extensively in English. John from FKE regarded English as an important language in their studies, especially in the discipline of Engineering. *“Well, because it has got to do with what I am taking now as well. Engineering. The references are all in English and the lectures, too. And I am used to reading English materials”* (Semi-structured interview with John from FKE). Hanan, who is currently also taking Quantity Surveying in Engineering domains, affirmed the extensive use of the target language, *“I used a lot of English. About sixty per cent. In Engineering, we*

*use a lot of English” (Semi-structured interview with Hanan from FKM). Ana from FKA asserted, “In civil engineering courses, almost everything is learnt in English (Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA).*

Ali (FKE) regarded English language as the best language to learn Engineering due to the familiarity of the words in the target language compared to the native language. *“..some of the words sound really weird in Malay. For example, the word ‘discharge’, in Malay, it will be ‘nyahcharge’ (laughter). It doesn’t sound wrong, but we are not used to it” (Semi-structured interview with Ali from FKE).* Similarly, Safiah who is currently taking Computer Engineering also thinks the same for English. *“I am taking Computer Engineering. Many of the computer programming terms are in English. It just doesn’t sound right in Malay (Semi-structure interview with Safiah from FC).*

With much attention and interest towards English at university level, Hanan from FKM had a change of perspective and was more willing to use the target language. Hanan claimed that:

*Even the lecturer speaks English. Age-wise, he is very old. I feel ashamed if I can’t speak English and he can. I am much younger than him. I should show that I can, or at least I am trying. I want him to feel proud of me (Semi-structured interview with Hanan from FKM).*

Such a claim from Hanan proved that the positioning of English throughout tertiary level education had positive outcomes on students’ perceptions and attitudes towards the need to use the target language. Interestingly, findings further showed that being at tertiary level, some students had also managed to overcome past resistance towards the language. Nur from FM now felt more encouraged to use the language, as her course in Management Technology requires an essential amount of English. Prior to

entering university, her MUET results had stopped her from speaking in English, having obtained a low grade of Band 2 for her speaking assessment.

*In marketing, I made really good sales though they were simple sales. In my first year, I handled a symposium, and then organized an annual dinner for the fourth year students. Everything is done in English. So the events forced me to speak in English, and I saw the need to speak English, especially in Marketing. (Semi-structured interview with Nur from FM).*

It appears that the substantial use of English in academic practices at tertiary level allowed the language to be seen as fundamental, purposeful and meaningful compared to their prior learning experiences. Such a state allowed shifts of interest towards the target language. *“There are no longer friends making fun of me for speaking in English like back at home. I guess everyone here now knows the importance of the language” (Semi-structured interview with Ainul from FM).* Her experience of being ridiculed by her peers will be further elaborated on in the section relevant to *Culture and Identity*.

On the other hand, findings had also identified tension among some students in dealing with the imposition of English. This was possibly due to the marginal exposure of English language in early schooling years and low oral competence prior to tertiary education. Safiah (FC) admitted that sometimes her classmates requested the lecturer to switch from using English to BM as they struggled to understand the lessons. Different opinions on the language were exemplified by Safiah:

*Some of the lecturers were using English. However, there were no international students in class. So my friends felt there were no reasons for the lecturer to speak the language then. Some of my friends were daring enough to ask the lecturer to switch to BM, and the lecturer did. I am fine with any languages, BM or English. I know that others need to learn, as well. Not everyone has a similar background like me. I will go with the flow” (Semi-structured interview with Safiah from FC).*

In short, the prominence of English at HEI had, to a certain extent placed learners with lower proficiency at a disadvantaged end of the system. In fact, it could inflict resistance towards the target language. In such circumstances, WTC in the target language may seem discouraging.

While some students felt they benefited from a substantial amount of English used throughout the academic discourses, findings significantly revealed that the implementation of English across disciplines at university did not assist much in their communication skills as it was only in limited academic learning contexts. In other words, the situation reverted to one, where English was used for instrumental purposes instead of communication. In this case, Saiful and Rebecca, both from the FKM confirmed that only specific words were in English, while the rest of the input was spoken in the native language. *“It contributes only like a very small percentage. Because it is not really used in conversation” (semi-structured interview with Rebecca from FKM).* Saiful explained the limited amount of English used did not contribute much to his WTC in the language. Saiful asserted, *“when you communicate or teach your friends, you say the items by using the English words like ‘brush’ instead of ‘berus’ (this is a Malay word for brush). But the rest of the communication is in Malay. So I feel that I still can’t speak English” (Semi-structured interview with Saiful from FKM).*

Despite being in an international university, communication in the target language did not seem feasible. Although it was apparent that higher institutions highlighted the importance of English through their teaching and learning, communicating in English was viewed as a constant challenge and the platforms on which to communicate were

confined only to the academic context as suggested by the respondents. However, these findings did not conclude that communication in the target language was entirely absent. The means to communicate existed through teaching and learning activities and the presence of international students. It was then learners' responsibility to utilize the opportunities they had to communicate in the target language. The later parts of this section will highlight communicative platforms in the target language, which positively influenced ESL learners' WTC.

In relation to the limited communicative platforms in the target language, another notable reason communicating in English was restricted among the ESL learners was the fact that the institutional community consisted of a majority of students of Malay ethnicity. Public universities in Malaysia were bound by the quota aligned by the differentiated citizenship policy. This powerful large culture imagery prioritizing the *Bumiputra* (Malays and the indigenous groups) resulted in the dominance of a Malay-speaking environment. Hazim from FKE asserted:

*Everybody knows that English is important and if we don't try to use English in the ESL class, we won't have other chances. But again, all my other friends speak Malay. Surely it's awkward if you are the only one who speaks English while others speak Malay. That's one of the reason why I don't speak English. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

Ana (FKA) confirmed that most of her friends were Malays. However, she took the opportunity to communicate in the target language with friends of other ethnicities despite their limited number:

*UA University (not real name) is full of Malay students, but our English class is a combination of various sections like section 3, 2 and many more. We have five Chinese students there. So it's easier*

*to speak English to them than in Malay. And everyone knows English is important. I don't see any problem speaking in English there (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

In essence, despite English being declared as Malaysia's second language, and placed at the forefront of tertiary education, English has yet to be accepted for communicative purposes. At university level, despite the substantial amount of English used, English is still perceived as important in connection to its instrumental purposes (academic and career) rather than communication. For students to be highly willing to communicate in the target language, will very much require their own motivation and drive to communicate. English dominance within the education system poses several conflicts for students who were not exposed to its usage in school and in their communities. This stops them from achieving fluent communication despite their overall good achievements in other subjects and domains. In spite of the national language (BM) binding different races together, English as the second language could potentially distort this unity among learners as the widespread use of English highlights complex perceptions and social interactions among students.

#### **5.4 Influences of history**

Despite BM being the national language that unifies diverse ethnicities, English is potentially becoming an important language for future career development. Either that or, it could be argued, that English historical positioning, the stereotypes and prejudices (second quadrant) have reinforced the economic narratives around the English language policy in Malaysia (first quadrant). Such primacy being given to English was likely to reinforce inequity and disadvantage.

*Most of my Chinese friends prefer to speak in Malay more than English. My Chinese friends who prefer to speak in English for what I noticed are the ones who are from very good backgrounds, very well educated backgrounds and their parents work in their own companies. I've met their parents and even their parents speak in English (Semi-structured interview with John from FKE).*

During the British colonial legacy, parents may have undergone different educational experiences such as having gone through English education in National or Vernacular Schools and thus were likely to bring up their children in the languages respective to the schools' medium of instruction. Loh, a Chinese student from FKE, claimed to have Chinese friends who spoke English as their first language instead of Mandarin.

*They speak English at home because both of the parents cannot speak Chinese or they [the parents] are English educated. Because in the early days of Malacca, there were too many English schools, so those parent who are aged about sixty and above, they can hardly speak Mandarin (Semi-structured interview with Loh from FKE).*

Malacca, Penang and Singapore (part of Malaysia before Malaysia gained independence) and Labuan were port cities during the British settlements. The areas were known as the Straits Settlements (Facts and Details, 2019). Malacca is now established as a tourist attraction site, staging the British colonials' heritage. Inherited from British colonialism, the English language is now reinforced by the tourism industry. Loh from FKE, who originated in Malacca, noted that the usage of English was a typical scenario within families and communities in Malacca.

*Malacca has many tourists. Every time you go somewhere near the tourist area, they [tourists] will start asking how to get to places. I think that's when we Malaysians if we can speak English, we are very proud of it. The Malacca community, especially in the central area, are treating English as another important language. We even use it in our daily conversations. Even the old ladies in the night market selling delicacies, they can speak simple English without fear. Because they sell things, if they sell things for five 'ringgit' to*



*the locals, they will sell the same thing at ten ringgit to foreigners [tourists]. So they will learn English no matter what. (Semi-structured interview with Loh from FKE)*

English was also observed to be prevalently used by the urbanites as compared to the rural population. This too was due to the settlements of British armies in towns or developed areas, causing the rural areas to be isolated from the target language. English became the language of administration and economic transaction in these areas. Farhan, who is from Kelantan, claimed that Kelantan itself did not inherit the target language. Kelantan was not part of the British colonial federated states (Facts and Details, 2019). Lacking the exposure to English, this situation had affected Farhan's state of fluency in the target language. Farhan noted:

*I still struggled to speak English because of the environment. People around me do not speak English even in Kota Bahru [capital city]. In Kelantan, I never heard anyone speak in English, except at the Oxford Centre when I started my English classes. Not even at the market [small scale business centre]. I think everyone speaks Malay. Even the Chinese speak Kelantanese Malay. (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE).*

Historical influences reinforced by globalisation and the positioning of English as the second language impacted on certain communities compared to others. For someone who lived in an urban area, English seemed to be a neutral and practical language. Vicky (FKE) who is an Indian ethnic from Serdang (urban area close to Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia) claimed:

*They speak a lot of English wherever you go. English is not rare. You speak English as well because there is a lot of English speakers there. There is no major community there. The Malay, Chinese and Indian are all evenly distributed there. So, somehow, we Malaysians speak English somehow. (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE).*

Another example of English being a common language in urban spaces was illustrated by Rebecca from FKM. Rebecca, who is a Chinese ethnic, lives in Johor Bahru, a city close to Singapore. The influence of English used in Singapore is reflected through the means of current economic transactions in Johor Bahru. Rebecca claimed that “*if like I am going CS [City Square- a shopping centre] right, the shop keepers will speak English*” (Semi-structured interview with Rebecca from FKM).

In essence, the restricted opportunities to be exposed to and to use English potentially affect learners’ state of proficiency and WTC in the target language. Theoretically, the lack of exposure towards the target language would influence the lack of WTC. Ken, a Chinese student from FKM, shared his contrasting experiences going through education in Kelantan (unfederated Malay state during British settlement) and Butterworth (capital of Penang during British settlements). With regard to his WTC in the target language, Ken claimed that:

*In my school in Kelantan, my friends were very stressed, most of them do not join me. They are reluctant. But when I go to Butterworth, my friends were willing to join me and then they don't have the stress. Sometimes you realize, during the Science subject they can repeat what our teacher had just taught us. Then they really enjoy the discussion. Even the Chinese here, like the class now, they just speak English with me. (Semi-structured interview with Ken from FKM)*

The historical narratives of English in urban areas benefitted the urban ESL learners, as there were more opportunities to use the target language. However, students from areas with little exposure to the target language, and from poorer backgrounds with little resources or opportunities to access English materials, will be disadvantaged when English is persistently used as the medium of instruction at higher education.

In relation to WTC, such a state is likely to be the reason for the lack of WTC. The strong culture of British historical narratives and English used as part of globalisation could suggest that English language has been securely positioned within urban areas and among those of higher economic status; if you are not part of any of these contexts, you could be disadvantaged. In light of the positioning of the target language, the following section investigated findings on the nature of the target language perceived of as having a status, which had played a significant role in ESL learners' WTC.

#### **5.4.1 Prestige**

As of now, English continues to command considerable prestige, raising questions about its role and value in relation to other languages spoken. Besides the solid positioning English has within the education system, findings in this study observed that students held the view that English and English culture have some kind of superiority. In this case, some sense of prestige was attached to being fluent in English.

Arif, an FKM student, claimed it was commonly perceived that competency in English is the benchmark to an individual's overall competencies "*the modern era has placed English on a more significant platform and is used a lot in our daily lives. It seems like if you don't know English, you are literally not good in other matters*" (Participant classroom observation- group discussion). The significance of English held at all levels of education seemed to be because of its pervasive role within the worlds of academia and business. However, other reasons for the presence of English throughout the Malaysian education system could be due to the historical narratives of

colonisation, where the dominance of English and the English culture were promoted by the British as superior. *“Some of my Indian friends are educated in the English medium. They know how to speak in Tamil, but they won’t use Tamil to speak to me. They prefer English over Tamil, and I think it’s because of status” (Semi-structured interview with Atiqah from FKT).*

In fact, it was not just that the English language suggested prestige, but that the English culture posited by the language fostered a sense of elitism and higher self-esteem. Syamira from FC claimed, *“British English makes me feel perfect. Others sometimes comment that your language sounds powerful and solid. The British English sounds like a rich speaking English” (Participant classroom observation- group discussion).*

The notions of superiority and success attached to English proficiency is seen as a form of perceived superiority. In this regard, it was a powerful set of ideas, which proved to have real presence within this research project. The impact of such form of perceived superiority on less competent English speakers was overwhelming. Nazri from FKT labelled himself as *“I am not good and useless” (Semi-structured interview with Nazri from FKT).* Commenting on his friends, Nazri said, *“you noticed that your friend has low confidence, but when you try to correct their mistakes, it will just get worse. They give up”.* Not being competent in the target language seemed to be a demoralizing experience for some ESL learners.

Apart from the perceived status given to the target language, the findings observed expressions that associate one as showing off. Siti from FKE refrained from communicating in the target language, as she feared being accused of showing off.

*“The reason I hesitate to speak the language is because others will think I am showing off and forgetting my roots” (Participant classroom observation- group discussion).*

Amirah from FKA also claimed that those who speak English will make others think of you as “*‘acah acah bagus’* [pretentious as someone of higher status]” (*Participant classroom observation- group discussion*). In effect to this labelling, Vicky had restrained himself from communicating in the target language:

*I myself sometimes don't have the confidence, or sometimes I might feel like, okay let's say if I volunteer, what if other people like, will say, you are just showing off, just get out of here. With that kind of statement, I will constrain myself from talking. Otherwise, they will label me as boasting. Then they will start talking behind my back. (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE)*

In this study, findings also suggested that there seem to be tacit categories between competent and incompetent speakers of English. Students who experienced the tensions and challenges with the positioning of English could be seen as withdrawing themselves from totally communicating in English or to have developed negative thoughts about themselves and sometimes towards others who were more competent. One clear example of such a tacit division was observed by Nazri, a Nuclear Engineering student from FKT, who was bilingual but had better command of English (he had his primary education in London) as his first language. Being a proficient English language speaker, Nazri claimed he experienced pronounced isolation from the less proficient group. Nazri complained that:

*I think it's a general culture of things where we sort of put on a pedestal onto western culture or other cultures like Chinese, Korean, and other oriental cultures. When you talk about a typical Malaysian, you label them as someone who doesn't speak English very well. So, when they meet someone of a different culture, these people become very shy to interact with them because they feel they are somehow inferior and they don't want to make fools of themselves, so they don't end up interacting. So, I end up meeting a*

*lot of people who tell me that because they knew or they heard that I could speak English well and they were intimidated, and they didn't want to initiate an approach to me. This happens, and it happens a lot of the time. (Semi-structured interview with Nazri from FKT).*

The existence of such tacit groups, especially those who regarded themselves as incompetent, clearly impacted on ESL students who were willing to communicate in the language. A student like Ali (FKE) felt constrained to use the target language through fear that those who perceived themselves as less competent would feel upset, “sometimes I am just concerned that other people will be offended” (Semi-structured interview with Ali from FKE). In addition, students who were more competent in English instead of the native language, seemed to face resentment from peers who were more competent in their native language.

*I don't normally see a Malay and Malay speaks English with each other. Other people will give you the look. I don't think it will work out. It's kind of awkward (laughter). They probably think that you are showing off and they pick on you by repeating what you said over and over again. It's very different when I see my Chinese and Indian friends speak English. It's like there's no problem when they speak English among themselves. (Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKE)*

The impact of English being treated with considerable prestige and superiority raised questions about its role and value in relation to other languages spoken. Besides the solid positioning English had within the education system, findings in this study observed that students were evaluating themselves as being either good or bad with regard to proficiency in the target language. Indeed, feeling good or bad about oneself and others in relation to one's level of proficiency in the target language influenced learners' state of WTC. The following section reveals that resentment towards English is somehow strongly connected to the elements of ethnicity and identity.

## 5.5 Influences of learners' ethnicity and identity

In light of the prominence of English, particularly within the boundaries of ethnicity, the findings disclosed complex social acceptance. Resentment was observed by the cold shoulder treatment experienced by Linda (FC) from her community who, in a way, regarded communicating in English as a form of betrayal to her Indian cultural identity. In reaction to such treatment, Linda refrained from communicating in the target language. Linda reported that:

*I don't speak in English in my home, and I didn't speak English much back in primary school and secondary school. All my friends speak in Tamil. So, if I speak in English they tend to say, 'Oh why are you speaking in English?' So they tend to say that. It comes from the Indians. I didn't mean to condemn them. (Semi-structured interview with Linda from FC)*

A Chinese student claimed that he feared that he would be marginalized or labelled by other Chinese friends each time he spoke in English. This participant attended a Chinese medium school during his primary education in Malaysia. In such schools, Chinese students were in the majority. Other friends who did not speak in Mandarin had been victimized and labelled as 'OCBC' (*Orang Cina Bukan Cina*) or (*Chinese but not Chinese*). That would make him feel odd and guilty. This was referred to by Loh from FKE:

*So they are saying that 'orang cina bukan cina'- OCBC. But you will feel like they discriminate you. I was just so scared to speak English (laughter). Of course, you just don't want people to label you OCBC. (Semi-structured interview with Loh from FKE)*

In addition, the three examples given by Ana, Linda and Loh, Nazri (FKT) also claimed he too was marginalized for not speaking in Malay, particularly by his Malay

friends. Nazri's fluency in the target language was due to his early education in the United Kingdom (UK) and English had become his first language at home. Disheartened by the situation, Nazri commented:

*I think personally for me I didn't see the importance of English [as he grew up in the UK]. Learning the language was because I'm trying to communicate with other people. But then when I came back, I saw English was something that no one wanted to use because I was the boy who couldn't talk Malay but looked very Malay, it was, I felt quite alienated by a lot of my peers. I thought that university would be different, but it's not, it's no different. (Semi-structured interview with Nazri from FKT)*

The cold reception towards students who spoke English were indicative of a strong large culture narrative of what it meant to be a Malay, Chinese and Indian or even to be Malaysian. Speaking in a foreign language would suggest a sense of detachment from one's identity. Globalisation and the creation of new identities among Malays, Chinese and Indians who speak English as the first language may not be well accepted by friends and the community. Unless students were able to tolerate the judgements and negative reactions, they might be emotionally injured and constrained from communicating in the target language. In Nazri's reflection, he expected support from friends, especially those belonging to the same ethnicity. However, the situation proved otherwise. *"There is a real sense of belonging, that is a sense of companionship that your friend will help you out, that you belong to this group right, otherwise people who had felt unattended by the group, they will just fly away, I guess"* (Semi-structured interview Nazri-FKT).

Aiman from FKT also spoke of his experiences travelling to Singapore and meeting Malays who were disapproving the use of the target language. It was surprising for



Aiman that the Malays were in favour of using the Malay language despite being in Singapore, where English is the national language. This was illustrated by Aiman's experience in Singapore:

*There was this time I went to Singapore, and I tried hard to speak in English. They just laughed at me. They said, 'if you are a Malay, just speak Malay'. I was at the tourist centre at that time trying to ask for directions. I was struggling to speak in English, but suddenly the guy spoke Malay. It was really humiliating. He laughed hard at me. (Participant Classroom observation-group discussion)*

The need to speak in the mother tongue language in order to conform to the group's expectations appear prevalent in communities where cultural norms, traditions and cultural identity are particularly strong. Ana from FKM decided to avoid speaking in English and opted for her native language to subscribe to the group's identity.

*It's like if you are the only one speaking the language in your group, you will definitely be bashed. People will say why you should be speaking in English. Sooner or later, you will feel alienated. So I think rather than becoming nobody, why not just join their group? If you can't beat them, join them. (Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA)*

Nazri (FKT) again reported that he had to 'hide' his knowledge of English to fit in with certain groups of friends. Nazri sensed there were still people who resented him for speaking the target language:

*It's kind of similar to all classes [home subject classes and ESL class]. Around you are friends from similar classes. You see them in most of classes and at college. But in English class you know you must speak English, so it gives me greater licence to use the language. But again there will be that somebody that looks at you with that look. Then you start to feel guilty, dilemma and I was like okay and when I start talking them in English they sort of, they fall apart right, and then I revert back to talk in Malay. (Semi-structured interview with Nazri from FKT).*

### 5.5.1 ‘Othering’ speakers of English

WTC in English has also become a dilemma, as students fear that others will label them as someone who is trying to uproot them from their origins. In other words, in the context of identity, you will be perceived as ‘others’ and ‘not one of us’. Amina believed that using English faced the risks of being misunderstood and perceived as trying to be like the “whites” (native speakers). To communicate among people of similar ethnicity, the mother tongue seems pivotal. *“I do want to speak English, but then my friends will say “you are acting like an English man” (‘bajet orang putih lah’). So that’s not good feeling. So it’s better to speak Malay. Just speak Malay”*. Other instances of othering were exemplified by Farul and Syamira who are students from FC. In their ESL classroom experiences, English names were purposely given to those speaking in English (*Participant Classroom observation-group discussion*):

*Farul: We do want to improve and try to speak English, but sometimes other group members will be asking why I needed to speak English.*

*Syamira: Yes. Sometimes they call you Peter. Peter, they are those who speak in English.*

*Farul: Oh, yes. You mean Peter is like Coco [a Malay singer who emulates an English person and English culture]*

*Syamira: Well, it’s like a Malay who is trying hard to speak English. Like ‘what is wrong with you, trying to speak English all of the sudden?’ So, in that case, it’s better that I just go on with my own language.*

*Farul: Me too*

Findings suggested that despite English being the lingua franca, the learner’s mother tongue functioned as a strong marker of one’s ethnic and cultural identity. Devi (FC) of Indian ethnicity, who had also been othered by her friends, noted that:

*As an Indian, I think sometimes I feel like when I start to speak too much English, they feel like I am an English person already. This was how I felt. For example, when you speak so much of English, then they say 'Oh you don't know how to speak Tamil' [sarcastically], and they take it seriously, sprouting and smirking. It's very bad. You know English is just a language. When you speak English, you don't become an English person. I feel it's more important to know your mother tongue than to know English. But it's a very good thing that you know English, but it is certainly not right for you to forget your roots and your mother tongue. (Semi-structured interview with Devi from FC)*

Data from the research also highlighted that speaking in English may also cause misunderstandings, conflicts or incongruity that could hinder acceptance by others. Faiz (FKE) clearly suggested, *“you don't speak English to a Malay friend. They might feel like you are teasing them, especially when their English is not good”* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). Adib from FC felt reluctant to use the language, especially when receiving ‘cold shoulders’ or negative reactions from friends *“when your friend asks ‘why must you speak English?’ it does not feel good anymore”* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). It was implicitly understood that using English could affect the outcome of the interaction, which in turn could be a powerful tool that may distance students from the rest of the group. If this was assumed to happen, aversion towards using the target language seemed to be the best option, especially when it involved social acceptance.

From the samples of the data in this research, ethnicity and identity could potentially be regarded as another significant obstacle to ESL learners’ WTC, thus positing the strong large culture influence of what it meant to belong to one’s identity. In light of this matter, the following section unveils the values embraced by ethnic groups and their potential influence on ESL learners’ state of WTC.

## 5.6 Influences of cultural values

Cultural values or norms are not only broadly reflected by a society, but also through the norms of the classroom and the relationship between teachers and their students. It is observed that classroom ethos and relationships are affected by broader societal norms and expectations of a teacher-student relationship.

In this study, findings highlighted that some ESL students felt constrained to communicate in English due to concerns that others might feel offended if English was spoken. Ali, a student from FKE, claimed that he communicated in English only when there was a need. Ali noted, *“sometimes I am just concerned that other people will be offended. So I will only speak at the right time. So when others are judging, I always have a good reason to justify why I use English”* (Semi-structured interview with Ali from FKE). From Ali’s behaviour, we can deduce that Ali was raised to avoid saying anything that might hurt other people’s feelings. Nazri, a student from FKT, also experienced a similar dilemma when he lamented:

*My Malay friends like to judge, and they are capable of alienating me if they see me being good in English. You know they don't like you in the house. I talk in English only to my debate friends, and they are not in my English class. I said earlier unless I really need to say something, then I will speak. It's complex. (Semi-structured interview with Nazri from FKT)*

In this case, it was clear that to avoid problems and further conflict with others, they chose to talk less. This phenomenon was further affirmed by Aisyah from FC who chose to be moderate and keep a low profile. Aisyah, who is very fluent in English, claimed that she was always willing to communicate but was careful to remain reserved. Aisyah had similar perceptions that others may be judging her and may not

like it when she spoke too much English. She had also been reminded by family members to be sensitive to the feelings of others.

*But when I was in school, I constantly feel [people judging] that way, even now, because in my class it is majority Malay. So that's why I don't like to show off. And nowadays I just stay low. I do feel like they are judging, even though I feel uncomfortable because that's what I'm so used to. My mom always reminded me. Mom says 'just be careful. We don't know the inside of other people. They might envy you, and you might not know' (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC).*

Ana, who is studying in FKA, confessed that she spoke in English in moderation, in order to fit in with others. Ana believed being modest was better to prevent others from shying away from her. Ana comprehensively explained that:

*I did once share a quote in class, and everyone said 'wow'. I felt so uncomfortable. I suddenly felt uncomfortable. I just don't like to feel I am above others. It doesn't feel good. Well, I fear that people might label me as boasting and they would isolate me. I mean when they saw me as above them, it became uncomfortable. It's like you feel you don't belong to that group anymore. When others see you as greater than them, they will shy away from you, and that's wrong. There are always other things they are better than me. So it's better to be at the same level. (Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA)*

The next findings revealed that WTC in English was also influenced by the feeling of obligation to respond and responsibility to answer the teachers' questions, especially when no one else was not keen to respond. During the group discussion, most students from FKT reported, *"I will answer first then I will be safe"* (Syafiq), *"Yes, to respond to the questions. So that is the reason why I speak in English"* (Adel). *"For me, I think that I still hesitate to talk in English, but when the teacher asks something, there is always that long silence, and I feel the responsibility to have to talk"* (Haziq) and *"if*

*the teacher asks any question I have to respond. So that forced me to communicate in English” (Zaki) (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).* Such feelings of obligation and responsibility to respond in class may be linked to respect to teachers, as the findings revealed.

However, the findings showed that a quiet ESL classroom might also be the outcome of respect towards the teachers or the higher authority. The following illustrated some students’ understanding on how being quiet is a sign of respect towards the teachers. *“It’s not that I don’t respond in the class, but sometimes I do not want to respond. It is like respect to the teacher (Semi-structured interview with Rebecca from FKM).* Similarly, Linda from FC agreed that a quiet class shows that *“sometimes they [students] just respect the teacher, teacher is teaching, so let her talk” (Semi-structured interview with Linda from FC).*

Students’ respect towards the teacher extended to being attentive and waiting to ask a question until the end of the lesson. Fahmi, a student from FM, strongly believed that asking questions while teaching was in progress was a form of disrespect towards the teacher. *“When teacher comes in, let her teach. So it’s best to keep quiet. At the end of the lesson, when she opens for questions they you can talk. At the beginning, it’s best not to interrupt” (Semi-structured interview with Fahmi from FM).* Affirming this, Amirah from FKA noted, *“I think it’s a cultural thing. Malaysians are trained to be quiet. Quiet in our class means respecting someone when they are speaking. Quiet means we don’t want to be rude (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).* Farhan from FKE further exemplified such classroom ethos:

*I have respect towards teachers. When the teacher is teaching, we have to respect her. Only when we have questions, we can be a bit noisy to discuss the things we don't really understand. But normally when we are in class, we are quiet. Only when she opens up questions, I feel it's okay to have some noises" (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE).*

Being quiet, attentive and refraining from asking questions until the end of the class are seen as a show of politeness to not interrupt the teacher or friends. Rasyid from FKM commented that *"Be humble and ask later"* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). Hassan from FKM even believed that asking questions while the lesson was progressing could also disrupt the lesson. *"I think it may be interrupting the lecturer teaching. That can be impolite"*. Hassan continued, saying that even when the teacher opened the floor for questions in the midst of the lesson, no one normally speaks:

*They don't want to interrupt. And probably they have been programmed already. It's been like that for a long time. Like even our seating arrangements right, the girls will be sitting in front, and the guys will be sitting at the back. As for me, I do ask questions, but for me, it's better to wait until the teachers completed her teaching. I will ask after that. I am just concerned that I might be interrupting. I mean it's like not really respecting the teacher and other friends. For example, there was this one day, my friend, who doesn't understand the lecturer, asks a question. The lecturer answered his question and became focused on him, so the rest of lesson couldn't be completed on that day. (Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKM)*

Other instances, which reflected such strong classroom ethos, were also posited by Fahim from FKM. Fahim strongly believed in the need to be attentive and quiet during lessons. He learnt that the best time to ask questions was when the teacher asked for questions. He recalled his ESL class as:

*Some lecturers who don't like us asking questions while they teach will think that as if we are interrupting her lesson. But I also feel that asking questions while they teach is rude. Everyone else is also like that. No one asks anything. Only when the lecturer calls our*

*names, then we respond. We only ask questions when the lesson is over. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

For Eddie, if he asked questions at the end of the lesson and still struggled to understand, he clearly stated that he would not ask again as means of respect to the teacher. *“Sometimes, even after the lecturer explained, it still doesn’t make sense. The explanation is actually correct, but I don’t really understand. I never asked again. You just want to be polite and back off”.* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). In this context, Eddie believed that if he repeated asking the same question, it may cause the teacher to feel uneasy.

