

LANGUAGE LEARNING CHALLENGES AND SOLUTION AT MELAKA FOUNDATION COLLEGE.

Nor Farhana Mardhiah Fissol
Hamidah Yamat@ Ahmad

ABSTRACT

This study intends to identify the difficulties or challenges faced by the students in learning English and solutions taken by the students to overcome these difficulties at Melaka Foundation College. The objectives of the research are (a) to identify the challenges faced by Melaka Foundation College students in learning English (b) to identify the solutions taken by Melaka Foundation College students in learning English. Respondents consist of students from Semester 1 Melaka Foundation College. They come from different courses such as culinary art, tourism management, accounting, early childhood education, marketing management and so on but learn English in the same class. 30 students with their ages from 18 to 22 years old were selected from different ethnic, gender and English ability background completed the survey questionnaire. Questionnaire is adapted from Mosaddaq Yahya (2012) to measure challenges or learning difficulties and SILL; Oxford(1990) to measure solutions taken by the students to overcome these difficulties or The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning and has been modified by researcher. The results of the study indicated that nearly all students from Semester 1 agreed that their attitudes towards English language affect learning the language. They are also have difficulties in mastering grammar skills. The solutions taken by the Melaka Foundation College students to overcome the problem is they noticed when they make a mistakes whether in speaking, writing, reading or listening, they will use that information to help them do better in future. They realised that even though they have difficulties in learning English, they still have to improve their English language in order to gain success at college level.

Keywords: language learning, language learning challenges, language learning solution, Malaysian students, college students

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study is to identify language learning challenges and solutions taken by the students to overcome these difficulties. A study focuses on the reasons that impact on their poor English performance. Hence, this chapter presents the background of the study to provide an understanding of the context of the study and the issue at hand. This is followed by the problem statement part, research purpose, research objectives, and research questions.

The Melaka Foundation College was formed with the belief and understanding that higher education is vital to ensure the progress of the nation. The institution received an auspicious start in 1997 when it was officially opened by the Minister of Education, Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, who is today's the Prime Minister of Malaysia. Melaka Foundation College provides quality education and training to global citizens so as to enhance their competitiveness in the global market. This institution offers many programmes and courses and all the students must take English subject as a core subject. There are many reasons that cause Malaysian students poor performance of their learning English as a second language such as the weakness of curriculum design, lack of English teachers, and lack of students' learning motivation. These are reasons discovered by studies on why students are not proficient in English. Murray & Christison (2010) observed that many students think English is only a school subject and they do not see its significance for their prospective employment to work with multinational or national companies where English is employed. Hutchinson & Waters (1991) and Susanna (2007), pointed out that the mismatch between the students' conceptual or cognitive capacities and the students' English proficiency level often cause problems for students because the students' learning style and teachers' teaching approach do not match. According to John & Ehow (2011), stated that the problems of learning English language derived from many different factors in different environments such as school resources, class size, quality of teachers, and the school attendance of learners. In class, students come from different level of proficiency so teacher faced a problem which is some students achieve the learning objectives and some students not. Despite English is taught as a compulsory subject, students are found not performing well in their examination. Students with different level of proficiency might have different level of difficulties in learning English (John & Ehow, 2011). Therefore, teachers and parents should know the difficulties in learning English and explore teaching strategy that can create an effective environment to overcome the difficulties in learning English.

Table 1.1 List grades, scores and percentages of Melaka Foundation College Students Semester 1 Session February 2016 in their Final Examination result.

Grade(s)	Score(s)	Total of students	Percentage of students (%)
A	80-100	0	0%
B	65-79	1	3.3%
C	50-64	2	6.6%
D	40-49	4	13.3%
E	1-39	16	53.4%
TH	0	7	23.4%

The table above shows that none of the student achieve grade A, 3.3% of the students achieve grade B, 6.6% students achieve grade C, and 13.3% of students achieve grade D. The highest percentage is 53.3% which is students failed in the English paper

while another 23.3 % of the students who absent during the test. This data definitely explains that students could not understand how to answer English test. They are having difficulties in learning English. As English is a compulsory subject, whether students are interested or not, they have to learn English and excel in it. However, every student has different challenges in their English learning process/experience. Some teaching strategy or materials are suitable for some students and inappropriate for the others (JR Meece, 2012). Therefore, teachers must examine their difficulties and what they need to do to overcome this problem. Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify the difficulties or challenges faced by the students in learning English and solutions taken by the students to overcome these difficulties. Apart from that, the study will provide evaluative data regarding this purpose and then provide useful information on a comparative study to researchers in the field and English teachers.

