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ENHANCING MUET PREPAREDNESS: A STUDENT-CENTRED EVALUATION OF SPACE UTM'S ENGLISH CURRICULUM IN DIPLOMA STUDIES

Farah Hamizah Muhd Zaimi^{1*}, Fariha Diyana Awang Ali², Nurnadirah Shahira Nazri³, Nur Hazirah Mohd Bakhri³, Nur Liyana Zakaria⁵, Azhan Zulfadhli Handeri⁶

¹ Centre for Degree and Foundation Studies, SPACE UTM, Malaysia
Email: farah.hamizah@utmpace.edu.my

² Faculty of Education, Open University Malaysia (OUM), Malaysia,
Email: fariha_diyana@oum.edu.my

³ Centre for Degree and Foundation Studies, SPACE UTM, Malaysia
Email: nurnadirah@utmpace.edu.my

⁴ Centre for Degree and Foundation Studies, SPACE UTM, Malaysia
Email: hazirah@utmpace.edu.my

⁵ Centre for Degree and Foundation Studies, SPACE UTM, Malaysia
Email: nurliyana@utmpace.edu.my

⁶ Centre for Degree and Foundation Studies, SPACE UTM, Malaysia
Email: azhan@utmpace.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This research investigates diploma students' perspectives on the effectiveness of SPACE Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)'s English language courses in preparing them for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). Despite these courses being structured around the four core MUET component; listening, speaking, reading, and writing little is known about how students perceive their relevance and usefulness. Through a survey of 130 students and follow-up interviews, the findings reveal generally favourable attitudes, particularly toward the speaking and listening modules. Participants also expressed increased exam readiness. Nonetheless, criticisms emerged, including limited test simulations, outdated content, and insufficient individualized feedback. The Expectancy-Value Theory guided this analysis, highlighting how students' motivation is shaped by their expectations and the perceived value of these courses. Recommendations include more comprehensive feedback mechanisms, interactive learning sessions, expanded practice materials, and the integration of digital tools. The results emphasize the need for learner-driven reforms to improve academic English instruction and MUET outcomes.

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This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)**Keywords:**

MUET, English Language Instruction, SPACE UTM, Student Evaluation, Language Skills Development, Formative Assessment, Expectancy-Value Theory

Introduction

MUET, or the Malaysian University English Test, is a standardized national exam that evaluates candidates' proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As a prerequisite for entry into degree programs in Malaysian universities, achieving at least Band 2 is essential. Recognizing the importance of MUET, SPACE UTM offers a series of English courses aimed at equipping diploma students with the necessary language skills. These courses include Introductory Academic English, Intermediate Academic English, and Academic Reading and Writing, typically spanning the first two semesters.

While the curriculum is structured to reflect MUET components, it is crucial to examine students' experiences and satisfaction levels to ensure course efficacy. Understanding students' perceptions can help tailor instructional content and strategies to improve language proficiency and overall exam preparedness. This study aims to evaluate how students perceive these courses and to identify key strengths, limitations, and potential improvements.

Background of the Study

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) is a crucial English proficiency assessment for university admission in Malaysia. However, studies have shown that many students struggle with specific components of the test, particularly speaking and writing (Karnine, Preece, Ahmad, & Muhammad, 2022b; Harun et al., 2021). Research has also indicated a positive correlation between MUET performance and academic achievement, with higher MUET bands associated with better CGPA scores (Rahmat et al., 2015). A predictive validity study further supports this link, revealing significant differences in academic performance between students with MUET Band 3 and those with Bands 1 and 2. This finding suggests a need to re-evaluate existing cut-off bands for university placement purposes (Baharum et al., 2021).

Given MUET's role in predicting students' ability to manage university-level English demands, targeted support for lower-band students becomes essential. In this context, the English modules offered at SPACE UTM are designed to address all four MUET components comprehensively. These modules emphasize practical language skills through classroom activities, assignments, and assessments aligned with MUET tasks. Nevertheless, it remains important to examine whether students perceive these modules as effective in preparing them for the MUET. Their perceptions may influence both motivation and academic outcomes, making it critical to evaluate the relevance and impact of these preparatory courses.

Problem Statement

Although the English courses are intended to improve MUET performance, there remains a gap in assessing their real-world effectiveness. A concerning number of students perform at a minimal Band 2 level, which may not be sufficient for university-level academic demands,

especially in English-medium programs. Furthermore, there is a correlation between higher MUET scores and better employment outcomes.

This study aims to bridge the gap by capturing students' feedback and determining whether the existing course structure meets their expectations. Student input can inform course revisions, thereby improving instructional quality and student outcomes. This is especially important in the context of today's generation of learners, who are digitally inclined and expect more engaging and relevant language instruction aligned with their academic and career goals.

Gap Analysis

Previous evaluations of SPACE UTM's English programs have primarily focused on curriculum design and instructional content, with limited attention given to students' perceptions of the courses' relevance and effectiveness in preparing them for MUET. However, without incorporating student feedback, educators may lack crucial insights needed to refine and improve these programs.

Recognizing this oversight, and in response to evolving educational practices, integrating learner perspectives becomes increasingly vital. Doing so can enhance course content and delivery, ensuring alignment with current academic and employment requirements. This research seeks to address this gap by offering empirical insights into student satisfaction and perceived course value.

Research Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

1. To assess students' perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of SPACE UTM English courses in preparing for MUET.
2. To identify course strengths and areas requiring enhancement based on student feedback.
3. To offer suggestions for improving the courses to better support student achievement in MUET.

