

L2 Learners and Facebook Group in Postcolonial Malaysia: Investment and Imagined Communities

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Investment



- ✦ Investment is a sociological construct.
- ✦ Learners commit to their language learning if they are invested in acquiring the target language (Norton, 2002).
- ✦ There are four categories of investment in language learning such as cultural capital, economic capital, social capital and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu(1986)



- ✦ **Cultural capital** – accent, appropriate behaviour and connections to access to desired networks - an enabler to other categories of investment.
- ✦ **Social capital** - generated through connections of families, social connections and social networks.
- ✦ **Economic capital** - inherited or generated wealth through individuals and the economy.
- ✦ **Symbolic capital** - an individual's prestige and personal qualities .


Imagined Communities



- ✧ Norton (2001) describes imagined communities as communities that language learners associate with, to which their existence is not a certainty.
- ✧ The desire to belong to these groups encourages and motivates the learners to invest in language learning activities.

Literature Review

- ✧ In Canada, Norton (2003) - young readers invested in learning the language by reading Archie comics although they receive less validation from their parents
- ✧ Participants in Uganda and Pakistan indicated their imagined community is of an English-speaking community with social, economic and political resources.
- ✧ Afghan refugee children in the Youth Millennium Project in Karachi are invested in learning English as English is perceived as the language of development, science and technology (Norton & Kamal, 2003). The findings indicate Muslim students do not associate with religious and linguistic affiliations when they learn English. These students identify English speakers as educated people in a developed country with resources and these speakers become their imagined communities.
- ✧ Similarly, Norton and Williams (2012) find that learners in a poorly resourced community invest in learning technology in eGranary project to gain cultural capital, economic capital, social capital and symbolic capital.

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- ✦ Murphey, Chen and Chen (2005) - learners want to join their imagined communities; time and energy are spent on learning to be like their members.
 - ✦ Gao, Cheng and Kelly (2008) - a weekly English discussion group in English Club by groups of students in Hong Kong reveal a different imagined community.
 - ✦ The club provided them supportive English speaking environment whereby they were given opportunities to speak sensitive issue. The members were able to improve their spoken skills, had a sense of ownership and projected their future plans.
 - ✦ Learning English is not associated with neither the target language culture nor the native speakers but an imagined community of Elite Chinese who are fluent speakers of English.

Studies in Malaysia



- ✦ Lee Su Kin (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006) - a study of attitude of Malay postgraduates towards English as the results show being show off, boastful, elitist, betrayal of Malay cultural and identity
- ✦ A research which comprised of non-Malay participants; Chinese participants, (Lee Su Kim, 2006, Lee Su Kim et al 2007) who were regarded as being too westernized for being fluent in English.
- ✦ The study of multilingual Malaysian undergraduates at private and public universities in Malaysia indicated there was a shift of attitude among these graduates as they embrace English as their own language to project their own voices not as a second language (Lee Su Kim et al, 2010).

Studies in Malaysia

- ✧ Ratnawati (2005) indicated Malays were reluctant to learn English due to cultural and religious identity. Malays are identified as people who practice Islam, Malay culture and Bahasa Melayu.
- ✧ Rajadurai (2009) investigated a group of Malay learners who were teacher trainees and students of Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) in Malaysia to comprehend the process of adult second language learning in non-native countries.
- ✧ These Malay TESL students admitted they needed safe learning environments just like 'safe houses' (Canagarajah, 1997).
- ✧ These students faced less support, as mastering English endangers language and culture by their societies at home.
- ✧ There was a struggle between being Malays and learning English as English was the language of the colonialists.
- ✧ Rajadurai(2009) perceived learning English as a second language as a process of identity negotiation and struggle for participation, acceptance and legitimacy.

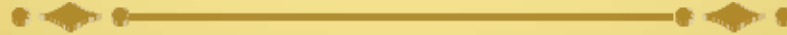
The Study



This study addresses these questions:

- ✦ Why are L2 learners invested in learning English?
- ✦ What are L2 learners' imagined communities?

Investment in Learning English



- ✦ The study reveals there are **four dominant themes** of participants' investment in acquiring English as their second language.

English for Workplace Purposes



- ✧ Participants perceive that English is a powerful language.
- ✧ Participants believe mastering English would be a key to better future with better work opportunities.
- ✧ This finding supports other findings from other studies from developing countries and developed countries (Norton & Mutonyi, 2007; Norton & Kamal, 2003; Norton & Williams, 2012; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007) which describe how English is seen as a language for workplace employment.
- ✧ L2 learners in the study were invested in learning English in order to secure better employment.