Khadijah (a Malay ethnic), a student from FKT felt that such classroom ethos was reinforced by cultural values that she was brought up with by her parents. Khadijah recalled she was often reminded to respect the elders by showing good behaviour and being attentive:

*From when I was little, I was taught that if someone older is speaking, never interrupt. For the Malays, especially when you have guests coming to your house, I wasn’t allowed to join them. My other siblings and I will stay in our rooms. We can’t make noises, or else your parents will be ashamed that you can’t behave when guests are around. It’s very important not to do that. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

Like Khadijah, Chong, a student in FKM was also raised in a culture that emphasized hierarchal respect within family and the society. Chong confirmed that being humble was a common value shared between the Chinese:

*We are always quite quiet at the beginning of our class since we don’t know many people yet. But later we are also worried that others might think negatively of us. It’s best to be humble. Being Chinese, being humble is part of the culture. (Semi-structured interview with Chong from FKM)*



## 5.7 Summary

From the findings in this section, the notion of a large culture may not fit the idea of a stereotypical large culture where we are nation-state, and the main language is Bahasa Melayu (BM) or Malay. However, it fits into the story of how Malaysia is, and how English is now an integral part of the language policy and the education policy at primary, secondary, and tertiary level.

In this modernised era, the worldwide use of English has allowed for the reinforcement of the said policies. In higher institutions, English has served as a tool for human resource development and technological advancement towards achieving developed nation status. It is necessary to upgrade the mastery of English in order for Malaysian graduates to gain employment and effectively compete at a global level. English competency in large culture has become so established and so accepted, that it is believed to be something that all learners must achieve in order to be successful within the Malaysian education system and future undertakings.

However, differences in learners' WTC in English were apparent, and these depended on the learners' educational background, origins, ethnicity, identity and cultural values. For example, some learners construct negative views of themselves as being incompetent in English. This is consistent with a social constructionist approach which "denies that knowledge is a direct perception of reality. All knowledge is derived from looking at the world from some perspective or other, and is in the service of some interests rather than others" (Burr, 1995 p. 9). Although having the same nationality, learners' views and attitudes about the target language greatly differ. Another important point to highlight is at the education system did not fully prepare

ESL learners for communication tasks. A coherent and consistent approach towards oral fluency within the national system is required.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS 2: SMALL CULTURE

#### 6.0 Introduction

The analysis of the data in this study was guided by the theoretical orientation of the ESL classroom cultures conceptual framework (Figure 3.5). The theoretical propositions helped to organize the entire analysis in the direction of the relevant context of ESL classroom cultures and learners' willingness to communicate in the target language. In this chapter, *Findings 2: Small Culture*, the presentation of the data addresses the small culture quadrants consisting of the iii] Social Constructions iv] Institutional culture (HEI). Pseudonyms are used to represent the participants of the study.

#### 6.1 Influences of social constructions

##### 6.1.1 Family and Community Narratives

In the context of this study, as respondents talked about their willingness to communicate in the target language, within the social constructions, it was found that families and community narratives contained individual elements, potentially feeding into the small culture concepts. Several learners revealed that they had been exposed to the language since they were little and had received support from other family

members. His parents support towards the use of English was brought up by John, who is Chinese, with significant encouragement to use it instead of his mother tongue. He recalled his earlier exposure to English in this way:

*We grew up watching English cartoon channels because our parents wanted us to be exposed to English and at home, we usually speak three languages, but mostly Bahasa (BM), Chinese a bit with my dad's side of the family and English is usually spoken with my big brother and my little brother. Sometimes we mix up all the three languages. I started learning through all the materials that my mom brought home. With all these cartoons, we learnt pronunciation, we learnt how they speak very well, and almost we will copy what they speak. My parents ask us whether we understand what the cartoon are saying. Then we said yes. We are not very sure how we actually learn the meaning. Just a little after that, both my mom and dad bought storybooks and encyclopaedias. (Semi-structured interview with John from FKE)*

Parents' professions that primarily use English, such as lecturers, engineers or business people, also have an impact on students' ways of perceiving the target language particularly as it is commonly used as the medium of communication and transaction in the business and professional sectors in Malaysia: *"My dad, he was in business, so when selling things, he uses English. Maybe that's why we communicate more in English"* (Semi-structured interview with Eddie from FKE). In this situation of perceived importance, English is sometimes treated as the first language at home. *"My mom is an English teacher. She sees the importance of it, that's why I grew up with the language. I went to English kindergarten"* (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC).

Other family members also played great roles in supporting language usage at home. Ana received encouragement from her siblings, who significantly used English in their

professional careers. In Ana's case, her siblings, who spoke English at work, also spoke English at home and this, in turn, raised greater awareness in her of the importance of the target language. Ana claimed she was motivated to be fluent in the language due to her sister.

*Her (sister) profession (magistrate) uses English. Because of her, I am motivated to study (English). My brother is also very good in English. So actually my siblings communicate in English. They are better than me. Everyone is competing to be good in English. (Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA).*

It was different for Nazri. English became his first language when he had the opportunity to live abroad in a country where English was the mother tongue language whilst his mother pursued her professional development as a PhD student;

*My mom was pursuing her studies abroad, my mom did take one and a half years staying in Boston, where she took her Master's Degree, and she completed it. And then she did her PhD in London for four years. I finished four years learning in London from primary one all the way to primary four. (Semi-structured interview with Nazri from FKT).*

Nazri described himself as a 'Malay boy but couldn't speak Malay' (Semi-structured interview with Nazri from FKT).

Another interesting finding in this context described Aron's Indian ethnic family where his mother spoke Chinese in an effort to support Aron who went to a SJKC, and his father spoke some Japanese as he studied and worked in a Japanese company. For this bilingual family, they created a specific language day to support the usage at home, including an English day. Aron shared:

*I speak Chinese at home. My mother speaks Chinese too. She goes to classes and learnt the language. This is because if you want to send your child to a Chinese school, one of the parents should be able to speak in the language. My dad doesn't know Chinese, but he speaks Japanese sometimes with us or Tamil. He studied and worked in a Japanese company. I don't really speak English at home. We have one day for English day. And a day for Tamil, Chinese, BM and Japanese. It's kind of funny really. (Semi-structured interview with Aron from FM)*

In these students' experiences, family narratives were strongly influenced by parental engagement with English and their strong investment in the development of their child's engagement with the language. In some cases, this led to parents investing in resources to support English language development. Some even chose English language as one other primary language used in a multilingual home environment. The community for such families was, at least in part, international in focus, looking beyond the immediate context. In some cases, this was extended when families lived abroad in English-speaking contexts. Community narratives were strongly influenced by how much English was used in the community. Lacking in English usage within the community, it was up to the family and students to hone their English fluency.

Although it was suggested that parents' professions were a strong influence on students' willingness to communicate in the target language at the same time it was found that another form of idiosyncrasy showed parental engagement in the target language in their profession may not always become a strong influence on students in learning the target language. Hashim from FC expressed his disappointment as he believed that despite his parents and siblings using English in their professions, they contributed significantly to his low competency in English language in another way. "My dad is an engineer, my brother is also an engineer, and my sister is an engineer

*while my other sister is a businesswoman. None of them cares about my English achievements. They never asked about my grades. They are okay with whatever I get”.*

Hashim described his lack of proficiency in English was due to the lack of support from family members, particularly his parents. As respondents talked about this, it could be suggested that psychological support from family members is another significant influence on learners’ proficiency and WTC in the target language. Parents interest, involvement and the type of relationship to be crucial factors to learners WTC.

In this research, findings also revealed that despite families lacking fluency in English, the target language was still perceived as a strong investment in the child’s future. For students whose parents were not using English in their professions, findings showed evidence of strong support towards the use of English as the means to a better future. Hassan from FKM noted that his parents were not highly educated and he lived in a less developed area of Kuantan within the army community. In this setting, BM monopolised the means of communication among the people living in the community as the majority of the Malaysian army personnel were Malays. Despite English not being used within the family, and the lack of exposure within the community, strong investment in the future of the child, was evident. Hassan claimed he had received encouragement to use the target language as soon as he started schooling. The following remarks illustrated the case in point.

*Since I was little, my parents are always reminding me the needs of the language (English), especially nowadays. I still remember the story that he told me when he met this old man. This old man didn’t even attend school at higher level, but my dad saw him talking to a foreigner in English so well. Everyone who heard that old man conversation was so amazed. My dad was actually trying to tell me that even though people may not know of your educational background, but if you can speak English well, people will have the*

*impression that you are highly educated. (Semi-structured with Hassan from FKM)*

Hassan may not have had the privilege of being exposed to the language at home and may lack resources, but he inherited the motivation from both his parents to be fluent in the language. Hassan stressed that he often felt encouraged because of his parents' engagement. His effort to succeed in the target language was reflected as he claimed that he always tried his best to communicate in the target language during class.

*I think my English is at level four out of ten. When I talk, I just say any words that I can think of, even if the words are not really good (standard English) words. Like broken English words. I also feel slightly afraid when I talk. But I will always try. It's an English class anyway. (Semi-structured interview with Hassan with FKM)*

In a similar case to Hassan, Saiful, who also originated from a less developed area in *Alor Setar, Kedah*, claimed that he was often reminded by family members to perform even harder than others to succeed in his study with specific emphasis on English, as they believed it as a form investment for a brighter future. *"My mom always thinks education is important. And of course, English. So she will push me to excel. I am from a village in 'Alor Setar'. I should be able to speak in English to get a good job in the future"* (Semi-structured interview with Saiful from FKE). These family and community narratives contrasted with the multiple resources and opportunities of some of the other students presented earlier. Strong investment in the future of a child through emotional support and encouragement contributed to students' state of WTC.

The absence of English as medium of communication in the family and community aggravated the lack of willingness to communicate in the target language. For Saiful from FKE, his socioeconomic background and less developed settings provided a



restricted platform for him to practice the English language. During a semi-structured interview, Saiful again claimed, *“in Alor Setar, there are many Malays so very little English is heard here. In the evenings, I play basketball with my friends, and most of them are Chinese. Between Malay and Chinese, we spoke Malay (BM). We never speak English”*. To Ainol the place she came from (Terengganu is a state on the eastern coast of Malaysia) would never tolerate the use of English as most of the community thought it was unnecessary. Ainol strongly believed speaking in English was pointless and frustrating.

*At home, the only way to improve English last time was through movies. The people living in that area (Terengganu) don't use English at all. I guess because it is a village area and it is considered quite rural. If I accidentally used an English word with my friends they will say '(smirk), do you really need to use English? (Semi-structured interview with Ainol from FM)*

Eventually, lack of support from family members and minimal practice in the community discouraged the students from using the target language. In such communities, it was argued that English seemed irrelevant, as there was limited or no experience of English as a form of communication within the community or family or as a vehicle for future improvement. It was then up to individual families, whether they encouraged children to learn, but there were limited resources to support the development of English competency. It could also be argued that resistance to English could also be related to the historical aspects (large culture narratives) which were linked to resistance to the British and to the frustrations at the effects of globalisation as discussed in the previous chapter.

Lack of exposure to English within the community was also reflected by Rebecca's (FKM) experiences, but she reacted to this in a proactive manner. Rebecca claimed that even though English was not highlighted in the community where she came from, she still felt driven to increase her competence in the target language by her own will in order to be a part of the small church community she was in contact with that spoke English.

*My mom speaks Chinese. She doesn't know English. And in 'Taman Universiti' it depends on the group you meet. I really want to be able to communicate in English because I want to join the Church society. The Christian people who go to Church together with me, they speak English. Mostly they are Chinese but married to foreigners and have stayed here very long. It's cool. (Semi-structured with Rebecca from FKM)*

In this situation, the student had internal and external motives and motivation to learn with her key focus being on English for communication and to facilitate involvement in a particular part of her community.

Another aspect of the family and community narratives was inter-ethnic marriages, which used English as means of communication among family members. In a multicultural country like Malaysia, inter-ethnic marriages, and becoming multilingual were considered a common phenomenon. Linguistic hybridity and fluidity moving from one language to another and the use of English as a neutral language to unify and create compromise seemed interesting and significantly contributed to students' WTC in English, particularly in the ESL classroom. English becomes a natural mode of communication to these students. Ali (FKE) whose father is Malay and whose mother is ethnic Chinese shared another example of such a scenario, where English was viewed as a neutral mode of communication in an inter-ethnic family.

*My family is primarily English speaking. This is because my mother is Chinese, and my father is Malay. So, in order, how do I say, in order to compromise, both of them usually going to speak English. So each people understand each other. So I was raised in that kind of household. I say that English would be my main language, exposed since I was young. My brother is also primarily English speaking, but in the household, we mix the three languages, English, Malay and Chinese around. We don't really speak any fixed languages unless we are all, for example eating dinner at the same table. (Semi-structured interview with Ali from FKE)*

Similar to Ali, Eddie (FKE) is a Kadazan Dusun while his father is a Chinese, and they had chosen English as the first language at home over their native language. *"We just choose the language. Yeah. Although my dad is a Chinese and my mom is Kadazan Dusun."* (Semi-structured interview with Eddie from FKE). English appeared to be prevalent in homes where parents were of different ethnicities, as it was perceived as a neutral mode of communication especially in a pluralistic society, which in turn influenced a greater state of WTC in the English class. Wanie from FKM believed that English was just another language to assist in communication in a Malaysian pluralistic setting. Wanie briefly noted that if Indians and ethnic Chinese could learn and speak BM, ethnic Malays could also learn another language. English seemed a neutral language for all ethnicities.

*For me, English is so important because Malaysia is a multiracial country. The Chinese and Indians learnt to speak Malay. So why not if we speak English when we need to communicate with them. So that is why I learn English. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

English as a choice of medium of communication over other native languages within an interethnic marriage was also seen as an interesting finding since it was perceived as a neutral mode of communication in unifying and maintaining harmony between

the two different ethnic groups in the family. On the other hand, the idea that English as neutral contrasts strongly to the opinions of others mentioned earlier in this study.

To summarize, in this section, the students' experiences suggest that family narratives were strongly influenced by parental engagement with English and their strong investment in the development of their child's engagement with the language. As a researcher, it was clear that the high SES of the family contributed significantly to the learners' state of WTC, but a socioeconomically disadvantaged family may not always be the reason for learners' lack of WTC. This research has suggested that emotional and internal and external motivation played a huge role in learners' WTC in the target language.

These small culture influences, which have their focus on English, could be much influenced by the large culture influences particularly when English was mandated in the national curriculum as a compulsory subject to learn and to be passed in earlier educational settings. The emphasis on English at the current tertiary level, especially in their existing studies, graduation and job recruitment influenced the family and community's engagement towards the target language. The ways in which learners were nurtured into the target language contributed to the ways the language was perceived at higher education institutions (HEI). This will be discussed in the following section.

## **6.2 Influences of the institutional culture**

In the previous chapter on larger culture findings, the large culture influences disclosed that the positioning of English at HEI through the second language policy resulted in the language being perceived as important and instrumental. Earlier findings showed English to be primarily used in HEI educational settings as a means of instruction, particularly in the teaching and learning processes reflecting the large culture narratives of the Malaysian government higher education policy.

In light of the small culture influences, English was mostly viewed in the context of globalization as the lingua franca that provided access to wider communities and markets for financial and educational success (looking outward) but was also important within Malaysia as a marker of being educated and as means of enhancing professional standing. This scenario was particularly true within the high social-economic status (SES) groups and those living in cities. However, as we have seen in the earlier findings, for those living in more rural and often poorer areas, the position of English was much more tenuous and lacking in relevance.

### **6.2.1 Perceived values of those in favour of English as medium of instructions (EMI) at higher education institutions (HEI's)**

In this HEI, where the study took place, English was emphasized and regarded as a vital language of survival, especially for the purposes of existing academic study and future careers. Several participants in the following findings explained the justification

for this. In an interview session with Aisyah from FC, she strongly believed in the universal concept of English, which was spoken by various nationalities in light of modernization and globalization. It was also important to note that Aisyah originated from the city area of *Seremban* that her mother was an English teacher and that English was the primary means of communication at home. As well as the position of English as a global language, family engagement potentially added some value to her perceptions towards the target language. Aisyah was one of the most fluent participants in this research study and her motivation to speak English was very prominent during the interview. This quote illuminates her motivation.

*We need to participate in the globalization. We have to speak a global language like English at the moment. If we want to make it excellent like Japan, as people always compare, everybody want to speak their language. But then they produced things. So we are like the global player, we have to play the game. We have to learn English. So that's the importance of English that I see and also because it is easier to communicate with other people. I don't believe in borders that much anymore because I feel like we are more like people of the world kind of concept. (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC)*

Aisyah here seems to suggest that because of globalization and the existing international community, the English language has transcended the national language. It could be argued that English is universal and belongs to everyone and being able to communicate in the language was crucial, especially to break language barriers.

Another interesting finding from Aisyah (FC) as regards the preference of communicating in English rather than her native language (BM) was her view that English was an empowering language. Aisyah once again declared that being able to speak in English elevated her level among her other friends.

*I feel like, if you are a student, you want the chance to be represented, then you have to use English. Nowadays we are required to learn more language than just to use English. Have the third language and stuff like that. So I think that's why you have to. You no longer have the option because Malaysia wants to be internationally recognized. Like I said, it's not about whether you are good. It's about using it! (Classroom participant observation-group discussion)*

Vicky (FKE) also affirmed the empowering status of English when he said he personally felt that fluency in English had the capacity to promote one's social status.

*Like we observed everywhere, it's a common thing where people says English is necessary when it comes to working life, so plus, if you want to earn a good income, you want to go overseas, you need good English. Wherever you go, you speak English, it's like a national language and international language. So it's never not a good thing to learn a new language and to be good at it. (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE)*

Like Aisyah (FC), Vicky was also socioeconomically advantaged as his father was working as an accountant in a private firm while his mother was working in the manufacturing domain and English was widely used by both in their working scenarios. However, unlike Aisyah (FC), Vicky's parents did not extend the use of English to home. Instead, Vicky's parents strongly felt that *Telegu* (one of the Indian native language) should be practised at home and maintained as the primary language. Despite the lack of exposure at home, Vicky's perceived values towards English potentially derived from other external factors especially the way in which English had been utilized as the means of communication in local and international domains where English was regarded as the world language and the *lingua franca*.

Apart from the pressure of globalization, Vicky and Aisyah parents' professions contributed to their perceived values, which in turn generated a greater WTC in the

target language. Aisyah (FC) believed being able to communicate in the target language provided a greater platform to understand people and world issues and to be heard at a higher level. In other words, the universal stance that English embraced allowed the learners to feel a sense of connectedness to the globalized society.

*And also we need to understand other people, so if we don't, if we don't speak one thing in common, it's hard to understand other people. And look at global issues, stuff like that. If we were to only speak Malay, we would be in this very small bubble, and we won't flourish. Except if you could translate stuff like that from Malay to English. But then you know, it's better for us to speak English in order to understand people. We don't just invite people to come to our world. But we also can go out. (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC)*

Looking beyond local and national boundaries, fluency in English increases the chance to be heard as a country on the wider stage as well as to be heard as an individual. These findings also reflect the role of the higher education institutions (HEI) as a means to engage with the local and international community. In terms of the conceptual framework, this quadrant seems to carry significant weight in influencing learners' WTC in the target language at HEI. However, it is worth reminding ourselves of the connection between learners' perceived values and the large cultural influences of national policies and cultural values on learners' WTC which were found to be prevalent in the findings in the previous chapter.

The importance of English and the concept of globalization was acknowledged by other ESL participants in this study when they agreed that English was most crucial as a means for communication as it was regarded as a “worldwide language” (Semi-structured interview with Azizul from FKM) and echoed by Ghafar (FKM) who also believed that “English is the primary language worldwide. It becomes really practical



*if you are travelling abroad (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

Rasyid from FKM believed English was an “important means of communication”

*(Semi-structured interview with Rasyid from FKM)* while Siti (FKE) explained that

*In today's' world English is an important language in order to work with various types of people. Not everyone could speak Malay. Even if your English is poor, you must know the language as long as you could get your message across. I really want to be fluent. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

Siti's view was mirrored by Zahrah's (FKT). Zahrah added that *with* the ever-increasing use of English worldwide, English provided her with a greater sense of self-esteem and a wider range of network due to its universal status. Zahrah (FKT) positively commented that:

*English is just a language that doesn't determine you are educated people or the levels of your education. It is just a language but just like when they said, when you can talk in English and can understand English, you are confident that you can mingle with everyone because you assume everyone knows English because it is used widely and commonly accepted in the world. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

In the context of multi-cultural and multi-lingual Malaysia, being able to communicate in the target language seemed prevalent. Amelia (FC) noted that her “*interaction with friends are normally in Malay but with Chinese and Indian friends sometimes in English*” *(Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

In the context of the international status of the higher institution, the urge to be fluent in the target language was in order to communicate with international friends. Anas from FKM was highly motivated to be fluent in English particularly for academic

purposes *“I need English to exchange knowledge especially during group discussions with my international friends”* (Semi-structured interview with Anas from FKM). Zain noted, *“I have 3 friends that come from Indonesia, two friends from US, one friend from Japan, his name is Sota Kurosawa. We spoke English together”* (Semi-structured interview with Zain from FM). Vicky from FKE experienced a sense of pride and acknowledgement in being able to speak in English as it not only elevated his status, but he had also took pride in being able to study at an international level HEI promoted by the English language. He noted that *“it’s good thing that they are bringing the foreigners in our university, we are recognized more worldwide”* (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE).

#### **6.2.1.1 Perceived values of those opposing the use of English as medium of instructions at the HEI**

Despite the fact that many participants were willing to communicate in English due to its popularity and practicality on local and international platforms, some other respondents were enduring the lack of WTC in silence as they believed the use of English was limited to academic purposes and that international students were too few in number to create an English speaking environment.

Hashim from FKM claimed, *“in my class I noticed there are only two or three international friends. We only communicate when work is involved. I don’t think their existence makes a big difference unless half of the class are international”*. (Semi-structured interview with Hashim from FKM). Hashim from FC agreed to this context

when he said, “*we speak English when it is work-related*” (*Semi-structured interview with Hashim from FC*). It was important to note that Hashim could be regarded as linguistically disadvantaged as he received very little family support with the target language and originated from *Alor Setar*, where English had very little significance in the community. Thus, the very few international students to communicate with justified his state of uncertainty towards his WTC in the target language.

The internationalization of universities and their efforts in attracting international students could either bring advantages, especially to students from better-off families who can afford resources to improve their English, or disadvantages to students who did not have good English. As globalization and the internationalization had an impact inside the HEI, the positioning of English at the forefront as the medium of instructions and the arrival of international students created an immediate platform for communication in the target language.

However, learners’ states of WTC could still become unsettled as learners may not have substantial knowledge and practice in the target language due to various reasons related to the large culture influences of their background and of language and educational policies as revealed in the previous chapter.

In the previous chapter on large culture findings, English was shown to be substantially used in current teaching and learning at the HEI. Despite the positioning of English at the forefront, particularly in academic discourse, findings revealed an opposing scenario as participants claimed they had to deal with lecturers who used either BM or

English as their preferred languages. Students claimed that they had to cope with two language choices (BM and English) when attending lectures in subjects other than English language and such cases contributed to the state of their WTC in the target language in the ESL classes. Vicky (FKE) who claimed that the marginal attention and interest of other lecturers towards the target language in the home subject classes could somehow impact on learners' interest and WTC in the language during the ESL class gave one example.

*If other classes are conducted in Malay and English in only English classes, it will be complicated. If other classes are conducted in English, you tend to learn new English vocabs. You talk to your lecturers. So later in English class, you are not so worried that you don't know much of English words. If in other classes, you asked questions in English, in English class you would feel okay to do the same. (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE)*

Vicky recalled that his engineering classes were conducted in both languages, BM and English, depending on the lecturers' discretion.

*It depends on some lectures, some lecturers, actually I usually noticed the more senior lecturers speaks English more. But the younger one (lecturer) said they mix. I think because the senior lecturers, at that time they graduate, their English is very good. Mostly study abroad. Or they may even go to English schools. (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE)*

Aisyah from FC also reflected this situation when she commented that BM was common in the home subject classes (e.g. Engineering subject) English was used only in the presence of international students. Aisyah (FC) illustrated “*the lecturer himself doesn't speak English. He speaks only when there are international students*” (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC). This statement was also resonated by Ana (FC). “*The lecturer automatically speaks in English when there are foreigners. But*

*when there are no foreigners, they automatically speak Bahasa Melayu” (Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKM).*

On top of that, Vicky also felt that lecturers’ tendency towards the choice of medium of instruction during lectures may also depend on learners’ preferences. *“I think the lecturers tend to speak in Malay because students sometimes prefer listening to the lecturer speak in Malay most of the time” (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE).* Loh noted, *“normally the lecturer will ask if there are any foreign students in the class. If none, they will immediately switch (to BM)” (Semi-structured interview with Loh from FKE).* Despite the internationalization of the university, the implementation of the language seemed challenging and complex. These circumstances reflected the learners’ own state of WTC in the target language within the ESL class.

At this point, learners felt that embracing the language could enhance social status and break the social barriers at local and international level. Globalization also created a borderless nation which allowed transitions of multi-nationalities, creating an authentic and meaningful scenario in education in which the target language could be used.

However, on a different note, in local contexts, it was regarded as unnecessary for the target language to be used, especially when the native language could fulfil the target purposes. The *internationalisation* of the university, which had attracted international students, promoted English as a vital mode of communication, but this was not always

the case for everyone. The small numbers of international students failed to create an English-speaking environment to the extent that home lecturers could chose to teach in BM instead of English.

In coping with such tension between BM and English in the various disciplines they were learning, students felt that having English as the medium of instruction was a way of enhancing their WTC in the target language, particularly in the ESL classroom. On the other hand, when the target language was switched back to BM, the perceived importance of English conflicted with this. Such instances logically impacted on students' motivation to improve their oral abilities.

Apart from globalization, the following section will narrate the findings on English as a means of career investment in future selves as another determinant of ESL learners' state of WTC.

### **6.2.2 English as a career investment in future selves**

Commenting against the institutional culture, English was primarily perceived as a means of obtaining a good career and later on for career or education advancement. Students' perceptions towards the language influenced their behaviour towards the class and to their perceptions that chances of finding employment were higher. Such a belief became a motivating factor in enhancing learners' WTC in the language. Azri from FKM was certain that future professions would utilize English as means of

communication, *“if instructions are in English you’ll be in trouble if you can’t understand and communicate”* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).

Ken from FKM supports this view;

*Some of them (employers) prefer us to have an advantage in languages. It is better to have more than two languages because I heard that if you have certificate of other languages the chances of getting the job or chances for you to be employed is higher than everyone else. (Semi-structured interview with Ken from FKM)*

Vicky from FKE desperately needed the language in order to work overseas. *“If I want to work in Singapore, my English has to be good. So I will try to talk as much as I can, hoping the teacher will correct my mistakes”* (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE). Farhan planned to further his studies and perceived that English was crucial for this purpose. *“I plan to do master’s degree in MBA, business management. My sister did the same. I saw her thesis, the way she talks and present in English. I think she has the best English in our family* (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE). Rebecca (FKM) encountered real life experience where English was perceived as essential in the working world. Thus, this escalated her willingness to communicate in the target language.

*Sometimes some people out there will like look down on people who like, can't speak English. There's time where I was working as a waitress during my school holiday at City Square. One customer, she was very harsh. I asked her how I should help (in Mandarin). She said, call somebody who knows English instead. She was impatient at that time. She wanted someone to speak English very fast. Someone who can understand her immediately. I think it reasonable. I feel like if you're not good in English, and you're not good at the job. (Semi-structured interview with Rebecca from FKM)*

Similar to Rebecca, Ana from FKA felt willing to communicate in the target language as she learned the importance of English through her working experiences.

*Before I joined matriculation and university, I had the chance to work. While working, I see for myself the importance of English language. That is why I am now very motivated to use the language. (Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA).*

Ken's WTC was also greatly influenced by his working experiences, especially in the context of communication with customers.

*I really want to learn English. I need to speak to my customer. I worked part-time, some customers they use English to communicate with me and I understand, but I cannot reply. I just stand there. That's when I know English is very important. (Semi-structured interview with ken from FKM).*

Vicky (FKE) strongly believed that competency in the target language, especially in oral fluency, was considered highly desirable by future employers. Vicky believed that fluency in English would give him an edge over others who were less fluent. Vicky described the scenario as follows:

*In your exam slip, it's clear that for English you got an 'A'. But let's say during an interview session there were two candidates. Student A and student B. Student A could speak good English, but his overall achievements is average. For student B, his achievement is excellent, his skills in computer programming is great, but he couldn't really speak English. In this case, I strongly feel that student A will be hired because he can communicate in English. Definitely, you want someone who can communicate confidently for your company. (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE)*

Apart from this, findings also showed that WTC was greatly influenced by learners' belief that English would be widely used in in the profession they had chosen, especially in the engineering domains. *"I am interested in the management in Nuclear Engineering. I will deal with loads of people in the nuclear world it, and it could be*



*anybody, any parts of the world. So English is universal” (Semi-structured interview with Nazri from FKT).* This finding could be related to the large culture narratives for the positioning of English as it was substantially used in the teaching and learning.

It was also interesting to find that Loh (FKE) used other instances to describe the importance of being bilingual in the working environment. Loh used examples of other nationalities like the Nepalese and Bangladeshi who had learnt a second language (BM) which he had observed in his father’s company. According to Loh (FKE);

*I think learning language is not necessarily about how much I will use it. Because I think learning another language is something you wouldn’t lose. An asset actually. To communicate with other nationality. Because even in my dad factory, he has foreign workers from Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. They speak Malay, and I always like to learn their languages too. (Semi-structured interview with Loh from FKE)*

In this research, learners’ WTC was very much influenced when fluency in English was viewed as a form of investment for their future selves through what learners had learned and discovered from real-life working arenas. Considering the fact that a substantial amount of English was used in their present studies, in present communication with international students and in their career prospects in the future, findings identified expressions of regret and disappointment for those who lacked the fluency in the target language. Hanan from FKM lamented that:

*I regret that I used to treat English half-heartedly. Nowadays, employers are looking at English, especially spoken English. If you can speak English, it is an advantage. Like me, I will become a mechanical engineer. They need to see me speak with confidence so they could interact, to agree or disagree with me. English is very important. (Semi-structured interview with Hanan from FKM)*

Rebecca estimated that on a scale of one to ten, her English was “*five out of ten*” (*Semi-structured interview with Rebecca from FKM*) and Hassan (FKM) thought that his fluency was very poor. Hassan ranked his fluency level at “*four out of ten*” and described his willingness to communicate as overshadowed by fear “*I am just afraid to talk*” (*Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKM*).

Considering the fact that English is important in their future careers investments, some learners recognized the need to acquire the language. Safiah (FC) claimed she observed changes in her friends’ behaviour from being distant towards the target language to being encouraging as they realized the importance of the language. Safiah explained that:

*Now it’s nearing internship for all of us. I can see that my friends who didn’t show much efforts to improve on the language are really working towards improving themselves now. It seems that they have realized they need the language in order to work. I see they have started using English in Facebook and asking me how to join the debate team and the Toastmaster club. (Semi-structured interview with Safiah from FC)*

Overall, participants in this study were in the third year of their studies in which they were nearing their internship program. This situation became another motivating factor, which supported learners’ WTC in the target language. The use of Facebook as one of the ways to improve competency was found to be one of the significant findings in this study however, it will be discussed in the sub-heading, *6.4 Digital narratives* in the later part of this chapter.