Research Questions

1. How do students perceive the effectiveness and relevance of SPACE UTM English courses for MUET preparation?
2. What strengths and weaknesses do students identify in the course delivery?
3. What improvements can be made to enhance MUET readiness based on student feedback?

Hypothesis

Students who perceive the SPACE UTM English courses as relevant and effective are more likely to achieve higher MUET performance and demonstrate a greater willingness to recommend the courses to others.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT)

The **Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT)** frames learner motivation in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), particularly in preparing for MUET, through three constructs: expectancy (belief in success), value (task importance), and cost (psychological burden) (Wang & Xue, 2022). Here, a **task** refers to a discrete educational activity—such as MUET reading or writing practice—that demands cognitive and emotional effort. **Task value** is defined as the perceived benefit of the activity, which may include its usefulness for future goals (*utility value*), relevance to self-identity (*attainment value*), or intrinsic interest (*intrinsic value*) (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). When Malaysian students believe that mastering these tasks will enhance academic or career prospects, they report higher motivation and engagement (Izni, Aksah, Mohd Aslam, & Alshekhly, 2024). Conversely, high perceived difficulty and stress—especially among undergraduates from non-English speaking or rural backgrounds—elevate the psychological cost and reduce motivation (Wee, Abdul Azis, & Abdul Rasit, 2006). Furthermore, among Malaysian undergraduates, elder Gen Z students often express strong value in English learning aligned with goals of employability and academic success, reinforcing the centrality of task value (Rahman et al., 2024). These findings highlight the need to design MUET-aligned EAP curricula that strengthen utility and intrinsic value while minimizing emotional cost to optimize learner engagement and outcomes.

Applying EVT principles in curriculum development thus enables educators to address both the cognitive and affective needs of learners, improving satisfaction and readiness for MUET. Although this research centres on evaluating SPACE UTM's English courses from students' perspectives, EVT provides a theoretical lens to interpret results. The theory explains how learners' belief in their success, their perceived value of the coursework, and the associated psychological effort influence their engagement with MUET preparation.

Conceptual Framework

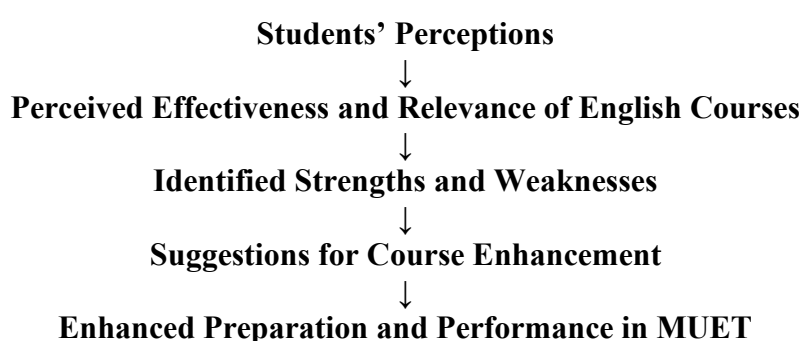


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework guiding this study considers students' feedback as the starting point in assessing the value of SPACE UTM English courses for MUET preparation. The primary independent variable is students' perceptions, which influence how they evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the courses. This in turn impacts their identification of key strengths and weaknesses, from which specific recommendations can be derived. These recommendations can guide strategic improvements in course design and delivery. The ultimate outcome, the

dependent variable is an increase in student proficiency and MUET scores. This model highlights the role of continuous student feedback in maintaining the relevance and impact of the curriculum, thereby ensuring it aligns with learner expectations and evolving academic needs.

Student Satisfaction in Malaysian English Language Courses

In Malaysian higher education institutions, student satisfaction with English courses remains a significant focus, given English's role as the primary instructional medium. Multiple factors affect satisfaction, including curriculum quality, instructional methods, lecturer capabilities, learning environment, and assessment procedures (Zailani et al., 2021).

Course Content and Structure

Curricula that are well-structured and aligned with learners' academic and professional goals tend to yield higher satisfaction levels. Research shows that courses using active strategies—such as problem-solving tasks and communicative methods to promote deeper engagement (Kaur & Sidhu, 2020). Moreover, content that directly supports academic writing and communication contributes significantly to learner satisfaction (Rahman et al., 2019).

Instructor Proficiency and Pedagogy

Lecturer effectiveness also plays a central role. Students favor instructors who adopt learner-centered teaching styles, give detailed feedback, and effectively integrate digital tools (Mustafa et al., 2022). A supportive and motivating classroom environment contributes positively to the overall learning experience (Azman, 2019).

Digital Environment and Infrastructure

The quality of the learning environment, including technological resources, shapes how students perceive English courses. As blended and online learning gain popularity, students tend to prefer flexible formats with interactive platforms (Hashim et al., 2020). However, infrastructure gaps, especially in rural areas, may hinder positive experiences (Ismail & Aziz, 2021).

Evaluation and Feedback Practices

Equitable and comprehensive assessment strategies significantly enhance learner satisfaction. Research by Yunus and Mat (2021) underscores that Malaysian students value formative and summative evaluations that authentically reflect their ongoing learning progress. For example, **formative assessments** such as quizzes, peer review, rubrics, and self-assessment encourage reflective learning and help learners adjust their strategies over time (Tan et al., 2022; Language Testing in Asia, 2022). These approaches have been especially effective when paired with **summative assessments** that consolidate skill mastery at pivotal points, ensuring both instruction and evaluation are balanced and meaningful (Sanako, 2019).

