

## THE CHALLENGES IN EMPOWERING STANDARD MALAY LANGUAGE AMONG THE UNIVERSITI BRUNEI DARUSSALAM'S STUDENTS: INITIAL ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

In a diglossic Malay society of Brunei Darussalam, teaching the standard variant of Malay pose big challenges to the educators. Standard Malay language (SML) is an erudite language and is, in fact, quite different from the colloquial Brunei Malay. However, due to a common perception that speaking Malay language of any variants or born as a Malay, we take the learning of SML for granted and do not pay serious attention to this. The emphasis on English in the education system has been adding to the existing problem. This paper aims to identify the challenges in empowering SML and to investigate whether there is an effect or impact of the daily dialect on acquiring and practising SML, by incorporating a mixed methodological approach and analysis based on both quantitative and qualitative data. This research conducted onto Universiti Brunei Darussalam's students, in particular, showed a tendency that the students' lack determination in learning and using SML is due to lack of exposure towards SML and their biased view on that particular language. Accordingly, this paper supports Hedge's (2000) theory that to acquire a language, one needs to develop it throughout the four language skills; reading, listening, speaking, and writing. However, it further showed that on certain aspects, students' motivation needs to be put into consideration.

**Keywords:** Standard Malay language (SML), Challenges to the Educators, Acquiring and Practising, Lack of Determination, Motivation

### Introduction

In Brunei, the Malay language has become the medium of language in all daily activities. Therefore, action has been taken to strengthen the position of the Malay language as noted by Md. Zain Serudin (2013, pp. 95-96) that "the 1959 *State of Brunei Constitution* stated the Malay language as the official language of the country, and this position has made historical recognition for the Malay language which has been used by citizens of Brunei over a long period of time". Meanwhile, standard Malay language (SML) is a familiar topic in the Brunei Darussalam's education system, starting from primary school until up to the pre-university level; a student is able to learn this particular language according to the syllabus structured by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, one can choose to learn this language even at the university level by enrolling for some of the Malay modules offered in their university. Despite the non-stop learning process, the students are still unable to acquire the SML fluently as it is not the students' mother tongue (either second or third language) and this situation leads to a number of challenges faced by the

educators in their attempts to empower SML among their students. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to figure out potential answers to the research questions listed below.

1. What challenges do the educators usually experience in teaching SML?
2. What are the students' general perspectives towards SML?
3. Will acquiring SML create a significant impact on the students' lives or society in Brunei?
4. Why is there a lack of motivation in learning SML among the students?

Even though these problems seem unpopular among researchers, the condition becomes serious from the academic perspective because this research finds that a number of students do not feel comfortable when using SML both in academic verbal and written tasks. Meanwhile, the aim of this paper is to highlight the convenient approach that can be taken into measure by the educators in improving this matter.

### **Methodology**

This research is done by incorporating a mixed methodological approach and is analysis based involving the use of both qualitative (observation) and quantitative (survey sheets) for data collection. The four phases of the research involve: 1) Identifying the language aspects and language use aspects for the SML, daily dialect, and English language through observations; and 2) Survey sheets were carried out among 179 students of Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) of whom 163 students are Malays, 13 other students are Chinese and 3 students are from other indigenous ethnics. The survey is conducted to gather data related to the students' interest and motivation in learning SML during their study years in UBD; 3) Developing a hypothesis of language learning pattern based on the data gathered in the first and second phases; and 4) Discussing and suggesting appropriate approach to enhance student's interest in learning SML and eventually reducing the risk of facing tougher challenges in teaching or empowering SML for the educator.

Among UBD's students, 179 students had returned their feedback through the survey sheets distributed earlier. All of them are locals and has been using Brunei Malay dialect (BMD) to communicate in their daily lives. Initially, BMD might have influence these students to acquire SML fluently since based on the observation made, they preferred to speak BMD more often even after being instructed to use SML throughout their Malay module class. Through the observation made in the classroom as well, the researcher realised some of the challenges vary from one student to another. Therefore, this research will not only list the challenges, but also suggest a couple of solutions on how to enhance students' interest in learning SML of which according to Hedge (2000) "to acquire a language, one needs to develop it throughout the four language skills; reading, listening, speaking, and writing."

## Findings and Discussion

The respondents of this research are aged between 18 to 30 years old (Table 1) and based on their age range, definitely as adult learners, these students have a different kind of needs when it comes to learning a language. Eventually, it may also create several challenges to the educators in delivering the lesson to the students.

Table 1  
*Respondents Age Range*

Age Range	No. of Students
18 below	8
19 – 24	151
25 – 29	14
30 above	6
<b>Total no. of students</b>	<b>179</b>

In this context, the educators have to deal with the students' needs that come from different age range background because not everyone wants to learn SML due to similar interest. Therefore, sometimes the respondents would show different understanding or feedback towards the SML lessons. As mentioned by Howatt (1978) from Hedge (2000, p. 343) that "consideration of learners as individuals will highlight such issues as the need to relate age to interests in a topic-based syllabus, how materials can be made challenging, or whether teacher-dependent attitudes suggest a need for learner independence as a goal". Based on this statement, it is true that educators need to design various degrees of difficulty in their teaching materials as some respondents might consider it as an easy task due to their exposure to social experience and culture. For instance, the older the student is the higher chance they become a self-independent human being. Similar to Knowles (1980) and Daing Zaidah, Abu Daud Silong, and Bahaman (2002) in Badli and Faizah (2010, p. 7) it has been discovered that 'as an individual matures and ages, his or her concept moves from a dependent to being a self-directed individual'. Thus, for an example in a classroom that consists of 30 students following a Malay module focusing on communication skills, the educator definitely will face random challenges as there are going to be different needs from each one of them. For instance, some students may want to strengthen their self-esteem while facing the audience, but for in-service students, they may just want to improve their knowledge on the grammatical aspect as they already acquire the skills on how to speak in front of people through their previous work experience.