Based on the aims above, the objectives of the research are:

- a) to identify the challenges faced by Melaka Foundation College students in learning English
- b) to identify the solutions taken by Melaka Foundation College students in learning English

Research questions are to answer the stated research objectives. Research questions are:

- a) What are the challenges faced by the Melaka Foundation College students in learning English?
- b) What are the solutions taken by the Melaka Foundation College students to overcome the problems?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social learning theory combines cognitive learning theory (which posits that learning is influenced by psychological factors) and behavioral learning theory (which assumes that learning is based on responses to environmental stimuli). Albert Bandura integrated these two theories and came up with four requirements for learning: observation (environmental), retention (cognitive), reproduction (cognitive), and motivation (both). This integrative approach to learning was called social learning theory.

Rieger (2009) investigated not only gender effect, but also the differences in learners' beliefs based on their target language. The results of the study are discussed in terms of the principal components that were established, which deal with attitude towards authentic materials, motivation, language aptitude, language difficulty and language learning approaches. These results show a number of significant differences based on the gender and target language of respondents. Jdetawy (2011) studied the problems encountered by Arab EFL learners focusing on the many problems in English language learning and the reasons that lie behind these problems. The study concludes that Arab EFL learners encounter many serious problems in the four language skills. Li Liu (2007) investigated the challenges ESL students face, regarding their academic performance in an English-speaking post-secondary institution. The results of the study are these challenges included: high demands of language proficiency, critical thinking skills, strong study skills, sufficient academic background knowledge in their areas of specialization. Parilah Mohd Shah et al(2013) investigated challenges, attitudes, needs and beliefs about language learning. The findings conclude that many students were afraid and nervous about participating in discussion. Dale McCreery(2006) studied the experiences and beliefs of a cross section of the second language. The most significant challenges facing learners were affective challenges such as anxiety; in addition the nature of resources available to learners and teachers was a significant challenge.

METHODOLOGY

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This survey was conducted to identify the difficulties or challenges faced by the students in learning English and solutions taken by the students to overcome these difficulties at Melaka Foundation College. The design used was descriptive design. A descriptive study can provide information about the naturally occurring health status, behaviour, attitudes or other characteristics of a particular group. It also conducted to demonstrate associations or relationships between things in the world around us. Descriptive studies are usually the best methods for collecting information that will demonstrate relationships and describe the world as it exists. These types of studies are often done before an experiment to know what specific things to manipulate and include in an experiment. Bickman and Rog (1998) suggest that descriptive studies can answer questions such as "what is" or "what was". Experiments can typically answer "why" or "how".

In the context of my study, Researcher has used questionnaires to look at some aspects of students' perceptions towards English language. These aspects will be seen in terms of difficulties or challenges in learning English and the means taken by the students to overcome these difficulties in learning. These aspects were measured by questionnaires given to the students from Melaka Foundation College.

The questionnaires were constructed based on questionnaires used Aiken (1997) and modified as appropriate to my research. It has been made to ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments used is good quality.

PARTICIPANT

Respondents consist of students from Melaka Foundation College. They are students from Semester 1. They come from different courses such as culinary art, tourism management, accounting, early childhood education, marketing management and so on but learn English in the same class. 30 students with their ages from 18 to 22 years old were selected from different ethnic, gender and English ability background.

According to Mohd Najib (1998), the larger the sample size the more robust studies have been able to reduce the error results. Large sample size to determine the validity and reliability of high scores and subsequent decisions made solutions are more accurate.

Therefore, researcher chooses 30 students to serve as respondents throughout this research. The selection of appropriate samples to study the problem is important because it is one factor that will determine the success or failure of research.

