

Summary

Aw, Lum, Peng, Chen and Tong (2017)'s *A Pilot Study of Singapore's Young Chinese Parent's Perceptions, Attitude and Behaviours Towards Bilingual Learning* was premised on the language reformation efforts through Singapore's bilingual education policy and the Mother Tongue Language (MTL) curriculum reform in 2004. Based on a language acquisition perspective, learning and acquiring are two approaches towards language learning. While the MTL reform mainly focused on the aspect of "learning", social language change is a matter of "acquiring". Home language environment provided by parents plays a dominant role in affecting the language acquisition ability of school-aged children (Gathercole & Thomas, 2009), and thereby greatly influencing language learning outcomes. Through a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodological approach, this exploratory study hopes to shed light on parental perception towards bilingual learning as well as parents' language choices and linguistic behaviours at home.

A total of 77 Singaporean parents, aged below 45 years old, participated in this study. These parents had at least one child who was either second or third generation Singaporean and studying in either a local pre-school or primary school. Research data was collected through four modes – multiple choice surveys, checklists, face-to-face interviews, and focus group discussions. Each survey was accompanied by a checklist and participants provided their responses through one of the three modes (i.e. multiple choice survey, face-to-face interview, focus group discussion). Data gathered sought to address several research questions. These include (1) parents' perception toward bilingual learning, (2) parents' perception towards using two languages at home, (3) possibilities of a balanced bilingual input in families that speak two languages, (4) parents' choice of home language and mastery level of that language, (5) parents' perceptions towards their child's bilingual learning and bilingual proficiency and (6) effective strategies parents have adopted to better support their child's bilingual learning.

Results showed a large overlapping number of parents who are able to speak both English and Chinese (i.e. 100% of parents reported that they are able to speak English, while 93.8% reported that they are able to speak Chinese). These numbers reflect that many parents are



bilingual and do possess the capacities to create a bilingual environment at home. Moreover, the majority of the parents indicated that they value the importance of bilingual learning. Majority of them believe that Chinese language is essential in defining one's ethnic identity (72.6%) and do consider the Chinese language as a form of symbolic capital to tap into future economic opportunities (59.7%) that may enhance an individual's productivity and prospects.

Interestingly, 62.1% of the parents use Chinese when communicating with their spouse as compared to 53.3% who use English to do so. However, this trend in the choice of language used by parents to communicate with their children was reversed (i.e. 89.2% of the parents chose to speak English language to their child, while 63.1% chose to communicate in Chinese language). This is indicative of a possibility that parents are making deliberate choices in their linguistic behaviour with their children. In general, the more common language choice for children appears to be English as only 26.2% of the surveyed parents indicated that their children use Chinese as their dominant language at home.

Although the majority of young Singaporean parents are supportive of the bilingual education policy and demonstrate positive attitudes toward Chinese language learning, they are still more inclined to use English with their children. The impact of "English knowing bilingualism" could have contributed to the attitude-behaviour gap where parents' language choice and linguistic behaviour are influenced by their children's English proficiency and performance. Additionally, this study was able to gather several cognitive misunderstandings toward bilingual acquisition and issues in language learning that parents are concerned about which calls on more in-depth research needed to examine the study findings further.

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