Another issue that leads to one of the challenges in teaching and empowering SML is the student's biased perspective towards SML as they consider it similar to their daily speaking language (BMD) when in fact it is actually two different languages - teachers somehow have to show the distinction between the two. Similarly, Mazlina and Siti Ajar (2016) believe that "linguistically, the teachers must somehow have contrastive information between the SML and native language students, even though the teachers are not necessarily proficient to communicate in their students' first language" (in this context it may be BMD, Tutong Dialect, Dusun

Dialect or other indigenous dialects). This factor creates negative attitude in learning SML among the students who prefer to take SML for granted and ignoring the language by adopting the usage of English language in their daily conversation as a result of the bilingual education system in Brunei. This is supported by Clynes and Deterding (2011, p. 260) that "English has influenced the syntax, lexis, phonetics, and phonology of both Standard Malay in Brunei (Poedjsoedarmo, 1996) and Brunei Malay (Maxwell 1990)". However, mature students that have work experience (in-service students) will have different perspectives and a positive attitude towards learning this language. Clynes and Deterding (2011) did mention that "in Brunei, Standard Malay dominates in the domains of education and administration", thus, this groups of students understood the benefits of acquiring SML for their work purpose compared to the pre-service students. Corresponding to that, students tend to force themselves to use SML in the classroom despite empowering it and making it become part of their language skills. As a result, the students face difficulty and awkwardness to use the language. From the observation as well, students have the tendency to imitate Malaysians' accent when they speak SML as they have been developing these skills from watching Malaysian films and television dramas. This condition definitely supports Asmah's (2015, p. 8) statement on similar issue. According to her, half-hearted learning process will create a fake language:

*Kekeliruan bahkan kesukaran dalam pelaksanaan akan timbul apabila bentuk bahasa yang ideal yang terdapat dalam konseptualisasi dipaksakan kepada realiti. Hasil dari paksaan ini adalah bahasa yang dibuat-buat. Juga hasil dari paksaan ini ialah kebekuan dan kehambaran pada bahasa itu sendiri. Bahasa standard yang kita anggap sebagai kerangka rujukan bagi penggunaan bahasa dalam keadaan tertentu, yang melambangkan taraf tinggi dalam penggunaan sesuatu bahasa sebagai bahasa ilmu, sewajarnya merupakan bentuk yang digunakan oleh ahli masyarakat sebagai salah satu sistem komunikasi yang "natural" (bukan yang dibuat-buat)...*

Subsequently, this situation creates a language learning pattern where students will only put more effort to learn about SML if it involves role play activities because they are entertained by it and they think it is fun compare learning SML through grammatical approach.

Based on Figure 1, 54.5% of students selected this methodology where they want the teacher to give different lectures and activities every week. This indicates that students' motivation can be enhanced through creative various teaching approach in order to trigger their self-interest in learning the language. In this way, perhaps a teacher-based researcher observation can implement differentiated instruction (DI) approach where educators will be able to explore all possibilities of empowering SML based on student's need and capability. Similarly, Walker (2015) agreed to DI as it is "the options [that] include a multitude of ways to make adjustments to the teaching methods and classroom environment, which then create a better fit between the curriculum and student's need and learning styles".

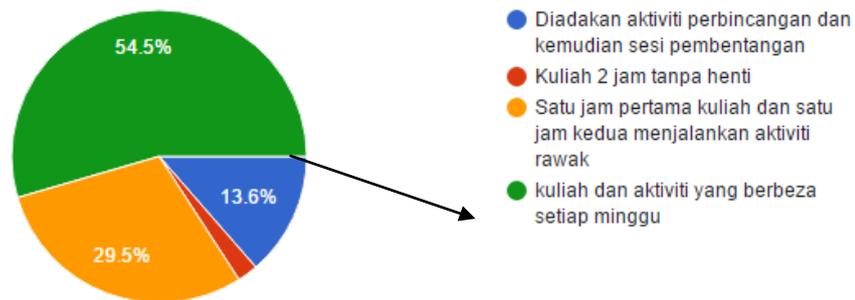


Figure 1. Preferable way of learning from students' view in percentage

### Conclusion

As mentioned by Mazlina and Siti Ajar (2016), the variety of teaching and learning strategies should be considered by the teachers to make teaching and learning become interesting, effective and not boring. Based on these findings, educators need to figure out and decide appropriate teaching and learning approach for these groups of students because the respondents can be categorised as mature students and those aged between 18-30 years. However, in this context, perhaps the integration of pedagogy and andragogy approach will enable the teachers to reduce some challenges, especially those mentioned above as it is believed that these approaches are able to produce an effective and fun teaching and learning environment. These elements in teaching may give different results in the effort of the educators to empower SML. Mazlina and Siti Ajar (2016) stated that "andragogy can be summed up as a way to learn directly from experience, a re-education process that can reduce social conflicts through the activities of private student groups, and a process of self-directed learning continuously and can reassess the needs of learning arising from the demands of the ever-changing situation". Indeed, for the respondents learning SML is not a novice lesson as they already experienced them when they were in tertiary schools. However, learning SML at the university level, allows students to rediscover new things about this particular language from the linguistic perspective. Therefore, according to socio-psychology theory (Gardner, 1985 in Mazlina and Siti Ajar, 2016), "the success of a student in language acquisition is also based on the orientation of integrative and instrumental orientation". Accordingly, with extra-linguistic component in the teaching of SML, it will determine the success of learning a language.

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