

IS THERE A POSSIBILITY OF CONVERGENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING FOR ENGLISH COMPETENCY AMONG GRADUATES?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to survey the extent of English language teaching, usage in Higher Institutions of Learning in Malaysia and review current trends and challenges in this niche. A sample of 100 English learners from public and private institutions participated in this study. Analysis of the responses indicated that English language is remaining to be difficult to master, due to speaking environment, proficiency of the teachers and other factors. However, there are indications of convergence in English teaching.

Field of Research : English Competency, convergent, competency, Higher Institutions of Learning

1. Introduction

With the process of globalization English language has become a dominant international language of 21st century. English is spoken at a useful level by some 1.75 billion people worldwide – that's one in every four. (Robinson 2017). According to Mark Robinson Director and the Head of Examination Department, British Council by 2020, two billion people will be using it – or learning to use it. And it is the economically active, the thought leaders, the business decision-makers, the young, the movers and shakers present and future who are learning and speaking English. (Robinson 2017).

In the Malaysian context, competency in communicating in English among local graduates has been the centre of contention with many commenting negatively. Although, Malaysia is ranked 14th out of 70 countries with high English proficiency in a survey by the EF English Proficiency Index, this surprised many, who feel that the command of the language is wanting among students here (NST, Thursday, 31 August 2017).

This study presents a survey of English teaching in institution of higher learning in Malaysia to find common grounds to improve English Language skill among Malaysia graduates.

2. Literature Review

According to the latest statistics provided by British Council (2016), the highest demand falls on learning British English language due to the reason that British way of delivering the language is traditional, effective and reliable. And also there are the consequences of the colonial rule.

2.1. Challenges in learning English language

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. Murray & Christenson (2010), observed that many students think English is only a school subject and they don't see its significance for their prospective employment to work with multinational or national companies where English is employed. (Hutchinson & Waters 1991; Susanna 2007), pointed out that the mismatch between the students' conceptual or cognitive capacities and the learners' English proficiency level often cause problems for students because the students' learning style and teachers' teaching approach do not match and also the English course does not relate to the students' needs and interests. Susanna (2007), also claimed that weak students usually have poor strategies and give up easily when they find a struggle.

It is sometimes appropriate for teachers to take an active role in trying to improve the motivation levels. However, Budden (2016) suggests not to feel personally responsible for a student's lack of motivation as other factors need to be considered like poor classroom environment or students cultural background. Lack of knowledge of English leads to low confidence level according to John (2015) and suggested teachers create awareness at early age.

Rivers (2013), survey on 200 participants of which 87% agreed that the low performance in English language is caused by lack of motivation. Researcher in England (Cooper 2013), found that students are not likely to study if classrooms environment and climate is not organized well. Others, like Ngok (2014) mentioned that students are demotivated by teachers, specifically the way of delivering the knowledge and teaching approach. Walker (2014) has stated that lack of appreciation and encouragement has affects students. The eBook "Chicken soup for the soul. Teachers edition" published in 2016 has suggested to present English in the classroom not as a language but as a culture.

2.2. English Teaching in Malaysia Higher Institutions

CEFR: An English Language Standards and Quality Council was set up to focus on the foundation and structural changes to help raise the standard of English in the country in 2013. A Roadmap was drawn for English Language Education Reform in Malaysia spanning 2015 to 2025 — completed in 2016 and approved for implementation in June of the same year — a joint initiative with Cambridge English and Ministry of Education's English Language Teaching Centre as the lead agency.

The focus of the road map is to shift Malaysia's English Language Education System towards the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) — an international standard that focuses on producing learners who can communicate and interact in any language, in this case, English. CEFR is expected to play a vital role in the reform process in Malaysia's English Language education system for the coming decade. Incidentally, CEFR as the framework of reference is also an element in the Malaysia Education Blueprint aim to boost the level of education in the country.

British Curriculum: Malaysia is a multinational country with a government language Bahasa Malaysia and English (British) based on the historical background. In Malaysia, it has become trendy to invest in knowledge especially English language. With support of the Malaysian Government and

the approval of Ministry of Education, British English oriented language training organizations have been established.

Malaysia has overall 83 higher educational organizations which offer English Language courses, Academic English, Business English, preparation for IELTS and many more. (?) These educational organizations could be divided on government and private sectors, by supporting British or American educational program. International schools in majority support IGCSE British program due to its stability, reliability and effectiveness, besides the colonial influence.

The focus of public and private institutions is to run the English course to support their academic programs that are conducted in English.

2.3. Public Institution of Higher Learning providing English Program

Overall in Malaysia there are about 13 academic institutions of higher education providing English Language course. Based on the curriculum and main requirements for students to possess general/basic level of English equivalent to Elementary Level. Public universities follow Cambridge English syllabus as it is standardized on university level. In tertiary English for non-English majors, varies with Universities (about 9 credit), no standardized textbook (free selection). Malaysia does not administer a nation-wide university entrance examination, however, an English test named Malaysia University English Test (MUET) is administered for university admission, (especially for public universities, minimum grade is required, varies with majors selected).

2.4. Private Institution of Higher Learning providing English Program

Private sectors expand the spectrum of learning English courses and provide degrees and diplomas specializing in English; Cambridge Certification Programs, Intensive English Programs, Academic English Programs, Business & Professional English, Bachelor of Arts (English Language Studies), Bachelor of TESL (Teaching of English as a Second Language). One of the compulsory requirements from private educational institutions is to provide IELTS certificate with minimum 6.5 score in order to prove that subjects, which are held in English will be well understood by the student.