In digital learning environments, Malaysian learners respond positively to online English classes overall, but concerns arise around limited access, unclear guidelines, and rigid pedagogy (Abdul Kadir, 2023; Wei et al., 2023). A notable challenge is the heightened risk of plagiarism and contract cheating, given easy access to online materials. Lecturers have addressed this by blending digital assessments with traditional, in-person methods, employing plagiarism detection tools, clear citation training, and scaffolded assignment design to reduce misuse and reinforce academic integrity (Jiffriya, Jahan, Ragel, & Deegalla, 2014; "Contract

cheating,” 2020). Many scholars advocate for **blended assessment approaches**, which combine online formative feedback with supervised summative tasks, enabling both flexibility and rigorous academic standards (Svensäter, 2023)

Preparatory Courses and Academic Readiness

MUET preparation courses play an essential role in improving students' language skills, test strategies, and emotional resilience (Mahmud et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence is linked to improved MUET performance, indicating that courses addressing both cognitive and emotional skills may lead to better results (Hamdzah et al., 2020). Still, individual learning styles and prior language experience influence effectiveness (Eitemüller & Habig, 2020; Weppert et al., 2023). While these programs positively impact readiness, they must also account for student motivation, which has a greater impact than course satisfaction alone (Weppert et al., 2023).

Interactive course elements, such as simulated exams and dynamic lessons, are well-received (Batouk et al., 2023). However, motivation remains the key predictor of success, emphasizing the importance of designing courses that inspire ongoing engagement and commitment.

Challenges and Innovations in MUET Preparation

Learners pursuing MUET through EAP pathways often face obstacles, particularly in speaking and vocabulary acquisition (Razaki et al., 2024; Sohaimi et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence again emerges as a contributing factor to test performance (Hamdzah et al., 2020). The shift to online instruction has added further complications, including vague assignments and ineffective time management (Yue, 2022). Nevertheless, these difficulties present an opportunity to revamp EAP courses through interactive, tailored approaches that address academic gaps and motivation simultaneously (Jayalath & Esichaikul, 2020).

New instructional models that incorporate game-based learning, artificial intelligence tools like MUETBot, and interactive digital platforms have demonstrated improved engagement and academic outcomes (Jayalath & Esichaikul, 2020; Yin & Hanif, 2024). Course designs prioritizing active participation, collaboration, and learner independence such as those using Moodle—further support student progress (Abuhassna et al., 2021). Incorporating these approaches, along with consistent student feedback, can significantly elevate both learner satisfaction and MUET results (Sohaimi et al., 2021).

Research Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 130 diploma students at SPACE UTM who had completed English courses and the MUET exam. The questionnaire, with strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.978), used a 5-point Likert scale to assess course effectiveness, MUET alignment, and satisfaction.

To complement survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 selected students, providing qualitative insights into challenges and improvement suggestions. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across academic backgrounds, targeting students who had completed the full curriculum and MUET.

The instrument included demographic questions, Likert-scale items, and open-ended responses. A pilot study with 41 students confirmed the questionnaire's high internal consistency. Data collection was done both manually and electronically. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rho correlation tests were used to analyze trends and relationships in student perceptions, offering actionable feedback for enhancing MUET-focused English instruction.

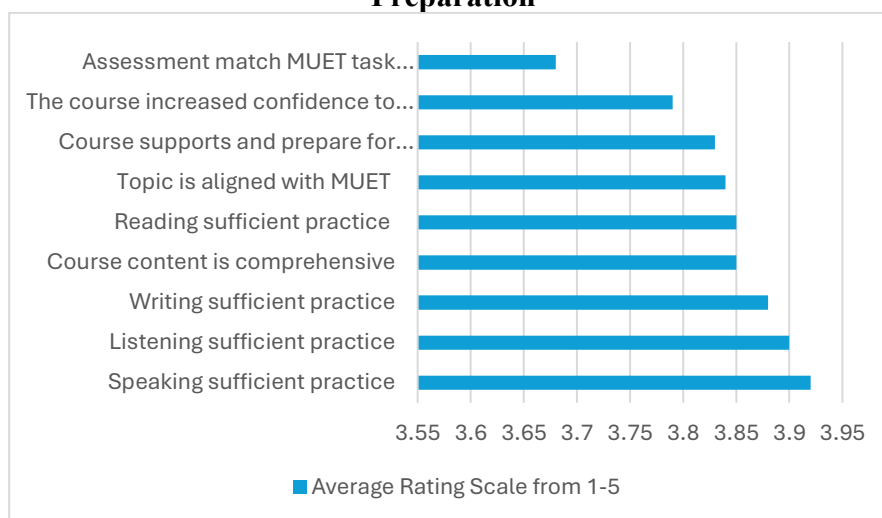
Findings

Research Objective 1: Analysis of Students' Views on MUET Preparation Through SPACE UTM English Courses

To evaluate how students perceive the effectiveness of SPACE UTM's English language curriculum for MUET preparation, responses from 130 diploma students were analysed using descriptive statistics. These responses focused on various course elements aligned with MUET assessment criteria.

Table 1 summarizes students' evaluations of key aspects of the course, including the perceived adequacy of practice in the four core language skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It also highlights students' views on how well the course topics align with the MUET exam, the extent to which the course enhanced their confidence and sense of preparedness, as well as the relevance and comprehensiveness of the course content.

Table 1: Student's Rating of SPACE UTM English Course Component for MUET Preparation



Most mean scores ranged between 3.68 and 3.92 on a 5-point Likert scale, reflecting a generally positive reception. Students rated opportunities for speaking (mean = 3.92) and listening (mean = 3.90) practice the highest. Writing (3.88) and reading (3.85) skills also received favourable ratings. Course alignment with MUET and content coverage both scored above 3.8, indicating students felt the courses addressed exam requirements effectively.

