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English Language Proficiency And Its Challenges Among Students From Diploma Of Mechanical Engineering

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Abstract

21st century education (PA-21) aims to create integration between Malaysia's multi races, ethnicities and building respect toward cultural, religion and racial differences. English language mastery among students in executing the 21st century education is very important so that they can communicate and collaborate with others. Despite that, English language usage among students is hard to reach its target due to psychological and attitude barrier. Through this research, it is hope to identify the challenges in English language usage among Diploma of Mechanical Engineering students and two factors were identified which are psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Psycholinguistic focuses on the study of attitude, personality and motivation towards the taught language while sociolinguistic focuses on the student's family background towards their language learning and mastery. Questionnaire and observation are the methods used in gaining information from 72 students' respondents. Research data is analysed descriptively using SPSS. The end results shows that both psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics factor is related to each other where mostly challenges comes from applied linguistics factor. Advices are given to the respective lecturers in facing the English language usage challenges and in order to raise their learning motivation so that they can stand to survive the 21st century education (PA-21) challenges.

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Introduction

English language proficiency is important in communication especially in the global world. Even though English is listed as the third most language spoken in the world but it is recognized as the international language (Lane, 2016). Education field especially in higher education widely uses English. This is obvious when most reference books on science, technology, engineering, medical, social science and many more use English. Reference books are imported to fill the need for the above mentioned field.

Student's ability to communicate in English is vital and critical in order to keep up with the fast paced world. It is also important in making sure graduates fulfil the current career demands. The close competition to grab job opportunity demands not just knowledge and skills but the ability to speak and write good English (Nadzalinda, 2015). Other than grabbing local career opportunity students need to be aware of job opportunity from the overseas. In order to stay in the race and to grab the opportunity English language proficiency is important for them. In this context, English language proficiency can be taken as an indicator for students to reach and grab job opportunities (A.L Adibah).

Research methodology

This research is quantitative. Data was collected with the distribution of questionnaire to 76 (DKM) students. These students are from two different classes but taking the same DUE5012 (Communicative English) course. Overall, all questionnaire distributed were answered completely. Data from questionnaires were used in analysing the research. Matched sample size with the population is determined from the previous reference (Krejcie R.V & Morgan D.W, 1970). Most of the questions asked relates to their background which become the support to student's psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factor.

Problem statement

Effective teaching process requires two way interactions between the lecturer and students. However, in teaching and learning process of DUE 5012 (Communicative English) course for Diploma in Mechanical engineering students it is quite difficult to achieve especially by male students. Students spend most of the time listening to lectures and only give psychomotor respond when asked by the lecturer without answering verbally to the question. Through observation, their achievement in writing test was quite impressive. This shows that student proficiency is on the right track and problem occurs when it comes to direct verbal communication. To support the statement their assessment mark on oral presentation and mock job interview was contradictory to what they achieved in writing tests. They tend to read from the text during the above mentioned verbal assessments thus making it hard for the lecturer to give them good marks. When two way communications does not happen, the objective of making English as culture will be hard to be implemented although many teaching methodologies are executed (Nadzalinda, 2015)

Research Objectives

Research purposes:

1. To study the challenges which caused communication difficulties in English language class
2. To study whether the psycholinguistic and socialistic factor has influence to the students ability to converse in English

Research questions

In this research, few research questions were stated to reach the objective so that it can be precisely fitted to the research topic such as:

1. How far is the students proficiency in English language
2. What is/are the challenges that caused the student's difficulties in communicating in English where they can actually master it?
3. How far their attitude, interest, family influence, peers, and dialect influence the usage of English

Research scopes

This research is done only to Diploma in Mechanical engineering (DKM) students from Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Arau, Perlis. DUE5012 (Communicative English) course is compulsory for semester four student. It is limited to time, knowledge, location, topic, number of students and financial. Analysis result and conclusion is relevant to Diploma in Mechanical engineering (DKM) fourth semester students only (December 2017 session). Only one instrument used for this research which is questionnaire. Even though this research focuses on applied linguistic which involves psychomotor factor

and sociolinguistic factor but not all can be studied. Psycholinguistic factor touches on their interest and attitude only while sociolinguistic research focuses on family, peers and dialect. Other aspects from the respondent are not taken into account. Research result depends on the respondents' trustworthiness towards answering the questionnaire. The time used to complete the research is 10 weeks. Research starts as early as the fourth week of academic (MK4). Research was completed in the fourteen week of academic (MK14).

Research instruments

In this research dependant variables and independent variables are referred to psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factor (Azman Che Mat, 2013). Dependant variable for this research is the level of english proficiency while independent variable is divided to five which are attitude, interest, family, peers and dialect (Shuhairy, 2018). Likert scales with 5 number scales is used to measure variables in this research starting from low scale to high scale. Questionnaire distribution method is done in order to get the precise information.