As described earlier, findings revealed that the use of English in their career fields, as perceived by the participants, led them to be willing to communicate in the target language. However, findings also recorded a contradictory event when jobs, which do not require English, triggered a different perception towards the target language and WTC.

Unlike the others who believed fluency in English was a form of career investment, Farhan (FKE) expressed a differing perception towards the importance of English. Farhan, who had undergone his internship in an energy company, discovered English was not really needed in the job scope despite being in the engineering field. *“During my internship, even the boss doesn’t speak English. It was at TNB Kota Bahru, Kelantan. I was explaining my project, so I still have to use some English words like voltage, current, supply so I mix. But more Malay was used” (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE).*

In this context, it was clear to Farhan there was no reason to speak in English as the staff members were locals, and thus English seemed out of place. Although Farhan did not mention he lacked the willingness to communicate due to these circumstances, he felt that the environment played a great role in enhancing his efforts to be competent in the target language. Farhan claimed that *“the environment (lack of practice and exposure of English) is the reason why I still struggle (to be fluent) in the language” (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE).*

In summary, English has been viewed as an important form of investment for their future selves, especially in their career intentions, which related to the small culture influences of the ESL classroom. Learners vary in terms of their proficiency levels, especially those who had little support and exposure from their family and in their earlier education. Working experiences, the substantial amount of English used in their academic discourse and the internship program all boosted learners' WTC in the target language.

However, the environment, such as lack of a suitable platform and of people to practice with, minimal English use in other lectures (home subject classes) and jobs that do not require fluency in English created a dilemma to learners' WTC in the target language in the ESL class. In other words, if the native language could allow learners to function well in education and job prospects, fluency in English would become less important, which would therefore, affect WTC. The small culture narratives of the ESL classroom in relation to learners' WTC will be further discussed in the following section, which could be described as personal experiences.

### **6.2.3 Other learning experiences that have impact on learners WTC**

Findings in this study have revealed that there are other learning experiences within the institution, which have an impact on learners' WTC in the ESL classroom. Overall, some learners agreed that the use of English in other home subjects (e.g. Engineering subject) in some ways influenced how they engage themselves in the ESL classes. Safiah from FC shared the first example. She, in general, felt discouraged from

speaking in English in the ESL class after her effort to ask questions was rebuffed during lectures in other home subject classes. Because these classes were also conducted in English meant Safiah felt a greater distance to her WTC in the target language.

*I used to take computer network. But now I take computer software, and my classmates are really quiet. My network classmates are really noisy. So now I am becoming like them. If I need to ask about anything, I will just go to the front of the class and ask the lecturer. I strongly feel it depends on the type of lecturer you have. Some lecturers do not like it when you interrupt while they are teaching. Some lecturers feel that if you can google the answer, then you don't need to ask them questions. You just need to google, google and google. I never saw anyone raising their hands in class. (Semi-structured interview with Safiah from FC)*

Consequently, Safiah claimed the lecturers' unapproachable attitude had affected her perceptions towards other lecturers, including teachers in the English class. Safiah said, "*I feel scared. Not confident. I don't know what the teacher (in ESL class) is going to be like*".

The role of learner and teacher seemed to have influenced her overall perceptions and generated a sense of reluctance when communication was expected during the ESL class. The silent ambience in other classes could affect the culture of the ESL class. This was especially a concern when Safiah mentioned that she never saw anyone asking questions during the lecture. Students' WTC in English classes was also sometimes affected by other lecturers' (home subject) lack of responses when learners asked questions.

*Some lecturers, when we ask question, they will explain. But some lecturers, they just ask you back. That is very scary. It is something like, he is asking you back the questions that you asked him which*

*you don't understand. We don't know how to respond to answer*  
(Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKM)

This circumstance seemed to impinge on students' confidence and concerns when they are expected to speak in the target language in the ESL classes. Hamdi (FKE) revealed another noteworthy finding when he described that lecturers' negative personas had a huge impact on his intentions or willingness to communicate in the target language in the ESL class.

*One of the reasons I seldom talk is because sometimes I really plan to talk, but then the lecturer wasn't really motivating and daunting. When this happened, I felt like I had zero self-esteem and zero confidence. I may start with the intention to talk but might as well withdraw the intention.* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)

In this instance, it could be argued that a non-judgemental atmosphere seemed crucial, especially to allow students to develop English oral fluency and to develop learners' thinking-out-loud skills in general. Some students like Chong (FKM) who chose to be positive, generally came to accept that it was common for lecturers not to accept questions as it could be regarded as a form of rudeness and that questioning should only be done at the end of the class. This had become common classroom culture.

*There are lecturers who dislike students asking questions while they teach. They think we are interrupting. It's kind of rude to ask during class. Generally, there is no one that asks during class. It's either teacher calls your name then you answer, or we wait till the class ends.* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)

Rasyid (FKM) also affirmed the scenario and claimed that it was a norm not to ask any questions while lessons were in progress “*it's a cultural thing, questioning is really rare. You don't really see many people asking questions*” (Participant classroom

*observation-group discussion*). This justified the reason learners may find it challenging when communication is expected in an ESL class. *“In the next class, we will be sure not to ask questions or to open up our mouth (laughter)” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*.

Apart from that, findings also identified that respondents’ lack of WTC in the target language in the ESL class could be the result of lecturers (home subject classes) who treated them in a harsh and abrasive way. In general, students often perceived teachers as role models, whom they respected and looked up to. However, with such things happening, students who were treated in a negative manner may feel traumatized in other classes.

Farhan (FKE) talked about his experience in one of his engineering classes, which left a negative impact on his other classes.

*He (the lecturer) likes to say harsh words to us. But I am okay to that. Well, he said we don’t have brains, this is a stupid piece of work. There were four of us at that time. At that time, we also had to prepare for exams. So two of my group members did not really do their part. But it was small mistake. But the lecturer was furious and started to insult and swear at us. He used words like stupid, brainless, useless, ‘sial’ (BM expletives- there is no direct equivalent in English). (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE)*

When asked about the impact of the incident towards his ESL class, Farhan’s attitude reflected apprehension when he said *“Yes, it really affected us. Because it was really hard after that. Lecturers are the main actors. Just afraid that similar thing might happen again”*. In Farhan’s case, his other friends chose to remain silent and become submissive in the ESL class. *“If they have anything to ask, they will ask me to ask instead. They are just afraid. Like me, I just don’t care anymore” (Semi-structured*

*interview with Farhan from FKE*). The hostile relationship caused them to think negatively about teachers, thus influencing the learning of the language. This explained why Farhan's friends were holding back from asking questions as they became less inclined to communicate in ESL class.

In summary, the findings in this section described how other learning experiences had the capability to influence learners' perceptions and behaviour in other classes. When the trust and bond between the teacher and learner have been broken, learners may feel emotionally distant, exhausted, and unwilling to trust another teacher. In the ESL class, learners' participation in activities are highly expected. Indeed, the success of these activities depended on learners' willingness to communicate and participate in the activities.

Other learning experiences that learners brought into the ESL classroom contributed to the small culture influences of the classroom culture. However, on a different note, the teachers' insistence on not allowing questions to be asked during the lesson may be linked to the large culture influences of the belief that the teacher holds the authority as discussed under the sub-heading 'cultural values' in the previous chapter.

It is safe to say that teachers are the most important figures in the teaching and learning experience, which could significantly or negatively, influences students' existing competencies and WTC in the target language. Trust and bonding in teacher-student relationships are deemed crucial, and the ESL classes could be made to be tailored to the learners' needs in order to encourage WTC in the target language.



The following section describes how the findings of the small culture narratives of learners' social groupings and hobbies within the HEI play a role in learners' state of WTC in the ESL class.

#### **6.2.4 Social groupings and hobbies**

Findings revealed that students' social groupings such as clubs, projects and hobbies influenced learners' perceptions and behaviour in the ESL class. Learners, who have chances to use English outside the ESL class, therefore find ESL classes as more meaningful and engaging. Findings showed that learners seemed more motivated and engaged in their ESL teaching and learning activities and in WTC in particular.

In this study some of the social groupings such as clubs and projects participated by the students were the *"Career Fair"* (semi-structured interview with Linda from FC), the university's *"Debate Team"* (semi-structured interview with Aisyah (FC), Safiah (FC) and Nazri from FKT), the *"International Young Women International Conference"*, *"Five Excellent Track Programmes"* and the *"Summer Exchange program"* (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah (FC), the *"International Association of Students in Economic and Commercial Sciences (AISEC)"* (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE), and the *"Young Graduate Johor"* (Semi-structured interview with Linda from FC).

Students claimed these programmes were officially conducted in English. Given this fact, they inevitably influenced learners' WTC within their ESL classes. Linda from

FC offered the first significant example. Linda confessed that by participating in the “*Young Graduate Johor*” programme, her overall proficiency in the target language had been enriched. Data from Linda suggested that such experiences upgraded her state of WTC in English as it boosted her self-esteem and confidence levels. In the previous chapter on the large culture narratives, one major finding identified that learners’ lack of WTC was due to fear of making grammar mistakes. Linda had now overcome her past resistance towards her fear of speaking; being grammar cautious and assuming, others will make negative evaluations towards her. Linda comprehensively explained these experiences. (Linda was the leader of the program):

*My proficiency improved tremendously a lot. After that, I think I became more confident, and it boosts my self-esteem. I think I started to communicate more in class using English. I don't really care of what people think about me. I realized that English is not about grammar. We all worry about that. It should be about communication. I know my grammar may be wrong, but I speak because I was like...no... because this whole program is in English, so I want all of them there to speaking in English. The car team, the teachers, because we're also communicating with the teacher from school. So yes, they were speaking English as well. The main organizer was the Dream-Catcher company from KL. So those managing director actually came down to UA University (not real name). We had the mentor trainee, and I had my own group, around eighty people and I communicated with them in English. (Semi-structured interview with Linda from FC)*

In this instance, there was emphasis on increasing willingness to communicate rather than simply recognising the usefulness of English. The experience of successfully managing an event where information and messages were successfully conveyed despite the non-standard forms of the language being used had helped Linda to rethink her attitude towards making mistakes in the target language.

Loh's (FKE) awareness of the importance of being proficient in the target language had also improved because of his participation in the university's "Career Fair" programme that he was in charge of as the programme director. Loh explained that his main task was to search for local and international companies to participate in the fair. His experience in facing difficulty communicating with a Japanese company as they had limited English, helped Loh to realize the universal value of English, especially as the medium of communication between different nationalities. This incident somehow contributed to his perceptions and belief that communicating in English was the means of building networks and breaking social barriers.

*I think it is very good Malaysians can speak English. The Japanese company, they cannot speak much English. They should if they want to carry out an exhibition in the career fair. So it was hard. So from that experience, I can say that English language is very important. Because foreign companies are running in English, so, therefore, the language is very important. (Semi-structured interview with Loh from FKE)*

In the previous chapter on the large culture influences, the lack of WTC in the target language was due to a complex social acceptance between those speaking the native language and the English language. However, a noteworthy finding revealed that those students participating in the university "Debate Club" felt they were more secure and confident to speak in English when belonging to this group. Aisyah (FC) claimed that:

*I joined UA University (not real name) debating club with X and a student from toastmaster club in my class. So it's the three of us who speaks English in class. Just the three of us. When we're in a café, we were like speaking, and people will be looking at us, so I can feel awkward. Malay with Malay speaks English. But the best thing, I mean one of the reason I joined debate was actually I needed this kind group of friends. So I can still practise English. Secondly, it made me feel more secure. So, like when I am with them, even though other people are like looking at us. I don't really care. That's why I don't really care and bother what people say. I will just speak. You just need the right group of friends. My debate friends are very*

*supportive in this matter” (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC).*

Apart from that, Aisyah had also participated in other activities like the “*International Young Women International Conference*”, the “*Five Excellent Track Programmes*” and the “*Summer Exchange program*”. On reflection, Aisyah arrived at a point when she said, “*If we were to only speak Malay (BM) we would be in this very small bubble, and we won’t flourish*” (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC).

Vicky (FKE) echoed the effectiveness of such programmes although he explained his level of WTC had not really improved, as he had to communicate information in BM to ensure is Malay friend understood. Vicky admitted that such programmes had the capacity to boost his level of WTC if English was the primary medium used by its members. Vicky noted that:

*In the career fair, I was in charge of the protocol. When we enter these kinds of programmes, people want to make sure the event goes well. Let say, I have 10 people working under me, Malay, Chinese, Indian if they don't understand something I will explain in Malay to my Malay friends. I want them to understand more about their job scope. Sometimes when I say it in English they might miss out certain details, so I think my English language competencies didn't improve in terms of this context. But if my group consisted of people who only could speak English, yes, that would make me more motivated to improve my speaking skills in class. (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKM)*

In essence, these findings suggest that these small social groupings, clubs and programmes which have their focus on the English language have transformed students’ state of WTC to become more confident individuals. The authenticity of the social groupings, clubs and programmes and the connection established to the real

world provided students with a sense of purpose and meaningfulness as the target language was being used. Indeed, such scenarios influenced learners' perceptions about making mistakes in the target language, allowing them to overcome past resistance and concerns towards the language hence, learners' willingness to communicate. The following findings narrate the cultural realities of the ESL classroom that focused around the teacher and learners as other determinants of learners' state of WTC.

### **6.3 Influences of ESL Classroom culture**

Findings disclosed another noteworthy factor influencing learners' WTC, which revolved around negotiation within the ESL classroom itself. The ESL class involved in this research study was the English for Workplace Communication (ULAB 3162) classes, which aimed at developing students' (the third year) communication skills. These students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, educational experiences and courses are considered as a newly-formed English class at the beginning of every new semester. *"I actually don't really know them. They are not from my class (home subject class). But because of this English class, I become close to them. All of us are taking pure Engineering courses, but we are from different sections (classes)."* (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKM).

Since the aim and objectives of the lessons focused a lot on developing learners' oral proficiencies, students were expected to engage in various communicative activities and be willing to communicate in the target language. *"This semester English class is*

*more towards communication. We can have fun and joke around. In the previous English class (English for Academic Purposes), we were afraid of the teacher. Now I can see that everyone is happy in this class” (semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKM).*

Findings also recorded teachers as important entity responsible for learners’ existing WTC and the entire atmosphere of the ESL class. Farhan claimed that he felt encouraged and motivated towards learning the target language as their current English teacher embraced a positive teacher persona, *“I am really grateful this semester that I got Ms X class. She allows us to laugh and have fun in class. She laughs with us as well. I think she also understand what I said. In fact, she said that I have good intonation and delivery. I really feel appreciated. (Semi-structured interview with Farhan from FKE).*

Apart from teachers’ persona, that determines the ambience of the ESL classroom, methods and approaches were also vital elements, which shaped the entire atmosphere of the classroom. Vicky described his ESL class as meaningful and practical as he was able to relate the input gained from learning the target language to the real-world scenario.

*It's fun to be in that class because they will do activities rather than just learning from book. Even in term, of syllabus, I think now they are headed more towards the professional world whatever we are learning we will actually, now use it like a resume, and term paper, its more to the academic world. We learn a lot. Last time we were more to fun thing now, we actually learn. (Semi-structured interview with Vicky from FKE)*

Students felt a greater sense of purpose in using the target language after joining the ULAB 3162 English class. Rasyid from FKM claimed *“I just realized the importance of English language after being in this third year. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*. Fahim from FKM reaffirmed that *“my current reason to be in the class is more to oral. So when we are in third year, we are a step closer to internship and career. So it’s a must for us to be good in talking in English. I think that’s the reason to be in this class. (class activity-group discussion)*. Syafiq from FKT expressed similar perspectives regarding his English class. *“It’s fun and its learning” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*.

It was a notable finding when Sheila from FKT claimed that *“I don’t feel stress anymore” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)* as it was described in the previous chapter on large culture influences that learners often mentioned the feeling of tension and stress when communicating in the target language. In essence, it could be suggested that teachers’ persona and teachers’ methods and approaches were critical determinants of learners’ state of WTC in the target language. It should also be reminded that earlier findings (*other learning experiences*) revealed that trust and bonding in the student-teacher relationship was what influenced learners’ perceptions and their state of participation in the class activities.

As a result of a positive and encouraging atmosphere shaped by teachers’ positive persona, meaningful lessons and trust, data in the study revealed that students managed to overcome their lack of WTC and responded positively to the speaking activities carried out during the ESL lessons. The following remarks illustrated the case in point.

*Well, now I don't really experience too many people laughing at me. Each time I did my presentation in front of the class, everyone listens, and my good friend will always try to help me out if I am stuck and he is a Chinese. I think overall, my English class is okay. Everyone is supportive. (Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKM)*

Saiful from FKM personally felt that he was in a safe zone to communicate in English without negative judgements from others in the current English class he is in. At this point of the study, such issues pertaining to safety and trust seemed prevalent in the context of learners' WTC in the English language. They need to feel safe and to trust that others will not negatively evaluate them and judge their efforts to communicate in the target language could be considered as another vital determinant to learners' state of WTC. This finding could be linked to several parts of the large culture narratives (*Ethnic and Identity*) where learners disclosed that they would be teased, scorned and even isolated for speaking English as a means to show off or to intimidate others.

*In my opinion, I feel comfortable. I like to speak in English because in class there is a space that no one will judge me because it is English class, so if you want to talk in English then, go ahead no one will judge you. In our mindset, when we talk in English, it does feels awkward. And people will judge you, why did you talked in English, why can't you speak in Malay. But in English class, no one will judge you. No one will criticize you. If it's wrong, it is still okay because it is a place to learn, right? (Semi-structured interview with Saiful from FKM)*

### **6.3.1 Belief that others were constantly judging**

Despite the reassurance of the safe ESL classroom atmosphere to communicate in the target language, findings revealed that fear that others were constantly judging remained present and influenced students' state of WTC. For Azizul (FKM), his WTC



was often challenged by others staring and giving a distant look. Azizul's express his concern;

*From movie, I can observe that the woman gets humiliated by people around her, and everyone looked down on her when she cannot speak English really well. She lost her confidence and fear of others looking at her. In class, too sometimes, we lost confidence when people look at us as if they don't understand when we speak. And that makes me to fear speaking the next time. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

Reflecting on similar concerns, Fahim (FKM) expressed that failures to respond to teachers' questions could affect his self-worth in the presence of others in the ESL classroom.

*Another thing, the waiter doesn't really know how to help the lady despite she realize that the lady can't speak English well. She kept asking her what type of coffee she wants. It was clear she doesn't know how to reply. Well if in class, if lecturer keep asking in English and I don't understand I think I feel the same. I will feel ashamed in front of others. But I am glad that our lecturer is okay. If we don't understand, she speaks Malay a bit. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

In the previous chapter on large culture, the data analysis revealed that the participants possessed diverse fears ranging from fear of making linguistic errors, as the result of the exam-oriented system (*National Education*), fear of being labelled as boasting or showing off, fear of being thought pretentious, fear of being marginalized, fear of dissociation from the ethnic cultural identity and offending others (*Cultural Values and Ethnic and Identity*). Despite the incidents being reported as happening in the past, the fear transcended to the HEI level and were endured in silence. The interview session allowed the students to share and express their concerns, which seemed to be overwhelming.

Aisyah perceived that there were others who disliked people for speaking the English language. *“My English classmates are also not bad. But like I said, I will see first what sort of vibes I get from them (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah from FC).* Maya from FKE also believed that others would somehow evaluate her: *“for me, I am always not confident especially during presentations. I am just concerned what others might think of me” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).* Alam from FKM stated that the dilemma was related to others’ reactions: *“my biggest concern when communicating in English is the people. People might laugh or people think your English is bad, so you are bad as well” (Participant classroom observation, group discussion).* Faiz from FKA firmly believed that most of his friends refrained from speaking *“because they’re afraid of what others people think because they are afraid that people will judge them based on their speaking ability” (Participant classroom observation, group discussion).* Likewise, Fahim (FKM) claimed that making mistakes in the context that there are others whose level of English was better than his was, had caused greater anxiety to communicate in the target language through fear that others would somehow compare his linguistic capability.

*I don’t think all of us in that class is at the same level. English is not our first language. So everyone is not really familiar with the language. But I still feel ashamed if I say something and it’s wrong. You never know what others are thinking about you. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

Amirah and Diana from FKA supported this phenomenon when they asserted that *“we are so worried that people will judge us because we are having bad grammar, people who have better English” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).* Despite the earlier findings that some felt that the ESL class was a safe zone in which

to communicate in the target language, the ESL students seemed vulnerable and sensitive towards what others thought about them, which affected their WTC.

*Feeling nervous is one thing. That's one of the cause I hesitate. It's a nerve-wracking moment because you know that others are judging, judging our grammar and others (who are better in English) will realize it is wrong. That's why I always hesitate. (Semi-structured interview with Salmah from FM).*

Similarly, Anas from FKM said, *"I feel that when my friends are more fluent than me, I will be hesitant with my own willingness to communicate. Sometimes I just become quiet"* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).

Ajwad from FKE revealed his choice to remain quiet in the ESL class was because his close friend had better proficiency than he did. *"I feel that if my friend is much fluent than me, like Miza, she always makes me feel hesitant to speak. I normally remain quiet"* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). When others seemed more fluent, learners felt inferior and out of place. Students had the tendency to perceive that they were not good enough as compared to others who spoke more fluent English. The following remark illustrates the inferiority that Ajwad felt in the ESL class (Semi-structured interview with Ajwad from FKE):

*Researcher: Okay, let's share your personal experience about being embarrassed that you mentioned just now.*

*Student: Because it's like everyone can speak well except me.*

*Researcher: You have that feeling?*

*Student: Yes. And then like, I feel like, I'm lack of something. It's like I'm so different from that community which speak English so well.*

*Researcher: Oh, okay. You feel like you are so different. Have you ever thought of trying to speak?*

*Student: Not enough courage. I was scared that I would make mistake.*

*Researcher: What happen if you make mistakes? What do you think will happen?*

*Student: I will feel ashamed that I can't speak. I feel I didn't learn well, because some of my friends studying words from the dictionary, some of them make a lot of effort, that's why at the end they are well-spoken in English. But me, I think my effort is not enough as compared to them.*

Findings disclosed that fear of teacher's negative judgements had further eroded confidence to communicate in the target language: *"Not confident, insecure and people might laugh. Teacher will think I am not good"* (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). In addition to this situation, such significant concerns of what others thought of their abilities to communicate in the target language seemed to suggest that it impinged on their self-image, self-esteem and particularly their self-confidence.

Hazim (FKE) believed that:

*Such event will always happen to you until you start working. You will see people with good and poor English. The ones with poor proficiency will always feel inferior to those with better English. Sometimes it makes them to lose confidence and never want to improve. This happens in English class often. They felt shy to speak up. And if they try others sometimes laughed at them. In this case, you will never regain confidence. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

Instances of bullying in the form of constant teasing and laughing at mistakes made while speaking in the target language observed in this study could also be a possible deterrent of WTC in the target language. The following highlights events of teasing within the ESL classroom experienced by the students. Jamiah from FKM reported that her hesitance was due to fear that others will tease her poor proficiency in the target language. *The reason is, I fear that I will be teased. If I make any mistakes, I really fear that I will be teased for that"* (Semi-structured interview with Jamiah from

FKM). Reflecting similar scenario, Nur from FM shared her negative experiences. *“I was once teased for saying it wrongly. “Those people are of course much fluent than me” (Semi-structured interview with Nur from FM).* Linda (FC) agreed that teasing about one’s poor proficiency happened in ESL. Linda commented that the lack of WTC observed among most of her ESL classmates was due to this teasing culture. A semi-structured interview with Linda from FC disclosed that:

*Researcher: Could you comment further when you said most of your friends are not confident to speak up in class. What could be the cause?*

*Linda: It's either their low self-esteem or maybe the friends tend to tease around, ‘oh you speak like that?’*

*Researcher: Does it really happen? Have you seen that in the class?*

*Linda: Yes, yes, I've seen that.*

*Researcher: Do you mean they make fun about it?*

*Student: Yes. So I think they (those who tried to speak up) tend to be very sad so they don't want to speak up.*

In similar situation, Ali from FKE recalled the teasing culture in his ESL class. Ali reported, *“my friends, I think they don't speak in English and it is not good. They are afraid people would laugh at them. So they rather not speak. So then, if this (teasing) keep on going a long time, people will develop phobia for English” (Semi-structured interview with Ali from FKM.* Similarly, Khadijah (FKE) confirmed some of her classmates were fond at laughing at others’ English mistakes.

*I face similar situation. Most of my friends ‘kaki gelak’ (those who love laughing at people). If I make mistakes, definitely I will be laughed at. It’s embarrassing. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion).*

For Zahrah (FKT), such a scenario where people laughed at one another appeared common. She, however, *confessed to being emotionally hurt*: “*when friends laughed, I just felt kind of sad. Sometimes demotivated then I just gave up at speaking*” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion-group discussion). Ajwad (FKT) recalled that in his case, the teasing he received from his friends had tarnished his motivation to speak the target language:

*Like me, I think it's my pronunciation the reason others like to laugh at me. Maybe I echoed like someone from the village ('bunyik kampong sangat'). Once people laughed, I felt insecure. It's also a kind of phobia to speak English again. Might as well speak Malay if you know others are going to laugh. (Participant classroom observation- group discussion)*

Saiful (FKM) made a disheartening comment “*I know I will make a mistake. And when I do that, people will be laugh at me. The impact is so strong on me. When I meet people (outside the class), I am being scared being laugh at again*” (Semi-structured interview with Saiful from FKM). Hassan from FKM said that

*I know to be good you have to practice speaking. But people might think you are putting an act ('mengada ngada) when you speak English. They repeatedly make fun of you. Repeating the English you used in previous class. (Semi-structured interview with Hassan from FKM).*

While the teasing culture seemed to be prevalent, Mat from FKT admitted he lacked the willingness to communicate in the target language and opted to be reserved in class due to fear of being teased. “*I am so quiet in class. Afraid if I give the wrong answer people will laugh at me. So that's the main reason*” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). Saiful claimed that he was more willing to communicate in the target language in groups rather than be put under the spotlight.

Findings suggested the vulnerability that students felt when they spoke in the target language. The following dialogue exemplifies the confidence Saiful felt if speaking was done in groups, thus reducing the risk of being judged. Saiful claimed that; (Semi-structured interview with Saiful from FKM).

*Saiful: I am willing to communicate in English. But if I am alone, I don't think I could do it.*

*Researcher: You mean you need friends to share ideas with?*

*Saiful: Yes. Something like that. If you have your group members with you, you'll feel more confident. We answer together. It feels better and more confident. If I am alone, I might be reluctant to respond.*

In summary, teachers' persona, teachers teaching approaches and the classroom ethos seemed to be powerful determinants of learners' state of WTC in the ESL classroom. Findings in the large and small culture influences several times highlighted the issue of safety and trust as critical elements, which should be present in an ESL classroom in order to motivate WTC. Learners seemed so vulnerable with regard to speaking in the target language through fear of others' evaluation. This, in turn, suppressed the desire to communicate in the target language, despite their awareness of the importance of English for their existing study and future career intentions. In this context, WTC was not just an issue of linguistic ability but also a psychological imposition.

## 6.4 Influences of the digital narratives

This section on digital narratives emerging within the influences of institutional culture, was not part of the conceptual frame, to begin with. The section was based on the newly emerging theme during data analysis in which the researcher found the findings to be noteworthy especially with regard to learners' state of WTC and the ESL classroom culture as a whole.

Digital narratives seem extremely relevant for students living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who could be referred to as the '*techno-savvy*' (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2019) generation. In the current age of globalization, digital practices have become a global culture, and those who did not adopt the technology will somehow be left behind. Evidence in this research indicated that technology, the internet and social media brought a significant influence on students' state of WTC and on learning the target language in general, as well as significant repercussions when using the target language.

Findings showed that students who used the internet and the social media experienced linguistic improvements in various ways. Rebecca (FKE) for instance, claimed YouTube channel had assisted her in her English pronunciation: "*last time I needed to attend an interview, so I need English. So I practised a lot. YouTube helps a lot*" (Semi-structured interview with Rebecca from FKE). The method seemed to be a versatile but effective platform to develop pronunciation skills in the target language.



Despite the social media being casual and unofficial, Aisyah (FC) fully utilized social networking platforms to practice writing in English with the support of her mother to check on her language. She noted;

*I started using social media when I was 12 or 13, and I would immediately use full English, I don't used Malay, I don't mix the language. I started to use full English because I wanted to improve. When the Facebook was popular, I was already 16. I did write a blog when I was younger. So she did read my blog sometimes. If there's too much errors, she would cringe, then she would tell me like, 'there is too many grammatical error. (Semi-structured interview with Aisyah).*

In the earlier discussion of English as a form of career investment, it was recorded that Safiah (FC) witnessed her friends using Facebook as a means to improve English language ability: *"I see they have started using English in Facebook and asking me how to join the debate team and the Toastmaster club. (Semi-structured interview with Safiah from FC).* Hashim (FC) who was interested in online gaming, discovered that communicating online with foreign players was a worthwhile activity as he was able to improve his English usage while interacting with multi-national players. Online gaming provided the platform to use the target language in a spontaneous real-life situation. *"The internet influences my English a lot. I play games a lot, and most of the players are not Malaysians, I don't know them. I have to use English automatically"* (Semi-structured interview with Hashim from FC). In addition, the pivotal role of technology, the internet and the social media played in aiding communication in English language, evidence also suggested detrimental effects towards learners' WTC in the target language.

Findings appeared to suggest that the teasing culture prevalent in the ESL class as discussed earlier (*ESL Classroom*) was also influenced by the social media culture known as ‘online bashing’ (word normally used in the social media as an act of criticizing or defaming). (<https://www.urbandictionary.com>). Ana from FKA claimed that “*Bashing is something like teasing. If you are used to your friends make fun of you, then it’s okay. But if you are the sensitive type of person bashing will be hard for you. Your mistakes will be reaped many times*” (*Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA*). Online bashing illuminated the negative outlook of digital practices, which had impaired students’ state of WTC in the target language. The following example illustrated students’ concern of ‘bashing’ and their state of WTC. In this example, Fahmi (FM) claimed that bashing which began online could also happen within the ESL classroom (*semi-structured interview with Fahmi from FM*).

