ENGLISH COMPETENCY TOWARDS LAW EDUCATION ACQUISITION FOR NON-LAW DIPLOMA COURSE STUDENTS

Ong Mee Nee (Corresponding author)
Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak
32610 Bandar Sri Iskandar Perak
Tel: +0165533889 E-mail: omn145@perak.uitm.edu.my

PM Dr. Puteri Nor Hashimah Megat Abdul Rahman
Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak
32610 Bandar Sri Iskandar Perak
Tel: +605-3742721 E-mail: phashi655@perak.uitm.edu.my

Jalilah Mohd Ali
Faculty of Law, Multimedia University
Tel: +60126938932 E-mail: mikajel272@yahoo.com

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Abstract
This research aims to find out if there is a significant correlation between English Language Competency towards the learning of the Law Subject, EMT 119 (Introduction to The Property of Law). This study involves the survey method through the use of a questionnaire. The respondents in the sample are 150 undergraduates pursuing the Diploma In Estate Management in the Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Mara Perak. Descriptive data are presented in the form of percentage, total mean scores and standard deviation. Inferential statistics is used to determine the correlation between the variables. The results show significant correlations between the following: (1) English Language Competency and EMT 119 and (2) Listening and EMT 119.

Keywords: English Language competency, Language skills, Law education
1. Introduction

The Malaysian society places emphasis on the learning of law as an instrument to confront social crimes and moral decay and therefore law education is not only learned exclusively by students majoring in law as other students undertaking other courses have to take this subject as part of their undergraduate programme. Language, on the other hand, is the tool used to impart knowledge and to communicate among humans. As such knowledge imparted by the lecturer or obtained through reading would not be fully utilised if a student is unable to reproduce these ideas in a written form. Past researchers have implied the importance of language and its contributions to cognitive development of humans (Barnes, 1995).

In Malaysia, English is used as a second language but its acceptance among undergraduate students in higher education institutions has remained a critical problem. This is because most subjects are taught in this language at the undergraduate level, and a student must have a certain level of English proficiency before they are accepted into any institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. However, the failure to grasp this language has been plaguing the minds of students because this could indirectly affect their conception and knowledge of other subjects which are taught in this language. According to Piper (1998), a student’s achievement in the academic field depends on his/her four language competencies, namely the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in order to master other subjects. However, statistics also showed that only 3.7 percent out of 467,970 students who took the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or SPM in 2010 scored an A+ in the English subject (The Star 8 May 2011).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Underlying Theories for Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Theory of Linguistic Relativity

The linguistic relativity theory was one of two theories which formed the theoretical framework (refer Diagram 1) of this research. This theory maintained that language was more than a simple expression of thoughts. Linguistic relativity advanced the notion that thought depended on language. Viewed in this perspective, language could be seen as a controlling framework in the creation and transmission of knowledge (Adair-Toteff, 1985). Also called the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, it was therefore a crucial factor to link the determinant effect of language on cognitive processes. In other words, this theory stipulated that the development of concepts would have been impossible without the parallel development of language (Carnes, 1965).

Kline (1999) mentioned the gist of this theory as “Language influences our world-view to varying degrees and in different ways depending on the language
we speak.” Therefore in this theory, it seemed that there was clearly a connection between language and thought. Both Sapir and Whorf agreed that it was culture that determines the language, which in turn determined the way a person categorised his/her thoughts about the world and his/her experiences in it (Ash, 1999).

2.1.2 Social Constructivist Theory

According to Tiene & Ingram (2001), the term “constructivism” referred to the emphasis on students “constructing” their own sense of the world, their own perspectives on critical issues, their own professionalism in a field and their own identities as learners. Constructivists stressed on the significance of how reality would have been socially constructed, arguing that children’s perceptions of the world depended heavily on the views of significant others around them, like parents, siblings, friends and teachers (Maddux, 2001).

Jonassen (1991) provided the nine characteristics of the Constructivist Learning environments:

1) Learning is an active process. Students use the internal source (attitude and prior knowledge) and learn how to find or motivate themselves to know certain meanings/translations. Therefore systematic learning will influence the learning outcome.

2) Humans learn to find knowledge. The more a person learns, the more an individual knows about a certain knowledge.

3) The basic concept in finding meanings or knowledge is a mind process. This is where knowledge is gained mentally; given certain definitions followed by meanings and later used in the interpretations of new relevant knowledge.

4) Learning involves the use of language. Language affects learning. This is where knowledge is obtained through listening, and reading, made to understand and then interpreted with speaking and writing. Thus language is the method to spread knowledge and is the key to obtain and spread information or thinking.