Excerpt 1

- ✧ Well, I take it as an opportunity. This will give me an opportunity to grab the chance for more choices of career. Organizations are competing out there with each other to hire well communicate employees especially in English. Opportunity for a better life.
(Participant A)

Excerpt 2

- ✧ it will help us mostly in finding the jobs as most of the job required us to know English so that we can communicate easily with others.(Participant B)

English as a Lingua Franca

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- ✦ The participants in this study are aware that people travel and work in foreign shores.
 - ✦ Even though there are many other dominating languages such as Mandarin, Spanish, French and Arabic, English is still the lingua franca connecting people from different nations.
 - ✦ The participants plan to live or travel abroad and it is only sensible for them to use English to communicate with locals and foreigners.



Excerpt 4

- ✧ The English language is the most widely spoken language in the world and the predominant academic language around the world (Participant G)

Excerpt 5

- ✧ Nowadays most of the daily communication we used English. Besides, English is an international language.(Participant I)

Excerpt 6

- ✧ for easiest communication, English language is used as it is widely used in many countries around the world. so it is important for the community in a country to be good in English in order to adapt with the globalisation. they can't use their local language as other people from other countries cannot understand it so the safest way is to use English language (Participant B)

English as a mean of Empowerment



- ✦ The participants are empowered by the language.
- ✦ English has given them not just a linguistic prowess but also a voice. They feel that they are respected by others when they converse in English.
- ✦ English is seen as a cultural capital that is a key to other desirable aims of L2 learners.



Excerpt 7

- ✧ so it's good to learn English as it makes people respect you. (Participant H)

Excerpt 8

- ✧ Malaysians are producing credible workers and managers. You can earn respect when u use English.(Participant A)

English as a language of instruction



- ✦ The participants are undergraduates of a local university in Malaysia which medium of instruction is English.
- ✦ The participants learnt all their subjects in English and they are required to do their assignments, tests and examinations in English.
- ✦ Therefore, it is not surprising that the participants emphasise on the importance of mastering English to fulfil their current needs as undergraduates.

Excerpt 9

- ✦ most text books that my lecturer recommended are all written in English..and i get to learn new things from the books that i read... the language used in teaching is English..thus students must have knowledge about English so that they will not left behind in class.. (Participant E)

Excerpt 10

- ✦ Nowadays, books, lecture notes and almost everything are in English (Participant F)

Excerpt 11

- ✦ I tried to learn English language since almost all the subjects are in English (Participant J)



IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

Native Speakers



- ✦ Only one participant; participant A, expresses her desire to join her imagined communities of native speakers.
- ✦ Participant A considers herself as achieving a fluent speaker status when she is as fluent as native speakers.
- ✦ Participant A looks forward to become a member of a community of native speakers so she could communicate with them in English.



Excerpt 13

- ✧ I prefer to communicate with native speakers. This is because, when I try to communicate with them, I will push myself harder to speak English in the right/proper way to look good. (Participant A)

Local Non-native Speakers



- ✧ Other participants reveal their imagined communities consist of non-native speakers who are fluent speakers of English.
- ✧ The reasons given are they are more comfortable with non-native speakers as it is easier to understand non-native speakers due to accents, code-switching



Excerpt 14

- ✧ I prefer to communicate English with non-native speakers like Malaysians..because if I speak, they can understand easily what i want to convey to them..as our english in terms of pronunciations is not so much different. I think communicate with native speakers such as Americans, British would be a little bit difficult. It is because their slang is different from us. there might be certain words that they said that i,maybe not understand and cannot guess the meaning.(Participant B)

Excerpt 15

- ✧ I prefer speaking with Malaysians (Participant E)

Global Non-native Speakers of English



- ✦ The participants regard English as the language that belongs to those who can master it.

Excerpt 17

- ✧ i define a fluent speaker of English language as someone who can speak confidently in proper/standard English..no silly grammatical errors..excellent pronunciation..don't need to arrange words from native language to English language during conversation..he/she speaks English as if he/she speaks his/her native language..everything that is said can be understood by the listeners. (Participant E)

Excerpt 18

- ✧ I don't mind..as long as we can understand each other..either native or non-native speakers have their own dialects and make the communication to be more fun

(Participant J)

Conclusion

- ✦ The most dominant theme is learning English for workplace purposes. The participants see mastering in English plays a deciding role in securing good employment.
- ✦ The participants are aware that they need to have high proficiency of English to seek employment in international companies and to communicate with other people.
- ✦ The participants' imagined communities consist of non-native speakers who could speak fluent English. The findings resonant with the findings of a study conducted by Gao(2007).
- ✦ However, only one participant has his or her imagined communities consist of native speakers.
- ✦ English belongs not to one country or race.



✦ Thank you