*Researcher: If you described yourself as weak in English, why not try to practice it in the ESL class?*

*Student: No. Other people will start bashing.*

*Researcher: Bashing? In class or out of class?*

*Student: In class.*

*Researcher: Will that happen immediately? Like right after you made the mistakes?*

*Student: Yes. They will laugh at you. They will give you that look. Sometimes they call you bad names.*

Apart from the teasing in class, online teasing and bashing may go viral. Data suggested that this circumstance seemed to be feared most by ESL students. In such a case, students avoided communication in the target language for fear that mistakes would be made viral. The following dialogue described the case in point (*Semi-structured interview with Ana from FKA*).

*Researcher: Can you explain what this bashing trend is?*

*Student: Well, after class, if just now you got teased in class, it will be carried away outside of class.*

*Researcher: So the teasing just got out of hand. So bashing is similar to teasing?*

*Student: Yes, others outside your class will start to think of you as showing off. Sometimes you don't know them. They might tease you as well. Or people will repeat your exact words (mistakes) over and over again.*

Consistent with this scenario, Saufi asserted, “*you always have to remember about the social media. Like in Twitter. They use that platform to bash others sometimes*” (*Semi-structured interview with Saufi from FM*). As indicated by these findings, the SNS tend to be a threat to students’ WTC through fear that mistakes made in the English class may spread on line. Maryam claimed, “*I don't really talk. They might upload your mistakes onto Facebook and Twitter, and it goes viral*” (*Semi-structured interview with Maryam from FKT*).

Fahmi (FM) claimed that he was often in a state of dilemma whether to use or not to use English as he believed there would be individuals known as ‘haters’. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019), haters refers to a “person who says or writes unpleasant things about someone or criticizes their achievements, especially on the internet”. The following dialogue (*semi-structured interview with Fahmi from FM*) illustrates the descriptions of haters against students who spoke English in class.

*Researcher: You told me that you have dilemma. What kind of dilemma?*

*Student: Haters.*

*Researcher: Haters? I understand that this is social media term right? Can you explain what ‘haters’ is?*

*Student: The one that doesn't like you. Maybe not that they don't like you, more of jealous perhaps.*

*Researcher: So how do you know there are haters in your class?*

*Student: I experienced it.*

*Researcher: You experience it. Can you share that experience?*

*Student: I always answer questions in class. Then I saw one group of students who stared at me when I answered something. So one day I gave the wrong answer. The same group laughed at me. Okay, there are haters here.*

In this case, Fahmi decided that the best resolution to ‘haters’ was by not speaking English in class. Likewise, Saizul from FKT agreed, “*if you don’t speak much, you don’t have many ‘haters’ . Maybe being silent is the best way*” (Participant classroom observation-group discussion). Concerned students also believed that ‘haters’ would somehow post issues online, which consequently will go viral.

Apart from that, findings also discovered that the tendency to talk less in the ESL class was caused by the fear of being associated with the ‘WeChat’ users in which they were often negatively labelled as having extremely low English proficiency. The media often depicted the gross errors in English language often committed by the ‘WeChat’ users. Saizul (FKT) confessed that he was worried that mistakes would be made viral and he would feel degraded if he was labelled as a ‘WeChat’ kid’:

*We just fear that it may go viral. Yes, I know that it may go viral. They are the WeChat kids. They are those who use the WeChat apps but make loads of silly English mistakes. Grammar all wrong, silly mistakes. So I am so afraid that if I make those kinds of mistakes, I will be labelled the WeChat kids. I don’t like the labelling. It’s bad. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

Siti (FKE) believed that the ‘WeChat’ trend was a threat to communicating in the English language. This instance was recorded as:

*I just feel worried that nowadays the trend of WeChat making it much difficult if we make mistakes in English. It makes it harder for me speak English. Just afraid there will be people who will bash you. Others will tease you or mimic your English. (Participant classroom observation-group discussion)*

Evidence in this research noted that the negative digital practices go beyond simply teasing and labelling and into the humiliation of the individual involved. Hamdi (FKE) described the extreme consequences of being labelled as ‘WeChat kids’ as getting ‘trolled’. According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary (2019), a troll is “*someone who leaves an intentionally annoying or offensive message on the internet, in order to upset someone or to get attention or cause trouble*”. Thus being ‘trolled’ implied the message of becoming the target of online verbal bullies or ‘trolls’.

*I do agree that the WeChat kids are wrong in making silly English mistakes online. They should make sure it’s correct before posting it online. But we should also be supportive to correct their English instead of condemning them. Worst, they are insulted. They are ‘trolled’ and treated as if they are the lowest of the society and that’s why they can’t speak correct English. It could become really bad. You become the target, and it never stops. (Participant classroom observation- group discussion).*

These negative digital practices seemed to add to learners’ state of vulnerability in dealing with the target language. Despite realizing the importance of the language, especially for future investments, the concerns of being shamed for mistakes made becomes a huge challenge to WTC in the target language. For learners who had been ‘trolled’, the psychological impact might become permanent.

As well as concerns of the potential threat that social media held towards learners' WTC, other noteworthy findings suggested that the digital space was preferred over the real-life face-to-face communication, thus effecting learners' WTC in the ESL class. The primary reason reported by Syafiq was because communication in English online reduced the risk of being evaluated. Shafiq (FKT) who regarded himself as a 'technology native', now preferred real-life communication less. *"Too many things are done online, so I am not used to speaking to real people. For me, I feel more comfortable and confident to use English in the phone (typing messages in English) rather than face-to-face."*

The typical face-to-face interaction proved to be less desirable and was echoed by Sheila when she said that nowadays, communication was easier via the internet through the diverse internet applications. *"You can 'YouTube' it, Google it, people are 'whatsapping', 'instagraming', 'facebooking', 'twittering'" (semi-structured interview with Sheila from FKT).* Her remarks suggested that information could also be gained without the need to communicate with others on the real-life platform. Finally, Ainol commented, *"each time I used my hand phone or laptop I normally get carried away. I wouldn't be bothered with anybody or anything. If you go to restaurants, you see similar scenario. Everyone at the table are with their own hand phone activities. There is no interaction. Me too". (Semi-structured interview with Ainol from FM).*

In summary, without doubt, technology and the internet have become a facilitating tool used by students to assist in English language learning, but most significantly, the

convenience technology and the internet may also dissuade students from communicating in the target language as interaction could be done online. Real-life communication could pose various risks of being judged and criticized, whereas the online space seems to be more safe and secure.

However, regardless of the social media encouraging communication, wireless communication has been regarded as a threat to learners' WTC in the target language, as mistakes made could spread to others beyond the ESL classroom context causing harsh psychological injuries. This is especially true when online bullying seemed to be transpiring, making talking less seem to be the solution. The salience of digital narratives placed within the small culture quadrants were relevant to the lives of the participants and institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and such culture will continue to embrace the lives of the nation.

## **6.5 Summary**

This chapter on small culture influences revealed findings on the role of family and community, ESL learners' perceived values, learning experiences and social groupings at the HEI, the ESL classroom ethos and the digital cultures which influence ESL learners' WTC and the make-up of the ESL classroom culture as a whole. The small culture narratives did not stand alone as means of influence to learners WTC but somehow proved to be connected to the large culture influences. Many of the findings in this chapter stemmed from ESL learners' fear of being ridiculed and humiliated for making mistakes in the target language, which hampered learners' WTC.

In connection with the large culture influences (previous findings chapter), such fear had started at school with teachers using punishment as a method of improving English proficiency. At HEI, when oral performance was treated more exclusively than just grammar and translation, learners resorted to becoming judgmental as they had potentially learned the behaviour in their previous English learning experiences after being much exposed to the judgement and evaluation of the teachers and the education system.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **DISCUSSION: PART A**

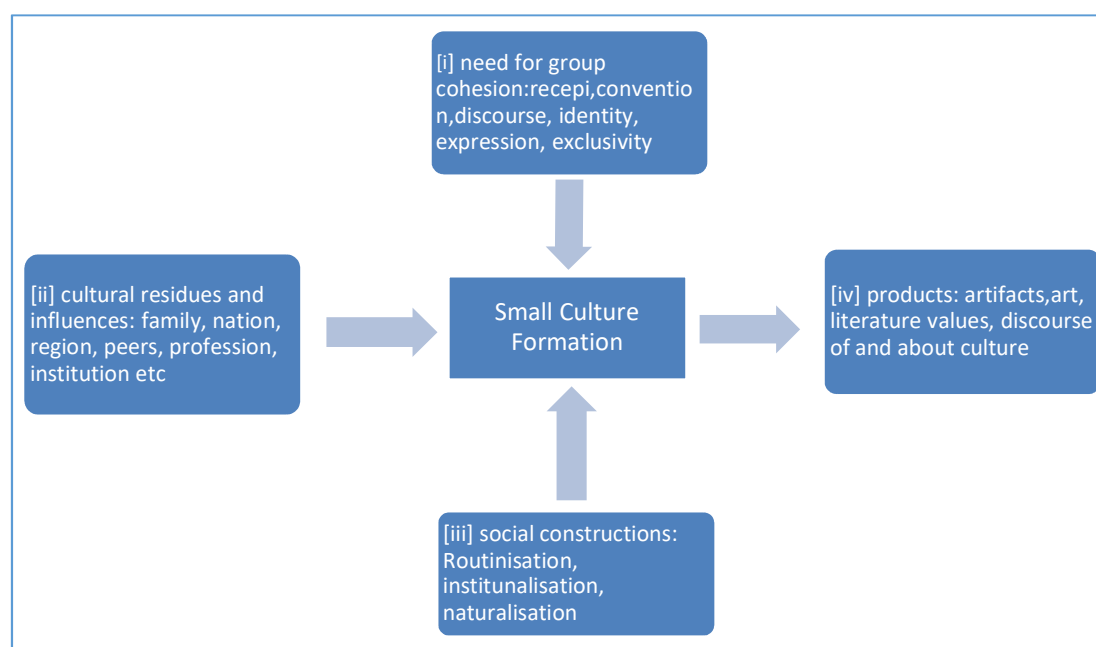
#### **7.0 Introduction**

The main aim of this research was to explore the dynamics of culture within the ESL classroom, acknowledging the potential salience of different cultural orientations involving large and small culture influences in order to understand ESL learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the target language in an ESL classroom. The discussion chapters consist of two chapters presenting Part A and Part B. Part A reviews the initial small culture formation model (Figure 3.3) which has contributed to the researcher's hybridized conceptual framework (Figure 3.5) and was used to investigate the culture of the ESL classroom in relation to learners' WTC. Part A also consists of individual narratives in relation to students' WTC, which exemplify different kinds of student profile. Such profiles contribute to an overall understanding of the newly developed nested model of the ESL Classroom Culture (Figure 7.1).

#### **7.1 Overview of the conceptual framework**

In this research, I started with Holliday's original small culture formation model to talk about the cultural make-up of the ESL classroom and its influence on learners' WTC. The small culture formation model (Figure 3.3) conceptualized by Holliday (1999) attaches culture to small social groupings and activities wherever there is

cohesive behaviour. Within group cohesive behaviour, new rules help to bind the group together whilst at the same time allowing cultural realities to be constructed and grow. Holliday noted, “we are all constantly, on an everyday basis, forming and re-forming culture as we go” (2015, p. 1). The researcher sees the ESL classroom domain as reflecting the small culture paradigm where learners from various cultural orientations and the differing academic practices at the learning institutions would negotiate on constructing new culture. The following is Holliday (1999) Small Culture formation model presented in the earlier part of the thesis (Figure 3.3)



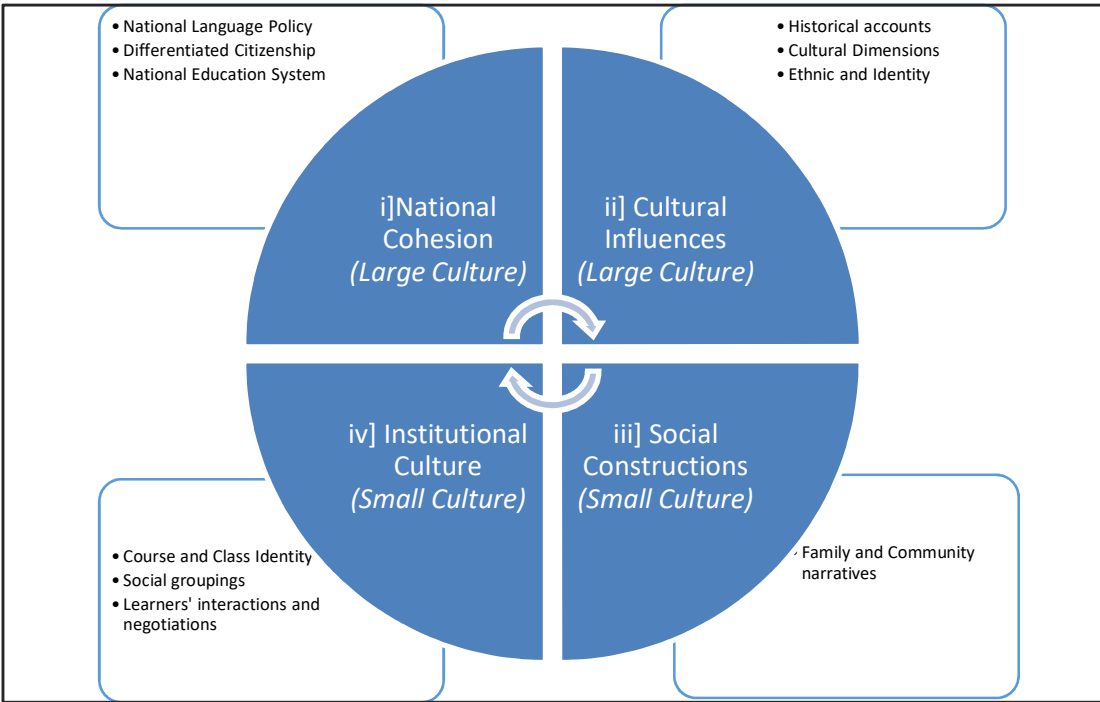
However, the concept of small culture as illustrated by Holliday (1999) does not entirely capture the essentialist notions of culture, which have particular importance and potential influence in the Malaysian context. Holliday (2014) argues that cultural resources such as, the way we are educated, the national institutions, government structures, media and economy are resources that we draw on but do not always confine to the ways they act and think. In other words, when approaching the issue of

culture of an ESL classroom, Holliday believes that it should not be underpinned by these large culture notions, but rather by the formation of new cultures. However, it could be argued that, in the context of learning English in Malaysia, where there is constitutional differentiation between ethnicities (particularly through the differentiated citizenship policy and ID cards) and their languages, the large culture imposed, becomes a potential influence on learners L2 learning behaviour. My findings and my experience as an ESL teacher revealed that communicating in the target language is perceived as challenging and demanding thus making WTC complex. To understand such discouraging perceptions, the researcher felt that it was important to recognize the potential salience of the different cultural orientations shaped by the large culture ideas and, at the same time acknowledging the small cultural ideas within the ESL classroom. Cao & Philp (2006) and MacIntyre & Legato (2011) note that learners' WTC has been recognized as a dynamic which endures both transient and trait-like characteristics. Thus to focus just on the small culture of the classroom would be insufficient.

Different to the small culture paradigm by Holliday (1999), and to conceptualize culture within the ESL classroom in Malaysia, the researcher has created a hybridized conceptual framework of the ESL classroom cultures that treats both the large culture and small culture as potential influences to learners' WTC in English. It is important to note that the model, which recognizes the large culture, does not impose pre-definitions or any stereotypical notions of Malaysian ESL classroom, but it provides

the initial framework to investigate the learners’ willingness to communicate in the target language within the immediacy of the ESL classroom.

The hybrid approach to the conceptual framework very much incorporates Holliday (1999) ideas on small cultures, viewed as emerging cultures in close proximity to the learners, and the inclusion of the large cultures mentioned in the contextual chapter, particularly the national cultures which set the setting of the research. The proposed *Hybridized Conceptual Framework of the ESL Classroom Culture* (presented earlier in Figure 3.5) suggests the large culture and the small culture might have an influence on the ESL learners’ WTC in the target language. A detailed explanation of each quadrant has been explained in Chapter 2.



As a consequence of the research project, verified by the data collected, the hybridized conceptual framework has been revised to the following nested model.

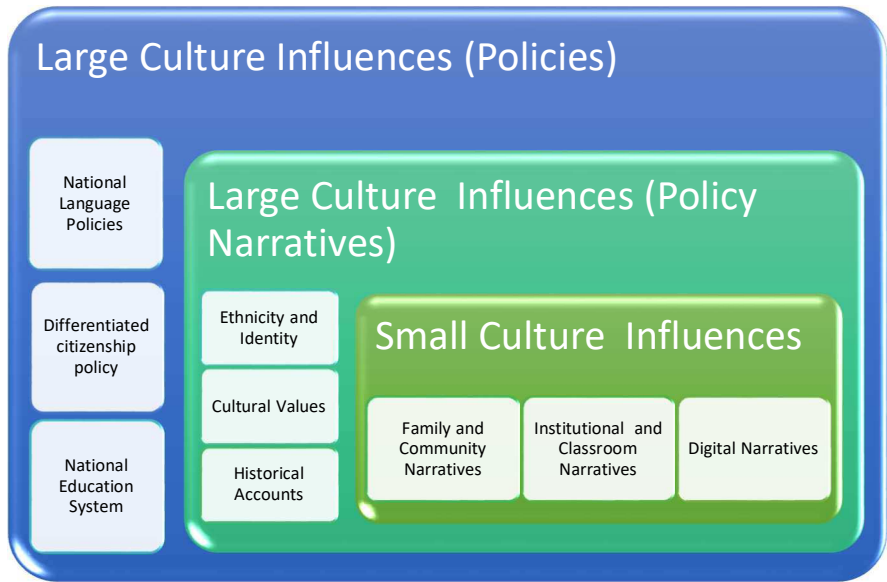


Figure 7.1 The nested model of the ESL classroom culture: The large and small culture influences to learners’ willingness to communicate (WTC) in English

Figure 7.1 describes the newly developed nested model of the ESL classroom culture. This model does not reduce the ESL classroom culture to specific essential features, instead the nested model of ESL classroom culture illustrates the complex integration of the large culture and small culture in influencing ESL learners’ state of WTC in the target language. Both large and small cultures make up the ESL classroom culture and should not be seen as separate. These large cultural ideas of *the national language policies* and *national education system*, imposed at a national policy level, have had a considerable impact on ESL learners’ perceptions, interactions and behaviour towards not only the target language in general but also WTC within the ESL classroom. *Ethnicity and identity, cultural values and historical accounts* influences are made up of large culture policy narratives which are essentially made up of stories that carry

political shadows along with them and at the same time which carry a particular kind of weight for ESL learners, particularly in the ways they view both themselves as individuals and also the way they view others using the target language. However, it is crucial to note that these large culture ideas, can be changed according to the implemented newly developed values and structures within the ESL classroom.

Potentially influenced by policy narratives, the small culture narratives were seen to influence learners' behaviour, values and the support received with regard to willingness to communicate in the target language. In fact, in responding to English language needs and the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, small culture influences such as *family and community narratives, institutional and classroom narratives and digital narratives* have significantly reoriented and encouraged ESL learners' perceptions and hence their state of willingness to communicate in the target language.

This new nested model arose as a consequence of researching ESL classroom cultures, which both contain elements of learners experiences, the host or the institutional values and structures which govern certain perceptions and behaviour through large culture narratives. This resonates with Cao & Philip (2006) and MacIntyre & Legato (2011) earlier studies, as they noted that learners' WTC is a dynamic in which both transient and trait-like characteristics interact with one another. However, in this research there is an acknowledgement of the importance of the large culture influences cultivated in space and over time, and which resonate with individuals in diverse ways.

Holliday's (2010, p. 175) later work however noted on small culture being definite and too defining in nature. Holiday proposes the notion of *cultural reality* and *cultural arena*. *Cultural reality* very much refers to the psychological entity which may differ from one person to the other, while *cultural arena* refers to the setting in which cultural realities take place.

### **7.1.1 Overview of the ESL learners in this study.**

This study draws on observations and interview responses, which explored ESL learners' state of willingness to communicate in the target language in the ESL classroom at a public university. This research focused on Malaysian ESL learners who were in their third year belonging to the engineering departments (FKM, FKT, FKE, FC) and the social sciences (FP and FM).

The participants were young adults aged between 19-22 years old and consisted of Malays, Chinese, Indians and other minor ethnicities from Sabah and Sarawak. It came to the researchers' attention that learners were either bilingual or multilingual as they lived in multilingual and multicultural environments in Malaysia and possessed different linguistic repertoires. For example, a Malay learner who spoke Bahasa Melayu (BM) as his mother tongue may also be proficient or at least able to have a basic understanding of the languages spoken by his Chinese, Indian or Sabahan counterparts and English. Communication among the different ethnicities was primarily in BM. Examples of bilingualism and multilingualism, which were unique to the individuals involved in this study, have been previously presented in Chapter 4

(Table 4.2). Participant's description in Table 4.2 shows learners are from various ethnicities and potentially utilize more than one language in their daily communication.

Within the ESL classroom experience, common practices involve learners sometimes working in BM, translating it to the mother tongue and sometimes code-switching. For example, it was common to hear ESL learners inserting English words into sentences composed of words entirely in their native languages and common also to hear one learner speaking entirely in English to which the other is responding entirely in Malay. The way these learners were brought up, educated and position themselves in various social settings, regardless of whether they are Malay, Chinese or Indian, allows them to influence and to be influenced by each other's languages suggesting a lack of language boundaries.

English language learning is not new to the ESL learners as it is taught from the start of their schooling at age seven years old and is now used in various professional domains in Malaysia. Good proficiency in the English language is often regarded as a form of future investment for the learners. According to Burns and Richards (2018), educational policies in many countries have mandated an international language like English as second language.

In fact, at the time the study was carried out, English was primarily used as the medium of teaching and learning in most of the content subjects (e.g. Engineering subjects) and also in outside classroom activities conforming to the international standards of the



university: “many countries in Asia have opened their doors to a model of transnational education...a move that itself necessitates a change in language policy from national languages to English” (Gill & Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 2). ESL learners at the higher institution were not just regarded as second language learners, but they were expected to become second language speakers, particularly with the advent of globalization. However, in order to become a second language speaker, to communicate in the target language is seen to be a complex trajectory for these ESL learners (Rajadurai, 2010).

### **7.1.2 Overview on ESL learners’ state of willingness to communicate (WTC) in this study.**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, WTC is defined as the intention or the desire to initiate communication (McIntyre et al., 1998) and is viewed as playing a key role in facilitating the process for ESL learners to become L2 speakers. Through the findings of the study in general, it was revealed that the majority of the ESL learners showed positivity towards the learning of the target language but demonstrated differing degrees of WTC. Every participant acknowledged the importance of English, especially when it was extensively used for teaching and learning purposes. Since the ESL learners involved were third year students, the immediate needs of English were felt particularly for the purpose of internship and graduation in their final year. Most importantly, learners were aware that proficiency in spoken English was highly sought after for the purpose of employability.

In the attempt to identify the influence of the large culture and small culture on ESL learners' WTC in the target language, a majority of the learners expressed that speaking in the target language was challenging and quite perplexing, with only a few learners claiming to feel at ease about communicating in the language. Within the immediacy of the ESL classroom, findings in this study shed light on the topic, that ESL learners in general self-assessed themselves within three different states or degrees of WTC. It is important to note again that the degrees of learners WTC is based on learners' self-assessment about their state of WTC, rather than on any objective criteria.

- *Low or lacking the willingness to communicate* in the target language.
- *Moderate willingness to communicate* in the target language.
- *High willingness to communicate* in the target language.

Nevertheless, ESL learners' state of WTC proved to be a dynamic process rather than a stationary one. In other words, learners' state of WTC was very much situation-dependent. It was observed that ESL learners' intensity and engagement to communicate in the target language fluctuated across various interactions with large culture and small culture influences. Such findings conform to recent research by Kang (2005) and Yu (2015) on EFL learners, which identifies that learners' state of WTC, is dynamic and situation-specific. In this research, it was discovered that the majority of learners were receptive towards the target language, however learners' state of WTC was very significantly conditioned by many large culture and small culture influences acting as factors to potentially discourage or, at the same time, eventually encourage

ESL learners' state of WTC in the target language. In this research, it is worth mentioning the definition of WTC is expanded to include responding as well as initiating the use of Malay and the inclusion of written language in digital communication. Being able to use the native language in ESL class and the digital communication somehow helps to increase with comprehension at the same motivation when learning English, as they can discuss via their mother tongue in class or digitally. Such achievement would promote greater WTC within the ESL class.

The following are examples of individual stories of ESL learners and the influences of large culture and small culture on their different states of WTC in the target language. It is important to point out that every individual's state of WTC was a combination of influences rather than simply one particular form of influence. However, for each of these individuals, there were dominant influences, which tended to negatively influence their WTC. Examples of these competing forces are shown in the following stories. It is crucial to note that, while acknowledging that most learners will be distinctive and having a complex combination of influences occurring in their profile, these particular individuals exemplify a particular kind of profile. The following are the examples.

## 7.2 Case A: Fahmi

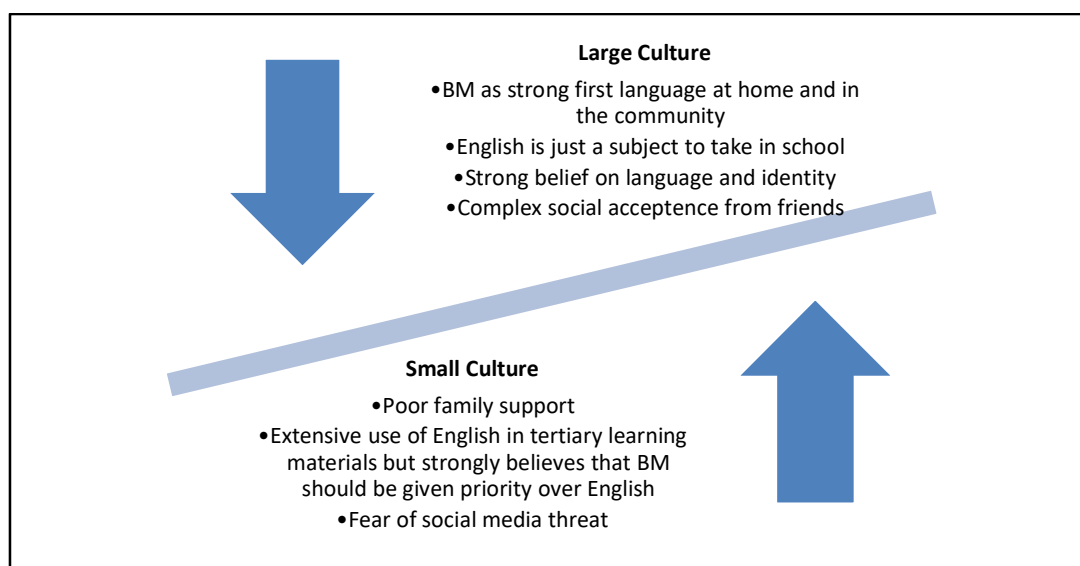


Figure 7.2  
influences.

Case A- Fahmi's poor state of WTC in English and the large culture and small culture

Fahmi demonstrated a poor state of willingness to communicate. Fahmi is a Malay and originated from a village, *Besut, Terengganu*, a place he described as rural. The community and schools he attended consisted of a majority of ethnic Malays who spoke a strong *Malay Terengganu* and *Kelantan* dialect. English language was entirely absent within these settings.

Fahmi strongly believed that being Malaysian, the BM was the primary language, which should be given strong positioning and importance instead of English, especially at tertiary education level. He claimed that teachers in the schools he attended and his parents did not place any specific emphasis on the target language.

Fahmi reflected a strong sense of nationalism when he highlighted some of the national policies concerning national language and national education. He clearly mentioned that learning the target language was acceptable, but to make it the medium of instruction at higher institutions suggested that English reflected a higher standard or was seen as having greater value and supplanted the national language.

Fahmi claimed that since he was now taking his *Bachelor in Management (Technology)* degree, he often felt half-hearted about communicating in English, although English was frequently used in the course. Unexpectedly, Fahmi noted that his lack of willingness was further pressured by the fact that there were ‘*haters*’ in the class or friends that disliked other people speaking English. Fahmi noted that he had experienced rejection, being stared at and laughed at for making linguistic mistakes. His greatest concern was about how these ‘issues’ in class could be extended on social media. Hence, the best option would be to reduce communication so ‘*haters*’ and mistakes could be avoided. Connected to that perception, Fahmi also believed that being quiet was a way to respect a teacher. However, if the teacher called out his name, he would definitely respond in English.

To conclude, Fahmi’s lack of interest and lack of willingness towards the target language stemmed from his large culture ideas about the national language and was partly historically and politically shaped. He supported the national narratives around a unified national identity and differentiated citizenry. Fahmi strongly felt that English should not supplant BM although English was used in his tertiary courses. He received a lack of support from his family and school, to begin with, and had experienced the

tension of friends' evaluations and the fact the social media could magnify his poor proficiency to a wider group of people outside his ESL class. The impact of digital narratives was acknowledged as substantial, capable of constraining WTC within the ESL classroom, especially when linguistic mistakes could be made viral.

### 7.3 Case B: Farhan

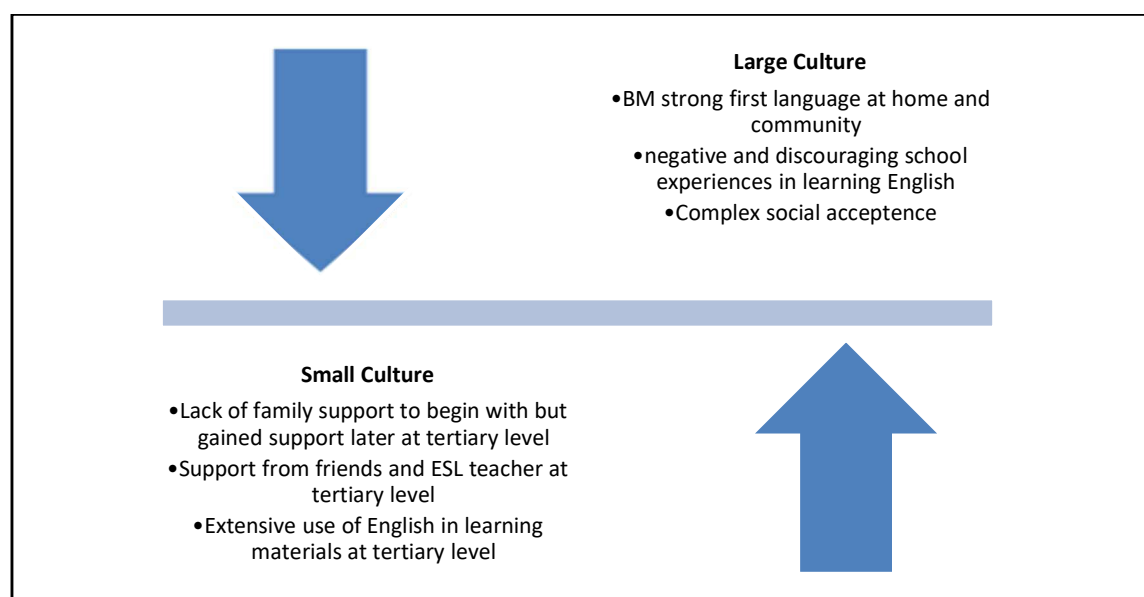


Figure 7.3 Case B-Farhan's moderate level of WTC and the large and small culture influences.