The lowest-rated aspect was assessment authenticity (mean = 3.68), suggesting room for improvement in aligning in-course tests with actual MUET standards. Still, students largely agreed that course participation boosted their exam confidence (mean = 3.79).

Table 2: Link Between Perceived Usefulness and Course Recommendation

		Content supports MUET preparation	Students would recommend to MUET peers
Content supports MUET preparation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.714**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	130	130
Students would recommend to MUET peers	Correlation Coefficient	.714**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	130	130

Further analysis using Spearman's rho correlation revealed a significant, strong relationship ($r = 0.714$, $p < 0.001$) between students' belief that the course supported MUET preparation and their willingness to recommend it to peers. This indicates that students who found the course valuable were also likely to endorse it to others.

This positive perception was reinforced in the interviews, where students linked the course directly to their increased confidence. As one participant shared:

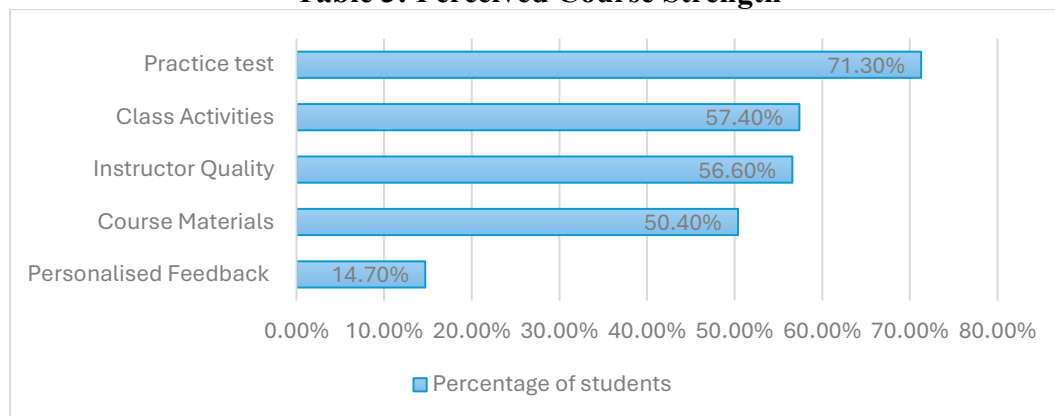
"I would definitely recommend it because the speaking practice we did in class really built my confidence. Before the course, I was terrified to speak, but the small group activities made it less scary and helped me organize my thoughts."

Research objective 2: Identifying Effective Elements and Areas Needing Improvement

This section focuses on the second research objective: exploring what students found effective and what could be improved in the SPACE UTM English courses. The insights are drawn from the feedback of 130 students, who were given the option to choose more than one response in each category.

What Students Valued Most

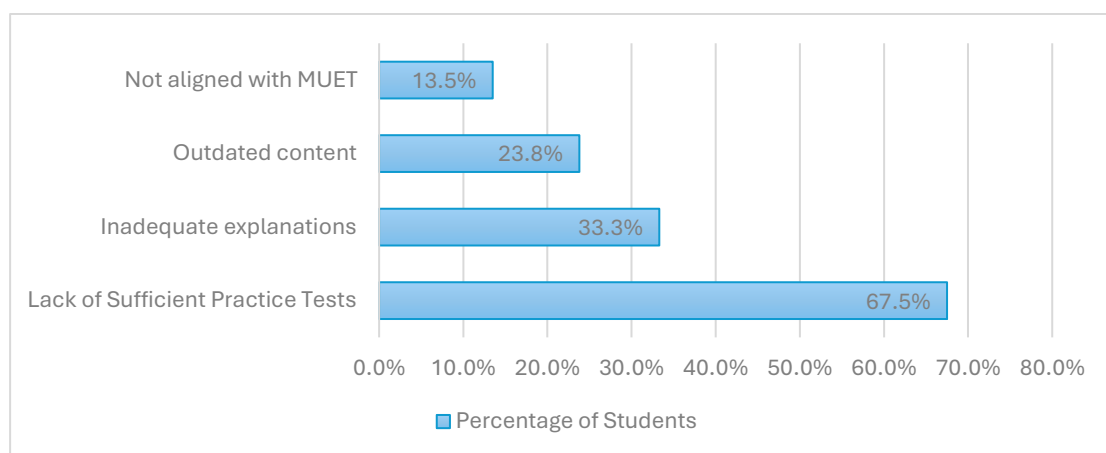
Table 3: Perceived Course Strength



Students perceived several core strengths within the English courses, particularly highlighting the inclusion of practice tests, which were acknowledged by 71.3% of respondents. Additionally, interactive classroom activities were noted by 57.4% of students, followed closely by the perceived quality of instructors at 56.6%, and the usefulness of course materials, which received positive feedback from 50.4% of participants. These findings underscore the crucial role of engaging pedagogy and practical application in fostering a supportive learning environment. However, only a small proportion of students (14.7%) identified personalized feedback as a notable strength, indicating that individualized attention remains an underdeveloped aspect of the current instructional approach. These findings underscore the importance of practical application and teaching quality in language learning.

