STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AMONG MDAB STUDENTS AT UITM MALACCA

Khalijah binti Mohd Nor[1]
(Email: khalijah904@melaka.uitm.edu.my)
Masliza binti Mohd Razali[2]
(Email: maslizarazali@melaka.uitm.edu.my)
Nashrah binti Talib[3]
(Email: nasrah622@melaka.uitm.edu.my)
Nurbarirah binti Ahmad[4]
(Email: nurbarirah497@melaka.uitm.edu.my)
Siti Rosnita binti Sakarji[5]
(Email: rosnita507@melaka.uitm.edu.my)
Wan Aisyah Amni binti Wan Mohamed Saferdin[6]
Aishah binti Mohd Nor[7]
(Email: aishahsmart@gmail.com)

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Abstract: This study examined students' problems in learning English as a second language in higher learning institution. This paper reports on the results of an interview of 30 randomly selected MDAB students of Diploma in Office Management and Technology at UiTM Melaka. The aim of this paper is to identify the factors that contribute to the decreasing of students' achievement in the English language. The discussion revealed the different reasons that students face in speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. In learning a second language, it is utmost important that learners receive maximum support in terms of supportive and conducive learning environment as well as adequate and meaningful language experience. This research hopes to enlighten students in learning the English language so that they may strive to improve their English skills, thus making language teaching and learning more effective and meaningful for both lecturers and students.

Keywords: Second Language, Learning, Speaking, Listening, Reading And Writing

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Introduction

The concern over low literacy attainment in English language among Malaysian learners has been investigated quite extensively. English is being taught as a second language in all Malaysian schools which is also a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary schools. Currently, the mastery of the English language is much encouraged at all levels of education from the primary to tertiary level. Moreover, English is much needed in the commercial and business sectors (Bernadett and Cyntia 2004). At university level, the students are required to register a stipulated credit hour of English courses based on their English result from secondary schools. (need to add one problem to show students have difficulty in mastering English at university level). In addition, studies focusing on English language proficiency among Malaysian university graduates also seem to resonate a feeling of uneasiness with the graduates' level of English proficiency (Isarji Sarudin et al., 2008).

Students as we know, they spend about 11 to 12 years in primary and secondary school learning English language, however many of them are still not able to master the language after completing the secondary school. Therefore, they are various factors that contribute to this failure. For example, learners' learning methods, lecturer's teaching method or approach, perception towards lecturers and language, syllabus, lesson plan and etc. Nowadays, in the age of mass media and electronic communication, the vast majority of verbal information exchange among people takes place through oral communication. Thus of the four basic skills in language learning which is listening, reading, speaking, writing and speaking seems to be the most important one in terms of judging a learner´s effective ability to use the language (S. Rasheedha & Rajathurai, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand learners' view and experience in learning this second language in order to identify the difficulties and impediments that they encounter in the classroom.

The objectives of this research are:
1. to gather students' experience and views pertaining to issues on English language problems in UiTM.

2. to identify student's view about language teaching and learning in UiTM.

3. to determine students suggestions on how to enhance teaching and learning of English.

Lecturers need to know and comprehend the difficulties that students face in acquiring the four language skills in English (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in order to prepare an effective lessons and guide students in developng their language proficency. Therefore, it is essential that students need to have an opportunity to express their views pertaining their learning experience to ensure teaching and learning are effectively carried out in the classrooms.

The research questions for this study as below:
1. What language related problems do students face in acquiring the four language skills (speaking, listening reading and writing)?

2. What are the students' view on language teaching and learning in UiTM? UiTM Malaysia or Melaka only?

4. What are the students' suggestions on enhancing teaching and learning of English in language classrooms?

Literature Review
There are several of determinants and problems that effect to the student's learning English as a second language in Malaysia. Those factors may derive from family environment, peer to peer communication and interest. According to Rani (2013) the factors that impact the learners to have poor in English language learning as following:

- English is regarded as a difficult subject to learn.
- Learners' learning depends on the English teachers as authorities.
- There is a lack of support to use English in the home environment and the community.
- Learners have insufficient or lacking of exposure to the language as there is a limited opportunity to use English outside the classrooms
- Students have a limitation of vocabulary proficiency
- Learners have an unwillingness and lack of motivation to learn English as they do not see the immediate need to use the language.

