

Family Language Ideology in English and Academic Performance of Junior High School Students in Chongzuo City of Guangxi Border Areas

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Abstract: The study aimed to explore the family language ideology in English and academic achievement among junior high school students. By adopting a quantitative approach, data were collected from students. The findings indicated that students had a negative perception towards English as a destructive language, held a favorable view of English as a pluralistic language, and recognized its importance in embracing diversity but also perceiving it as relatively irrelevant to their local community. The results also revealed no significant relationship between students' perception of family language ideology and their English grades. The study highlighted the need for comprehensive language programs with differentiated instruction and interventions to enhance students' language proficiency. Recommendations include promoting multilingualism, enhancing cultural sensitivity and curriculum, involving community, implementing long-term research to delve into qualitative studies to gain deeper insights into language attitudes and academic performance among students, and considering the socio-cultural context.

Keywords: Family Language Ideology; English; Academic Performance; Junior High School Students.

1. Introduction

The family serves as the foundation for human language learning, the setting where people use language for the longest periods of time, and the last support system for language preservation and survival (Zhang, Shao; 2018). According to Spolsky (2018), in the family, the belief about language itself and language use is language ideology, in other words, family language ideology pertains to how family members perceive language, employ language, and assign value to language. However, English is a foreign language in China. Families in China do not truly speak English in their regular interactions, so the two key facets of English language policy study in Chinese families are language ideology and language management (Ma, 2021).

Chongzuo City is home to 37 ethnic minorities, such as Zhuang, Miao, Yao, Dong, and more. In addition to using Mandarin, the common national language, for communication, people here also use ethnic languages or Chinese dialects. Even some dialects of ethnic languages are dialects of Vietnamese ethnic languages. The natural multilingual environment is supposed to be a condition for interest in multilingual learning, however, like other ethnic minority regions, the least strong and valued subject in Chongzuo's primary and secondary schools is English. Most students are not particularly interested in learning English. Some academics have investigated this issue. According to Wang (2020), the issue with basic foreign language instruction for ethnic minorities is rooted in the fact that "foreign language education is often viewed with a short-sighted perspective" and that there is a lack of awareness of the significance of basic foreign language instruction. This awareness is in fact "ideology", which extends to people's perceptions and attitudes towards English language learning in ethnic minority regions.

While most study being conducted on English language planning and policy in China focuses on top-down macro

policies, it is equally crucial to explore the attitudes of families towards English in the micro sphere. Understanding the family's perspective is particularly important as it can significantly influence the English learning experiences of individual family members during the basic education phase. By investigating these micro-level dynamics, this study intends to fill a research vacuum and shed light on the influence of family attitudes on English language learning.

2. Theoretical Basis

To bridge this gap, to provide a comprehensive interpretation of Chinese family language ideology concerning English, and to deconstruct the conceptions and attitudes of families in ethnic minority areas towards English and identify the problems that exist. In achieving this objective, the three perspectives on English's place in the world that Jeffrey Gil offered in 2016—English as a destructive language, English as a pluralistic language, and English as an irrelevant language—were used to inform this study.

2.1. English as a Destructive Language

According to Pennycook (2017), using English as a destructive language would lead to the devaluation and even destruction of other languages and cultures. It will also provide one access to higher education, better employment opportunities, and social status. Western ideologies and practices, which are promoted as being the "best," form the foundation of English language instruction (Mackenzie, 2022).

2.2. English as a Pluralistic Language

The idea that English is a pluralistic language implies that native speakers are no longer the only ones who can speak it (Park & Wee, 2012). Many languages in the world are not just spoken in one country, such as English, French, Spanish, Arabic, etc. The cultural connotations of a language as widely

spoken as English are far more than just a few native English-speaking countries, but a multicultural experience. Indian English, Malaysian English, Singaporean English, and other variations of the English language are increasingly acknowledged and recognized on a global scale. One should not only see the inequality or non-reciprocity that English brings. English is taught and learned in a variety of local settings, which means that local cultures, beliefs, and practices are incorporated into the teaching and learning processes. People can also use English to promote and introduce their traditional culture and tell their country's story in English.

2.3. English as an Irrelevant Language

English as an irrelevant language means although it is a global lingua franca, in their daily lives, people essentially do not speak in English. Even if they do not speak English, it does not affect their lives in any way. The national lingua franca, or even local dialects, can meet people's communication needs. Especially in those poor and remote areas, learning the national language is the first priority.

By adopting this analytical framework, the study contributed to a more nuanced and holistic examination of the conceptual scope of Chinese family language ideology in relation to English, shedding light on specific challenges and issues encountered within ethnic minority areas.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

This research aimed to understand that family language beliefs in relation to English, as well as the connection between these language beliefs and students' academic achievements. To specify, the study aimed to address the following inquiries:

A. What is the family language ideology in English as perceived by students in selected schools in Chongzuo city in terms of: English as a destructive language; English as a pluralistic language; and English as an irrelevant language?

