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THE CHALLENGES TO LEARN MALAY LANGUAGE AMONG FOREIGN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract:

The Malay Language is Malaysia's national language and learning it is very essential. Since the Covid-19 epidemic, most educational institutions have used online learning as one of their teaching strategies. Unfortunately, studying and reading a language through online instruction can be challenging, and some students may find this way to be very tedious. This research investigates the difficulties that foreign students and lecturers may encounter when learning and teaching Malay language online. To address the research issues, a qualitative method was employed in this study, which drew information from secondary sources such books, chosen articles, and official reports. The initial results indicate that there are numerous foreign students and numerous difficulties for both foreign students and instructors, as they are unable to acquire the language as effectively as they could in completely physical classes. In addition, students struggle to concentrate and face other challenges such as poor internet access, sluggish online videos, and difficulty understanding instructors' pronunciation of the Malay language.

Keywords:

Malay Language, Online Learning, Foreign Student Challenges, Role Of Lecturers

Introduction

The educational landscape underwent a profound transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, ushering in a new era that elevated the role of online learning as a cornerstone of modern education (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). The pandemic's aftermath saw a persistent preference for online education, revolutionising teaching and learning methodologies through significant advancements in educational technology (Lee, S. 2023). Amidst this shift, the challenges encountered in learning the Malay Language through online platforms emerged as a focal point of concern.

The Malay Language holds pivotal cultural significance within Malaysia, embodying the essence of its national identity. In response to global trends, Malaysia's Ministry of Education outlined the need for students to acquire 21st-century skills, foster inter-racial unity, and cultivate effective communication (Mazlan, N. H. 2020). This imperative, coupled with the surge in online learning, prompted a re-evaluation of pedagogical approaches, particularly in teaching languages.

Transitioning traditional language instruction to virtual environments presents multifaceted challenges, especially for foreign university students. While the initial adaptation to online learning appeared seamless, the complexities of language acquisition, particularly in studying Malay, unfolded distinctly. Learning a language demands dedicated time and innovative instructional approaches that resonate with students navigating the digital landscape. However, this shift necessitates educators to adopt adaptable and engaging teaching methodologies tailored to diverse student needs, encompassing varying learning preferences, cultural backgrounds, and technological proficiencies.

This study is centred on exploring the intricate challenges encountered by both foreign students and lecturers in navigating the online learning framework to comprehend and teach the Malay Language effectively. As the investigation progresses, the aim is to illuminate these complexities and propose viable solutions to enhance the online learning experience for foreign university students studying the Malay Language.

Findings

Online learning is giving an opportunity to the world to gain knowledge about everything. There should be no excuses for people to say they "do not know" about some information as people can get access to knowledge or information on their fingertips. But getting information and understanding the knowledge are two different things that people need to be aware of. The topic of learning language via online is something that needs to be focused on as nowadays students in University are facing the new norm in the education system. Based on Horwitz (1985) and Jabeen & Thomas (2015), students can understand the information and techniques in language by attending physical class methods.

Nevertheless, with the recent introduction of online learning as a new teaching and learning approach, a pressing query emerges. To what extent can online classes ensure quality education for learners? This paper identifies several concerns regarding online classes by MQA and for individuals aspiring to learn the Malay language.

To learn and understand the language, students need to focus and have more interaction during the class time, where there should be two ways of communication; student-lecturer interaction

or student-student interaction. Based on the research done by Muilenburg et. al (2005), one of the reasons why people could not understand the lesson in class is due to lack of social interaction. It is shown here how interaction plays an important role in making students understand things that they have learned. Physical class is the best platform to teach and learn language, where students need to practise the language to master the language. Comparatively, many students responded that physical class was more comfortable than the online class (Tej, Dipak and Deepak 2021).

Other challenges that might be faced by the new learners is difficulty to master the skill of language especially for those who have language anxiety. Which is related to the way learners perceive things in life. To some extent, personality does play roles in this issue. In this scenario, students who learn a new language might have obstacles in terms of understanding the whole context of the language when using an online platform. Those who are emotionally unstable might be impacted from this scenario. Based on Bialayesh (2017), there is a positive significance between those who have high neuroticism and openness with language anxiety. For emotionally unstable people, they might be facing vulnerable experiences when it comes to the new norm. Online classes in this case, might leave unpleasant feelings to some new language learners. In the worst-case scenario, learners might lose their interest as they think online classes make them in an overwhelming situation. If this situation happens, new learners will not be able to perform well in this course or maybe they will learn nothing from the online class. Another problem encountered by new learners in online class is lack of interesting activities to practise the language in class. During physical class, there are many activities that can be introduced to learners such as role-play, group speaking activities, organising language events and many more to instill the interest among students, but for online class most of the time learners will depend much on their lecturers. In another word, poor level of engagements will lead to challenges to the institutions, lecturers, and students (Stott, 2014). Language is the art that should come with joyous practice. The more interesting language class being introduced, the more exciting the experience will be for learners to gain some new exciting experience on learning languages.