Challenges Reported by Students

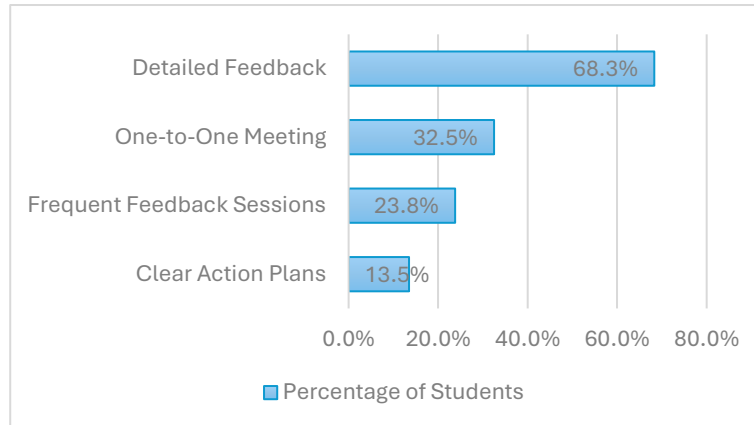
Table 4: Reported Course Challenges



Despite recognizing the benefits of practice tests, a significant number of students (67.5%) expressed concern about their limited availability. This apparent contradiction reveals a desire not merely for practice but for a broader range of assessments that simulate MUET conditions more authentically. Additional challenges reported include the lack of thorough explanation of course content, cited by 33.3% of students, outdated instructional materials (23.8%), and a misalignment between course content and MUET requirements (13.5%).

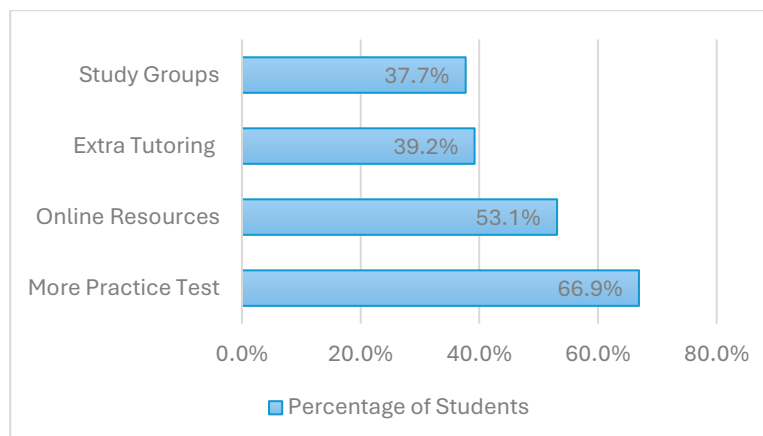
Feedback and Resource Improvement Suggestions

Table 5: Feedback Improvement Suggestions



In terms of improvement, students recommended more comprehensive and personalized feedback, with 68.3% of them calling for detailed commentary on performance. Others suggested structured one-on-one support (32.5%) and regular check-ins with instructors (23.8%) to monitor their progress more effectively.

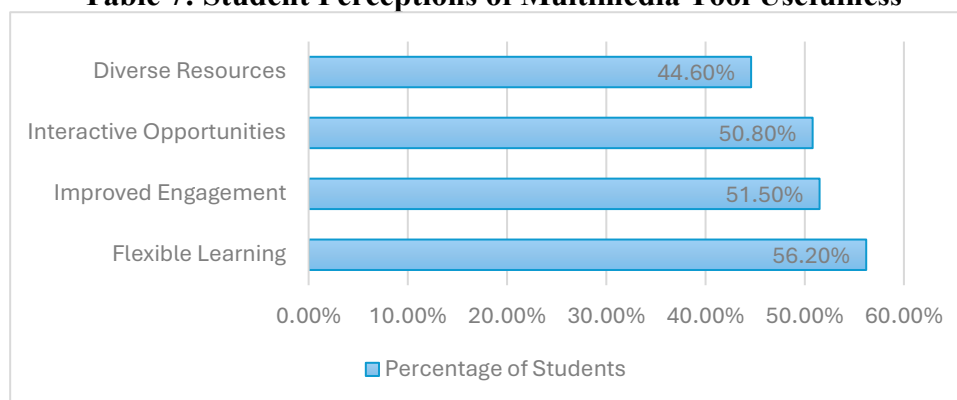
Table 6: Suggested Additional Resources



As for learning resources, many proposed increasing accesses to supplementary materials (66.9%), integrating more online tools and references (53.1%), offering additional tutoring sessions (39.2%), and facilitating study groups to promote peer collaboration (37.7%). These suggestions collectively reflect a clear student demand for enhanced support systems, diversified instructional resources, and more personalized learning experiences, which can ultimately contribute to greater course satisfaction and improved MUET preparation.