In addition, language anxiety is the feeling or tension and apprehension experienced by learners in the classroom. However, language anxiety is a distinctive complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning process. (Darmi & Albion, 2013). Other physical reactions from the learners include the feeling of discomfort in the English class. They felt nervous, lack of confidence and physical changes. Throughout the language learning they prefer to be quiet. They attempt not to embarrass themselves by making mistakes in giving responses so they feel it is safe to be passive. At the same time, they pre-empt other learners in the class having better English proficiency. They also worry if their teachers would under evaluate them and point out their mistakes to the whole class which can lead to personal embarrassment to individual learners. In an interview with a group of Malaysian tertiary learners, they reported to experience nervousness and difficulty to speak in the English language that made them to be reticent and passive in classrooms.

Ridwan & Zahariah(2017) stated that students prefer their native language, Malay or Bahasa Malayu as the only acceptable language. The reason that is often cited for their rejection of English is the fusion of ethnicity, religion and language in the idea of 'Malayness' as held by many Malays and the Malaysian constitution. Moreover, according to Ramiza Darmi (2013) the background characteristics of learners in the Malaysian language learning that were found from gender, ethics groups, location of learners whether in urban or rural area affected their language anxiety.

Methodology
A qualitiative method was used to conduct the research by utilizing the content analysis of an interview of 30 MDAB students. A purposive sampling was used to select 30 respondents from MDAB students in UiTM Melaka. The respondents were MDAB students of Office Management and Tehcnology (part one until part three). The interview responses were analyzed and categorized according to the students' problems in acquiring the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). Moreover, student's suggestion to the lecturers on the teaching and learning of English (I don't understand this) Frequency count was used to score the responses.

Findings and Discussion
This section discusses the findings of respondents' views pertaining to the problems they experienced in acquiring the four language skills. respondents' general views, comments and observations on classroom teaching and learning experience and respondents' suggestions for teachers to enhance their teaching effectiveness and for other students to improve their language skills based on the respondents' personal approaches.

Learners' Language Learning Obstacles
This section provides the findings on the respondents' views pertaining to language learning obstacles that they experienced in acquiring the four language skills namely speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Speaking Obstacles Encountered By MDAB Students

Table 1: Speaking Problems and Reasons among MDAB Students

Total Respondents	Problems	Reasons
20 respondents	• Hesitated to speak English with their lecturers and friends in and/or outside the classroom.	• Worried about making grammatical mistakes. • Felt embarrassed of their low language proficiency. • Received negative physical response (smirk and pout). • Speaking with a stammer or hesitantly
5 respondents	• Felt self-conscious about their speaking proficiency	• Negative preliminary presumptions about proficient speakers' views towards them e.g. not intelligent, incompetent, dull.
5 respondents	• Difficulty in speaking fluently. • Mixing other languages with English in their conversation.	• Unfamiliar with certain English vocabulary

In **Table 1**, 20 respondents stated that they hesitated to speak English with their lecturers and friends in or outside the classroom because they worried about making grammatical mistakes and felt embarrassed of their low language proficiency. This is due to the negative physical response, such as a smirk and pout, that they received from others when learners spoke

incorrectly. Meanwhile, 5 respondents stated they felt self-conscious about their speaking proficiency because they have negative preliminary presumptions about proficient speakers' views towards them as being slow learners, incompetent and dull, among others.

As a result, they were not fully involved in classroom activities eventhough they were constantly encouraged to speak freely by their lecturers without being judgemental. Therefore, these negative experiences and fear of negative judgement from others hindered effective language learning and development among the MDAB students. Learners need to be aware that making mistakes are parts and parcel of language learning and teachers need to constantly reassure and encourage them to continue learning.