On the lecturer's side, they will experience new obstacles in managing online learning. Some of these barriers are related to student discipline, student signal and network barriers, and difficulties in applying the principles of teaching foreign languages effectively. The lecturers found that it was quite difficult to monitor student activity with more than 30 students in one frame and not all students obey the lecturer's request. The problem of timeliness is also an obstacle for lecturers in managing this online learning. Increased expenses related to technology and restricted Internet accessibility can serve as additional discouragement for both students and lecturers, impacting their willingness to utilise online educational resources (Buragohain, Punpeng, Jaratjarungkiat, & Chaudhary, 2023). The problem of timeliness is also an obstacle for lecturers in managing this online learning. Many students arrive late or go in and out of online classes without permission. Signal problems are also one of the lecturer's problems.

The management of online learning will present new challenges for the lecturers. Some of these obstacles have to do with student behaviour, obstacles to student signal and network access, and challenges in successfully implementing the concepts and to learn Malay language. The lecturers discovered that it was quite challenging to keep an eye on the activities of more than thirty students at once, and that not all the students followed their instructions. Another challenge that lecturers face in overseeing this online learning is the issue of punctuality. Many

students arrive late for online classes or enter and exit without authorization. There are a wide variety of foreign students, from large cities to rural places without access to the internet that turns into a challenge for overseeing online learning (Adi, 2022).

Understanding the various learning styles of students is a contemporary problem for academics in an online learning environment to improve learning outcomes. The delivery of education in the modern classroom, where e-learning technology is a crucial factor, may render the traditional style of instruction insufficient. In principle, recognizing the variety within the virtual classroom is essential to comprehending the demands of the students. (Donahue and Glodstein, 2013).

Because students have varying cultural perspectives on how to acquire and perceive information in the context of online education, teachers need to be aware and sensitive to each student's unique learning style. Sharing and communicating the material with students is crucial. The way that technology and instruction are delivered does not reflect the cultural background of the student, instead it lowers learning objectives and has an impact on how well the learner can use e-learning resources. The results are diminished because students from diverse cultural backgrounds have varying aptitudes for using e-learning technologies, and students who speak different languages react to the layout of these tools differently. (Islam, 2015)

In an online learning environment, the teaching methods used by lecturers alone are insufficient. Academics must also accurately analyse the written work that students submitted online, comprehend the context, and recognize the needs of both individuals and groups within the group. As a result, online education will be more effective (Loveless, 2011). To encourage academics to use e-learning technology, the institution management must market the pedagogical benefits of online learning with relatable practice examples. Simply having a well-designed course with an emphasis on teaching styles and having academics understand the various strategies of online learning with an understanding of diversity, context, and group dynamics is not enough. (Jackson and Fearon, 2013).

Discussion

Malay language learning usually consists of the skills towards literacy development. Students need to know how to pronounce, read and know the common words before they can read some essays and to connect the text (Wagner, 1987). This makes students easy to understand and use the correct grammar to write a Malay language essay and also to pronounce the grammar correctly because they have to know and understand how to pronounce first before they can use the correct words to write in a Malay language essay. According to Lonigan (2019), the other skills that students must have and understand in learning this language before they can read properly are cognitive abilities, oral language, and very strong vocabulary. Lecturer who teach this subject supposed to play important role to teach students how to use correct grammar to read, the function of the Malay words toward some particular sentence and also help student to understand more how to write long essay in Malay language but when this pandemic happened especially in Malaysia, this make students and also the lecturers to face many of the challenges to make sure teaching and learning can be done very smoothly through online class.

The effect of learning Malay language through online platforms is that the students will not focus during the class time, lack concentration of studies and failure to complete assignments

or tasks on time. Furthermore, students also have the difficulty to practice and do grammar exercises when learning language through online platforms. Some students also will not understand their lecturer's instructions well due to poor internet connection and will get distracted very easily during the class time. Besides that, students also will not be unclear when to use the inflected word forms of the verb that have many prefixes and suffixes that students have to understand more how to use it in a particular sentence and also to write an essay. Based on Gentner (1982), in the Malay language, the most important thing is to validate how to construct words. It is very important because this language does not have any past tense, present tense and future tense. The grammar that is usually used in the Malay language actually is more towards how to write a sentence in an essay and also how to use it in pronunciation only because in this language, there are some morphological and phonological constructions of words that have to be concerned. This makes students hard to understand and will make them confused on how to use the exact words towards some particular sentence that usually during face-to-face class, lecturers tend to write on whiteboard and explain one by one during the class time and make students understand very well first before proceeding to the next chapter.