Integration of Multimedia Tools

Table 7: Student Perceptions of Multimedia Tool Usefulness



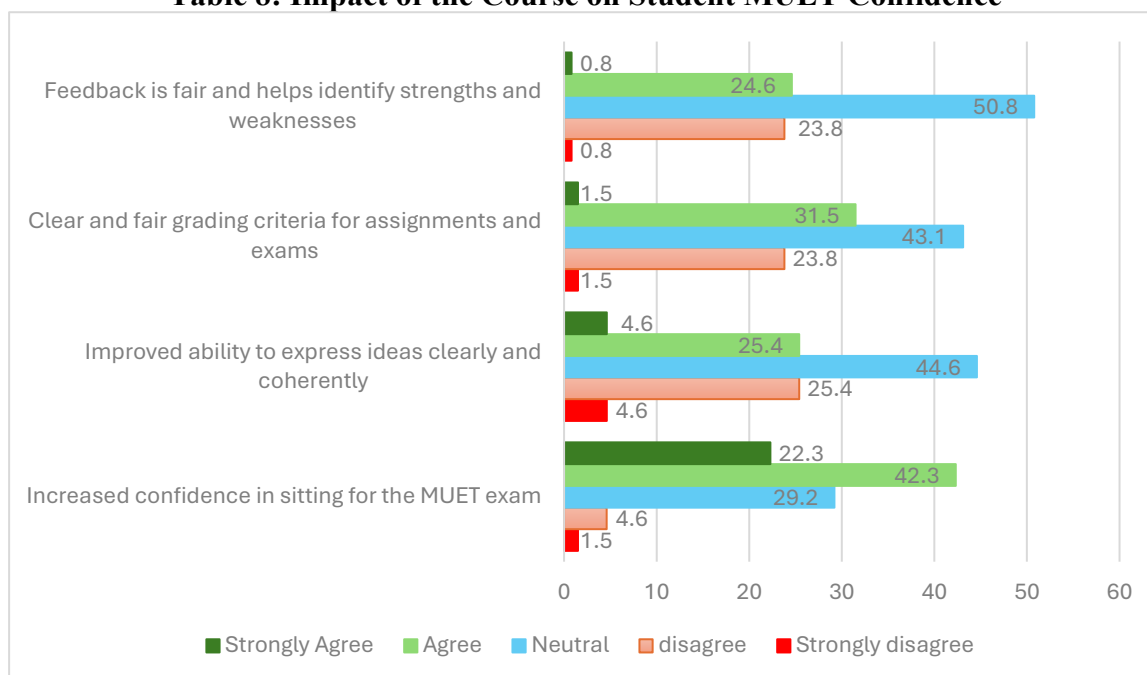
Students shared their views on how multimedia tools supported their learning experience. Many appreciated the flexibility these tools offered, with over half (56.2%) highlighting how they allowed for more adaptable learning. Others felt more involved in lessons, with 51.5% noting improved engagement. Around 50.8% valued the interactive elements that multimedia tools brought to the classroom, while 44.6% pointed out the benefit of having access to a wide range of learning materials. These findings support the integration of digital tools to cater to diverse learning preferences and increase course relevance.

Research Objective 3: Recommendations for Enhancing SPACE UTM English Courses to Support Higher MUET Achievement

In addressing the third research objective, offering suggestions to improve the SPACE UTM English courses to better support students in achieving higher MUET scores, a detailed analysis of student feedback was carried out. This analysis was based on both frequency distributions and descriptive statistics to ensure a well-rounded interpretation of the data.

Student Endorsement and Confidence Indicators

Table 8: Impact of the Course on Student MUET Confidence

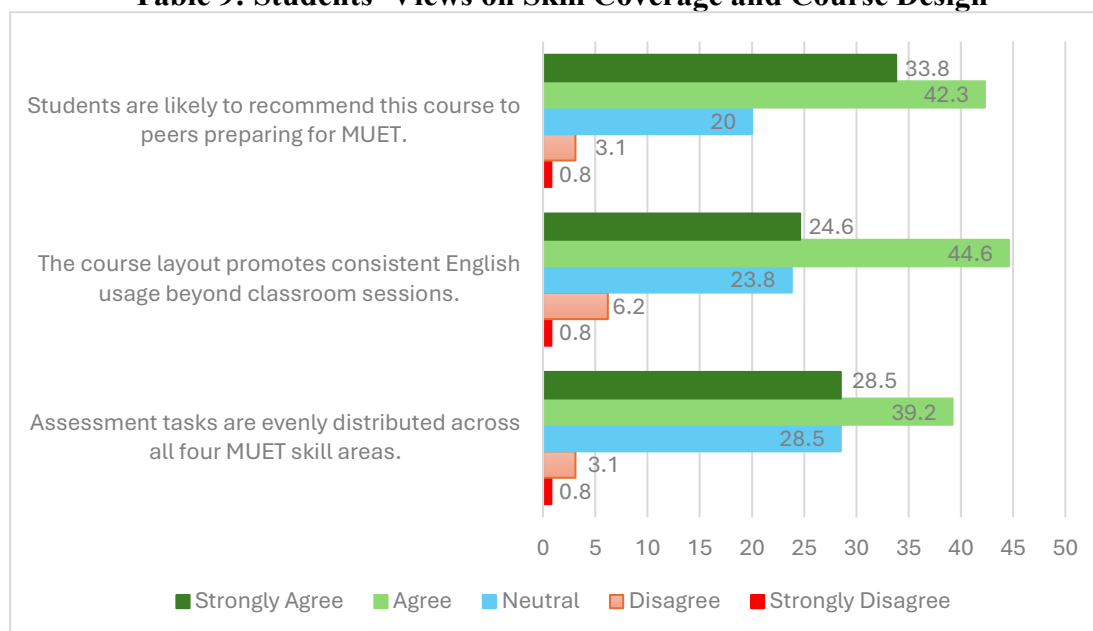


The feedback revealed that most students held a generally positive view of the course's role in preparing them for MUET. Specifically, 64.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the course increased their confidence in sitting for the MUET exam, and 70% indicated that it helped them express their ideas more clearly and coherently—pointing to the curriculum's strength in developing communicative competence.

In terms of assessment, 74.6% of students agreed that the grading criteria were both clear and fair, while 75.4% appreciated the usefulness and fairness of the feedback they received. These results suggest that the course supports assessment literacy, an essential factor for success in high-stakes exams like MUET.

However, a closer examination of the chart reveals that a notable proportion of students remained neutral or unconvinced. For instance, 29.2% responded neutrally regarding increased MUET confidence, and 25.4% were neutral about expressing ideas clearly. Furthermore, around 5–6% of students expressed disagreement or strong disagreement across several indicators. While these figures are relatively low, they cannot be ignored, as they may reflect inconsistent delivery, unmet expectations, or a lack of individualized support in certain classes.

These findings highlight a dual reality: although the majority found the course beneficial, a sizeable minority experienced ambiguity or dissatisfaction. This points to a need for targeted instructional adjustments, especially in areas like confidence-building and personalized feedback, to ensure that the course benefits are experienced more consistently across the entire student body.