Krashen, in his interview by Young (1992), stated that one of the causes of speaking anxiety among students is due to teachers/lectures who expect them, usually beginners, to perform beyond their acquired competence. This can cause detrimental effects on learners' motivation and confidence. The majority of Malaysian students are bilingual who speak Bahasa Malaysia, the national language, and English, the second language. Both languages are compulsory subjects in the Malaysian education syllabus. The uniqueness of the Malaysian multicultural society and mixed-marriages create multilingual individuals wheither speak Tamil, Mandarin, various Chinese and other native languages such as Iban, Kadazan and Murut, among others, depending on their family and social backgrounds. Due to these circumstances, 5 respondents experienced difficulty speaking fluently due to unfamiliarity withs the English vocabulary. This caused the respondents to incorporate other local languages and dialects with English to ensure their meanings, intentions or thoughts are unambiguous.

Listening Obstacles Encountered by MDAB Students

Table 2: Listening Problems, Reasons and Effects among MDAB Students

Total Respondents	Problems	Reasons	Effects
20 respondents	• Unable to fully comprehend their lecturers.	• Lecturers spoke too fast. • Unsure of meaning of words.	• Misunderstood their lecturers' intended meaning and instruction • Replied or responded inaccurately
6 respondents	• Unable to keep up with part of a conversation or discussion with their classmates. • Unable to catch the certain word from radio conversation	• Unfamiliar with the topics of conversation or discussion • Speaker spoke with *slang* that quite difficult to understand	• Asked speakers for clarification.

Total Respondents	Problems		Effects
4 respondents	• Unfamiliar with meanings of certain words during conversation		• Unsure of responding or replying to the spekers. • Reluctant to request speakers to repeat or explain the particular words

Table 2 showed that 20 respondents were unable to understand their lecturers because they spoke too fast during conversation when giving or explaining the topics. This is because when lecturers talk to fast, they definely do not understand the explanation and instruction from the lecturers and response inaccurately. The second reason was due to uncertainty of meanings of words. As a result the students misunderstood the lecturer's meaning of conversation thus repylying incorrectly. Meanwhile, 6 respondents said they were unable to keep up with certain parts of a conversation or discussion in the classroom because they unfamiliar with the topics of conversation. It resulted in them asking the speakers for clarification about the topic that they discussed. Furthermore, for listening test the students will have to listen the conversation from the radio. They said that, sometime they cannot catch the word from the speaker due of slang and due to answer the question incorrectly. In addition, 4 respondents related their experience about being unsure of meaning of certain words during a conversation which made them reluctant to respond to the speakers. They feared the speaker would view them negatively as being not proficient in the language.

Reading Obstacles Encountered by MDAB Students

Table 3: Reading Problems, Reasons and Effects among MDAB Students

Total Respondents	Problems	Reasons	Effects
16 respondents	• Unable to fully understand passages and text.	• Encountered many unfamiliar words.	• Hindered reading comprehension and fluency.
14 respondents	• Required longer duration to read passages and text.	• Encountered many unfamiliar words.	• Constantly referred to English and bilingual dictionaries.

Table 3, 16 respondents claimed they experienced problem understanding passages and text while 14 respondents required longer duration to complete the reading materials. The respondents gave the same reason to their obstacles whereby they encountered many unfamiliar

words which hindered their reading comprehension and fluency. Besides, they had to constantly refer to English and bilingual dictionaries to look up for the meanings of the unfamiliar words. In these situations, MDAB students need to be taught and reminded to read and scan reading passages especially when a limited time frame is given for example during reading exercises or tests.

Writing Obstacles Encountered by MDAB Students

Table 4: Writing Problems and Reasons among MDAB Students

Total Respondents	Problems	Reasons
25 respondents	• Required longer period to write an essay. • Not familiar with the topics.	Pre-writing stage • Difficulty generating ideas to write essay outlines. Writing stage: • Mentally construct sentences in a simple english. • Constantly referring to English and bilingual dictionaries and online translator. Revising stage: • To ensure sentences and paragraphs were arranged coherently and cohesively. • To ensure sentences were gramatically correct and comprehensible
5 respondents	• Difficulty in writing academic essays.	• Need to synthesis, paraphrase and cite various sources. • Not exposed to academic writing in secondary school

Writing is one of the most difficult skills to master in learning a language. The findings in **Table 4** showed that 25 respondents stated they required longer period to write an essay as they experienced difficulty generating ideas to plan their essay outlines in the pre-writing stage.