2.5. Standalone Institution of Higher Learning providing English Program

There are institutions that are fully focused on training the language skills of the students. The top ten English Language education centers based on the tallypress.com website; The Language House, British Council, ELS Malaysia, Stratford International Language Center, English Language Company, Stratford Language Center, Wall Street English, Erican Language Center, Standard Language Center, IMEC. However, there is no criteria presented for the set of these particular institutions and have different curriculum and some support mixed framework of combination of American and British curriculum.

TABLE 1: Survey Of Direct Interviews With 100 Fresh Graduates And Newly Employed

Non-habitual speakers of English	Habitual speakers of English	
70%	30%	
Mix local language in English	Think in native language and translate to English	
Sometimes 43%	Yes 17%	
All the times 57%	No 83%	
	Hesitated to speak English:	
Worried making grammar errors	25%	
Felt embarrassed at low language pro	65%	
Received negative physical response	10%	
Sustain and critically analyze and rebuttal in English		
Yes 80%	If yes: Converse in pure English	Yes 45%
		No 55%
No 20%		

Based on survey findings, it appears that the command of English language is an issue. The obstacles are mostly faced by English learners are in grammar and construction of the sentences. Students are not in a pure English spoken environment, so the realization of the wrong pronunciation is not there and it's a common issue when students mix English with a local dialect. English Learners have the wrong perception of importance of the language, as well as they could be understood it is enough to keep moving in secondary or high school environment. The Low English Proficiency will arise when students fail MUET or IELTS or any other equivalent examination while applying to Higher Institution of Learning.

The types of current exposure to University English program insufficient to allow a person to speak English fluently. These are the consequences of earlier exposure to English in Primary/Secondary schools in Malaysia.

Critical view: There is a gap between Public and Private Secondary/High school standards of the English language subject. Government schools provide general knowledge of English and Private schools follow European and Singaporean syllabus. But due to the low proficiency among facilitators both (Government and Private Secondary educational institutions) the level of English preparation is below satisfactory. However, Government Policy (European Educational Framework) expected to bare through and improve the situation for the better. The brand new approach of teaching English in Malaysia based on Cambridge English Framework could expectedly show its results in the next 10 years.

Teaching Paradigm Shifting: One of the positive elements of nature is a change, with the process of globalization the educational environment in the classroom has dramatically changed and it can be observed in the classrooms nowadays. Malaysia as many other countries follow the trend. Before focusing on the trends in teaching English, we can take a look at the difference between *traditional* teaching and *modern* teaching paradigms as identified by Larsen-Freeman (2001); Genesee & Upshur (1996); Nunan (1988); Richards & Rodgers (1986); Tudor (1996).

Traditional Teaching Paradigm:	Modern Teaching Paradigm:
1. Focus on language as a subject	1. Focus on the language as a culture
2. Teachers-centered	2. Learners-centered
3. Individual learning	3. Cooperative learning
4. Limited assessment (test, multiple choices)	4. Expanded assessment (essay, coursework)
5. Focus on the rules	5. Focus on the fluency and understanding
6. Focus on memorizing	6. Focus on <u>integrativeness</u>
7. Emphasis on the result	7. Emphasis on the process
8. Usage of traditional tools (board, chalks)	8. Implementation of technology

Fig. 1: Teaching Paradigm Shifting (adapted from the Hawaii State Department of Education 1991).

With the implementation of some of the modern teaching ways (Figure 2) the atmosphere in the classroom in Malaysia has become friendlier and more comfortable for learners to make mistakes and work on it. As well students tend to understand the origin of foreign words based on the cultural aspect of the English speaking countries, especially England, as it became traditional to represent English language in a context of England. However students may request the variety in English, for example American English, which has become trendy. Assessments in the classroom have taken an integrative form, whereby a student can write an essay or make a research on the certain topic. The process of learning the subject became more exciting and interesting and the positive result is a complement to the great work that has been done. The attention to the English facilitators has become a serious issue. As it is important for the teacher not only to know the subject perfectly but to know how to interact with students and create a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

3. Is there a Convergent? The Way Forward with CELTA/DELTA

CELTA: Stands for Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages is an initial teacher training qualification for teaching [English as a second or foreign language](#) (ESL and EFL) and is provided by [Cambridge English Language Assessment](#), through authorized Cambridge English Teaching Qualification centers.

DELTA: Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages is for teachers with at least one year's experience. It's suitable for teachers in any context, working with any age range – young learners, teenagers or adults.

The wave of the trend for CELTA and DELTA has covered the world in 2014 it was prestigious for teachers to hold this qualification, but in 2016/2017 it has become a number one requirement from employers, it is important for the teacher to possess any of these certificates in order to assure that teacher has an understanding of modern teaching paradigm and will need no training for delivering the classes in the correct manner. In Malaysia CELTA and DELTA can be granted only in British Council, which is number one authorized English teaching organization but this need to be expanded to other institutions for convergent in teaching the Language and upgrade the quality among graduates.

4. Conclusion

Malaysia is following towards improving the quality of teaching/learning routine progressively. Malaysian Government takes leaps to provide the positive opportunities for English learners. The important aspect is the shift Malaysia's English Language Education System towards the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages this contribution expectedly will impact the English learning in a positive way in the future.

5. Acknowledgements

We are grateful to MBA students cohort 27 of Binary University for assisting in data collection and their contribution.

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