B. Does the perception of the family language ideology in English have an impact in English academic performance of the students-respondents?

C. Based on the findings, what recommendations on family language ideology and academic performance of Junior High School Students in Chongzuo City may be proposed?

3.2. Research Approach and Instrument

The research predominantly employed a quantitative research methodology. A questionnaire was utilized to furnish responses to the research questions. There are two sections to the questionnaire. The first section is the participants' age, sex, grade level, and grades of English final examination for School Year 2022-2023. The second section is family language ideology in English in terms of English as a destructive language, English as a pluralistic language; and English as an irrelevant language. Each dimension consists of 10 indicators.

3.3. Research Participant

The research participants were drawn from three schools, namely Longzhou Ethnic Middle School, Pingxiang Ethnic Hope Experimental School, and Jiangzhou District No. 2 Middle School with. In total, 792 questionnaires were received.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Family Language Ideology in English as Perceived by Students in Terms of English as a Destructive Language

Table 1. The Perception of English as a Destructive Language

Indicators	Students	
	Weighted Mean*	Verbal Description*
1. English might undermine the value and importance of other languages.	2.09	Disagree
2. Who do not speak English might be treated unfairly in educational settings or society.	2.09	Disagree
3. English might erode or overshadow local cultures and languages.	1.88	Disagree
4. Learners feel inferior if they do not possess native-like proficiency in English.	2.23	Disagree
5. Learners are devalued if they do not conform to native-like English pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary.	2.10	Disagree
6. Learners are from non-English-speaking backgrounds excluded from certain opportunities.	2.66	Agree
7. Native speakers of English are regarded as superior or privileged.	1.80	Disagree
8. English might contribute to the erosion or extinction of other languages.	1.75	Strongly Disagree
9. English language learning materials, media, and resources is skewed towards specific cultural or linguistic groups.	2.31	Disagree
10. English perpetuate the historical power dynamics and colonial legacies associated with English-speaking nations.	2.76	Agree
Over-all Weighted Mean	2.17	Disagree

* Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 – 3.25 Agree, 1.76 – 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree

Based on the numerical data showed in Table 1, it is evident that students generally hold a negative perception of English as a destructive language. Most indicators show a weighted mean falling within the "disagree" range, indicating that the respondents do not perceive English as having a harmful impact on language and cultural diversity. However, students concurred on the notion that learners originating from non-English-speaking backgrounds might be excluded from certain opportunities or privileges due to their language proficiency (Indicator 6), with corresponding weighted mean score of 2.66. Likewise, they also agreed that English language learning perpetuates historical power dynamics and colonial legacies associated with English-speaking nations to a certain extent (Indicator 10), as evidenced by weighted mean score of 2.76.

4.2. Family Language Ideology in English as Perceived by Students in Terms of English as a Pluralistic Language

Table 2. The Perception of English as a Pluralistic Language

Indicators	Students	
	Weighted Mean*	Verbal Description*
1. Multilingualism is given importance in language learning contexts alongside English.	3.25	Agree
2. Linguistic diversity, including different accents, dialects, and variations, is embraced and celebrated in English language learning.	2.96	Agree
3. Cultural perspectives and experiences are integrated into English language learning materials and pedagogy.	2.97	Agree
4. Language proficiency empowerment is emphasized, allowing learners to develop their language skills while maintaining their unique linguistic identities.	2.85	Agree
5. Efforts are made to revive and promote endangered or minority languages alongside English in language learning programs.	2.83	Agree
6. Learners are encouraged to develop intercultural competence and communicate effectively and respectfully across different cultures and languages.	3.13	Agree
7. Learners are made aware of their linguistic rights and encouraged to advocate for language diversity and inclusivity.	3.13	Agree
8. Opportunities for language exchange programs are provided, allowing learners to interact with speakers of different languages.	2.98	Agree
9. Bilingual and multilingual education is supported, allowing learners to acquire English alongside their native language(s) and fostering bilingual or multilingual proficiency.	3.15	Agree
10. Language expertise in English and other languages is equally recognized and valued, acknowledging learners' diverse linguistic repertoires.	3.15	Agree
Over-all Weighted Mean	3.04	Agree

* Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 – 3.25 Agree, 1.76 – 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree

Based on the numerical data presented in Table 2, students demonstrate a positive perception of English as a pluralistic language. All the indicators have weighted means falling

within the "agree" range, indicating that respondents generally agreed with the importance of promoting linguistic and cultural diversity in English language learning. Indicator 1 shows the highest weighted mean score of 3.25, which means that students agreed that multilingualism is given importance alongside English in language learning contexts. This result supports the idea that valuing multiple languages can enhance students' language proficiency and intercultural communication skills (Li & Hu, 2020).