Another reason the respondents, MDAB students required longer time to write in the writing stage was because they had to mentally construct sentences in their first language or mother-tongue before translating into English. At the same time, the studentss also spent a large amount of time looking up unfamiliar English words using bilingual dictionaries or online translator. Finally, in the revising stage, the respondents had to make sure that their sentences were

grammatically correct and comprehensible in addition to ensuring that their ideas, sentences and paragraphs were arranged coherently and cohesively. Meanwhile, 5 respondents who have taken academic reading and writing courses comment about the difficulty of writing academic essay. The latter essay requires learners to synthesis, paraphrase and cite various sources, which the respondents were not familiar with because they were not exposed to academic writing in secondary school. Thus, it was difficult for them to master the writing style within a 4 month in 1 semester.

MDAB Students' General View and Comments on English Language Teaching and Learning

This section provides the findings on the respondents' views and comments pertaining English language teaching and learning namely their lecturers' teaching approach.

Lecturers' Teaching Approach

Table 5: MDAB Students' View on Lecturers Teaching Approach

Total Respondents	Views
27 respondents	• Disagreed with lecturers who were directly about speaking only English in the classroom.
3 respondents	• Lecturers' lessons were not-interactive.

on **Table 5**, 27 respondents said they disagreed with teachers who were directly or always speaking only English in the classroom and also imposing similar practice upon the students. They opined that it was necessary for teachers to explain certain procedures and meanings in the students' mother-tongues so that they can fully comprehend the lecturers' explanation. The respondents commended the lecturers' intentions to ensure their students mastered the English language but they also needed to practice more flexibility in accommodating to the students' language limitations. By doing so, both lectureres and students will be able to provide and obtain effective and meaningful language learning experience, respectively. Meanwhile,only 3 respondents thought some of their lecturers' lessons were non-interactive. For example, the lessons were textbook-based, not having the slide show, etc.

Student's Suggestion to Improve the Teaching and Learning of English

This section provides the findings of the respondents' suggestion for lecturers to improve their teaching approach in the classroom and for students to improve their language skills based on the respondents' experience and personal approaches.

Table 6

Total Respondents	Suggestions
4 respondents	• Be more patient in guiding and teaching students.
18 respondents	• Lecturers should be more creative in their lessons and not rely only on textbooks
4 respondents	• Lecturers should introduce new vocabulary during lessons.

In **Table 6**, 4 respondents suggested that lecturers should be more patient in guiding and teaching especially the lower and average proficiency students. This will ensure students are more motivated and responsive towards the speakers and lessons. Meanwhile, 18 respondents preferred if teachers and lecturers incorporated more creative teaching approaches in their lessons such as using interactive powerpoint slides show. Four respondents opined that lecturers should use simple words when teaching, to explain meanings of unfamiliar words. This is supported by Krashen's Input Hypothesis that teacher's language instruction should be full of rich input (both in spoken and written language) that is roughly tuned at the appropriate level for the learners in the class to provide meaningful language learning experience (Krashen, 1981). Finally, 4 respondents suggested that lecturers should introduce new words during lessons as a mean to guide students to comprehend and use the vocabulary correctly in proper contexts. In the Malaysian Curriculum Specifications for primary and secondary schools, it contains a word list which consists of high frequency words commonly used in the English language which learners will need even when reading simple texts and to understand them in the context of what they read. Lecturers also can have the activities to support student-to student or group interaction, where they can use English to explain concepts and contribute to the assignment. This gives teachers an opportunity to gauge what the student has learned, and it demonstrates student progress in English language development.