Farhan demonstrated poor WTC, to begin with, but eventually motivated himself to communicate as he approached tertiary level. He described himself as moderate in terms of his WTC. He relates this to his poor level of English proficiency and the minimal exposure to English in the family and the community he came from.

Farhan came from Kelantan and English was hardly used as the community spoke the Kelantanese dialect in daily communications. Although Farhan's mother is a secondary school English teacher, he claimed that he was never supported to learn the

language in his early stages of schooling. The small community was also not exposed to the target language, as English did not serve any purposes in the community.

Farhan claimed that to speak in English was often difficult, as it would require him to translate from 'Kelantanese' BM to English. The strong family and community narratives, where English was hardly used strongly influenced his state of poor willingness to communicate. In addition, Farhan claimed that he had his education in an Arabic / Islamic school where the Arabic language was the priority, and the only exposure to English was as a subject to be learnt and passed in examinations.

He explained that English was so foreign that most of his friends hated the language. Farhan claimed that his poor willingness was reinforced by a negative educational experience where he was laughed at by the teacher and friends for mispronouncing an English word, which left him entirely withdrawn from the target language during his schooling experiences.

Farhan's negative experiences with the target language were further revived when his first attempt to join tertiary education was rejected due to his lack of proficiency in English during the interview, despite the fact that he had obtained an excellent score in other subjects. Farhan claimed that his speech during the interview was scripted and memorized, as that was how English was learnt in schools. Learning English was merely for passing exams.

During his diploma level, his lecturer in the English class discouraged him because he was struggling to read well. In addition, Farhan reported abrasive treatment by the lecturer during class project presentations, which were carried out in English. All these strong ideas of English being the measurement of success caused Farhan to accumulate negative feelings towards the target language. Farhan specifically said that achievements were often marked down by lack of proficiency and anyone proficient in English was believed to be highly educated; hence, Farhan would avoid communicating to avoid being evaluated in any way.

Fortunately, at tertiary level, Farhan claimed that he gained support from a teacher from an English language-learning centre who had a strong influence on his motivation to improve on his proficiency in English. Again there was a point that he was discouraged when his internship in *Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB)* in *Tumpat, Kelantan* did not even use a single word of English, placing doubts on the importance of the language as claimed in the second language policy.

However, due to the amount of English used at tertiary level, Farhan remained positive about developing his communicative skills. Nonetheless, he reported on the pressure he received from friends who disliked his efforts to speak in English. Such complex social acceptance was shown in term of teasing or the weird looks he received. Therefore, he would talk only when he felt safe to talk and apparently, this was during his ESL class. Interestingly there were also times when he became the representative to ask questions on behalf of his friends during an ESL class as the rest lacked the confidence to do so.



Farhan claimed that his ESL teacher and his ESL classmates were very supportive, which further reinforced his interest towards the target language and willingness to communicate in the target language. In Farhan's case, although the large cultural influence strongly influenced his poor willingness to communicate, the aspects of small cultures of family and institutional narratives managed to push against these negative influences towards a better state of willingness to communicate. However, Farhan was still selective of when, where and with whom he would communicate in the target language.

#### 7.4 Case C: Ana

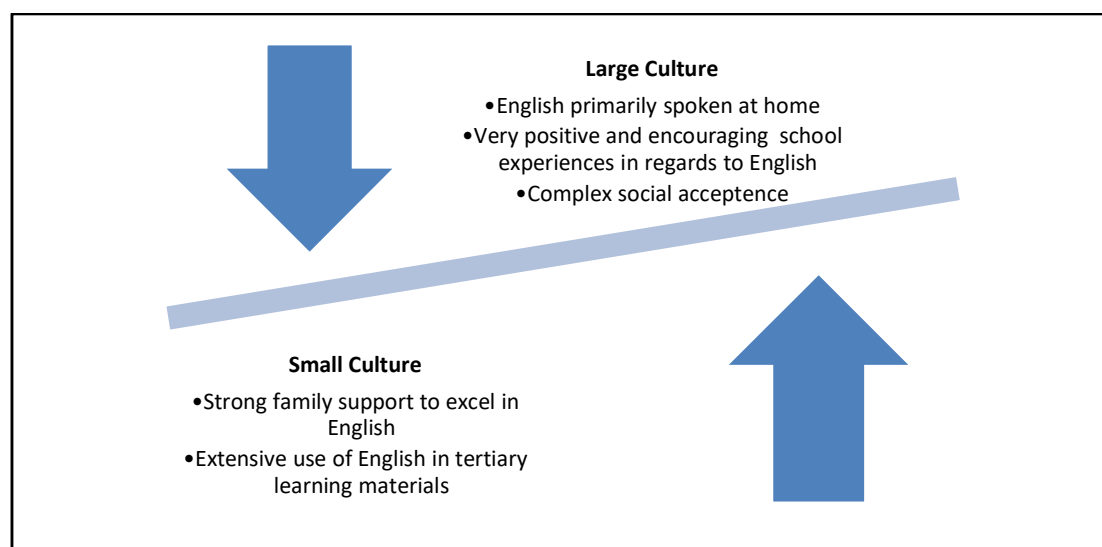


Figure 7.4 Case C-Ana's high WTC within selective context and the influences of large and small culture.

Ana demonstrates a high willingness to communicate but within a selectively situated context. Ana is a Malay from Sabah and went to a Chinese vernacular primary school and Arabic/religious Secondary school. Being Multilingual, Ana speaks Malay Sabah (BM with Sabahan dialect), Mandarin, minimal Arabic and English as English was one of the primary languages spoken at home, encouraged by her parents. The reason

English was spoken at home was due to her parents' belief in the importance of the language for future investment.

Explaining her interest towards the target language, Ana recalled being exposed to the language as early as her kindergarten years through her learning materials and recalled competing with siblings to obtain the best English exam results and English proficiency. In fact, Ana recalled that she had very encouraging ESL teachers and very positive school experiences, which contributed to her state of interest. Pursuing her studies in Civil Engineering, Ana reflected even greater motivation to become a proficient speaker as she strongly felt that proficiency in the target language was an added bonus to her future career.

On the other hand, Ana claimed that her state of WTC in English was often challenged by friends who would evaluate her linguistic errors. She feared it could become the source for others to shame her in class or even on an online platform. Ana personally said she had a friend who was traumatized and now refused to speak in English due to such circumstances, which was why Ana had become more cautious about communicating in the target language. Ana commented on the importance of being at the same level as others by which she meant speaking the language of the majority, especially if it had the tendency to offend others, especially among similar ethnicities. Ana claimed the only way to justify her use of English was to use the language at the right place and at the right time and only if it was really critical to do so. Ana was confident in communicating in English in the ESL class but again would evaluate the state of her friends and teacher before speaking in English.

To conclude, Ana's high state of willingness to communicate was often challenged by the large culture ideas of the education system which often focused on accuracy and exam success and by the threat posed by social media, despite having strong family support towards the use of the target language and a strong drive to be a proficient second language speaker.

## 7.5 Case D: Nazri

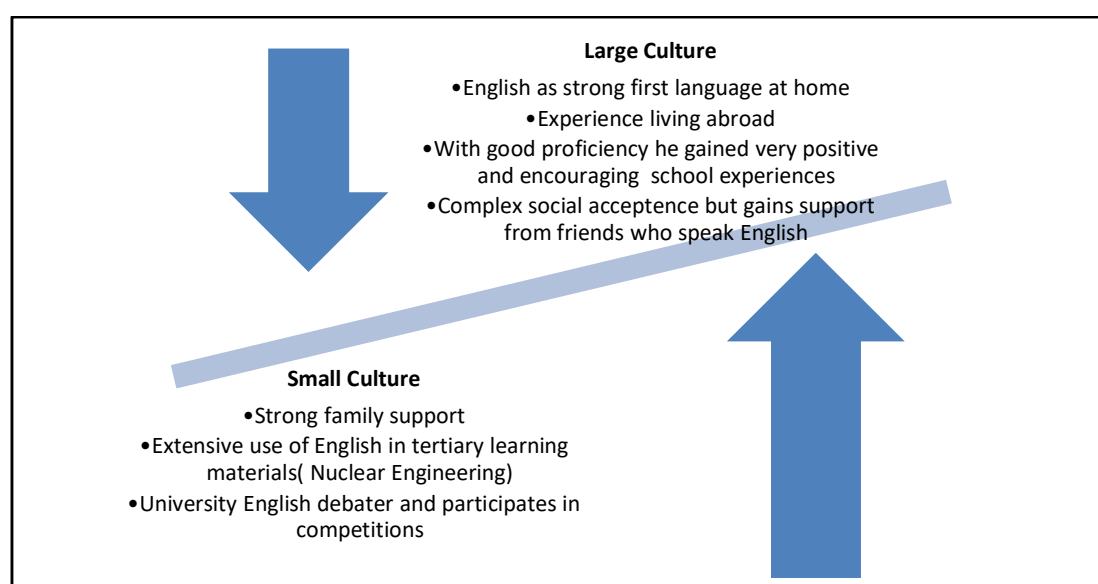


Figure 7.5 Case D-Nazri's high willingness to communicate and the large and small culture influences

Nazri demonstrated a high willingness to communicate in English. His parents were highly educated, and Nazri had experiences of schooling abroad in the UK when his mother was furthering her PhD. Apparently, English became his first language at home with a mix of BM. He studied Nuclear Engineering in which English was required at a greater level through his educational materials and activities. Nazri claimed that all his learning materials were in English and his faculty often networked with

international companies as part of their learning strategies. Nazri also took part as a university English club debater, something which he had been involved in since his schooling years.

Apparently, Nazri claimed that his spontaneity in using English was often resented among those who felt inferior and intimidated, and they would avoid communicating with him just because they perceived that his English was too good. Nazri reported similar experiences upon returning from the UK when he felt alienated by his schoolmates.

Nazri noted the stereotyping mindset that people often held against those who were proficient in the target language, which presumed that just because you are good in English, you are generally smart in other matters as well. Nazri claimed he was often placed at a *'higher status'*. *"We perceived English as a sort of winners' language; if you can master it you will win at life right?"* At university, Nazrin sought his own group of friends who were highly motivated to improve proficiency in the target language and who motivated each other to communicate in the target language despite the pressure they received from people around them. Such mini-community allowed safe spaces for learners like Nazrin to communicate in the target language without being negatively perceived by others.

With other circles of friends, Nazri would mask his ability and communicate in BM in order to fit in with the group and meet social expectations. Nazri strongly felt the community he was with were not happy about him speaking English with members of similar ethnicity (e.g. Malay with Malay) as compared to members of other ethnics.

The tendency for one person to be alienated was high if you did not speak the same language. But because his circle of friends who spoke English belonged to the same ESL class, Nazri felt highly confident and willing to speak in English. At the same time, Nazri strongly believed in the role of the teacher to motivate learners to speak the target language and never differentiated between learners according to their proficiency level, as this would create a caste system between the good and the poor learners.

To conclude, it was clear that Nazri's high willingness to communicate was due to the strong influence of the small culture narratives of his first language, family support and institutional experiences, which had dominated the influence of the large culture ideas despite learners' complex social acceptance.

These profiles give a glimpse into the world of individuals and their WTC. They reflect different kinds of balances or imbalances of large and small culture influences and highlight the complexity of willingness to communicate for each student. It is crucial to note that while acknowledging these particular kinds of WTC profile exemplified by these learners, other participants potentially consist of a complex combination of influences occurring in their WTC profile.

## CHAPTER 8

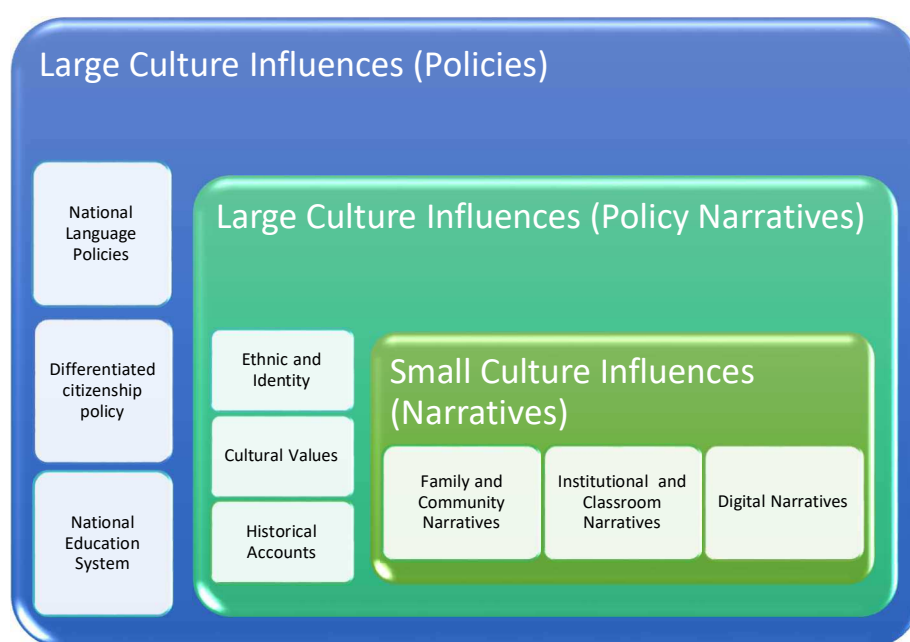
### DISCUSSION: PART B

#### 8.0 Introduction

In Part B of the discussion chapter, the influence of the small cultures will be discussed in more detail and will occasionally use data from the students discussed in Part A of the discussion chapter. A thorough discussion of the findings is presented in this chapter based on large culture and small culture influences in relation ESL learners' willingness to communicate.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the culture within the ESL classroom in influencing learners' state of WTC, each section of the discussion in chapter Part B will include both large and small culture influences, as the entire culture of the ESL classroom is made up of complex cultural orientations believed to have both a potentially positive and/or negative impact on ESL learners' WTC in the English language. It is important to mention that all the discussion in this chapter are all related to the mentioned conceptual framework of the hybridized model of the ESL classroom culture (Figure 3.5) and later the new *Nested Model of the ESL Classroom Culture*. The new *Nested Model of ESL Classroom Culture* (Figure 7.1) is a significant discovery in this study, as a consequence of researching ESL classroom cultures, which both contain elements of large cultures, and small cultures, which learners experience, and the imported orientations which govern certain perceptions and

behaviour towards willingness to communicate in English. The discussion of learners WTC this chapter is structured in relation to the nested model, which consists of the *large culture influences (policies)*, the *large culture (policy narratives)* and the *small culture narratives*. Below is the *Nested Model of ESL Classroom Culture* (Figure 7.1) as described in the previous chapter.



## 8.1 Multilingualism and WTC in English Language Learning (ELL)- (Large Culture)

Many studies on WTC suggest that learners' motivation exerts a crucial influence on learners' willingness to communicate in the target language (MacIntyre et al., 2001; Hashimoto, 2002; Yashima, 2002 and Yu, 2009). Findings from other studies reveal that prevailing obstacles affecting ESL learners' lack of WTC concerned having little

motivation or purpose and not having authentic platforms to communicate in the target language.

Findings revealed that BM was not only used and understood among Malay learners but also among Indians, Chinese and other minority ethnicities in Malaysia. The widespread and vigorous use of the national language by various ethnic groups restricted the platform for ESL learners to communicate in English. In fact, willing speakers of the English language in their immediate community were very rare to find, primarily because of the dominant usage of BM (national language) in learners' everyday rituals.

The BM language is the official language in government administration, the educational system, the media and academia. It is used as the language of instruction in state schools and is taught as a compulsory subject and often the medium of instruction at the tertiary level, especially in public universities. Entry to higher institutions requires students to obtain at least a credit in their *Bahasa Malaysia SPM* examination. The national language policy promotes BM usage as the unifying force in society. The major highlight of the national language for the Malaysian government was illuminated through a popular national tagline of “*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa or Bahasa Malaysia is the soul of the people*” (Gill, 2004, p. 137) to signify the continuing role of BM as a catalyst for national identity and ethnic unity for the multicultural nation.

In places where Malays are dominant, English was regarded almost as an irrelevant language to learners by participants in this research. This was noticeable in the case of Fahmi (Case A) from Terengganu when he recalled that his schoolmates were all



Malays and everyone spoke the local BM dialect. Findings revealed that some ESL learners in this study tended to utilize various mother tongue languages in addition to BM as the national language, as they lived in a multicultural society.

In cases like this, English would potentially be regarded as a foreign language to these learners as it was unfamiliar and hardly used within their local community contexts. In places like Kelantan for example, Malays make up the majority (95%) followed by Chinese (3.8%), *Siamese*, an ethnic group from Thailand' as well as Indians (0.3%) (Jabatan Perangkaan Kelantan, 2015). This scenario in Kelantan explains why English is rarely used in everyday language and is thus often perceived as a foreign language. In addition, according to Don (2003), the dialect of the Kelantanese, (especially those who were born there and have lived there since they were young), is their first language and standard BM is their "second language," the language that they learn at school.

Such a case further highlights the 'foreign' state of the target language in such a community. It is likely that this scenario is also common in other parts of Malaysia. Findings note that such cases are prominent among learners from areas in Sabah, Sarawak, Kelantan and Terengganu. This is consistent with a study by Wahi (2015) among undergraduates in a university in Malaysia, which found that a significant number of the ESL participants in her study regarded English as an alien language.

In general, the vitality that BM, as the national language, and other mother tongues carry and the few opportunities to communicate in English have impacted on not just learners' motivation but also their capability to communicate in the target language as

it is hardly practised in their daily lives. Considering that BM and other mother tongues languages are substantially used in the formal and informal situations among and between learners of various ethnicities, there is very little doubt that hesitance or lack of willingness to communicate in the target language in the ESL classroom could stem from the lack of platforms for English to be used in intra-group and inter-group communication. Logically learners cannot attach themselves to English as the platform to use the language is restricted and primarily confined to classroom settings. Indeed, willingness to communicate in the target language is believed to rely critically on the speaking opportunities in the target language (Pattapong, 2010).

#### **8.1.1 Dominance of L1 (BM) as an indicator of national identity and as a lingua franca for different ethnicities**

Another strong influence leading to the lack of WTC is the inhibition by the first language (L1). As noted in the findings. *“Malaysia is ethnolinguistically dynamic, with its many communities holding to their traditions, cultures and languages”* (Albury & Aye, 2016, p. 71). The powerful large culture image of the ESL learners’ socio-linguistic setting.

*Malaysia was never conceived to be a nation with one language and one culture, as it will lose completely its distinctive characteristics as a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural society. (Lim Kit Siang, 1982, p. 8 in Pennycook, 1994).*

Participants in this study claimed that communicating in the English language was such a demanding task that they almost naturally and spontaneously translated or used knowledge of their L1 in their efforts to communicate in English.

Although several studies have noted the effectiveness of using the translation method as one of the powerful tools that have contributed to students' confidence in understanding the foreign language, expressions and expressing ideas in the target language (Al-Musawi, 2014), several studies by Malaysian scholars have suggested translation can lead to transfer from the mother tongue which has contributed to the inappropriate use of grammar and syntax in the target language. Malay grammar seems to influence learners' English grammar (Maros, Tan and Salehuddin, 2007; Darus & Subramaniam, 2009).

In this study, the ESL learners claimed they always referred to their first language system when they needed to communicate in the target language. Musa, Koo & Azman (2012) in their study, assert that many ESL learners view English as a difficult language to learn and thus rely heavily on the translation method using the dictionary. Research by Nambiar, Ibrahim & Krish (2008) discovered that ESL learners are highly dependent on BM to help them comprehend the English language as they lack other language learning strategies and thus use the translation method to a certain extent, assisted by L2 learning.

According to the participants, translation is regarded as an increasingly difficult task as it involves words that do not have English equivalents and a knowledge of syntax to create well-formed and grammatically correct sentences to deliver ideas in English. In doing so, ESL learners experience tension and anxiety about committing errors in terms of vocabulary, phrases and grammar. It is even worse when no words could be found that were the equivalent in the target language.

Such impediments can contribute to withdrawal and the lack of willingness to communicate in the target language. It could be argued that the participants do not possess strong translation skills, thus avoiding communicating in the target language would be the best resolution to escape such difficulty. Jalaludin et al. (2008) in their studies find syntactical differences between the Malay and the English language are one of the major hurdles in influencing ESL learners to successfully acquire the target language.

This study clearly indicates that the customary use of the mother tongue languages by the ESL learners in their daily communications significantly inhibits ESL learners' efforts to communicate in the target language. This often results in the feeling of awkwardness, reluctance and hesitance as English is not customarily used, hence lacking the sense of connection to it. Other studies indicate that without substantial support and a conducive learning environment to support second language learning, an adequate and meaningful language experience is impossible. The lack of support to use the target language in the home environment and community contributes greatly to the low proficiency level (Musa, Koo & Azman, 2012).

In addition, findings in this study made it obvious that the influence of L1 combined with limited English proficiency contributed to the lack of willingness to communicate in the target language in the ESL class. Such finding is supported by an earlier study by Lu and Liu (2007) who demonstrated that learners who suffer from an inadequate knowledge of vocabulary and who have difficulty communicating their message in the L2 will often experience anxiety and hence will withdraw from communicating in the

L2. McIntyre (2007) contends that ESL learners' level of proficiency in the target language can significantly affect their degree of willingness to communicate. Such a state is clearly reflected in the study by low proficiency ESL participants who resorted to silence as the best option rather than initiating a conversation in the target language. Peng (2007), who studied WTC in an EFL classroom context among Chinese learners to measure linguistic, cognitive, affective and cultural readiness, concludes that reluctance to engage in second language communication is attributable to one's lack of readiness. At this point, it could be concluded that the dominance of BM as the L1 and the lingua franca for other ethnicities combined with the lack of platforms to communicate in the target language serves as primary influence to the lack of willingness to communicate.

To conclude, the vitality of the national language spoken among the various ethnic groups and the lack of a platform to communicate in the target language, together with the national language policy positioned at the macro level of national policy is shown to strongly influence ESL learners' perceptions and attitudes towards their willingness to communicate in the target language. There are insufficient speakers of English and platforms on which to communicate in the target language to enable this to succeed.

## **8.2 The influence of the second language policy on perceptions and willingness to communicate (WTC) in English at HEI's. (Large Culture Influence)**

Although English in Malaysia began as a language imposed by British colonialists, it is now a language of prestige and regarded as a means to better jobs, higher education,

improved living standards and social success (Omar, 1992). English was implemented as the medium of instruction in selected areas of the curriculum to better equip the nation in facing globalization (Rajadurai, 2010) and the modern dominance of English within key industries/work environments. Throughout the study, ESL participants reflected a strong understanding in the prominence of English and its reward in terms of job opportunities and career advancement. The policy has impacted on learners significantly given that the target language now has an international standing and global significance. Some learners showed shifts of interest towards the target language when it is much used internationally but were often hesitant due to the lack of opportunities to communicate in the target language, as discussed earlier.

Despite this acknowledgement of the high importance given to English internationally, some ESL learners argued that English had little significance as it was hardly used as a language in everyday communication in Malaysia. With much focus on English for instrumental purposes, learners claimed that English lacked the socio-communicative goals they wished for, particularly as a medium of communication and this contributed to their low willingness to communicate in the target language.

From learners' feedback, it is clear that such strong large culture influences built around the positioning of the target language as a kind of imperative for individuals and the nation, created tensions, particularly for those who had marginal exposure to the target language and also those with poor English competency. This, in turn, produced negativity regarding their language capability and, even more concerning, resistance towards the target language. In these circumstances, it is fair to say that the

implementation of the second language policy, without a meaningful and substantial platform to support the practice of the target language, has become a deterrent for ESL learners, inhibiting their willingness to communicate in the target language.

Malaysia is a multiracial, multilingual and multicultural country in which most of its people speak at least two or more languages (Abdullah and Chan, 2012). The sociolinguistic context of Malaysia is rather complex and unique. In contradistinction to what has been claimed in the earlier chapter, recent research in 2018 by Simons and Fennig discovered 136 native languages spoken within Malaysia rather than 15 native languages (Albury and Aye, 2016). In cases where English is almost irrelevant in learners' lives, findings revealed the feeling of hesitance often inhibited ESL learners' willingness to communicate, and this was due to the target language being perceived as a foreign or alien language. Its status and relevance do not echo those of the wider education policy. The large culture influences and policy narratives of English used as the language of globalization, societal, individual success, economic competitiveness is in contrast to the small cultures around family and community and institutional cultures, closely reflecting the newly created nested model of ESL classroom culture.

Adnan (2011), through his research, claims that English is likely to be regarded as a foreign language rather than a second language, particularly for the Bumiputra Malays in the Sabah and Sarawak. Parallel to Adnan's study, ESL learners, particularly from Sabah and Sarawak in this project, significantly claimed that the target language was irrelevant within their communities and limited only to being taught in English classes in schools. Indeed, coming from the communities where there were limited venues for

ESL learners to use the target language, ESL learners' efforts to communicate in the target language in the ESL classroom at the higher education level were contested and challenging.

### **8.3 National education system and learners WTC in ELL**

A major highlight of the study revealed that learners believed that the national education system they experienced was one of the reasons for their poor communicative performance. The move to prioritize English as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum reflected Malaysia's aspiration to become a developed nation, particularly in the age of globalization (Rajadurai, 2011). However, this study revealed that despite extensive exposure (10-11 years) to the English language through the education system, learners were still struggling to become competent speakers. Learners strongly claimed that they learned English only to pass the English exams necessary for progression/and or access to further schooling, rather than for communicative purposes. In fact, some learners demonstrated that learning of the target language began with unclear motives, particularly among learners with restricted exposure to the target language.

Musa, Azman and Koo (2012), in their study among ESL learners, concluded that the ESL syllabus and teachers' teaching approaches in Malaysia needed immediate revision as the teaching of English language is based on rote learning and the mastery of specific language skills which are then tested in examinations. Unfortunately, speaking is not an important component tested in national examinations (Spawa &



Hassan, 2013). Apparently, this lack of exposure to English only increased the social distance between those proficient and less proficient English users, potentially due to the lack of interest and perceived purpose and relevance in using the target language.

However, it was noted, in general, in this research, good achievements in English examinations along with other subjects promised advancement in education and better career opportunities. Although English was not the only subject claiming to be central to learners' success: failure or poor performance in English potentially jeopardized one's future, especially in terms of advancement towards higher education.

### **8.3.1 High-stakes subjects, exam-oriented system and accuracy: influencing communicative competence**

The English Language in Malaysia is, to a considerable extent, regarded as a high-stakes subject as it is characterized by the profound consequences it brings to learners' lives in years to come when there is lack of success. High-stakes is defined as "such situation where admissions, promotions, placements or graduations are dependent on the tests" (Madaus, 1990). Findings from this study have illustrated that, to some extent, examinations have caused learners' learning attitudes and learning objectives to be unclear. In other words, learning the target language was only to pass the exams instead of for daily communication purposes. Confirming the work by Munoz (2017), the practice of high stakes subject testing is not the most conducive factor in motivating learners to learn, as the focus is on outcomes and grades rather than interests and fluency of communication.

In this regard, it is fair to say that large culture ideas about English success and its positioning within the education system have resulted in a narrow notion of what it means to be successful. Such situation could also explain why learners are naturally quick to negatively label themselves and others as incompetent, as described in the earlier discussion.

A local newspaper reported, *“Another discrepancy of the exam-oriented system is that it destroys the pupils’ passion for knowledge since they are forced to learn something that hardly leaves space for their own creativity and innovation”* (The Star, 29 October 2013). The Malaysian education system reflects the prevailing dominance of examinations (Koo, 2008). Results from high-stakes public examinations are treated as a major yardstick of students’ progression to higher levels of education or occupational opportunities (Ali and Talib, 2013). Hence, it is not surprising when learners claim communication often takes place only in the event of controlled assessment processes.

As Marimuthu, Mukherjee and Jasbir (1984) and asserted, the exam-oriented system is reported to govern the learning behaviour of learners. Lack of willingness to communicate was also the impact of teachers’ examination-oriented lessons. These were often driven by the national examinations and so neglected the communicative component as it carried little weight in examinations. Learners regularly claimed that learning to speak in English was only for the purpose of fulfilling the examination components.

Research by Pandian (2002), sadly reveals that teachers' most popular teaching methods are drilling and using past years' examination questions, worksheets and exercise books. Methods used by teachers and exam expectations restrict learners to rote learning, memorization and rehearsing scripts, as disclosed in the findings. With so much focus on exams, it could be argued that learners' communicative skills are underdeveloped, and this certainly emerged in the findings from this study. Due to the nature of a competitive educational system that focuses on high scores above anything else, it is unfortunate but perhaps understandable that some ESL learners in this study have not shifted from a rote learning culture and have resorted to preparing scripted speech, as they are concerned about producing grammatically correct sentences despite being at university level. Examples in the findings revealed that learners were exposed to drilling for correct answers and learning English primarily for examinations. This account for learners' hesitance to communicate in the target language.

The Ministry of Education (2003) reported that classroom teaching was characterized by the teacher-centred approach, chalk and talk and drill methods. Such teacher-centred approach, combined with the exam-oriented system, potentially creates learners who are vulnerable to others' evaluations and judgements of their L2 competencies. The strong positioning of exams has effectively diminished communicative competence as the focus of learning English. At one point in this study, learners were honest enough to mention their state of reluctance to communicate in the target language.

Accuracy seems to be crucial in an examination-oriented system. The high-stakes nature of English as a subject only leads learners to have significant concerns about making linguistic errors and about producing linguistically or grammatically correct sentences, which eventually become detrimental to their willingness to communicate in the target language. Apparently, speaking skills, as taught in schools, also focus on accuracy, which involves the correct use of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Looking for ‘correct’ answers and ‘correct’ ways of constructing language as an essential element in language learning can mean that students are stuck in translation mode rather than attempting to actively communicate in the spoken form with all its inaccuracies, incomplete sentences and so on.