Findings and Discussions

Acquired data from the questionnaire were then analysed by using the *Statistic Package for the Social Science (SPSS)* software. The min value and standard deviation value became the statement on the tendency of dependant variable and the independent variable (Konting, 2005) Reliable test result is seen using the Cronbach Alpha (CA) (Zahinothman, 2005). Reliability test is used to measure correlation strength between the designed questions. Question reliability Value outcomes are shown in the table below [Table 1](#).

Item	Variable	Cronbach Alpha
Dependant Variable :		
English Language Proficiency Level : 10		0.912
Independent Variable :		
Attitude	5	0.815
Interest	5	0.858
Family	5	0.773
Peers	5	0.732
Dialect	5	0.794

Table 1. Question reliability Value Outcome Table

[Table 1](#): The table above shows the Question reliability Value Outcome to the designed question. Reliability Value is based on the Cronbach Alpha where the value is at 0.7 and above scale. This means it is in good and acceptable condition (Faizal A.N.Y, 2014).

Likert scale Analysis is shown based on Table 2 below where score analysis is based on the minimum mark which is 1 and the maximum mark which is 5 (Najib, 2003).

[Table 2](#):

Min Score	Level of Agreement
0.00-1.50	Strongly Disagree
1.51-2.50	Disagree
2.51-3.50	Not Sure
3.51-4.50	Agree
4.50-5.00	Strongly Agree

Table 2. Likert Scale Analysis (Min Interpretation)

[Table 3](#) shows the range of min score for this research based on the reference done (Najib, 2003). The score level is modified based on the Likert Scales analysis used by the researcher. The score level is divided to three which are low, medium and high.

[Table 3](#):

Min Score Range	Score Level
1.00- 2.40	Low
2.41-3.80	Medium

3.81-5 .00	High
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Table 3. Minimum Score Level Classification Table

Table 4:

Item	Variable	Min Score	Standard Deviation
English Language Proficiency Level	10	3.9080	0.4560
Attitude	5	2.0523	0.3832
Interest	5	3.6780	0.4129
Family	5	1.8794	0.2044
Peers	5	2.3716	0.5051
Dialect	5	2.1006	0.6517

Table 4. Min Score and Standard Deviation

Table 4 above shows min score and standard deviation for the studied variable. English Language Proficiency Level was at Min Score of 3.9080 considerably high. This shows that students can master the language in the classroom. The result is also supported by their final test result which shows that they can answer the written test well. For the second item which is attitude, Min Score was at the low level with only 2.0523. Based from the question asked, main challenges to English speaking ambient are low self-confident, shyness and fear of being laughed by their peers. The finding is parallel with the previous research which states that attitude played important role in achieving victory in whatever things we desire especially when it comes to mastering second language (Yahaya, 2007).

The third item is interest; min score was at medium level with the value of 3.6780. The lowest value is family being placed as the fourth item with the score of 1.8794. This is believed to be caused by the question asked in the questionnaire. 87% of the respondents originated from villages and rural areas. English is very foreign in the family and never being educated with the simplest of English language. Family is the major factor and plays important role in influencing children's learning process where socio economics status, parent's attitude, education level, aspiration to their children and education patterns will give the direct impact to student's ability (AziziYahaya, 2010)

Peers come in the low min score level with the value of 2.3716. For this item, making English as a culture seems to be very hard due to the inferiority complex when comparing them to the rest of their classmates. It is as similar as the second item which is attitude. Last but not least, the last item is dialect with the min score of 2.1006. Based on the background information retrieved from the questionnaire students from the east coast and the northern side of Malaysia are having this problem due to the uniqueness of their dialect. When speaking in English the replacement of English consonants accidentally happen thus making the pronunciation sounds very local following their states of origins (Wagini, 1998).

Conclusion And Suggestion

Based on the research findings and analysis, it can be concluded that applied linguistics for students is proven to be influenced by psycholinguistics factor and sociolinguistics factor. The main challenges in speaking English language in the classroom for DUE5012 course comes from psycholinguistics factor which is attitude and for sociolinguistics factor comes from family, peers, and dialect.

Overall, there are few suggestions prepared to improve students confident when it comes to speaking in English:

1. Educators/Teachers/Lecturers must have the creativity when asking question so that the question must be answered by speaking not just by psychomotor reaction
2. The gap between lecturer and student must be closer by having lots of creative activities that can bring them out from the barrier.
3. Try to avoid them from memorising texts when doing the oral presentation. Brief the students on how to use simple words and sentences during presentation.
4. Encourage them consistently and remind them not to be afraid to make mistakes as it is part of learning process.
5. Enrich their vocabularies by reading English reading material for beginner and keep on raising the standard as time goes by.
6. Add more singing activities and try to get to know their favourite English song so that will spark their interest more.

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