In the context of this research, this study is useful for them because through it, students can identify their potential and strive to equip themselves both mentally and physically before they start to learn English at colleges or universities. It thus can increase their potential to a more optimal when the examination by the public and they can master English properly.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Survey instrument is in the form of questionnaires developed by the researchers in order to get feedback from the respondents. Questionnaire is adapted from Mosaddaq Yahya (2012) to measure challenges or learning difficulties and SILL; Oxford(1990) to measure solutions taken by the students to overcome these difficulties or The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning and has been modified by researcher. Used questionnaires containing detailed items covered. Items covered are questions that have been focused on the answer. Respondents only need to tick (/) to the answer as it deems appropriate. This will facilitate the respondents answered with a simple and able to respond quickly. The data used is qualitative. Quantitative data is data that can be measured numerically. It is also objective data that produced through a systematic process that is verifiable, replicable and in and of itself is not subject to interpretation.

DATA ANALYSIS

The 30 close-ended items will be analysed based on the scale 1 to 4 (Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree). Questionnaire survey will be analyzed using frequency and percentage score. Data will be analysed descriptively.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

This is a survey using a self administered questionnaire to the respondents (selected students). It is not post by mail but the questionnaire delivers by researcher to the college and researcher collects it back. The Senior English lecturer of the college helps in the distribution and administration of the questionnaire to the respondents with the permission of the Vice President Academic of Melaka Foundation College. Students will be brief on how to respond to the questionnaire and 45 minutes would be allocated for the answering session. After finish, researcher would collect the questionnaire forms.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

THE RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSES AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

- a) **Research Question 1:** What are the challenges faced by the Melaka Foundation College students in learning English?

Table 4.0.1: The challenges faced by the Melaka Foundation College students in learning English

No.	Item(s)					Total	Percentage (s) score
		1	2	3	4		
1.	'My attitudes to the English language affect learning the language' (Q1)			2			80.83
2.	'If I use English my status is raised and feel proud' (Q16)	1	3	18	8	30	77.5
3.	'Grammatical errors are a serious problem for me' (Q11)	0	9	16	5	30	71.67
4.	'My English vocabulary is limited' (Q2)	1	8	19	2	30	68.33
5.	'I am careless in learning English' (Q6)	4	8	17	1	30	62.5
6.	'English language listening skill is a challenge for me' (Q10)	3	14	9	4	30	61.67
7.	'English speaking skill is a difficult for me' (Q12)	3	16	8	3	30	59.17
8.	'Writing is a major problem for me' (Q13)	5	15	8	2	30	55.83
9.	'Pronunciation of words in English is difficult' (Q14)	3	20	5	2	30	55
10.	'Reading and understanding English texts are not easy' (Q15)	4	18	7	1	30	54.17
11.	'I feel uneasy and lack confidence when I speak English' (Q4)	9	10	10	1	30	52.5
12.	'I am forced to learn English by the people around me' (Q5)	7	14	8	1	30	52.5
13.	'My past level in English holds me back' (Q7)	7	16	6	1	30	50.83
14.	'The English syllabuses I learn do not suit my needs' (Q3)	8	16	6	0	30	48.33
15.	'The economic situation of my family does not help me learn English' (Q9)	14	10	5	1	30	44.17
16.	'I will not need English in the future' (Q8)	22	6	2	0	30	33.33
Total							928.33/16

Average of Percentage(s) Score: 58.02%

Table above shows 16 items to measure the challenges faced by the Melaka Foundation College students in learning English that arranged from higher to lower percentage score. Item that higher is item which is ‘My attitudes to the English language affect learning the language’ (Q1) and item that lower is item ‘I will not need English in the future’ (Q8). This is to show that students are strongly agreed that their attitude towards English language is the highest challenges faced by them in learning English. Meanwhile, the students are disagreed that they will not need English in their future.

- b) **Research Question 2:** What are the solutions taken by the Melaka Foundation College students to overcome the problems?

Table 4.0.2: The solutions taken by the Melaka Foundation College students to overcome the problems.