According to Koo (2008), an exam-centric culture may cause ESL teachers to concentrate on the teaching of accuracy or grammar to be applied in examinations and neglects communicative competence. According to research by Pandian (2002), too much focus on grammatical skills and the tendency towards rote learning eventually has diminished the importance of communicative competence within learners’ perspectives. Pandian also contends that this creates a new class of students who are high achievers and who manage to continue to further studies at higher institutions, but who cannot communicate in the target language. Such circumstances are true reflections of most of the learners in this study. The latter were often high academic achievers who shied away from making mistakes. Learners were naturally very concerned about committing errors in their speech, as they believed was being evaluated by others in a strict way.

Through the discussion on the national education system, ESL teaching and learning in Malaysia could adapt methods, approaches, strategies, techniques, and curriculum through the lens of sociolinguistic and sociocultural issues in the Malaysian ESL situation. Perhaps, with sociolinguistics and sociocultural perspectives being emphasized in methodology, the learning of English and WTC within the classroom may improve in the long run.

#### **8.4 Ethnic origin and identity affecting WTC in English Language Learning (ELL). (Large Culture)**

Strongly related to the large culture narratives of ESL learners' first language and their willingness to communicate in the target language is the issue of learners' ethnic origin and identity. Young (2008) notes that in a postcolonial and multilingual country like Malaysia, language is often associated with ethnicity and national identity. Findings show that lack of willingness to communicate in the target language among the ESL learners was strongly related to the need for complex social acceptance by members of the community. In many cases, ESL learners claimed they needed to speak the mother tongue language in order to fit in or to conform to the expectations of members of the group.

The language spoken by the learner is an essential part of his or her identity (Norton, 1997). Data from this research suggest that language spoken by learners strongly illuminates their identity and ethnicity. Other scholars confirm the complex social interactions, which influence learners' ways of navigating their identities in the

multicultural and multilingual Malaysian society. Anchimbe (2007, p.13) asserts that linguistic identity in postcolonial spaces is multifaceted, used for survival, to benefit from the advantages of the linguistic group or for asserting pride in one's roots.

In the case of these groups of learners, it was important that they were accepted by friends, especially by the members of their community of similar ethnic origin. Participants in the study quoted instances of resentment, marginalization, labelling, othering, cold reception and name-calling (English names were given), especially by members of their ethnic community, for speaking English. According to the learners, it was often perceived as rude, arrogant, offensive and as showing off. Speaking English potentially meant contesting the ethnic boundaries of what it meant to be a Malay, Chinese and Indian or even being Malaysian. Undeniably, such behaviour is indicative of the strong large culture influence of one's membership of a particular ethnic group where the perception of English language use was perhaps seen as a threat to their sense of identity and community. English as language of colonialists served as another

Chapter 1 reviewed the history of English use in Malaysia. Several authors, for example, Rajadurai (2011), have studied the resulting conflicts and continuing resentment long after independence. In this study, findings revealed that in order to subscribe to their group's identity, some ESL learners, particularly the proficient speakers, to some extent had chosen to mask their ability to communicate in the target language. These proficient ESL learners perceived that masking their proficiency in the target language seemed necessary, as it would reconstruct their identity to cope with the complexity of social acceptance. These struggles in participating at the same

time as having to negotiate membership within their community caused dilemmas and tensions, which impacted on their willingness to communicate in the target language.

Claims by the learners made it clear that using English could affect the outcome of the interaction, which in turn could be a powerful tool that might distance students from the rest of the group members. If exclusion was assumed to happen, aversion towards using the target language seemed to be the best option, especially when it involved social acceptance. Studies by Abdullah and Wong (2006) among Malaysian undergraduates (Malay, Chinese, Indians and others) indicate that learners do not discard the perception that English might be a threat to their ethnic identity.

According to Pierce (1995, p. 17) when learner invest in a second language, “they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic (language, education and friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate and money) which will, in turn, increase the value of their cultural capital”. However, in the context of this study, the efforts to speak the target language received opposition, impacting WTC. Investment in the English language for learners became a tricky issue especially within a multicultural postcolonial society because the investment had to be hidden or masked instead of hoping it would be rewarded (Lee, 2009).

Previous studies conducted by Lee (2009, 2010) and Lee, Lee, Wong et al. (2005) mentioned that in postcolonial contexts, perceived resistance towards the use of the target language as the language of the colonial masters may result in a complex social acceptance. Participants will somehow “switch identities, minimize, withdraw or

abandon the use of English to conform to the dominant group's unspoken expectations" (p.153).

In the context of this study, ESL learners who were hiding or masking their proficiency in the target language were doing it in order not to offend others who were less proficient and to avoid judgements related to identity. English, being the language of the colonialists, may well be described as carrying 'historical baggage'. The previously mentioned study by Rajadurai (2011), pointed out that the emphasis accorded to English had nevertheless attracted opposition and resistance and was perceived as a threat to the national culture, particularly the aspects that are related to the Malays' historical resistance towards British colonialism and English as the colonial language and culture.

Findings in this study revealed that Malay ESL learners were observed as the least receptive to the use of the target language. The majority of the Chinese and Indian learners were very open to the target language, although there were a few ethnic Chinese and Indians who felt awkward towards English for similar reason, particularly the complex social acceptance. Studies by Mohd Asraf (2005), Abdullah, and Wong (2006) reveal that Malay learners show greater reluctance to be engaged in the English language as compared to their Chinese and Indian counterparts, as it is perceived as a threat to their ethnic identity.

Shamsul (1999) provides a critical justification when he mentions that the protection of the dominance of *Malayness* takes place through the protection of three Malay



pillars, namely language, religion and royalty. The promotion of English to some extent suggests the erosion of Malay identity and dominance (Rajadurai, 2011). As noted by Lee (2009), the Malays strongly perceive the Malay (BM) language as a symbol of their cultural identity and as an emblem of group solidarity. The dominance of English at some point caused the community to make sentimental choices, which in turn could determine the extent of their readiness and willingness to engage in the target language (Abdullah & Wong, 2006).

The participants of this study who were very proficient in the target language, (some of whom were university English Language Club debaters) described the need to minimize and sometimes exclude the use of the target language in order to fit in, not to offend, embarrass others and to avoid showing off or boasting in the former language of the colonial master. Findings revealed that these learners strategically reduced the amount of speech in English, as they believed it was best to be humble in order to conform to the social norms and expectations within their communities.

A very confident and competent English language speaker affirmed this phenomenon when she claimed that her central concern was always to be extra vigilant through staying reserved and humble in the ESL classroom. To her, the feeling of being '*hebat*' (superior) when speaking the target language was a reflection of the western society. Thus in order to avoid being labelled westernized or as having renounced her ethnic identity by members of the local group, switching or masking her identities seemed most practical. Such events were clearly confirmed by other proficient ESL learners in this study.

The current importance of ELL and the creation of a new identity among the young population of Malays, Chinese and Indians who spoke the target language as their L1 between their mother tongue languages in their daily communication had yet to be well accepted and agreed to by the rest of the community they subscribed to. In this present study, it was suggested that unless these learners were able to withstand harsh judgements and negative reactions, they might be emotionally injured and restrained from communicating in the target language.

### **8.5 Cultural influences and learners WTC. (Large Culture)**

The state of lack of WTC in the target language was also strongly related to learners' cultural upbringing. Although studies by Zhu (2016) rejected the idea of overgeneralization towards simplistic cultural interpretations, findings notably revealed that learners' cultural narratives produced a significant impact on learners' state of willingness to communicate in the target language in this study. Several essentialist culture characteristics mentioned in the chapter 2, such as hierarchical, collectivist and cultural appropriacy (related to religion), have resonated throughout the data.

Most of the learners, particularly the Malay learners, persistently noted the importance of being sensitive to the feelings of others (especially to less proficient speakers) when they need to speak English. Regrettably, such paramount concern often resulted in reduced communication in the target language. A study on Malay culture (Goddard, 1977 in Mastor et al., 2000) found that Malays are concerned about others' feelings

and often about the effect of their choice of words and actions on social and religious norms. Malay speakers, therefore, tend to think before they speak and to be extra careful about commenting on opposing views. In fact, those who speak loudly are considered impolite (Goddard, 1977 in Mastor et al., 2000). One participant also noted that it was important to be moderate in communicating in the target language, as there might be others who disliked it when she spoke too much English. To show the severity of this issue, this participant claims she was often reminded (through text messages) by family members always to be sensitive to the feelings of others. Being modest was also believed to prevent others from shying away and was the best way to be accepted by members of the group.

Apparently, other instances of reduced communication in the target language related to learners' reactions to teachers as authority figures. Research by Lee et al. (2010), shows that Malaysian learners exemplify culturally-bound learning styles as they were usually raised in a culture that emphasizes hierarchical respect within family and society. Within the immediacy of the ESL classroom, the classroom ethos was reinforced by cultural values that participants were brought up with. Several ESL participants reported that respecting elders or the higher authority through obedience and being attentive was part of their everyday practice. This finding was also consistent with previous research by Keshavarz & Baharudin (2009), which indicates that Malays, Chinese, and Indian cultures consider respect for elders as a form of children's obedience. Hence, in the presence of such strong cultural beliefs, a silent ESL classroom may not be an uncommon scenario and could easily be misunderstood as learners' lack of interest or poor competency, as learners believed silence to be a show of respect towards the teachers or the higher authority.

Other forms of findings which complimented acts of respect towards the teacher and which were also regarded as a norm in classes were:

- i) waiting for lessons to end before questions could be asked,
- ii) not asking/ repeating similar questions
- iii) not interrupting the lesson as it could interrupt friends' concentration.

In extension of this issue, the sense of respect towards teachers induced a sense of obligation to respond and a responsibility to answer the question by the teacher especially when no one else was keen or brave enough to respond.

Yong (2010) explains that, due to the traditional learning style which mainly revolves around the teacher, textbooks and the blackboard, Malaysian learners tend to be introverted, closure-oriented, analytic and field-independent. According to Yong (2010) being introverted refers to the preference of receiving knowledge from teachers rather than discovering and evaluating, being quiet or shy and rarely expressing opinions, views and emotions overtly. Despite the use of more interactive learning styles, which involved the use of technology, through presentation and group projects, communicating in the target language would conflict with the learners' cultural expectations. In the case of this study, it was observed that those with greater confidence, especially with linguistic competence in the target language were able to break these cultural norms, but those with lower confidence were less willing to communicate or resorted to total silence, which in this case is a question of confidence, rather than whether the learner was extrovert or introvert.

An additional feature of learners' cultural values is any affiliation to religion. The word 'shy' frequently emerged when learners described the reasons for their lack of willingness to communicate. According to Mastor, Jin and Cooper (2000), Islamic teachings have a big influence on aspects of learners' behaviour and being shy, or '*malu*' carries basic goodness in Malaysian society and is regarded as virtuous. Potentially these learners were guided by Islamic teachings and were taught not to say anything that may hurt others' feelings, especially if it is done openly. This possibly explains why to communicate openly in classes can be regarded as pressurizing, particularly to those accustomed to such norms and ethos.

The powerful role of learners' cultural values is also part of the learners' identities, given that ESL learners are governed by certain factors of cultural appropriacy such as when to be quiet, when to talk when it is appropriate to ask questions and what is the right thing to say or do. Inevitably, learners are likely to communicate in the target language in a way that would conform to cultural expectations. These findings seem to resonate the findings by other research mentioned in the earlier chapter. As a researcher cum teacher, I would not wish to associate myself with the act of stereotyping these ESL learners, but it can be argued that learners behave as they were nurtured by the norms of the culture in which they grew up. In fact, much research criticizes how Asian learners are often labelled in a negative way and stereotyped by the notion of Asianess (Kumaradivelu, 2003). Kumaradivelu argues that the aim of such stereotyping is to better inform the western culture in which he said,

*...stereotyping our learners helps us reduce unmanageable reality to manageable label and second, primary pedagogic conceptualization in TESOL is very much conditioned and constrained by the predominance of Western perspectives to the teaching of culture (p. 716-717)*

At this point in the study, it was clear that communicating in English was a complex social practice as it engaged learners' identity, the cultural practices and social expectations.

## **8.6 Historical narratives and learners WTC. (Large Culture)**

It was earlier mentioned that findings note that a conscious attempt to speak down by the learners when communicating in English is also an act not to hurt the feelings of others, particularly those who are less proficient. Apparently, less proficient ESL learners are often associated with families of lower socio-economic status (SES). This resonates with the study by Razali (1992) who notes that conflicts can occur when individuals from two different social classes meet. This is possible in Malaysian classrooms where the teacher may not only be a member of a different racial group but also a member of a higher social class than the students or vice versa. Learners originating from lower SES families are not always from the rural areas. Nevertheless, the deficits in the target language seem obvious among learners who stay in the rural areas due to their lack of exposure to the target language.

It seems clear then from the findings, due to greater contact with English, ESL learners with a higher level of willingness to communicate in the target language, originate from the urban areas. The gap in English language exposure between rural and urban areas can be traced back to previous settlements of British armies, which were concentrated in towns for economic, and administration purposes causing the rural areas to be entirely isolated from the target language. The historical narratives of

English being positioned in urban areas benefitted ESL learners originating from such areas, as there were more opportunities for the target language to be heard and used by them.

Sadly, ESL learners from areas with little exposure towards the target language, poorer backgrounds with fewer resources or opportunities to access English materials will likely to be disadvantaged when English is persistently used as the medium of instruction at a higher education institution. Consequently, this restricted exposure potentially has prevented them from appreciating the value of English, greatly influencing their lack of willingness to communicate in the target language.

Lowenberg (1992) notes that English was used in urban schools, and the more prosperous and prestigious families had the privileges of English medium education in Malaysia during the British colonisation. By the end of the 1950's, English was the lingua franca of the more educated people in the country. A current study by Thiagarayah (2003) clearly illustrates the gap between urban and rural when he highlights the fact that teaching English in rural areas is more challenging as compared to schools in urban areas as teachers struggle to increase learners' proficiency in settings where English is almost irrelevant or non-existent. A study by Peter et al. (2013) confirms that challenges often faced by learners in rural areas, of low SES and in an environment where English is almost foreign or zero opportunity to practise the target language. In addition, their parents are often not educated enough to provide them with the necessary educational support and easy access to learning resources. Although English is the language to be taught early in ESL learners' lives and although

it functions as a dominant language in the economic sector, it is often mentioned that rural or low SES level populations place competence in English as a low priority, especially in the Malay community (David & Govindasamy, 2007).

In this case, it could be argued that the power of the historical positioning of English, which has reinforced the economic narratives around English, has benefitted those from the urban settings most. However, primacy given to English is likely to reinforce inequity and disadvantage between learners from urban and rural areas. These strong large culture narratives of British historical narratives and current globalization has allowed the English language to become securely positioned within urban areas and the economic activities that surround them and among those of higher economic status; if you are not part of any of these contexts you are likely to be disadvantaged within Malaysian society.

In relation to WTC, such state is likely to be the reason to some ESL learners feel discouraged from communicating in the target language, as they may feel linguistically incompetent. It was found that learners' potential and prospects are highly dependent on their ability to convey knowledge and skill in the target language. With lack of competency in the English language, ESL learners felt that they were academically disadvantaged and felt linguistically incompetent and therefore, unlikely to obtain good jobs after graduation. The overshadowing feeling of ineptitude and incompetence potentially drives ESL learners away from communicating in the target language in ESL classrooms and any other classrooms where the target language is used. Such discouraging feeling towards the target language is linked to student experiences of



negative teaching/environments during schooling. This aspect will be further discussed in section 8.8.1 (Teachers approaches to teaching and learning, and learners WTC).

It is arguably true that the target language is clearly identified as having a distinct advantage over other languages, and this status has been confirmed by the pervasive role given to it within academia, especially in HEIs. Through the findings, ESL learners confirm that English is an empowering language and assert that English and English culture have some kind of superiority, prestige and elite status for its speakers. According to Omar (1982, p. 9) “knowledge of English gives one added prestige as well as means of personal advancement in the professional and academic field”.

A similar study on identity among 20 Malaysian undergraduates of various ethnicities indicated that English, as a marker of social class, related to the notion of social prestige such as being well-educated, of higher social status and highly respected (Wong et al., 2012). These powerful set of ideas either boosts motivation to speak in the target language, specifically for those with higher English language competency or causes learners to distance themselves from the target language as it is too overwhelming, specifically for less competent ESL learners.

Findings in this study expose acute gaps (between the competent and less competent) which are naturally built by ESL learners within the ESL classroom university. Such tacit categories between competent and incompetent speakers of English groups are based on how they evaluate themselves and who they believe are competent or less

competent, as they are pressured by the education system which strictly emphasis on the importance of English. Withdrawal from communicating in the target language obviously occurs as they believe they are not as good as those they perceive to be good. Pattapong (2010), in his studies, reveals that learners' perceived self-esteem has a strong relationship to learners' willingness to communicate. This called for the ESL teacher to take note of such tacit groups (between the competent and the less competent members of the class) as ignorance towards it could defeat teaching and learning efforts in the target language.

Ignorance of such tacit categories would likely be detrimental to learners' self-esteem and eventually, learners' engagement with the target language. As a teacher, I would adjust teaching approaches to reduce these negative emotions. It is noticeable that affective aspects have been considered to be as important as language aptitude in language learning success (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985). The dominating and empowering nature of the target language, experiences of being 'othered', labelled and marginalized, overlapping with issues of ethnic, identity negotiations, and cultural expectations, to a certain extent, contributed to a greater degree of withdrawal from communicating in the target language.

English, treated with considerable prestige and superiority in this way, raises questions about its role and value in relation to other learners and other languages spoken. Indeed, the power of the historical positioning of English as an imposed colonial language and the stereotypes and the prejudices inherent in this, have reinforced the economic narratives around English language policy in Malaysia.

### **8.7 Family and community narratives and learners WTC. (Small culture)**

Contrasting with the above experiences, another aspect that emerged as significant in the analysis of the data was how family and community narratives could bring dissonance in learners' state of willingness to communicate, reflecting the small cultural influences. Findings revealed that among family and community, some learners, primarily from families of inter-ethnic marriages, treated English as a 'neutral' mode of communication, to be spoken between family members and extended to different ethnic groups, rather than it being construed as a threat to the national language and to ethnic origin and identity. Rather than seeing English as truly neutral, it could perhaps be seen as a leveller: --giving everyone access to the power it brings to the user. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Lee (2003) noted that speaking English suggests a sense of 'neutrality', freeing the speakers from any cultural and moral stance of the speakers' native culture. The linguistic hybridity and fluidity of moving from one language to another and the use of English as a 'neutral' language to unify and create compromise significantly contributed to learners' willingness to communicate in the target language. With the advent of globalization, the potential repositioning of English in a modern and pluralistic society like Malaysia, suggests that English may be perceived by some as a neutral mode of communication.

Apparently, others with limited English language proficiency suggested that English was a language that belonged to everyone. Such positive reactions have been constructed potentially through a family's upbringing and the communities to which they belonged. Data suggested that a family's socioeconomic status and parental engagement with the target language played a large role in ESL learners' differing

perceptions and competency in the target language. Findings indicated that a high SES family may afford early exposure and resources to the learning of the target language, and these had undeniably contributed to a greater level of willingness to communicate.

However, it was interesting to also discover that coming from a socioeconomically disadvantaged family may not always be the reason for learners' low state of competency and lack of willingness to communicate in the target language. Such idiosyncrasies point to family support as being a crucial aspect in learning the target language and in a willingness to communicate in the target language, especially for less privileged learners. Many instances in the findings suggest that, despite participants lacking the resources, motivation and encouragement, family members played a substantial role in ESL learners' drive to excel in learning and in their willingness to communicate in the target language. In an interesting finding, a learner from a lower SES recalled how his father purposely made up stories of successful English speakers from low SES backgrounds to inspire his interest and efforts in the target language.

A study by Singh (2014) shows that, with more parental support, ESL learners develop a positive attitude towards language learning. In fact, in the context, that family lacks engagement with the target language, community support in the use of the language may also play a critical role in learners' motivation and willingness to communicate in the target language. Interestingly, findings confirm that despite not having the privilege of being exposed to the target language at home and lacking the resources to support learners in learning the target language, consistent encouragement from family

members allows learners to be determined to improve their state of willingness to communicate in the target language.

In the context where the target language is mainly recognized for its instrumental purposes by learners, learners' willingness to communicate greatly depends on families' and the community's role to support learners with the target language.

According to Norton (2000, p. 11),

*When language speakers speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world.*

Findings record that the opportunities learners had to participate in the target language within the community simultaneously increased their motivation to communicate in the target language.

In contrast, in the situation that English is hardly used, as in a community where the community is almost homogenous (Malay- dominated, Chinese- dominated or Indian- dominated), speaking in English could be met with resistance, thus impacting on learners' perception of the language and their willingness to communicate. The lack of community practice of the target language, alongside the restricted practice of English within English classes and other academic contexts, can affect ESL learners' proficiency and confidence in communicating in the target language. Fluency in the target language could not really be expected to develop and work by carried out by Wahi (2015) supports this idea.

## **8.8 Institutional and classroom culture and learners WTC. (Small culture)**

English has been perceived to having tangible benefits to those who learns and acquire the language, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Malaysia, English holds very high instrumental values, and this is manifested through implementation of the second language (English) policy in Malaysia. Findings suggest that English is highly recognized at the higher education institutional level (HEI) for its occupational importance in relation to globalization and English as a *lingua franca*. Findings revealed that the universal values that English embraces have allowed some learners to feel a sense of empowerment and connection to the globalized community and thus, this has potentially improved learners' willingness to communicate. This is supported by a study carried out by Abdullah & Wong (2006), in which 331 undergraduates from different ethnic groups in Malaysia agreed that the instrumental motivation to master English explained learners' positive attitudes towards the target language.

In fact, ESL learners in this study revealed that the increasing status of English worldwide provided them with a greater sense of self-esteem and a sense of empowerment since learning English would give them the tools needed to engage at international levels. As noted in the findings, English is regarded widely as the language of knowledge since most academic textbooks and the teaching and learning resources and activities at participants' respective universities are carried out in English.

It was also perceived by the ESL learners that proficiency in English as an opportunity to be acknowledged within the education system and employment, and for a sense of connectedness to the globalized society. Indeed, learners felt proficiency in the target language elevated their social status, increasing potential social mobility.

These findings confirm the results of studies conducted by Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) who found that engineering students of Hadhramout University of Sciences and technology in Yemen exhibited greater motivation towards the instrumental needs for learning the English language, especially for utilitarian and academic reasons. Such positive language attitudes have encouraged ESL learners' willingness to communicate in the target language according to their research.

However, on a different note, the perceived value of English does not always support ESL learners' willingness to communicate, given participants' different language circumstances and diverse individual and social backgrounds, educational experience and family upbringing. An important finding in this study revealed that although learners were very much encouraged by the amount of English used within the university, the platforms to use the target language were generally restricted to the academic context and carried little communicative purpose in their daily activities.

The mode of peers' interaction was dominated by BM (national language), as learners primarily consisted of a majority of those of the Malay ethnic group and other ethnic groups who were proficient in the national language. When participants talked about their low state of WTC, it was due to the dearth of venues in which to communicate

beyond the ESL classrooms and beyond the educational setting. Despite the substantial amount of English used in lectures, reference books, notes and university projects and clubs, lack of other opportunities in which to use the language in their daily interactions had become a prevailing determinant in learners' lack of WTC in the target language. These findings correspond with the study carried out by Wahi (2015) which found that due to the restrictions by the community of practice in providing authentic opportunities to use the target language, students were not able to hone their communicative competence in the target language.

For the ESL learners in this study, English was crucial for their graduation requirements; thus, it being made as a compulsory credit subject. In responding to globalization and the internationalization of universities and having the aspiration to make Malaysia an education hub for the Asian region and to attract foreign investment in education, the use of English language medium teaching and credit was seemingly crucial for attracting international learners. The use of English as a tool to attract foreign students to Malaysia (Grapragasem, Krishnan and Mansor, 2014). Prime Minister Dr Mahadir Mohamad (1994, cited in Gill, 2002, p.101) states, "learning English language will reinforce the spirit of nationalism when it is used to bring development for the country". In these circumstances, it reinforces awareness of the importance of the target language. Participants had claimed they currently felt more willing and motivated to communicate in the target language, as they were able to link the importance of learning to the target language. The substantial use of the target language in academic discourses and the teaching and learning activities have also shifted learners' interest towards favouring the language as opportunities to use the target language have increased. Communicative platforms were deemed available as



learners could take the chance to communicate in class and with other ethnic groups. Learners strongly believed that frequent communication in the target language would foster linguistic development.

On the other hand, there was also feedback from some ESL learners that the substantial use of English as the medium of instruction for teaching and learning at the university did not really foster communicative performance as English was primarily taught as a subject rather than for communication. It was discussed earlier that BM and other mother tongue languages dominated much of the communication between learners. Interestingly, one participant strongly argued that Japan, for instance, uses their first language in higher education and they are excelling in different fields without the need for English. This comparison suggests that although English might be seen as a *lingua franca*, it is not the only means of advancement at individual and national level.

It can be argued that imposing a language other than the mother tongue in higher education might be regarded as form of linguistic hegemony and a means of marginalization of other mother tongue languages. It is often debated publicly whether English is overpowering the national language (BM) in Malaysia. This raises the question of whether learning and prioritising English can become a threat to ethnicity and identity.

Other discrepancies, which discouraged the use of the target language, were the variations in language choices used by lecturers of other subjects despite English having been given paramount attention at tertiary level. Learners claimed some

lecturers preferred BM to English while some utilized a blend of BM and English. Consequently, learners claimed that the amount of the target language used in other subjects greatly influenced learners' perceptions and hence their willingness to communicate in the target language in the ESL class.

Learners also related negative learning experiences, which involved the use of English in one of their content subject classes, having a negative impact on their overall willingness to communicate in English in the ESL classroom. It seems surprising that learners recall being orally assaulted with abrasive language in class, which later greatly impacted on their state of confidence to communicate in other classes. This again goes beyond teachers' persona. The ethos of the classroom, the small community at the heart of the classroom and the relationships, principles and values that shape interactions and which are influenced by large and small culture narratives. Within this small community, the teacher has the power to enable or disempower young people. From this finding, we see evidence of very negative classroom cultures focused on ridicule and punishment via the impossible demand for everyone to speak this second language perfectly. In the context where learners are linguistically and socioeconomically diverse, teachers play a critical role in encouraging communication. In light of WTC, McIntyre (2001), Hashimoto (2002), Yashima (2002), Peng (2007) and Yu (2009) agreed that learners' motivation plays a big role in learners' willingness to communicate in L2. It is believed that such motivation generates interest in using the target language. Yashima's (2002) study specifically demonstrates that motivation has a direct impact on learners' self-confidence in communicating in the target language.

### **8.8.1 Teachers approaches to teaching and learning, and learners WTC**

Within an education system that places importance on examinations, the findings gained insights that teachers' characteristics and approaches to teaching are relevant to learners' state of interest and hence their willingness to communicate in the target language. It has been demonstrated in this research that teachers' stringent (very strict) approaches often limited learners' autonomy in learning but reinforce rote learning. In terms of communication, stringent approaches restricted learners' willingness to communicate as they feared that their efforts would not meet the teacher's expectation and would be met with negative evaluations. Learners who claimed they were caned for not completing the English homework would only distance them from meaningful learning of the target language.

In the context of this study, findings revealed that caning reinforces rote learning (learning English for passing examinations) and to some extent in traumatic language learning experiences. It was unfortunate to hear that a learner recalled he was laughed at and received obstructive comments from the teacher and friends for mispronouncing a word. Simply put, the negativity students held against the teachers as a result of such actions, affected the learners' trust in their teachers. As far as learners' WTC is concerned, being in such an environment was discouraging to especially in initiating communicative learning behaviour. It has been observed by the Ministry of Education (2003) that classroom teaching has been characterized by teacher-centred approaches such as chalk and talk and drill methods. This was also mentioned by Pandian (2002) who found that learners have the tendency to become dependent on teachers, assuming that teachers will teach all that they need to know due to the prevalent discourse of

examinations throughout their educational experiences. The high importance attached to scoring, grades and national assessments further establishes the need to memorize, regurgitate and produce learners who are less autonomous, even in higher learning institutions (Koo, 2008).

### **8.8.2 Vulnerable ESL learners influencing the lack of WTC**

The consequent impact of a highly structured education system may leave learners feeling sensitive and vulnerable to others' negative evaluations. It could be argued that such vulnerability may have been nurtured by the long-standing examination system which places such great importance on accuracy and correct answers within a subject discipline rather than a language for communication. This has contributed to the building of learners who may have developed sensitivity towards assessments or evaluations of performance. This is also mentioned by Kirkpatrick (2011, p.39) who finds that "exam-centric education causes extreme stress for students because tests are regarded as a means to prove self-worth". This is especially true when learners tend to negatively evaluate and label themselves as not good when they are asked about their English language performance. In fact, to be safe and to avoid the risk of peers' and teachers' evaluations, avoiding communication in the target language seems to be the best option.

Such action is supported by Merga (2014), whose studies have found that adolescents tend to be sensitive to what their friends think and they are likely to engage with or disengage from particular activities depending on how the activities are viewed by

their peer and friendship groups. The students in this research revealed that these ESL learners were very sensitive, particularly to what others thought or felt about their communicative performance. Some learners felt that there was little point in trying to speak when others judged what they said and how they said it. In this instance, learners felt pressured not to show incompetence. If learners had a poor proficiency level, aversion towards the target language became more perceptible, due to the enormous amount of stress experienced as a result of other people's evaluation. As far as academic achievements are concerned, such perceptions play a growing role in the learners' lives, especially when they are adolescent. The exam-centric approach is potentially an oppressive force to one's academic and social lives (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 39).

In short, learners' vulnerability to criticism and negative consequences sat at the heart of ESL learners' lack of willingness to communicate in the target language. According to my findings, learners' vulnerability became more severe in the presence of a social media culture which will be discussed in the small culture influence of the digital narratives.

### **8.8.3 Positive learning experiences with the ESL classroom and learners WTC. (Small culture)**

Despite English being a subject to be passed, and the lack of communicative opportunities, some ESL learners did experience a very positive learning experience which nurtured their interests and skills the target language. As noted in the findings,

some of the learners took part in English school debates, choral speaking competitions while others had encouraging English teachers who encouraged their learning and the participation of learners in class and in any English language competition. Findings seem to suggest that these positive learning experiences strongly influence learners' perception, motivation and interest towards the language which continue at tertiary level, as seen by their inclination to participate.

In contrast, the negative experiences learners experienced produced less inclination to communicate in the target language. Apart from teachers' traits, classmates' reactions were also highly influential in encouraging or discouraging learners' state of participation. Studies by Mustapha, Rahman and Md Yunus (2010) about factors influencing learners' participation in class revealed that lecturers' traits and classmates' reactions were claimed to be the top two most influential factors which encouraged learners to take part in classroom activities. Liu (2001), in his studies, claims that facilitative factors like teachers' encouragement and peer support greatly contribute to learners' positive perceptions towards classroom oral communication.