4.3. Family Language Ideology in English as Perceived by Students in Terms of English as an Irrelevant Language

Table 3. The Perception of English as an Irrelevant Language

Indicators	Students	
	Weighted Mean*	Verbal Description*
1. English is perceived as having limited relevance or practicality in everyday life within the local community.	2.55	Agree
2. The emphasis on English neglects or undermines learners' cultural identities and heritage languages.	2.09	Disagree
3. English proficiency is perceived as mismatched with employment opportunities or career paths within the local context.	2.13	Disagree
4. English learning materials and curriculum do not align with learners' educational goals or needs.	2.10	Disagree
5. The learning process fails to integrate English with local languages, hindering the development of bilingual or multilingual proficiency.	2.30	Disagree
6. There are limited opportunities for learners to practice English outside of the classroom or learning environment, resulting in a lack of relevance in real-life contexts.	2.22	Disagree
7. Learners actively resist the perceived dominance or imposition of English, promoting the importance of local languages instead.	2.17	Disagree
8. Learner's encounter communication barriers when using English to effectively communicate with others due to linguistic differences or limited practical use.	2.77	Agree
9. There is a strong emphasis on preserving and promoting local languages, leading to a perceived lack of relevance or necessity for English.	1.97	Disagree
10. Learners prioritize the learning of other languages over English due to their perceived relevance within the local or regional context.	2.28	Disagree
Over-all Weighted Mean	2.26	Disagree

* Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 – 3.25 Agree, 1.76 – 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The combined weighted averages (2.26) indicate that students expressed dissent towards the idea of English being irrelevant, as showed in Table 3. While based on the numerical data, Indicator 1 shows that students agree that

English is perceived as having limited relevance or practicality in everyday life within the local community, with a weighted mean score of 2.55. This perception might arise from a lack of exposure to English in their immediate environment, leading to a perceived disconnection between the language and its application in their daily activities (Phan & Suryani, 2020). Meanwhile, the respondents agreed that due to linguistic differences or limited practical use, learners still encounter communication barriers when using English to effectively communicate with others, with a weighted mean score of 2.77 for students (Indicator 8). The findings gleaned from the indicators underscore a prevailing perception shared by students. Specifically, there exists that English, while a

valuable skill, is often deemed lacking in immediate practicality and relevance in the fabric of daily life. This sentiment emerges from the collective acknowledgment that learners continue to face communication hurdles rooted in linguistic disparities or constrained opportunities for practical application.

4.4. Impact of the Perception of the Family Language Ideology in English on the English Academic Performance of the Students

Table 4. Students' Perception of the Family Language Ideology and English Academic Performance

Students' Perception	English Academic Performance	df	α	Significance f	Interpretation
The family language ideology	Grades	791	0.05	0.15	No Impact

The data in Table 4 presented students' perception of family language ideology in English vs. English academic performance, the computed F-value is 0.15, and the significance level (α) is 0.05. The result revealed no significant relationship between students' perception of family language ideology and their English grades. While this suggests that although the family language ideology may not have a significant impact on one's present academic achievement, it is important to take other aspects into account that may affect one's attitude toward and experiences with language.

To gain a comprehensive understanding, future research could explore additional variables, such as students' language proficiency levels, language use patterns within the family and community, and the socio-cultural context of the students' language learning environment. Additionally, in-depth understanding of students' perceptions of the family language ideology and its possible influence on their language learning experiences and academic achievement can be gained through qualitative research techniques like focus groups and interviews.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed that students in selected schools in Chongzuo City held distinct perceptions toward English. They view English as a non-destructive and pluralistic language, emphasizing the importance of embracing linguistic and cultural diversity in language learning. However, respondents also perceive English as relatively irrelevant in their daily lives and future career prospects within the local community.

Considering the findings, the following recommendations for family language ideology and academic achievement of Junior High School students in Chongzuo City may be proposed:

5.1. Multilingualism Promotion

Encouraging the learning of multiple languages, emphasizing their value and importance alongside English. Highlight the advantages of being multilingual in a globalized world. Meanwhile, designing programs that celebrate and promote multilingualism, showing the value of English proficiency alongside preserving local languages and cultures, this can empower students to embrace the awareness that learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds have equal

access to educational, professional, and social opportunities.

5.2. Cultural Sensitivity Enhancement

Incorporating cultural sensitivity into language learning, including discussion about the historical and cultural contexts of English, which can help students understand the broader implication of the language and its ties to power dynamics.

5.3. Curriculum Enhancement

Designing an English curriculum that incorporates real-world scenarios, practical communication skills, and examples relevant to the local community. This can help students see the direct application of English in their daily lives. Moreover, Integrating interactive activities, role plays, debates, and group discussions into the curriculum. This approach fosters active engagement and enhances students' language skills while making the learning process enjoyable.

5.4. Community Involvement

Organizing community events, workshops, or language exchange programs where students can practice English in real-life situations with native speakers or other learners. This provides practical exposure and boosts confidence.

5.5. Long-term Research

Conducting longitudinal research through qualitative research techniques like focus groups and interviews to understand the long-term effects of family language ideology on academic achievement and language development. Using findings to refine and adapt language education strategies over time.

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