*Equitable Skill Integration and Course Design***Table 9: Students' Views on Skill Coverage and Course Design**

Students also shared their views on how well the course supported the development of key skills. When asked about the balance of assessments across the four MUET components; Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing with **67.7% either agreed or strongly agreed** that the assessments were well-distributed. This is important, as balanced exposure across all skill areas is fundamental to comprehensive MUET preparation.

Furthermore, **69.2% agreed or strongly agreed** that the course layout encouraged consistent English usage beyond the classroom, indicating some transfer of learning into students' daily lives. Perhaps most notable is that **76.1% of respondents said they would recommend the course to other students**, suggesting a high level of endorsement.

However, a **closer qualitative analysis** suggests this endorsement may not fully reflect enthusiasm. Around **20–28% of students responded neutrally**, and **4–7% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement** across the three indicators. This may imply that while a majority found the course beneficial, a significant minority felt indifferent, uncertain, or even dissatisfied with its implementation.

Comments collected from students revealed that some were unsure if the course alone was sufficient, noting issues like “too many generic tasks,” “repetitive activities,” or “not enough MUET-format drills.” Others expressed appreciation for the course simply because “there was nothing else available to help prepare,” hinting that **their recommendation may stem from a lack of alternative resources rather than complete satisfaction**.

This suggests that while the course generally met students' needs, **there remains room for enhancement**, especially in offering more targeted support, diverse practice methods, and perhaps a more structured blend of digital and face-to-face strategies to accommodate different learning styles and expectations.

Table 9: Association Between Students' Overall Satisfaction with the Course and Their Willingness to Recommend It to Others

		The course assessments provide equitable coverage of all four essential MUET skill areas	The student expresses willingness to recommend this course to peers preparing for the MUET examination.
The course assessments provide equitable coverage of all four essential MUET skill areas	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.751**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	130	130
The student would The student expresses willingness to recommend this course to peers preparing for the MUET examination.	Correlation Coefficient	.751**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	130	130

To further understand the relationship between student satisfaction and their willingness to recommend the course, a Spearman's rho analysis was conducted. The results revealed a strong positive correlation ($\rho = .751$, $p < .001$) between the perception that the assessments covered all four MUET skills effectively and the likelihood of recommending the course. In simple terms, students who felt that the course provided balanced and relevant assessments were much more inclined to suggest the course to others. The correlation was statistically significant, which adds weight to the reliability of this finding.

Feedback and Resource Recommendations

While personalized feedback was previously identified as the least emphasized strength (as shown in Table 4), this observation is further validated by current findings. Only 15% of students reported receiving feedback tailored to their individual needs. In contrast, 66% recommended the inclusion of more detailed and specific feedback, 32% requested individual consultation sessions, and 23% suggested increasing the frequency of feedback.

This discrepancy points to a clear gap between student expectations and current instructional practices. A likely reason why personalized feedback was not consistently implemented is the **heavy teaching load and administrative responsibilities** faced by lecturers. Many English instructors manage multiple course sections, often with large class sizes, making it difficult to provide individualized responses for every student.

Additionally, the current institutional **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** for lecturers may emphasize quantifiable outputs such as syllabus coverage, number of assessments administered, and teaching hours—rather than the **quality and depth of formative feedback**. As a result, lecturers may prioritize delivering standardized feedback quickly over engaging in time-intensive personalized consultation.

Uncovering this underlying issue is important, as it suggests that improving feedback quality is not merely a pedagogical matter, but also a structural one. Reforms at the policy level such as revising KPI frameworks to value **student engagement**, **feedback effectiveness**, or **consultation hours**, could empower instructors to invest more time in personalized learning support. Providing digital tools or AI-assisted feedback platforms could also alleviate workload while maintaining quality, offering a sustainable path forward.

Regarding suggestions for additional learning support (see Table 6), the most commonly proposed improvement was to increase the availability of practice tests, which was mentioned by 67 percent of students. This was followed by requests for online resources (53 percent) and extra tutoring sessions (39 percent). These suggestions reflect a clear preference among students for more flexible and comprehensive support materials that cater to different learning styles and academic needs.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

As detailed in Table 4, students also identified several recurring challenges. These include a lack of adequate practice tests, which was raised by 65 percent of respondents, and insufficient explanation of course materials, noted by 32 percent. A smaller yet notable group of students (23 percent) indicated that some content appeared outdated, while 13 percent believed the course did not fully align with the expectations of the MUET examination. These points suggest that careful course review and updated content are essential for ensuring alignment with exam standards and maintaining relevance.

Use of Multimedia Tools

Students generally responded positively to the use of multimedia tools in the classroom (see Table 7). Around 56 percent agreed that these tools support flexible learning. Just over half of the respondents noted that multimedia elements improved classroom engagement (51.5 percent), created more interactive learning opportunities (50.8 percent), and introduced a wider variety of learning materials (44.6 percent). These findings suggest that digital and multimedia components should be further incorporated into the course structure to enrich the learning experience.

Altogether, the data reveals that while most students view the SPACE UTM English courses as useful and beneficial, there is still room for improvement. Three core areas emerged as priorities: increasing the number and frequency of practice-oriented assessments, offering more specific and personalized feedback, and modernizing the course with up-to-date resources and multimedia tools. Addressing these areas would significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of the course and better prepare students for the MUET examination.