In short, it could be argued that learners' state of proficiency in English and hence their willingness to communicate in the target language is highly influenced by learners' classroom experiences. Behaviour and attitudes of some teachers and pupils, including hostile responses to linguistic bravery, can lead to an unsafe community for language speakers. However, the constant pressure towards examinations only promotes narrow teaching approaches and a narrow notion of what it means to be successful, thus making communicating in the target language a complex process as learners become

very vulnerable. The small culture of the classroom is emphasized here and the kind of ethos that prevails leads to the lack of willingness to communicate.

### **8.9 Digital narratives and learners WTC. (Small culture)**

It is important to note that this study highlighted a perceived relationship between digital narratives and WTC, as newly emerging evidence suggested that technology, particularly the social networking sites (SNS), may have a significant influence on ESL learners' state of WTC in the target language, both positively and negatively. From the positive point of view, according to the findings, the use of the Internet, YouTube, Facebook and other social media platforms linguistically assisted learners in various ways. Some learners claimed to use these social networking platforms to help develop writing skills, especially in upgrading vocabulary and language structure. This appeared to boost learners' perceived competence in the target language. Similarly, *YouTube* assisted learners in 'correcting' their pronunciation in the target language. Playing online games also allowed ESL learners opportunities to communicate in the target language with international online users (in written or oral format).

Learners in this study seemed to reflect positively about using language-enhanced computer technologies and using the target language as it offered more flexibility and made online learning more versatile and flexible as compared with learning to use the target language in the ESL classroom. It is also much more purposeful as these digital environments provide authentic spaces for communication in the target language, as it

resembles real-life communication. Although communication is mostly carried out in the written format online, the whole experience contributes to learners' sense of confidence as they engage with the target language.

Internet technology has a great potential to positively affect students' learning outcomes in the language learning process. Indeed, studies regarding computer-assisted language learning (CALL) have suggested that computer technologies facilitate processes beneficial to second language learning (Cunningham, 1998; Teeler & Gray, 2000). According to Zha et al. (2006), students' communicative competence is strengthened through computer-based instruction such as games.

Additionally, findings of the studies had identified evidence of the usefulness of computer-based English learning for developing the basic skills, including listening (Gruba, 2004), reading (Rahmani, 2013), and writing (Murray and Haurigan, 2008). Language-enhanced technology research has been proven to be effective in promoting English learning, including the enlargement of vocabulary size, pronunciation correction and reading comprehension (Sunga and Yeh, 2012). However, in terms of speaking skills, current technology has limitations in developing learners' speaking skills (Sung, 2011). Research by Buga et al. (2014) observes a notable change in attitudes towards English language learning through Facebook pages. Students showed a more relaxed attitude in class, and they were more eager to learn. Games are said to be motivating, to lower effective barriers and to encourage foreign or second language interactions (Gee, 2007) this is especially true when playing with native speakers from various countries (Paterson, 2010).



An important highlight in this study revealed that, aside from the recognized benefits of the use of SNS, there were obvious concerns among ESL that the SNS could pose greater threats to ESL learners' WTC due to the possibilities of online 'bashing' or bullying, a form of online shaming and defaming for mistakes made in the ESL class. Through the findings, learners who had experienced online 'bashing' felt discouraged and less willing to communicate in the target language.

The nature of online comments, which may go viral, added much to student withdrawal from participation in the target language for fear of committing errors while speaking. Much concern was articulated about mistakes being uploaded online and made viral by other online users. Findings from some ESL learners on the concept of *haters* among the ESL learners in the classroom connected with the idea of online bashing but in a slightly different way. '*Haters*' made a point of exposing the flaws of another person (<https://www.urbandictionary.com>) through offensive comments before forwarding it to other online users. In such a gruelling situation, learners seemed to be strongly affected emotionally by what will happen online, hence reducing the amount of communication in the target language. This would, therefore, reduce the opportunity of attracting *haters* to criticize their ways of speaking in the target language.

Another noteworthy finding is related to something called, 'withdrawal syndrome,' due to association the with '*WeChat*' (online chatting platform) users. Learners often felt degraded if associated with the "*WeChat* kids" in Malaysia, as the WeChat application was often negatively associated with very poor proficiency in the target language.

The consequence of online shaming was that the learner was likely to be ‘trolled’ by other online users. By trolled, I mean learners are becoming the target of online verbal bullies. The worst scenario of being trolled is when other online users start to believe what is said about them online which impacts on real-life face- to- face contact attempts. In these circumstances, most learners claimed the best way to avoid being an online victim, was by purposely avoiding speaking in the target language.

The internet has undoubtedly promoted engagement with the target language, but cyber threats had reinforced learners’ existing vulnerability due to the examination system, which often emphasized accuracy and competition as discussed earlier. Such condition had caused these learners to withdraw from communicating in the target language. As discussed earlier in the findings, the feeling of vulnerability was exacerbated by the complex social interactions, which labelled speakers who spoke English as rude, showing off, patronizing, offensive and arrogant, and caused ESL learners to be misunderstood, left out, judged, alienated or ignored. “The online world enables a person to be anonymous, with ability to post threats at any time of the day and spread news within seconds” (The Star Online, 18 March 2018).

On the other hand, it seemed contradictory that, despite the cyber threats, online communication still seems to be a much-preferred platform as compared to the face-to-face platform among learners, if learners were given the option, consequently reducing the number of willing speakers in the ESL class. Researchers have asserted several possible psychological explanations for the linguistic benefits of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which are related to low language-related anxiety and a low-stress environment (Roed, 2003; Warschauer, 1996). According to Roed

(2003, p. 158), the illusion of anonymity that language learners experience when communicating via computer is an important element in reducing language anxiety”. Bradley and Lomicka (2000) are quoted as saying that the computer serves “as a shield from being on stage” (p.362) which is due to the absence of the paralinguistic (e.g. frowning, raised eyebrows) and social clues (e.g. nationality, gender and race) (Warschauer, 1996) that expose their language use to potential ridicule.

With the availability of online communication and the option of being anonymous through online communication platforms, current findings state that ESL learners are finding it harder to communicate face-to-face (within the ESL classroom), contributing to the lack of willingness to communicate. Nowadays, information on teaching and learning may be shared via text messages like the *WhatsApp* application instead of having to ask in class. This would mean a safer platform with minimum risk of being labelled or linguistically evaluated as they are able to participate at their own pace. The text messages platform would also allow learners to monitor and edit their own text messages without feeling anxious about potentially committing linguistic errors if it was orally performed in classrooms.

In the context of Malaysia, for vulnerable ESL learners, cyber worlds have become too risky and insecure to expose one’s abilities and deficiencies in using the target language. The digital world had become a magnifier of mistakes that exposed learners in front of a larger audience (e.g. mistakes going viral). Hence, in order to protect themselves, learners reduced speaking or avoided speaking in the classroom. In short, one could be exposed to a heightened risk of being ridiculed, shamed and

‘bashed’ for making mistakes in the classroom. Having reduced the amount of speech in class (to avoid being ridiculed and shamed), learners could still have direct access to the teacher, via online text messages.

Digital narratives could belong to the large culture narratives. People may be ‘seen’ through the prism of large culture stereotypes especially when dealing with international connections, but arguably at the same time, it could belong to the small culture influences belonging to more ‘local’ groups online, the attacks could be more personal. I have spoken about digital narrative influences as if they are separate and exist in isolation from the small culture of the classroom, but obviously, they are in a dynamic relationship with other cultural influences.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 9.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings in relation to the research questions. This then leads into the Nested Model of ESL Classroom Culture (Figure 7.1) and the ways in which this research contributes to the field of WTC in general and especially among ESL university learners in Malaysia. This chapter also highlights the approach taken to the topic of WTC and how this has led to a new and more complex understanding of these students' dynamic engagement with key influences of WTC. Limitations and directions for future research pertaining to ESL classroom culture and learners' WTC in the target language will also be discussed.

The methods used to collect data involved 100 third year Malaysian ESL learners (equivalent to 7 ESL classes) in a public university in Malaysia who were involved in the study. The classroom non-participant observations and participant observations involved all seven ESL classes, while 30 ESL learners participated in the semi-structured interviews. These methods were utilized to explore large and small culture influences on ESL learners' WTC in the English language.

## 9.1 Summary of the Research Questions

This study sought to engage with WTC among Malaysian university ESL learners from a socio-cultural perspective and in doing so, began to investigate the possible nature of culture within the specific multi-ethnic and multi-cultural context. These research objectives are operationalized by two research questions. The following section summarizes the key answers to the research questions.

### 9.1.1 Research Question 1:

*How do Malaysian university ESL students construct their sense of self in terms of cultural narratives: societal, familial, institutional and classroom?*

In Malaysia where English is not the mother tongue, the national, political and social structures placed at the macro-level in the society have become a powerful source of learners' identity, security and belonging, influencing their approach towards the target language. These powerful, explicit large culture influences resonate with the traditional notion of culture, which views this concept "as a system of fixed bodies of knowledge possessed equally by all members of well-defined cultural groups" (Duranti, 1997, p.45). Nevertheless, the subtle salience of *small culture* influences, particularly from family and community, educational institution, classroom and digital narratives indicate idiosyncrasies in learners' state of WTC.

While the large culture is about macro ideas, the small culture is about the individual, families, communities, and institutions who may reject some of the large culture ideas and their influence on how they see and engage themselves within the ESL classroom. It is crucial to highlight that ESL learners are at the same time, members of multiple groups and communities who participate in various educational programmes and activities and thus have learnt to negotiate other cultural identities.

Unlike *large cultures*, the influences of *small cultures* are viewed not as a fixed body of knowledge, but as dynamic and flexible and is regarded as an emergent process located within various activities and contexts that learners are part of. In this study, both the *large* and *small culture* influences are seen as influencing learners' WTC within the ESL classroom. I believe this research has answered not only the research questions but also helped us to understand how these different elements, *societal, familial, and institutional and classroom*, are strongly linked to learners' self-constructions.

### **9.1.2 Research Question 2:**

***In what ways, if any, do the above, influence the students' WTC in a Malaysian university ESL classroom?***

This study suggests that ESL learners' state of WTC in English is very complex and highly contextualized. Learners' WTC is very much a dynamic process depending on

the large and small influences they experienced within their environment. It was observed that ESL learners' degree of WTC in this study were self-categorized by the learners into three types, 'lack of WTC', 'moderate WTC' and 'high WTC'. However, it is crucial to stress that learners' state of WTC proved to be dynamic rather than stationary, greatly depending on the interactions of the large and small culture influences. The large and small culture influences could be seen as reinforcing one another, which strongly influences learners' state of WTC.

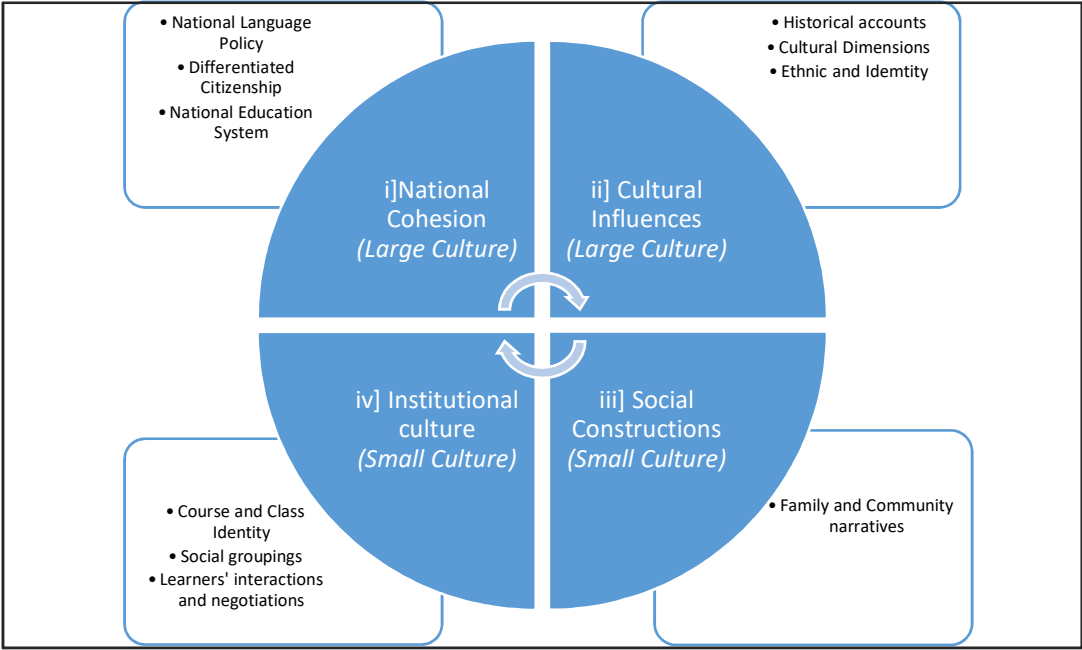
## **9.2 Summary of the Research Findings**

It is worth noting once again that this study began by acknowledging the concept of *large cultures* and *small cultures* by Holliday (1999). The notion of *large culture* equates large groups of people to homogeneous ideas of culture or to prescribed essential features of ethnicity, religion, values, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. In contrast to large culture, Holliday sees *small culture* as a process, which is somewhat dynamic and which emerges from any small social groupings. In order to explore the complexity of learners' WTC in Malaysia, both large and small cultures were considered since, it was argued, both were potentially important. In this context the term 'culture' does not only encompass the generalized essentialist notion of culture like identity markers such as national language, national policies, cultural identity and ethnicity which support particular social structures, but extended to cultural influences and narratives found in any social groupings that will continue to grow. The potential salience of different cultural orientations involving



large and small culture influences was essential to understand ESL learners’ willingness to communicate (WTC) in the target language in an ESL classroom.

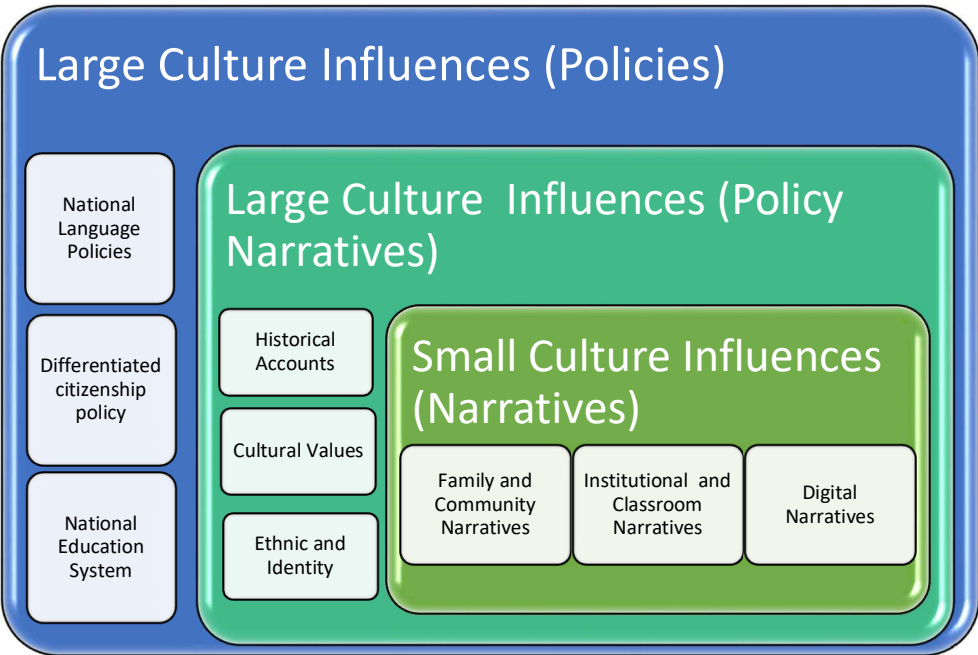
The study began by developing a hybridized conceptual framework of the ESL classroom that attempts to synthesise the emergence of the large and small culture influences, which make up the dynamic of the ESL classroom, in relation to ESL learners’ WTC in English. The following was the hybridized conceptual framework presented earlier (Figure 3.5) utilized for the data collection purposes.



However, by the end of this research, an updated version of the conceptual framework was developed. The development from the initial conceptual framework to the final nested model came about as a result of the data analysis, which emphasized the dynamic relationship between the *large culture* and the *small culture* influences that affect learners’ WTC. It is important to note once again that the small cultures framework (Figure 3.3) informed by Holliday (1999) and literature reviews, has been

adapted as a means of capturing the potential influences of WTC among the ESL learners within the classroom.

To begin, in the study, the elements of *large culture* and *small culture* involved were artificially separated in order to gain an in-depth understanding of these potential influences within the dynamic ESL classroom. The final nested model (as presented earlier (Figure 7.1) shows that the influences of each are likely to be influenced by other influences, creating layers, where some influences may have greater impact at one point and less at another onto learners WTC. This also suggests the interactions and complexity of the *large culture* and *small culture* influences on ESL learners’ WTC.



The summary of the findings presented in this chapter is viewed in relation to the nested model.

## 9.2.1 Large Culture Influences

### 9.2.1.1 Large Culture Influence (Policies)

This study reveals that the influence of *Large Culture (Policies)* influence, underpinned by the policy of *Differentiated Citizenship*, *National Language* and the *National Education System*, played a pervasive role in how ESL learners perceived English and in their state of WTC. The powerful influences alluded here are encapsulated by the national policies set at macro level that create strong large culture imagery and certainly were observed to influence learners' self-perceptions, interactions and behaviour within the ESL classrooms.

The concept of Bumiputra (Malays and indigenous Malays) and Non-Bumiputra (Chinese and Indians) serves as the core of Malaysian national identity, defining what it means to be Malay, Indian and Chinese, alongside the use of BM as the national language. ESL learners' state of WTC illuminates the dominant influence of the national language as the social discourse among the different ethnicities. The findings indicate that Malaysia, a multiracial country, strongly holds to the national and native languages but also supports, through policies and practice, a powerful model of English as a potential second language. Nonetheless, with the intensification of the *differentiated citizenship policy*, the ethnic divide is reinforced; hence, the use of the mother tongue among the different ethnic groups is prevalent. BM as the national language is strongly used and taught in schools and as the official language used in government sectors, is also prevalently spoken across the ethnic groups. With BM and other native languages spoken in spaces around the learners, English is potentially

regarded as a 'foreign language', serving only for instrumental purposes, instead of functioning as a 'second language' affecting learners' perceptions and their state of WTC within the ESL classroom.

Lack of WTC is linked to the strong influence of the mother tongue languages. The need to frequently translate into L1 in order to communicate in L2 makes communicating in L2 linguistically challenging. Having to think of what to say and how to say it in English, moreover drilled towards accuracy, leads to concern over making linguistic mistakes, which in turn discourages WTC. Communicating in the target language is often described as difficult and demanding particularly by those with lower competence in English. Besides, the lack of opportunities to speak English provides no meaningful platforms to practice effective communication, thus discouraging WTC within the ESL classroom.

The existence of vernacular schools (Chinese and Tamil schools) also plays a critical role in reinforcing the use of national and other mother tongue languages and influences learners' perceptions of English which is taught only as a language subject rather than for communication. This again addresses the issue of limited platforms to promote authentic interaction in the target language among learners. These separate school systems have also reinforced ethnic identity. As a result, speaking English could be perceived as possibly threatening and uprooting from one's ethnic identity.

For Malaysia, the international dominance of English and post-colonial influences led to the national education system introducing English as a high-stake subject into the

education system at primary, secondary and the tertiary levels. At tertiary level, the English medium of instruction became significant as it promoted the importance of the target language for employability, educational advancement and nation-building. Serving these instrumental purposes, most learners became rote learners, declaring that English was learnt primarily for passing exams (compulsory pass) rather than for meaningful communication, which in turn affected WTC within the ESL classroom. This indirectly governs the teaching style at university, where English is used in lectures, whereas for task-related discussions, learners do not seem to need English. Learning can still take place without English.

In addition, lack of WTC is potentially linked to the exam-oriented system introduced at primary and secondary level, which very much focuses on accuracy, (grammar, and vocabulary and sentence structures). Learners are preoccupied with concerns and fears of committing linguistic errors in speech. Learners also fear that communication will be linguistically evaluated and judged by others and this injects feelings of tension towards the L2 and, hence, their reluctance as far as WTC is concerned. The focus on examinations also means learners' communicative competence is not systematically developed; thus impacting not only on learners' communication skills but also on their confidence to communicate in L2.

Notably, the positioning of the English language in the education system has placed ESL learners with poor competency at the disadvantaged end of the system. In fact, tacit gaps are evident between proficient and less proficient students, building greater inferiority complexes, especially among poor competency learners for whom keeping

quiet in the L2 class would be the best option. In cases where learners previously had negative experiences in learning English, lack of WTC is evident, as these learners feel vulnerable and traumatized by their previous ESL learning experiences.

#### **9.2.1.2 Large Culture Influences (Policy Narratives)**

This study also suggests that learners' WTC is strongly influenced by the large culture policy narratives underpinned by historical narratives, ethnicity and identity and the cultural practices in which they are situated. The positioning of English as the second language via the *Second Language Policy* added to the 'supremacy' of the English language as used in the past, generally known to be the language of the British colonials and the language of the elites, mainly those who served the colonials and were educated in English schools. The association of speaking English to 'show off' is related to English being the language of the 'elites' or the upper echelons of society during British colonial rule. This study suggests that being linked to the 'colonials' may result in a complex social acceptance. To some ESL learners too, resistance to the colonials' language was due to the perceived threat to national culture. A complex social acceptance was evident when speaking English and speaking the native language strongly contributed to what it meant to be a Malay, Indian or Chinese.

The study highlights that ESL learners are vulnerable, as they fear not only criticism but also being rejected by groups of similar identity and being labelled as upholding the western supremacy. The notion that English is the language of the colonials remains prevalent thus a conscious attempt to speak down or speak as little as possible

in English in order to be accepted, is prevalent among the ESL learners in this study. Surprisingly, to be able to ‘fit-in’ to the community, proficient ESL learners are willing to ‘switch’ identities or to ‘mask’ their ability by pretending to have poor English competency. The positioning of English within the education system is dealt in many different ways, and thus WTC becomes a complex phenomenon. The powerful large culture influences related to ethnicity and identity have created a strong image of what it meant to be Malaysians.

Cultural narratives such as equating teachers to authority figures and classroom ethos such as silence as a show of respect and obedience towards teachers were some of the prevailing influences on learners’ WTC. In fact, most learners agreed that asking questions and speaking English while lessons are running could be regarded as ‘showing off’ or ‘boasting’ (due to its ‘supremacy’ and positioning). Thus, limiting their speech in L2 as a show of respect towards teachers is generally common and acceptable even among proficient ESL speakers. ‘Masking’ abilities by pretending to be poor in speaking English is another attempt to avoid intimidating other with lower proficiency. Learners claim that such values and ethos are crucial to avoid misunderstandings and promote harmony among learners in the classroom. On the other hand, ESL learners with greater confidence to break these cultural expectations are more likely to be willing to communicate during the ESL class. Such strong culture governed behaviour resonates other studies mentioned earlier. The strong link between ESL classroom ethos and cultural values are significant to the Malaysian ESL learners’ context, but with English classrooms that necessitate ESL learners to interact in order to develop competency, English teachers play a vital role in developing a culturally sensitive approach to encourage WTC.

### 9.2.2 Small Culture Influences

Despite the strong large culture influences that shape learners' WTC, the small culture influences underpinned by the *family and community narratives*, *institutional cultures narratives* and *digital narratives* are also seen as potentially encouraging WTC even among learners with poor competency.

#### 9.2.2.1 Family and Community Narratives

Notably, it has been established that family support and encouragement play a critical role in supporting learners' state of interest and motivation, which may overcome any obstacles related to the target language and their willingness to improve in their communicative performance. The use of English as the first language or second language in some families among different ethnic groups promotes greater WTC as it is no longer construed as a threat to self-identity or to the local languages and cultures. To some, English is perceived as a 'neutral' language free from any negative associations. Apart from that the study shows that a family's high socioeconomic status (SES) contributes to greater proficiency and WTC but, at the same time, low SES does not necessarily have the opposite effect. Although with low SES, consistent family support and encouragement toward excellence in the target language naturally enhance greater WTC. The opportunities to communicate in the target language within the community they live in is another supporting factor towards greater WTC within the ESL classroom.



The institutional cultures, which position English as the MOI in other subjects other than English classes and also implemented within university projects, promote greater motivation which enhances WTC within ESL classrooms. Such domino effect, result to learners perceiving English as the language of empowerment, which in turn encourages WTC. Learners feel strongly empowered, that with English, they are able to interact and communicate ideas beyond the confined borders of ESL classrooms.

At the tertiary level, learners acknowledge the importance of the English language, as they took part in the teaching and learning. However, English is still limited to the academic context (lectures, notes and references) with minimal communicative purposes, which in turn influences the lack of WTC. This again raises the issue of the lack of a meaningful platform to interact in English. With regard to lectures, there are variations of MOI (BM, English and bilingual) in the teaching and learning approaches used by various lecturers, depending on their preferences. Especially for lower competency learners, when other courses are not taught in English, motivation to use the target language in ESL class is also low. Surprise findings revealed that some ESL learners had dealt with negative or traumatic learning experiences (related to the use of English) in classes other than English; thus they would generally opt to totally withdraw within the ESL classroom. There is no doubt that the position of English at HEIs is a source of empowerment and motivation to WTC, but platforms of meaningful communication in English are crucial to promote greater WTC.

This research advances the idea that digital narratives act as a strong influence to cause the lack of WTC among ESL learners. This was an unanticipated finding of this study.

Findings clearly support that Social Networking Sites (SNS) as they find the online community as less hostile and it promote the use of the language beyond boundaries of the ESL classroom.

Due to the virtual nature of SNS, there are obvious concerns among ESL learners that the SNS pose greater threats due to the possibilities of ‘online shaming’, ‘bashing’ and ‘defaming’ for linguistic mistakes made in communicating in the target language. The possibility of using the ‘wrong’ English and the large culture threats mentioned earlier such as equating speaking English to showing off or boasting could be ‘magnified’ via SNS and extend to the real-life scenario. Mistakes could go viral, and the shame learners’ encounter could be almost continuous.

Although it may sound surreal, the cyber world poses various risks to ESL learners’ WTC, particularly those vulnerable learners. On the other hand, for some, the online nature of the SNS was preferred over face-to-face interaction, where ESL learners claim that online sites are safer platform, as they reduce the risks of being evaluated by other members of the ESL classroom. In both circumstance, WTC in the ESL class is low. Such strong *small culture* influences of digital narratives could encourage WTC, but at the same time, the set back of the ‘online’ nature, impacts on WTC within the ESL classroom. These findings of the negative impact of digital narratives on WTC, which surfaced in this study, require a new way of thinking so that learners will be not discouraged from communicating in the ESL classroom.

### **9.3 Potential Influences of this study in the field of ESL and WTC.**

#### **9.3.1 The Socio-cultural Perspectives: New ways of thinking about WTC**

It has been mentioned in Chapter 3 (*section 3.2.3*) that prior research has thoroughly investigated WTC by focusing on learners' psychological constructs and trying to find correlations between these particular constructs and WTC. However, very little research has been conducted to show that socio-cultural elements play a big role in influencing learners' WTC within the classroom.

The unusual nature of this research is that it is concentrating on an almost ethnographic kind of approach (*semi-structured interviews and observations*), which aims to understand the world from the student's point of view and is concerned with socio-cultural influences of those young people, rather than focusing on individual attributes. These socio-cultural perspectives also take account of the historical narratives coming down through the years, which affect the current social settings. The study found there are additional layers of influences that are quite complex and those influences are related to identity. It takes account of the fact that there are certain niceties that form learners' engagement within the classroom. Added to that, these different layers of influences are coming from societies and other cultures within these societies.

There is no research specific to the Malaysian ESL learners' context, which involves socio-cultural perspectives in relation to WTC. In this regard, the socio-cultural aspect of WTC helps this research to be original, as it does not study the correlations between constructs and WTC. This study investigates deeply the socio-cultural aspect on the

influences that might be affecting learners' WTC. This research is potentially unique and one that poses interesting questions for the future direction of this study.

The large culture influences, which are placed at the macro-level of society, create a dominant culture for the nation. Policies implemented for the nation are “top-down” for they are “policies that come from people of power and authority to make decisions for a certain group, without consulting the end-users of the language” (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997, p. 196). Thus, learners are confined by such powerful influences, learners' behaviour, and the way they perceive English and others who speak English will be affected. According to Holliday (1999), *small culture* concerns cultures that emerge from social groupings. In this research, I have extended this concept of small culture to family and community narratives as well as institutions and digital narratives. Within this group, the salience of these different narratives cultural realities are constructed and will continue to grow.

### **9.3.2 ESL Teachers' training**

As mentioned in the *Chapter 5*, discussion with teachers through informal and formal interviews which took place during the data collection period reveal that teachers' ideas about learners' state of WTC is in some ways different to learners' views. From the teachers' point of view, the lack of WTC in the classroom does not result from socio-cultural factors but from individual attributes and linguistic weaknesses instead. Seeing these differences in perception, as a teacher myself, I would wish to compliment my in-depth study of learners' perceptions with a parallel study of

teachers' perceptions on WTC. As a teacher, these differences in views of WTC could lead to further conflicts among ESL learners.

Having established all of the influences, which have influenced ESL learners' WTC, it is suggested that discussion with ESL teachers could be built on. Teachers should be made aware of these powerful influences and build something more substantial to contribute to their practice, in terms of helping teachers of English to understand the complexities and the potential conflict that ESL learners feel that might be affecting their state of WTC. As a teaching team, teachers may well discuss how to respond to these conflicts that learners are confronting linked to their WTC.

In addition, it should be suggested that teachers conduct reflective activities with ESL learners and communicate about their identity in relation to being ESL learners. The findings of this research could be made into a teaching tool to help learners with lack of WTC. By making the unconscious conscious, not just the knowledge of large and small culture influences is shared and discussed, but this approach effectively scaffolds learners' ability to think about thinking. As teachers openly talk to students about this, the culture in class is genuinely shifted.

### **9.3.3 Creating the 'small culture' of the ESL classroom.**

In relation to the above discussion, this begins to initiate the question about how a teacher can alter the small culture of the ESL classroom, taking account of those potential external influences such as society and family. This picks up on Holiday's

(1999) *small culture* ideas and the potential power of *small culture* influences in influencing learners' WTC. It raises important questions about how classroom culture can be developed and enhanced in order to meet and engage with the more negative narratives the students have to deal with.