Additionally, according to Susan (2011), traditional language classrooms are interactive by nature, with students rarely having the opportunity to learn the Malay language on their own. Although lecturers must prepare, prompt, and promote a lot of interaction, a lot more happens spontaneously. Sometimes, the online class was quite disappointing. Students are quiet during the class during the third or fourth weeks when most of them would have paired up or teamed up for their oral communication assignment. Learning language through online platforms makes the activities become more personal and one-dimensional. Learning language through old traditional classrooms proved to be better for communication skills because people meet and learn. Teachers and students will need to be equipped with better platforms and with skillful facilitation by teachers it can encourage the students just like the face-to-face classroom.

Furthermore, to make students more focused during online learning class, they must be highly motivated that leads towards their attitude and learning behaviours (Deci, 1985). This shows that to conduct online learning, lecturers must have creativity to make sure students can have more motivation to focus on online class even though it is hard to gain and form positive student attitudes (Prior, Mazanov, Meacheam, Heaslip & Hanson, 2016). There are a little differences between face-to-face and online learning that lead towards students understanding because with online learning they have to be discipline and more focus towards class and if they have some question to ask, they tend to keep to themselves because during online learning especially to learn Malay language, they need more time to understand how to use particular words to structure the sentence while on face-to-face learning, they can ask directly when they have something that they are not understand and can make more extending exercise with their lecturer until they understand towards particular matter.

According to B. Yang (2017), individuals are influenced by social source information that they perceive to be more trustworthy. This means that people need some face-to-face learning to encourage them to improve their abilities and network social space to make sure they have good understanding towards the subject. If students keep learning online especially in Malay language subjects, this makes it hard to understand the subject and makes it hard to understand more about this language. Language is better and easier to learn in the classroom so that students can engage more with their peers in social interaction through activity that can be

made for this subject (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2016). This can make them have more understanding and have knowledge of collaborative activities that make them fun and understand more how to use a particular word that is connected towards the Malay language. This cannot be achieved in learning through online platforms. Students are more quiet and also never wanted to take part in activities that are done via online because of internet interruption, cannot look at the question very well, and also have computer lagging problems that make students lose their interest and not take part with online learning activities.

From the argumentation and findings above, online learning is difficult for students who are quite new to learn Malay language using online platforms. This is because they will find it hard to understand the language more and will tend to lose interest because they might feel hard to master the language because it is not as interesting compared to face to face interaction. New learners also will feel difficulty to master the skill of language if they have language anxiety and are emotionally unstable while using an online platform. This will make it hard to catch up and make it hard to understand how to use the grammar and make them feel very bored during online class. They also cannot practise the pronunciation perfectly and fluently while using online platforms because they tend to face the poor internet connection or surrounding environment barrier such as having online class in the living room that has some noise that make them lose focus during online class. While compared to physical class, students can have many interesting activities such as role-play, group speaking activities, organising language events and many more to instil the interest among students, but for online class most of the time learners will depend much on their lecturers. This make students will lose interest to learn language such as like Malay language through online class because they will tend to feel that learning languages is bored and not interesting while actually learning languages make people feels joy to learn many new languages to be use later on in life when travelling to all over the world and can communicate easily while travelling overseas. For the Malay language, is it the National language of Malaysia, so that students that stay and born in Malaysia should learn and know how to communicate and use this language.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that learning through online platforms have a lot of advantages to both learners and educators. Unfortunately, in certain subjects or modules, it is better to keep it as an offline method of learning, as what we have practised before, the traditional method of learning in the classroom. The challenges to learn Malay language through online platforms might have many negative impacts towards students such as being unable to learn and pick-up the details of language since they are shy or not interested in practising it in the online classes. However, we cannot avoid using this method of teaching and learning in future as we are now in a digital society. Digital society refers to the utilisation of technology into various aspects of life, and education is one of the aspects (Ribble & Bailey, 2004; Ribble, 2008; Isman & Gungoren, 2014; Che Hasniza Che Noh, et. al, 2017). Thus, we have to find tools to settle this issue. As we believe that students will focus more on learning language through this online platform if lecturers manage to find creative and attractive ideas to make their students more focused and interested in learning this language, students also must held the responsibility to learn the subject too, such as willing to do exercises on the subject's learning and at the same time willing to engage with the lecturer and students in the class during the learning session. Another focus that this paper wanted to highlight is language anxiety since online classes might leave unpleasant feelings for some new language learners. To avoid this, lecturers play an important role to make sure students can focus and make students welcome and easy to learn

language by providing some interactive games related towards the Malay language subject. This practice can encourage them to talk in Malay language during online class by making them speak in this language. Indirectly they can understand more on how to use the correct words and grammar.

Language is the art that should come with joyous practice. The more interesting language class being introduced, the more exciting the experience will be for the learner. Online learning is supposed to give more excitement and can attract more students to learn Malay language because learners can easily get information through online and gain more knowledge towards it but the challenges that might hinder them to do so. Hence, pointing out the challenges will only be useful if we can come out with better solutions.

Acknowledgments

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