Identified Strengths, Weaknesses, and Suggested Improvements

To comprehensively address the second and third research questions, a thematic analysis of the qualitative interview data was conducted. This approach facilitated a deeper exploration of students' perceived strengths and weaknesses (RQ2), while also generating constructive suggestions for course enhancement (RQ3). Three key themes emerged, each pairing a specific challenge with a targeted recommendation:

Theme 1: The Critical Need for Authentic, High-Stakes Practice

One interviewee clearly articulated this gap:

"The class quizzes were fine for checking knowledge, but the real MUET is about pressure and time. The format, the strict timing, the silence... it's a different feeling. We needed more full-length simulations to really feel prepared for that environment."

This highlights the importance of incorporating full-length mock MUET simulations to better prepare students for the high-stakes nature of the actual exam.

Theme 2: The Demand for Personalized and Actionable Feedback

A student explained this distinction powerfully:

"Getting a 'B' on an essay doesn't help me improve. I wanted the lecturer to write, 'Your introduction is weak; try using a counter-argument to make it stronger,' or 'Your grammar is good, but work on your topic-specific vocabulary.' That's feedback I can actually use for the next assignment."

This suggests that moving beyond summative grading toward individualized, formative comments would significantly enhance learning outcomes.

Theme 3: The Call for Modern, Flexible, and Integrated Learning

As one participant noted:

"Some of the examples in the textbook felt old... Also, everything was separate. We'd have a reading class, then a writing class. MUET isn't like that. You read something, and then you have to write about it. The classes should be connected like that."

This reflects a need for content modernization and an integrated skills-based approach that mirrors real MUET tasks, where multiple language skills are applied in sequence.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of SPACE UTM's English curriculum in preparing diploma students for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), from the students' perspectives. Overall, the results indicate that students perceive the courses positively, particularly in the domains of speaking and listening. However, the study also uncovers several critical areas in need of improvement—namely, limited access to authentic MUET-style assessments, outdated learning materials, and insufficient personalized feedback.

Consistent with previous studies (Mahmud et al., 2021; Sohaimi et al., 2021), student responses highlight the importance of practice-based, interactive, and relevant instruction in building MUET readiness. The high mean scores for listening and speaking components suggest that

these modules are effectively delivered, likely due to their interactive nature and real-time feedback mechanisms. Nevertheless, the relatively lower scores for assessment authenticity point to a mismatch between classroom tasks and the rigour of actual MUET conditions. This echoes earlier findings by Razaki et al. (2024), who emphasize the necessity of incorporating high-stakes, exam-simulated tasks to develop students' test-taking confidence and competence.

Framing the analysis within the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), students' reported confidence and course satisfaction appear closely tied to their expectancy of success and the perceived value of the course. As EVT posits, learners are more motivated when they believe they can succeed and when they view the task as meaningful (Wang & Xue, 2022; Chen, 2024). The strong correlation between students' perceived usefulness of the course and their willingness to recommend it to peers reinforces this theoretical perspective. Notably, while students generally found the course valuable, those who reported receiving limited feedback or outdated content were less confident—suggesting that perceived cost (e.g., lack of support or relevance) may negatively impact engagement and outcomes (Berweger et al., 2021).

The thematic analysis of interview data offers further depth to these findings. Students expressed a strong desire for more authentic practice, such as full-length MUET simulations that mimic actual testing conditions. They also called for personalized and actionable feedback to help them improve specific language skills, rather than receiving only summative grades. These findings align with research by Tan et al. (2022), who found that detailed formative feedback fosters better academic performance and self-regulation. Additionally, students advocated for a more integrated learning approach, where reading, writing, speaking, and listening are taught cohesively, reflecting the demands of real-world communication and the MUET format. This pedagogical alignment has been shown to enhance language transfer and cognitive flexibility (Tabari et al., 2021).

Digital and multimedia tools were generally well-received, with students reporting increased engagement and flexibility. These findings are consistent with Hashim et al. (2020) and Abuhassna et al. (2021), who emphasize the role of digital platforms in enhancing learner satisfaction, particularly when they provide interactive and accessible learning opportunities. However, students also identified the need for more current and diverse digital content, suggesting that ongoing content updates are crucial for maintaining relevance and interest.

Taken together, the results suggest that while the SPACE UTM English courses have made significant strides in MUET preparation, further enhancements are necessary to maximize their impact. The integration of regular MUET simulations, detailed and frequent formative feedback, updated instructional materials, and a more holistic, digitally enhanced curriculum could address existing gaps and elevate student outcomes.

Conclusion

This study evaluated diploma students' perceptions of the English language curriculum offered by SPACE UTM, with a focus on its effectiveness in preparing them for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). Overall, students expressed favourable views of the courses, particularly highlighting the value of speaking and listening components in boosting their exam confidence and communication skills. The positive correlation between students' perceived course relevance and their willingness to recommend it reinforces the curriculum's strengths in promoting engagement and learner satisfaction.

However, several challenges emerged, including the limited availability of authentic MUET practice tests, insufficient personalized feedback, and the use of outdated content. These concerns underscore the need for course improvements that are aligned with current academic demands and examination standards. Students' calls for integrated skills instruction, more interactive and technologically enhanced learning, and detailed feedback mechanisms point to actionable areas for curriculum enhancement.

Anchored in the Expectancy-Value Theory, the findings affirm that students' motivation and performance are closely linked to their expectations of success and the perceived value of the learning experience. By addressing both cognitive and emotional aspects of learner engagement, the SPACE UTM English curriculum can be refined to better support student outcomes.

In conclusion, a student-centred approach to curriculum design—one that prioritizes authentic practice, targeted support, and continuous feedback—can significantly improve MUET readiness. Ongoing course evaluations, instructor development, and the integration of digital tools will be critical in sustaining the relevance and effectiveness of English language instruction in Malaysian higher education.

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