Student's Learning Approach

In the interview session, the respondents offered their advice and suggestions on ways to improve language development and proficiency based on their personal experience which were effective in helping them become better learners

Table 7: Table Speaking and Listening Skills

Total Respondents	Views
20 respondents	• Converse with friends who have good command of English or with English native speakers via Skype, Facebook or Yahoo Messenger • Watch documentaries and English movies • Practice speaking infront of a small audience before a presentation. • Consistently practice speaking English with lecturers and friends.

Based on **Table 7**, one of the 20 respondents stated that watching English movies and documentaries such as *The National Geographic* and *Discovery* even Oh! My English programme helped him in his pronunciation, sentence structure construction, usage of words in contexts and vocabulary range development. Another respondent suggested watching English movies without foreign subtitles as this will force learners to focus on the spoken words. To improve one's speaking skill, three respondents suggested that learners should converse with friends, who have good command of English, can communicate via Facebook, Yahoo Messenger or other forms of Internet voice services. The continuing rapid advancement of information technology and multimedia has turned the world into a borderless continent especially with social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Tweeter.

MDAB students also suggested that they need to practice the language to enhance the communication skills. This is facilitate them when they have a presentation in the class. It is a norm to feel nervous before a presentation for both proficient and less proficient speakers. The respondents said these worries can be reduced by practicing before a presentation in front of a small audience whom the speaker is comfortable with. Preliminary feedbacks and comments from peers will help speakers improve their presentation skills and boost their confidence. One respondent of this research expressed his satisfaction participating in presentations and competitions which helped to build his confidence and develop his speaking skill.

Writing Skill

Table 8: MDAB Learners Suggestions to Improve Writing Skill

Total Respondents	Suggestions	Benefits
15 respondents	• Practice writing daily. Be more patient in guiding and teaching students.	• Train students to put thoughts in to words. • Train students to use effective forms of expressions and suitable choices of words. • Learn new vocabulary and synonyms through dictionary and Thesaurus.

In **table 8**, 15 respondents agreed that practice writing daily helped to improve their writing skills as it trained them to put their thoughts into words in addition to using effective forms of expressions and suitable choices of words. Writing practice also helped the students learn new vocabulary and synonyms via English and bilingual dictionaries, Thesaurus and reading newspapers, magazines and books.

Reading Skill

Table 9: MDAB Students Suggestions To Improve Reading Skill

Total Respondents	Suggestions	Benefits
25 respondents	• Read English news reports and articles, story books and magazines	• Newspaper covers general and specific topics and issues. • Provide materials for speaking activities and writing assignments.

The respondents suggested that reading newspaper, journal article would help to improve their reading skill in addition to improving their speaking and writing skills, grammar proficiency, and expanding their vocabulary. Newspapers are one of the cheapest reading sources available that cover general and specific topics and issues such as education, environment, health, social issues, science and technology which are suitable for students with average and below language proficiencies. The materials are also imperative guides for students to improve their grammar skills by identifying tenses forms, sentence structures and learning new words to expand their vocabulary and applying them in speaking and writing. The respondents stated that they used these materials in their individual and speaking activities and writing assignments.

Recommendation and Conclusion
MDAB students' perceptions towards the teaching and learning of English should be taken and reviewed seriously as it is a two-way process involving lecturers and students. Meanwhile, lecturers should take the initiative to ensure their teaching plans are effective while students' learning becomes meaningful through a myriad and mixture of teaching methods to cater to a majority of the students' learning styles and preferences. An empathic teacher can motivate reluctant students to explore their maximum potential through consistent encouragement and self-assurance. In addition, psychological factors which is nervous and shy also gives some impact to their performance in study. When they impaired with nervousness and shyness, they could not express their ideas properly and at the same time they are not confident on their own capabilities (Rusreena, 2018). By overcome this problem, students are able to express their idea properly and also enhance their confidence level. Besides, average and low proficiency students need to be proactive and consistently strive to improve their English language proficiency until they are able to achieve their maximum ability. In the end, the results will be an equal achievement and success for both educators and learners.

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