No.	Item(s)	← 1 2 3 4 → (Strongly Disagree) (Disagree) (Agree) (Strongly Agree)				Total	Percentage (s) score
		Less			More Agree		
1.	‘I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better’ (Q8)					30	83.33
2.	‘I ask proficient speakers to correct me when I talk’ (Q11)	0	3	16	11	30	81.67
3.	‘I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English’ (Q3)	1	2	16	11	30	80.83
4.	‘I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake’ (Q10)	0	5	14	11	30	80
5.	‘I ask questions in English’ (Q14)	0	3	20	7	30	78.33
6.	‘I ask for help from proficient English speakers’ (Q13)	0	5	17	8	30	77.5
7.	‘I read with pleasure in English’ (Q4)	0	5	19	6	30	75.83
8.	‘I practice English with other students’ (Q12)	1	4	18	7	30	75.83
9.	‘I write notes, messages, letters or reports in English’ (Q5)	0	8	17	5	30	72.5
10.	‘If I can’t think of an English word, I use other word or phrase that means the same thing’ (Q7)	0	6	21	3	30	72.5
11.	‘I try to talk like native English speakers’ (Q1)	1	7	19	3	30	70
12.	‘I start conversations in English’ (Q2)	1	10	15	4	30	68.33
13.	‘I notice if I am nervous when I am studying or using English’ (Q9)	3	8	15	4	30	66.67
14.	‘I try not to translate word-by-word’ (Q6)	1	10	18	1	30	65.83
Total							1049.15/1

Average of Percentage(s) Score: 74.94%

Table above shows those 12 items to measure the solutions taken by the Melaka Foundation College students to overcome the problems. Item that higher is item ‘I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better’ (Q8) and item that lower is item ‘I try not to translate word-by-word’ (Q6). This is clearly shown that the highest solution taken by the students to overcome their difficulties in learning is when they make mistakes in English, they use the information to help them do better in other time. The students also agreed that they ask proficient speakers to correct them when they communicate in English. Meanwhile, the students disagreed that they are not try to translate word-by-word. Meaning that, they do translate word-by-word in order to overcome the difficulties while learning English.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

These studies are to identify language learning challenges and solutions taken by the students to overcome these difficulties. This study was done using quantitative design based on questionnaires. This study was collected at Melaka Foundation College with 30 students from Semester 1. They come from different courses but learn English in the same class. Instruments used for this study is questionnaire. Questionnaire is adapted from Mosaddaq Yahya (2012) to measure challenges or learning difficulties and SILL; Oxford(1990) to measure the means taken by the students to overcome these difficulties or The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning and has been modified by researcher. I choose to use the Likert Scale (4 point rating scale) to measure respondent’s answers. Respondents are required to make an appropriate choice for each statement to be submitted. Data was analyzed to get frequency based on percentage.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The challenges faced by the Melaka Foundation College students in learning English (RQ1) on the whole, nearly all students from Semester 1 agreed that their attitudes towards English language affect learning the language. This finding same with Rieger (2009). The results of the study are discussed in terms of the principal components that were established, which deal with attitude towards authentic materials, motivation, language aptitude language difficulty and language learning approaches. Moreover, less agree that they will not need English in future. Meaning that, in their thought, they know that English is important in order to

success in education as English is world-wide language. Even though they have difficulties in learning English, they still realised that they will need English in future especially when they are trying to apply for a job or further studies in overboard.

The solutions taken by the Melaka Foundation College students to overcome the problem (RQ2) on the whole, nearly all students from Semester 1 agree that they noticed when they make a mistakes whether in speaking, writing, reading or listening, they will use that information to help them do better in future. They realised that even though they have difficulties in learning English, they still have to improve their English language in order to gain success at college level. Besides that, the students also disagree that they start conversations in English. This data definitely explains that the students were afraid and nervous to speak in English. This finding is same with Parilah Mohd Shah et al (2013). Many students were afraid and nervous about participating in discussion. Same with Dale McCreery(2006), the most significant challenges facing learners were affective challenges such as anxiety.

IMPLICATION RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study found that most of the students were afraid and nervous to communicate in English. Teacher must take an action to provide them speaking activity in class such as presentation, role-play or public speaking. Teacher and parents must motivate them to speak in class or at home. Thus, they must be a role-model to the students. Teacher also must ensure that during English lesson, all students need to actively involve in all activities in class. The teacher and parents also must adapt intrinsic motivation into the students so that the students will learn English without feeling nervous or afraid of doing mistakes.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was conducted with several limitations of the study. Based on the limitations of this limitation, the following proposed further research a) this study involved only college students with a students from semester 1. Further research is proposed to involve secondary and primary school students .b) this study only used questionnaires and surveys carried out over 45 minutes. Further research is proposed to use the interview sessions and performed with longer.

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Nor Farhana Mardhiah Fissol
Faculty of Education
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Email: farhanafissol@gmail.com

Hamidah Yamat@ Ahmad
Faculty of Education
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Email: hamidah_yamat@ukm.edu.my