As a teacher myself, I strongly feel that setting up ethos for the ESL classroom would somehow create a completely new classroom culture, which would allow learners to take more control of their own learning. Investing time in exploring our learning and teaching identities gives us more chance to make decisions about what we do and how we behave. At the beginning of the first ESL class, the teacher should inform learners how she intends to approach the teaching and learning and what the relationship with the learners will be at the same time discussing lists of do's and don'ts within the class. Positive changes in the ethos of the classroom and the ways teachers are engaged with students would build a stronger level of trust between them, which thus would possibly stimulate greater WTC in the target language. Essentially, this very much creates the *small culture* of the classroom and learners will understand what will happen in this *small culture* classroom environment.

#### **9.3.4 ESL teachers' positive persona**

It was clear from the study that learners' who had low WTC fear taking risks. In most cases, they fear being *othered*, negatively labelled and judged when English is spoken. The importance of teachers' roles in encouraging WTC has been mentioned in previous studies by Liu (2005), Kang (2005), Liu and Jackson (2008), Cao(2009) and

Matsuda and Gobel (2004). Cutrone (2009) claimed that a teacher's demeanour and attitude plays a critical role in shaping and causing L2 anxiety. To overcome learners' fear of making mistakes and receiving negative evaluations, Kang (2005) suggests that ESL teachers should be attentive to learners while smiling and then providing their feedback. In Cutrone's study (2009, p. 58), attributes such as "kindness, friendliness, a good sense of humour, and stability" are desired in an English teacher.

Since the majority of the ESL learners were identified as vulnerable to negative evaluations from others, it is crucial for teachers to ensure a safer and more secure environment in learning the target language. Research into the classroom climate by Patrick and Ryan (2005) notes three constructs, namely, teacher academic support, emotional support and classroom mutual respect. A teacher's academic support is defined as the teacher assisting learners to master the content rather than nurturing competitiveness between learners. Emotional support sees teachers as caring individuals, and classroom mutual respect sees the teacher fostering respect and encouraging students to help one another within the classroom. These qualities will allow learners to feel that they are valued and able to contribute through interactions within the classrooms. Interrupting and correcting learners while speaking could also make the learners hesitant and insecure in their speech when they should really be practising communication.

Teachers should also make learners aware that it is acceptable to make mistakes and constructively work on these mistakes. With this in mind, learners will not always be preoccupied with the fear of making mistakes and will be less concerned about their

linguistic limitations. Cutrone (2009), in his study among Japanese ESL learners, suggests that teachers make less obtrusive measures in error correction as a way to move away from the evaluative paradigm and to promote a sense of trust between the learners. Gregersen (2003, p. 31) mentions that teachers' overcorrections can "draw students' attention away from communication and toward a focus on form and accuracy".

### **9.3.5 Empowering English and preserving identity**

The national policies impart a strong large culture image on how students perceive English, on their identity and the way they behave towards the target language. English is seen as an important language of employability. Juggling between the national language and the instrumental needs of the target language while submitting to one's cultural identity as Malaysian (being Malay, Chinese or Indian and speaking the native language) requires not only that ESL teachers should be mindful of who their learners are, but also be constructive and supportive in motivating ESL learners to communicate in the target language.

As an ESL teacher, changing language policies as an immediate approach to encouraging WTC would not be practical, but integration of a culturally-sensitive teaching approach is vital. An earlier study on Malaysian ESL learners' identity suggested that learners could merge their own cultural identity with the more contemporary Malaysian identity (Lee, Lee, Wong et al., 2010). Learners can still learn English by keeping their social identities, cultural values and frame of reference.



Teachers should introduce local teaching and learning materials to inculcate pride in one's own culture at the same time keeping to learners' national identity.

In Malaysia, where the national culture is dominant, ESL teaching methodologies should be tailored to the learners' identity, whilst at the same time fostering interest in and motivation towards communication in the target language. It is important to convince ESL learners that speaking a second language allows greater prospects for knowledge, employability, educational advancement and mobility. Alternatively, by making explicit the various cultural narratives, teachers should empower learners to move beyond their reluctance to communicate in English. Lee et al. (2010) suggest the need for language policy that promotes multilingualism and multiculturalism, particularly in achieving a well-developed nation. Bahasa Malaysia is the main medium of instruction in public schools, but the mastery of English needs to be promoted, and the learning of Mandarin and Tamil as other language for communication should also be encouraged.

In this research study, findings highlight that learners show evidence of struggle, tension and frustration as they approach the target language and their WTC. With understanding and compassion from the ESL teacher, ESL learners would be able manage these complexities and be able to improve their state of WTC. This again calls for more fundamental training and engagement with teacher perceptions of WTC, as mentioned earlier in section 9.3.2.

### **9.3.6 Meaningful communication platforms**

Another highlighted issue with regard to learners' lack of WTC was the lack of platform to communicate meaningfully in the target language. Since English serves mostly instrumental purposes for ESL learners, communicative activities should be made routine in English language classes to promote meaningful communication, which could enhance WTC. Among other activities, these can be carried out in the forms of impromptu speeches, role-play, simulations, information gaps, interviews, brainstorming, storytelling, story completion, reporting and picture narrating which allow ESL learners to use the language within authentic platforms. The highly structured examination system could also introduce speaking components to be tested and evaluated so that this might motivate learners to accelerate their WTC in class.

In cases where learners are vulnerable and less confident, studies by Riazi and Riasati (2007), Cetinkaya (2005), and Cao and Philp (2006) recommend that learners work in pairs or small groups. The participants in their study reported that they were more willing to speak in groups with a small number of participants than to speak individually in front of a mass audience. This way, they have the opportunity to help each other and learn from each other. As such, language teachers are advised to incorporate more pair work and group work activities into their teaching syllabus. Just before doing this, ESL teachers should be tutored in the understanding of the complexities affecting WTC among their learners.

### **9.3.7 Maximizing the use of social networking sites (SNS)**

One of the significant contributions of this study shows that SNS to a certain degree can negatively influence learners' WTC within the ESL classroom. SNS were perceived as posing a threat to especially, vulnerable ESL learners, particularly those with lower competency. SNS has the capacity to magnify linguistic mistakes and weaknesses beyond the classroom walls. If we are to successfully teach a post-modern generation of ESL learners, then teaching methods, which incorporate the use of technologies including the SNS, are important to promote a positive, safe and secure language learning environment.

One of the advantages mentioned through the use of SNS is that ESL learners will have a larger audience, thus fostering a sense of global interaction. Blogs or Facebook could be the platforms for ESL learners to communicate with their teachers and friends. Such platforms are especially helpful for shy and vulnerable language learners who might not otherwise take the opportunity to communicate with others (Yunus, Salehi, Chenzi, 2012). It is crucial that the platform be made formal to ensure that language learning takes place and to avoid misuse of the online platforms (Yunus, Salehi, Chenzi, 2012). "The relationship between teacher and students can somehow be tricky. Teachers need to realize that even though the environment is virtual, the identity should not be hidden" (Yunus, Salehi, Chenzi, 2012).

It could also be suggested that online activity could also be extended to real life situations and to face-to-face classroom discussion in order to promote real life communication. For instance, teachers may introduce an online forum for learners to

discuss issues or problems related to their state of WTC, and the issues discussed could be brought into the actual class to be further discussed in search of solutions. I generally believe the online forum could be regarded as a safer platform for learners to communicate ideas without being identified or judged. Besides, online discussions also allow learners to regulate their own learning. Computer-based learning (CBL) among many other benefits, “promotes self-paced learning as learners interact at their own pace, increases motivation as learner feels empowered and involved and supports less confident learners as it allows learners to visit materials” (Jordan, Carlie & Stack, 2008, p. 237). In short, ESL activities could be made across different spaces to promote meaningful communication within the ESL class.

#### **9.4 Limitation and future directions of the study**

The data was collected in only one public university in Malaysia, and the number of participants was limited to 100 ESL learners from diverse home disciplines. Hence, the results do not represent the perceptions of ESL learners nationwide. Nonetheless, as a piece of qualitative work, this allowed for an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of a wide range of students while also providing a form of ‘fuzzy’ generalisation (Bassey, 1999) which looks to the typification of research participants as having resonance for those in similar situations.

However, the main intention of this study was to carry out an in-depth investigation of the influence of culture on learners’ WTC. Therefore, the value of this study derives from 100 ESL learners who had been observed and interviewed in order to investigate

their feelings, beliefs and perceptions of their WTC in English. Although the findings are limited, the outcomes may contribute greatly to the issue of culture (large culture and small culture) as influencing Malaysian ESL learners' WTC within the ESL classroom. A future researcher may also be interested to investigate the perceptions of ESL teachers in regards to the influence of culture towards learners' WTC. In this way, the findings may be able to complement the findings of this study. Malaysian ESL teachers may need to focus more on the essentialist large culture views when reflecting on learners' WTC.

A future study could be extended to a larger sample of ESL learners in all public universities in Malaysia. Similar studies could also be extended to ESL learners at private universities in Malaysia, and this would potentially generate different outcomes as learners studying within private institutions may largely vary from those in the public system especially in terms of learners' SES, educational experiences, origins and cultural values. In fact, these institutions are not constrained to the Bumiputra policy, impacting the demographic, potentially allowing bigger portion of Chinese, Indians and other ethnics.

This study produced findings which implicitly corroborate the factors influencing WTC in MacIntyre's (1988) heuristic WTC model (Figure 3.1). However, findings related to digital narratives, as significantly influencing learners' lack of WTC in learning English, have never been mentioned in any previous study. For future recommendation, it would be interesting to investigate in depth the influence of digital narratives on learners' positive and negative WTC in English. In fact, the findings in

this study were limited to the use of SNS. Other social media platforms like ‘Instagram’, Twitter and ‘Tik Tok’ could be researched to study their effect on students’ WTC in English.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

The ultimate goal in second language learning is no longer merely focused on linguistic competence but also on competence to use the language. Likewise, the ultimate goal of teaching and learning English at tertiary level is for learners to be able to communicate using the language for the purposes of employability and educational advancement. However, without WTC, ESL learners are less likely to be engaged in communicative activities within the ESL classroom and hence would fall short on the benefits of L2 interactions. According to MacIntyre et al., (2002, p. 539) “willingness to communicate is the one overwhelming communication personality construct which permeates every facet of an individual’s life and contributes significantly to the social, educational, and organizational achievements of the individual”. The following is the summary of the research;

- In Malaysia, where English is learnt mainly for instrumental purposes, the national, political, social structures and cultural system placed at the macro level of the society (large cultures) is potentially a powerful influence on learners’ identity influencing learners’ perceptions and behaviour towards WTC in the target language.

- Influences coming from family and community, institutions and digital narratives (small cultures) nevertheless are creating discrepancies in how learners engage themselves in terms of WTC.
- WTC in English is complex and highly contextualized. It is very much a dynamic process largely depending on learners' interaction with the large and small culture influences, the extent learners self-categorized themselves into different degree of WTC (poor WTC, moderate WTC, high WTC, high WTC within selective context).

It is fair to say that ESL teachers need to account for the convergence and divergence of the complex layers of the socio-cultural elements bounding learners' lives to understand their state of WTC. These socio-cultural elements, seen through the lens of large culture and small culture influences, suggest that WTC potentially is a situational phenomenon, as these influences to some extent pose situational constraints that affect what happens within learners in a given situation. The underlining importance that this thesis has achieved is suggesting a new way of thinking about the socio-cultural influences that help to shape student perceptions and potentially affect their WTC. The hybridised model and the nested model of the ESL classroom culture developed in this research acknowledge the dynamic nature of the large culture and small culture influences towards ESL learners' state of WTC.

Finally, yet importantly, considering my journey through the PhD I would like to emphasise that a PhD is not only about the product (a thesis) but about the journey and the transformation of understanding which leads me to see the familiar in a new way.

The challenging journey through study, research, investigations, observations and experience has allowed me to be able to discern and judge which aspects of knowledge and information that life offers are true and applicable in life as an ESL teacher and as a human being in general. I would like to end this journey with a quote “*We don’t receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us*” (Marcel Proust). The PhD journey may be long, winding and solitary, but it was worth the journey. “*By three methods we may learn wisdom: first by reflection which is noblest; second by imitation which is easiest; third by experience which is the bitterest*” (Confucius).





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## Appendix A Classroom observation Check List

**Class:**

| Time | Teacher's action | Student's action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|      |                  | <p><b>With teacher</b></p> <p>[ ] Actively respond to Q when T asks</p> <p>[ ] Extensively respond when T asks</p> <p>[ ] Volunteer answer</p> <p>[ ] Ask T some Q's</p> <p>[ ] others:</p> <p><b>With peers</b></p> <p>[ ] Ask questions in English</p> <p>[ ] Actively speaks English</p> <p>[ ] Actively speaks Malay</p> <p>[ ] Bilingual</p> <p>[ ] Others:</p> |
|      |                  | <p><b>With teacher</b></p> <p>[ ] Actively respond to Q when T asks</p> <p>[ ] Extensively respond when T asks</p> <p>[ ] Volunteer answer</p> <p>[ ] Ask T some Q's</p> <p>[ ] Others:</p> <p><b>With peers</b></p> <p>[ ] Ask questions in English</p>                                                                                                             |

| Time | Teacher's action | Student's action                                                                                                                                                             |
|------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|      |                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Actively speaks English<br><input type="checkbox"/> Actively speaks Malay<br><input type="checkbox"/> Bilingual<br><input type="checkbox"/> Others: |

## Appendix B Pattapong's Original Classroom Observation Checklist

Source: Pattapong, K. (2010). *Willingness to communicate in a second language: A qualitative study of issues affecting Thai EFL learners from students' and teachers' points of view*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Sydney, Australia.

| Appendix D: Classroom observation sheet |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                |                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Time began                                                                                                     | Time ended                                                                      |
| <b>Task</b>                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Lecture<br><input type="checkbox"/> Free short<br><input type="checkbox"/> Free long<br><input type="checkbox"/> Ind <input type="checkbox"/> pair <input type="checkbox"/> group <input type="checkbox"/> whole                                                                              | <input type="checkbox"/> control<br><input type="checkbox"/> Prepared<br><input type="checkbox"/> Presentation | <b>Sts speaking characteristics</b>                                             |
| <b>Skill/ language focus</b>            | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening/ <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking/ <input type="checkbox"/> Reading/ <input type="checkbox"/> Writing<br><input type="checkbox"/> Grammar/ <input type="checkbox"/> Vocab/ <input type="checkbox"/> Pronun/ <input type="checkbox"/> Meanings/ <input type="checkbox"/> Expression |                                                                                                                | With T:<br>Actively respond to Q when T asks<br>Extensively respond when T asks |
| <b>Teacher actions</b>                  | Volunteer answer<br>Ask T some Qs<br>With peers:<br>Actively speak English<br>Turn of Eng use<br>Length of Eng use<br>Actively speak Thai<br>Turn of Thai use<br>Length of Thai use                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                | Episode<br>Date                                                                 |

## Appendix C Example 1 Classroom observation notes

Time: 11-12.50 pm

Date: 26/2/2017

Class 3 (FKT)

| Time           | Teacher's action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Students Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11.05-11.20 am | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher greeted students</li> <li>- Teacher explained about the topic for today's class : What makes a good speaker</li> <li>- Teacher asked the class "<i>what do you think makes a good speaker?</i>"</li> <li>- Teacher then asked, "<i>what types of personality will make a person a good speaker?</i>"</li> <li>- Teacher note down students' response on board.</li> </ul>                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most students replied and greeted teacher in return</li> <li>- Students hesitate to answer at first. But after teacher gives examples like "<i>a happy go lucky person</i>", "<i>a confident person</i>", students started to give their own ideas.</li> <li>- Students were recorded saying "<i>talkative, open-minded, brave, extroverts</i>".</li> </ul>                                        |
| 11.20- 12.pm   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher explained that students will work in groups of four to five members</li> <li>- Teacher said "<i>everyone, please count from 1 to five and repeat. Then go and find you friends with the same number. Please sit with them</i>".</li> <li>- Teacher then said, "<i>In groups, please discuss these questions. What are the characteristics of a good speaker, in terms of delivery and in terms of content? Secondly, what are the things you should avoid?</i>"</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students were actively talking in Malay with their peers calling out numbers. But the numbers were mentioned in English.</li> <li>- One student asked the teacher a question (in English), "<i>do we have to elaborate?</i>"</li> <li>- Students actively proceeded with discussions in Malay and English.</li> <li>- Groups that consisted a significant number of Chinese and Indians</li> </ul> |

| Time          | Teacher's action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Students Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher wrote the questions on the board.</li> <li>- Teacher frequently reminded the students to communicate in English language,</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ethnic were observed to be communicating in English language. Groups consisted with only Malay ethnic were observed speaking in Malay language.</li> <li>- Students switched to English if teacher was present in the group.</li> </ul> |
| 12.00-12.50pm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students took turns to share what they have discussed.</li> <li>- Teacher encouraged others to asked questions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students presented in English</li> <li>- No questions were asked from the others.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                            |
|               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group 1 (this group volunteered first)</li> <li>- Presentation was fluent and confident</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No questions were asked</li> <li>- The others listened attentively</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                           |
|               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group 2 (Teacher pointed out)</li> <li>- The group members hesitate to go in front and present. They were pushing each other to be the speakers.</li> <li>- Two students came to the front but were very nervous.</li> <li>- Teacher calmed them down by giving encouragement. Teachers instructed to take deep breathes.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No questions were asked</li> <li>- The others listened attentively</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                           |
|               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group 3 (They volunteered)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No questions were asked</li> <li>- The others listened attentively</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                           |

| Time | Teacher's action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Students Action                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Every members of the group came to the front to present.</li> </ul> <p>(They feel more confident in groups)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher stopped at group 3 due to time constraints.</li> <li>- Teacher summarized the characteristics of a good speaker, as mentioned by the students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eye contact</li> <li>- Binging notes</li> <li>- Know what to say</li> <li>- Knowledge</li> <li>- Body gestures</li> <li>-</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students shows signs of relief when teacher discontinued with the group presentations.</li> <li>- Students added more characteristics</li> </ul> |

**\*Note**

- Teacher was 100% using English in her lesson.
- Students responded in English when teacher asked questions
- Mixed ethnic group members were observed to be speaking more English among each other. Malay students were seen to try to speak English.
- Some Indians ethnic students were observed to switch from English to Malay when speaking with Malay peers. The same with Chinese students.
- One Malay student was observed trying to speak in English when teacher encouraged several times.
- Groups with all Malays were observed to be comfortable speaking in Malay.
- Students were comfortable speaking in groups rather than individually.

## Appendix D Example 2 Classroom observation notes

Time: 11.00-12.50 am  
(FP)

Date: 20/2/2017 Class 1

| Time          | Teacher's action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Students Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11.10-11.20   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher greeted students</li> <li>- Teacher explained about the term paper assignment</li> <li>- Teacher wrote details on the board and explained them to the students</li> </ul>                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most students replied and greeted teacher in return</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher asked for any questions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No questions were asked to the teacher</li> <li>- Students were actively talking with peers about the term paper assignment in Malay.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 11.20-11.50am | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher instructed students to take out the given article (Title: Metro Sexuality)</li> <li>- Teacher elicited students background knowledge on the topic by asking examples of the characteristics of a metrosexual person</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students were observed giving examples of a metrosexual person in Malay and English (bilingual)</li> <li>- The same students (Razif, Akmal and Jefri) were keen to contribute giving examples while the others were quiet.</li> <li>- Razif, Akmal and Jefri responded in a group rather than giving individual answer</li> <li>- In general, the girls were quieter than the boys. Some were very passive by only taking down notes with no interaction</li> </ul> |
|               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher carried out the discussion of the article as teacher expected students have read and understood the main ideas.</li> <li>- Teacher asked, "have everyone read this at home?"</li> </ul>                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most students, especially the boys, responded "yes".</li> <li>- Some girls remain silent. (Probably because they were feeling anxious sitting close to me)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

| Time              | Teacher's action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Students Action                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12.00-<br>12.50pm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher asked, <i>"do you understand?"</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very few students responded "yes".</li> <li>- Students were actively speaking in Malay language, asking peers of what they understood from the text.</li> </ul>                   |
|                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher began pointing out to Ramzi, asking him to share his view of the main ideas of the text</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ramzi said <i>"it's about..."</i> then he discontinued.</li> <li>- The others were also quiet.</li> </ul>                                                                         |
|                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher then instructed to those who understand to share what they thought of the article.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No one volunteered. Silence in class.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  |
|                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher than insisted that everyone to be honest to declare whether they have understood the text.</li> <li>- Teacher switched to Malay language and said<br/><br/><i>"kene bagitaulah awak faham atau tidak. Saya tidak akan tahu apa yang awak tidak faham. Kita boleh bincang"</i> (<i>"you have to tell me if you don't understand. I will not know unless you tell me, only then we could discuss"</i>)</li> <li>- Then teacher informed students to discuss with peers of what they have read by focussing on the main ideas of each paragraphs.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students actively speak in Malay during discussion with peers.</li> <li>- After 10 minutes of discussion, nobody volunteered to share the outcome of their discussion.</li> </ul> |
|                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher adopted another strategy. Teacher invited students to read the text together with her. Teacher asked for volunteers.</li> <li>- Since there were no volunteers, teacher pointed to Husna to read the first paragraph and praised her for</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- After being pointed out, students read the paragraphs.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                 |



| Time | Teacher's action                                                                                                                          | Students Action                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|      | doing it well. Teacher said " <i>well done</i> ".                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher calls for class discussion of the main ideas after each paragraph being read.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher started to use Malay to start the discussion.</li> <li>- Students were also using Malay and English is sharing what they think about the paragraph.</li> </ul> |

\*Note

- Teacher was 100% using English in the beginning of her lesson.
- Teacher began to use Malay as means to encourage response from students.
- Teacher allows students to use Malay to share ideas as means to encourage them to take part in the activity. Otherwise, students seemed to be in silence.
- Only similar students volunteered to answer, however in groups. Students seemed more confident responding in groups.
- Most students will only talk in English after being pointed out by the teacher. It is hard to find students who are willing to volunteer giving feedback.
- The girls were very quiet but attentive. They were seen taking down notes most of the times.
- Interaction among peers were in Malay all of the time.
- Students seemed to be more relax when teacher is bilingual.

## Appendix E Students Semi-structured Interview Guide

|         |                                                                                                                                       |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ1     | Learners description of themselves in relevance to factors such as identity, family and societal notions (culture and national goals) | Q1  | When did you start learning English?                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q2  | Tell me about your experiences learning English.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q3  | Why do you think you have to learn English?                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q4  | Do you think you enjoyed learning English? Why?                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q5  | Do you think communicating in English is challenging? Why?                                                                                                                                                                       |
| RQ2 & 3 | Influences of social/ family values                                                                                                   | Q6  | Do you think your family influences you learn English? Why/ Why not? How?                                                                                                                                                        |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q7  | Do you think the community you come from influences the way you learn English?                                                                                                                                                   |
|         | Influences of other social groupings                                                                                                  | Q8  | As a student in this university, what other <b>opportunities</b> (apart from you English class) that have helped you in learning English?<br><br>Have this helped you in your <b>willingness to communicate</b> in English? How? |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q9  | As students in this university, what do you think are some of the <b>opportunities</b> you have gained (apart from your English class) that have helped you in your willingness to communicate in English during English lesson? |
|         | Influences of classroom culture                                                                                                       | Q10 | Can you describe some of the <b>activities</b> you have carried out together in your English lessons?                                                                                                                            |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q11 | How do you think that activities that you experienced together with friends and teacher in the English class have helped you become a better English learner?                                                                    |
|         | Influences of the Institutional culture                                                                                               | Q12 | How do you think being in students in UA University known as international university, influences your belief and attitude towards learning English?                                                                             |

## Appendix F Students Semi-structured Interview Guide in Bahasa Malaysia

|         |                                                                                                                                       |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ1     | Learners description of themselves in relevance to factors such as identity, family and societal notions (culture and national goals) | Q1  | Bilakah anda mula mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris?                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q2  | Sila terangkan pengalaman anda mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q3  | Mengapa anda rasa anda mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris?                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q4  | Adakah anda suka mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris dan mengapa?                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q5  | Adakah anda rasa mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris itu sesuatu yang sukar? Mengapa?                                                                                                                                                                             |
| RQ2 & 3 | Influences of social/ family values                                                                                                   | Q6  | Adakah keluarga anda banyak mempengaruhi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris anda? Jika ya, bagaimana? / Jika tidak, bagaimana?                                                                                                                                  |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q7  | Adakah anda rasa masyarakat sekeliling anda mempengaruhi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris anda?                                                                                                                                                               |
|         | Influences of other social groupings                                                                                                  | Q8  | Sebagai pelajar di universiti, selain kelas Bahasa Inggeris, apakah peluang-peluang yang ada, yang telah membantu anda mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris?<br><br>Adakah peluang-peluang ini telah membantu anda untuk mahu berkomunikasi dalam Bahasa Inggeris? |
|         |                                                                                                                                       |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|         | Influences of classroom culture                                                                                                       | Q9  | Bolehkah anda kongsikan beberapa aktiviti yang telah dijalankan di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris anda.                                                                                                                                                      |
|         |                                                                                                                                       | Q10 | Adakah aktiviti –aktiviti ini membantu anda mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris secara berkesan?                                                                                                                                                                  |
|         | Influences of the Institutional culture                                                                                               | Q12 | Dengan menjadi pelajar UA University, sebuah universiti antarabangsa yang tersohor, adakah ini mempengaruhi anda untuk mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris? Jika ya, bagaimana? Jika tidak, bagaimana?                                                            |

## Appendix G Participant Classroom Observation (Group Discussion Activity Sheet)

|                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Prior</b> to watching the clip from the movie ‘ <b>English Vinglish</b> ’, consider the following questions about the movie. |                                                                                                                                |
| Q1                                                                                                                              | What do you normally think of when thinking about the Indian culture in Malaysia, and what do you think of culture in general? |
| <b>As you watch</b> the clip consider the following questions about the movie                                                   |                                                                                                                                |
| Q2                                                                                                                              | What do you think are the family cultures/ values you observed through the movie?                                              |
| Q4                                                                                                                              | What do you think motivates Shashi to learn English?                                                                           |
| Q5                                                                                                                              | What do you think are the struggles/ dilemmas/ challenges Shashi faces during her English lesson?                              |
| <b>After watching</b> the clip, consider the following questions in relation to your culture.                                   |                                                                                                                                |
| Q6                                                                                                                              | What do you think are the things that define your culture?                                                                     |
| Q7                                                                                                                              | Can you name some important values you think are important to you?                                                             |
| Q8                                                                                                                              | What do you think you will achieve by learning English?                                                                        |
| Q8                                                                                                                              | What factors helped to shape your belief in learning English?                                                                  |
| Q9                                                                                                                              | What do you think are the struggles/ dilemmas/ challenges you face during your English lesson?                                 |
| Q10                                                                                                                             | During English lessons, when you <b>decide/ hesitate</b> to speak in English to your <b>friends</b> , why do you do so?        |
| Q11                                                                                                                             | During English lessons, when you <b>decide/hesitate</b> to speak in English to your <b>teacher</b> , why do you do so?         |

## **Appendix H Application Letter to conduct Research**

### **APPLICATION LETTER TO CONDUCT STUDY**

Nur Salwa bt Abd Wahid  
Moray House School of Education  
University of Edinburgh  
United Kingdom

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Dekan,  
Akademi Bahasa  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia,  
81300  
Johor Bahru  
Malaysia

TARIKH: 20 FEB 2017

Tuan,

#### **MEMOHON KEBENARAN MENJALANKAN PENYELIDIKAN**

Berhubung perkara diatas,

Saya ingin mendapatkan kebenaran menjalankan penyelidikan bagi menyempurnakan penulisan ilmiah Doktor Falsafah (Ph.D).

2. Pelajar yang terlibat adalah pelajar pelajar tahun tiga yang mengikuti kelas Bahasa Inggeris ULAB3162 seramai 100 orang. Ini melibatkan 7 buah kelas.

Kerjasama dari pihak tuan amat dihargai dan didahului dengan ucapan terima kasih.

Sekian,

Yang benar,

.....

(NUR SALWA BT ABD WAHID)

## **Appendix I Participants Consent Forms**



### **Culture and the ESL classroom in relation to learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) at a public university in Malaysia**

#### **Participant Information and Consent Form**

This research looks at the topic of the role of culture in ESL classrooms in higher education in relation to learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. The research will address the role of the 'culture', where ethnicity, family, society alongside with the learners' social groupings, institution and the government in influencing learners state of using English. My intention is to open up new understandings towards learners' state of learning English, especially towards their willingness to communicate in English. You are invited to take part in the study which will be conducted over 8 weeks' period (Mid-February – End of April 2017).

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your school or the institutions represented by any researcher. If you initially decide to participate, you are still free to withdraw at any time later without affecting those relationships.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no risks associated with participating in this study, and there are no short or long-term benefits to participating in this study. In the event, you experience stress or anxiety during your participation in the study; you may terminate your participation at any time; however, it does not preclude you from completing your teacher's assignments. You may refuse to answer any questions you consider invasive or stressful.

#### **Compensation:**

There will be no compensation provided for your participation in this study.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report of this study that might be published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact address: Nur Salwa, Room 1.10 Thomson's Land, Moray House School of Education, The University of Edinburgh, Old Moray House, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ

**If you have any queries or concerns, please get in touch with Salwa at s1574048 @sms.ed.ac.uk**

## Appendix J Implementation of the actual research

| Month                   | Activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| January 2017            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot focus group interview among 3 Malaysian learners in the University of Edinburgh</li> <li>Pilot semi-structured interview of 1 Malaysian learner in the University of Edinburgh.</li> </ul>                                                                         |
| February 2017: Week 1-2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot non-participant classroom observation of a 2<sup>nd</sup>-year undergraduate ESL class.</li> <li>Pilot first participant classroom observation of an ESL LEAP class.</li> <li>Pilot second participant classroom observation of another ESL LEAP class.</li> </ul> |
| February 2017           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visits to the ULAB 3162 ESL classes to brief about the research and to obtain consent from participants.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                      |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted 3 Classroom non-participant observation (FKA, FKM, FKT)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| March 2017              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted 3 Classroom non-participant observation (FP, FM, FC)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SEMESTER BREAK</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Classroom non-participant observation (Class 1)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Classroom participant observations (Class 2, Class 3)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Classroom participant observations (Class 4, Class 5)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| April 2017              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Classroom participant observations (Class 6, Class 7)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Classroom participant observation (Class 8)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 Semi-structured interviews (ESL learners)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 Semi-structured interviews (ESL Learners)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| May 2017                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 Semi-structured interviews (ESL learners)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |