

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRIMARY 5 AND 6 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL ENCOURAGEMENT AND THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN MANDARIN LEARNING AT AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, BANGKOK

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Abstract: This research investigated the relationship between students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their academic achievement in Mandarin learning at an International School, Bangkok during term 2, and 2014-2015. The study focused on three objectives. The first was to identify the level of student perception of parental encouragement to learn Mandarin in primary 5 and 6. The second was to identify the level of student academic achievement in primary 5 and 6 Mandarin learning. The third was to determine if there was a significant relationship between primary 5 and 6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their Mandarin academic achievement. In order to collect data, the researcher employed a parental encouragement questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). For the students' academic achievement in learning Mandarin, the researcher used the students' Mandarin academic achievement scores at the end of term 2 in school year 2014- 2015. The findings indicated that there was a significant relationship between primary 5 and 6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their academic achievement. The article concludes with recommendations for practice and for future research.

Keywords: Parental Encouragement, Academic Achievement, Mandarin, Primary 5-6 Students.

Introduction

Parental encouragement plays a significant role in children's education. Parental support is considered a critical strategy for improving student performance. This research investigated the relationship between students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their academic achievement in Mandarin learning at an International School, Bangkok during term 2, and 2014-2015.

Objectives

Three objectives informed the study design, procedures and findings, as follows.

- 1 To identify the level of student perception of parental encouragement to learn Mandarin in primary 5 and 6 at an international school in Bangkok.

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- 2 To identify the level of student academic achievement in primary 5 and 6 Mandarin is learning at an international school in Bangkok.
- 3 To determine if there is a significant relationship between primary 5 and 6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their Mandarin academic achievement at an international school in Bangkok.

Literature Review

Language learning is not a linear process and there are many models of second language acquisition. Second language learning not only involves the culture of the second language but also its personal and social dimensions. It is clear that students' attitudes toward their second language learning influence their language learning success (Dornyei, 1998). According to Dornyei, students are motivated toward learning a second language by positive personal, social and specific learning experiences. As Dornyei noted, language belongs to students' whole social being.

Gardner (2006) identified four stages of second language acquisition and development. The four stages are Elemental, Consolidation, Conscious Expression and Automaticity and Thought. In the initial stage, the Mandarin as second language students are required to learn and memorize the initial vocabulary, pronunciations, simple declarative sentences and grammar. In the second stage, Consolidation, students learn to recognize that language is a system, develop rules for sentence structure, understand idioms, and learn some meaningful expressions. In the third stage, Conscious Expression, the learners observe the right words or forms of expression and know how to express their ideas in Mandarin. Automaticity and Thought are the fourth stage of second language learning acquisition. In this stage language learning unites language and thought together, to emphasize automatic thinking in the target language and culture, in this case, in Mandarin and Chinese.

Much research has shown that parental encouragement is a factor in motivating and affecting language learning (Gardener, 2006). Students' attitudes will affect their performance in a language learning task. Parental encouragement moves the child through the school system, and plays an important role in the process of language learning. Parental attitudes and levels of encouragement to language learning play a vital role in children's language learning performance. Parents' positive perception' profoundly influence their children's perception of language teaching (Gardner, 2006).

Nixon (2010) found that when parents demonstrate to their children learning support, warmth, and affection, positive developmental language learning outcomes ensue. To build children's confidence is not only telling them how great they are but also acknowledging their academic growth and improvement in learning the second language (Wilson, 2012).

Parental encouragement, their expectations, interest and enthusiasm toward their children's learning, will influence the students' level of motivation in second language teaching (Gardner, 2007). Parental encouragement reflects the attributes to language learning perspective of students. The active parental expectation is beneficial for strengthening and improving the learner's Mandarin learning habit (Jin et al, 2014). Parents supporting and participating in their child's education in a variety of ways influences the children's academic success (Vera et al, 2012). Parent who

pay attention to the details of the teaching and events of the school, and who are deeply concerned about their children's language learning, create an encouraging, positive Mandarin learning environment for their children. They encourage their children to communicate more with others in Mandarin, and so help the children deal with culture shock, thereby increasing participation (Arias & Morillo-Campell, 2008).

Students' Mandarin learning, academic assessment, and educational success are influenced by their parents' attitudes, behaviors, and activities. Parental involvement is highly positive to students' good behaviors, attendance, Mandarin academic assessment and social skills. Parental encouragement is a kind of extrinsic motivation to engage and lead students to learn Mandarin. It encourages the student to achieve their Mandarin learning goals (Li & Lynch (2016). Inngam & Eamoraphan (2014)' found that extrinsic motivation was important for Grades 4 to Grade 6 students to learn a foreign language. Ye & Jiang (2014) pointed out that parents of Grades 5 and 6 students can be a model for their children's learning and guide them to learn. Their research indicated that parental involvement makes a positive difference in children's learning.

Griffith and Reynolds (1996) it showed that parental involvement positively affected children's school achievement. Walberg (2008) found that children whose parents were involved in their early childhood language program got more benefits than children whose families were not involved. The study also found that parents who maintained long term involvement in their children's language learning and who held high expectations for their children and encouraged the children to work hard, made a difference in the children's success at school and life. Nixon (2010) found that parental involvement was linked to children's positive development outcomes.

Wilson (2012) found that students who had parental encouragement improved their confidence and self-esteem in language learning than students without parental encouragement. Hoover –Dempsey and Sandler (1995) also found that students whose parents were actively involved in their learning, developed a vigorous and active sense to achieve in school than the students whose parents were not involved in their learning. Butler's (2013) study showed that parental encouragement impacted on the socialization of academic achievement and motivation among children. Jin et al (2014) demonstrated that parental encouragement positively impacted the students' second language learning achievement. Jiang (2012) in her study on differences in students' academic achievement between more and less parental involvement in Bangkok Christian international school, found that parental involvement in children's education did make a positive difference to students' achievement.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 is the conceptual framework of the study

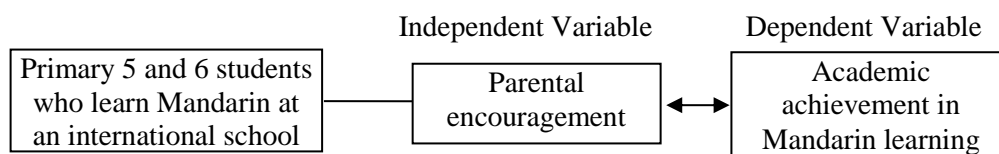


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study

Method

This research was designed as a quantitative relationship study which involved descriptive and inferential statistics. A questionnaire was used to collect data.

Population

The population of this study was the group of students from primary 5 and 6 at an international school in Bangkok during the academic year 2014-2015.

Sample

The sample of this research was 103 students who were learning Mandarin in primary 5 to 6 at an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. The study was conducted in the second term of academic year of 2014-2015.

Instrument

There were two instruments in this study. First, a perceptions of parental encouragement questionnaire adapted from Gardner's (2004) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). The questionnaire comprised of two sections, section one was the demographic data, section two was parental encouragement investigation.

The second measurement instrument was the students' Mandarin academic achievement. The researcher took the students' Mandarin academic achievement scores at the end of term 2 test, 2014-2015. The final score as a percentage representing skills: 1) listening, (2) speaking, (3) composition, (4) vocabulary and grammar.

Validity and Reliability

Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery has been validated many times since its development. Derin Atay, Gokce Kurt (2010) found that the instrument possessed content validity of all scales. The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery Manual (Gardner, 1985), shows median internal consistency estimates of .91 and .89 and median six weeks test/retest reliability of .79. Another study in Turkey by Derin Atay, Gokce Kurt (2010) found reliability and parental encouragement the median value is .86, while the values reported by Gardner (1985) vary from .79 to .88.

Procedures

The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the respondents on May 27th-29th, 2015. There were 103 questionnaires distributed and 103 useable questionnaires returned, giving a return rate of 100%.

Descriptive statistics involving means and standard deviations were used to identify the level of student perception of parental encouragement and levels of students' Mandarin academic achievement. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between primary 5 and 6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their Mandarin academic achievement.

Findings

In terms of the three research objectives, the main findings are given below.

Research Objective One. To identify the level of students' perception of parental encouragement to learn Mandarin in primary 5 and 6 at an international school in

Bangkok. The research finding showed that overall mean score of the students' perceptions of parental encouragement was 3.92; it was in the range of 3.51 -4.50. Based on the interpretation criteria, it was identified that the students' perceptions of parental encouragement to their academic achievement in learning Mandarin was high.

Research Objective Two. To identify the level of student academic achievement in primary 5 and 6 Mandarin learning at an international school in Bangkok. To analyze the students' Mandarin academic achievement the researcher calculate the mean and standard deviation of student test scores. The research finding showed that the mean score of student academic achievement was 64.4; thus the level of student academic achievement in primary 5 and 6 Mandarin learning was moderate.

Research Objective Three. To determine if there is a significant relationship between primary 5 and 6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their Mandarin academic achievement at an international school in Bangkok. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze the relationship between each students' perception of parental encouragement to learn Mandarin and each of their Mandarin academic achievement. The research finding of the hypothesis testing showed a relationship between the students' perceptions of parental encouragement for Mandarin learning and their Mandarin academic achievement. The correlation was .684 and the significance value was .000. Therefore, the research hypothesis was accepted that there was a significant relationship between the primary 5 and 6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement to Mandarin learning and their Mandarin academic achievement at an international school in Bangkok.

Table 1 shows the summary of the main findings.

Table 1: Summary of the Main Findings (n=103)

Scale	Interpretation	Correlation
Parental Encouragement	High	There was a significant relationship.
Academic Achievement	Moderate	

Discussion

The following section presents a discussion of the research findings of the study, which are related to the result that there is a relationship between students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their Mandarin academic achievement.

In terms of the level of overall parental encouragement, the findings of this study showed that all primary 5 and 6 students had a high level of overall parental encouragement. The research subjects agreed that they received much parental encouragement to learn Mandarin. The students perceived their parents as being interested in their (the students') activities connected to their Mandarin learning, and encouraged their children to study Mandarin, emphasizing the importance of learning Mandarin. The researcher would like to mention that the students' Mandarin experience and nationality could be related to their Mandarin academic achievement, but when it came to helping them with following up Mandarin lessons at home, they got help from their parents. The findings of this study support the notion that parental encouragement is a factor to motivate the students toward the language they study (Wilson, 2012). The positive attitude toward language learning makes the learning

task of language not too difficult. Even in and out of the classroom, the learning experiences of the students would be positive. Students whose parents were involved in their language learning did better and were more successful in school (Walberg, 2008).

The findings of this study indicated that the level of student academic achievement in primary 5 and 6 Mandarin learning at an international school in Bangkok was *moderate*. Children whose parents were involved with their learning, would achieve positive academic outcomes. Parents involved in students' learning helped students get positive learning outcomes (Nixon, 2010). This study supported that children could do better if their families are interested in their schoolwork and expect them to succeed (Tam and Chan, 2009). The research also showed that there was a long-lasting influence of parental encouragement on the students' academic achievement.

The findings of this study also showed that there was a significant relationship between the primary 5 and 6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement in Mandarin learning and their Mandarin academic achievement. Parental encouragement is linked with language academic achievement; if the students are encouraged by their parents and motivated when learning Mandarin, they will achieve proficiency in Mandarin. The data indicated that high expectations from parents had real influence on students' second language learning achievement (Jin et al., 2014). The research of Butler (2003) demonstrated that students' parental encouragement strongly affected the students' achievement. This study showed that the level of parental encouragement for students' language learning is related to their level of academic achievement. The testing of the research hypothesis showed a significant relationship between students' parental encouragement and their academic achievement.

The research evidenced that parental encouragement was a determinant factor to influence primary 5 and 6 students' Mandarin achievement. Parental encouragement made students feel more motivated and enthusiastic to achieve Mandarin learning. It is beneficial for students to strengthen and cultivate their communicative abilities, and good learning habit, and it even achieve the students' academic goals (Jin et al., 2014).

Recommendations

Recommendations for Parents

The research found that overall students' perceptions of parental encouragement was high and related to their achievement. Thus, parents should pay more attention to students at home about learning Mandarin in class - asking the child about school, checking and reviewing homework, motivating and enhancing the child's learning behavior, giving the child emotional support, communicating with the teacher to know how the child is doing in class, and creating a community to support school Mandarin programs.

Recommendations for Teachers

A better understanding of the relationship between students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their academic achievement in Mandarin learning helps Mandarin teachers in modifying and improving the teaching to suit students' needs and interests. According to the data analysis, it is recommended that Mandarin

teachers be that professionally trained in areas of being a guide to students and parents in learning Mandarin. Mandarin teachers can communicate with parents through a phone calls, newsletters, email, and parent–teacher conferences, to talk about students’ progress.

Recommendations for Administrators

As the study showed, there is a positive relationship between students’ perceptions of parental encouragement and their academic achievement in Mandarin learning. The researcher suggests that schools create more opportunities or programs to encourage parents to help students to improve their Mandarin academic performance... The school should encourage parents to participate in school decision-making through school councils, committees and parent-school organizations to development Mandarin teaching/learning with resources and services, to encourage parents to pay more attention to the Mandarin program and events of the school, to be concerned about their children’s needs, goals, and views of Mandarin.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research offered some findings for an international school, while future researchers who are interested in parental encouragement can also do at other types of schools in Thailand. Larger sample sizes would also benefit future research.

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