5) Learning is a social activity. People learn to speak and do work together and this is a social activity. What is important is that learning will not occur if there is just one way input. What is learned is the product of interactions between the individual, reading materials and other sources.

6) Learning is subjective. Humans learn by relating to prior knowledge based on our beliefs, ideologies and prejudices.

7) Learning involves prior knowledge.

8) Learning does not occur in a short period. It takes time to learn a new concept or idea. This is because a person has to organise the information,
give it meaning, interpret it and then learn how to use it.

9) Learning is linked to motivation and learning will not develop without motivation

Another famous constructive psychologist, Lev Vygotsky placed more emphasis on the social context of learning. Vygotsky’s Social Constructivist theory (refer Diagram 1) offered more room for an active and involved teacher. One aspect of Vygotsky’s theory was the potential for cognitive development that was limited to a certain time span. In his view, peer interaction, scaffolding, and modelling were important ways to facilitate individual cognitive growth and knowledge acquisition. These could be composed of different levels of expertise of individuals (students and teachers), and could also include artifacts such as books, computer tools, and scientific equipments. Therefore, the purpose of Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory was to support intentional learning (Kearsley, 2005).

2.2 English Language Competency

Language was defined as a system of transmitting meaning (Brumfit 1984, Cook & Newson 1996 & Cook, 2008). Sapir (1921) asserted that language was “...a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols”. Juriah, Halimah, Puteh & Zalizan (1995) mentioned that language competency was the ability of a person to use language according to the situation or problem that arose. There were three criteria for language competency:

1) Ability to read and understand a text in a certain language

2) Ability to understand and give meaning to the concepts/ideas in the sentences/phrases

3) Ability to translate or write what has been read into writing form

Language competency, according to John & Evans (1991), covered two important processes. The first process was based on oral skills such as speaking and listening. The second process was text based, which was reading and writing. Thus, language competency depended on the four skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The proficiency in English language was very decisive as it was difficult to predict that students would perform academically well if they were not able to understand instructions, answer questions, do homework and respond to the exam (Wongtrirat, 2010).

3. Methodology

This is a descriptive research using the survey method. In this research, the instrument was a set of questionnaire which would be used to obtain information from the students (sample). This type of research enables data to be collected not only for description but also to identify the relationship between the variables.
The population of this research was the 236 Diploma In Estate Management part two students who had taken the EMT 119 or Introduction to The Property of Law as a core subject in the previous semester two of 2010. The researchers had chosen this group for research as it was an ideal place to find out about the students’ ability to cope with a difficult subject like Law related subjects with their prior knowledge of the English Language.

The sampling method used in this research was random sampling. 150 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the students currently studying in part two of Diploma In Estate Management. Only 131 completed sets of questionnaires could be used for this research. This research used the instrument of questionnaire to obtain data for analysis. This questionnaire was divided into two parts:

1) Part A: Students’ Demographic Profile
2) Part B: Questionnaire on English Language competency level

Part B had 15 questions concerning the English language competency and this questionnaire had been designed by Khatijah (2008). Each competency skill (reading, writing, listening, speaking) had a total of between 3 to 5 questions that measured its usage in a 5-point Likert scale.

The collected data from this research was analysed using the “Statistical Package For Social Sciences” or SPSS PC 11 For Windows. Two types of statistics was used in the analysis of data; descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics was utilised in the explanation of the respondents’ demographic characteristics. Inferential statistics such as The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the null hypotheses of the research (Refer Table 2). The level of 0.05 (p<0.05) had been determined as the significant level to reject the null hypotheses.

4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Research Sample Profile

In this research, 150 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the samples in a random manner to all seven classes of Diploma in Estate Management part two students in UiTM Perak. Only a total of 131 sets of completed questionnaires were returned to the researchers the following day, 54 from male students and 77 from the female students (refer Table 3). This meant a return of over 87% of the original number of questionnaires which was adequate to conduct an analysis for this research.

The results of the EMT119 or Introduction to the Property of Law is also shown (refer Table 4). The respondents who scored high grades of the A range is around 38 (22 with As and 16 with A-s) or 29%. Those who scored the average range of B make up the highest number with 64 (23 with B+, 33 with B and 8 with B-) or 49%. Those who scored the lower range of marks are 29 (11 for C+, 16 with C, one with a D+ and one with D) or 22%. Besides that, the results of BEL120 or Consolidating Language Skills for the same group of students are also shown (refer Table 5). This subject is the English proficiency subject for semester one students of all UiTM
diploma students. Around half (52%) of the students scored the average B (20 with B+, 40 with B and 8 with B-) range grades. Another 16% of the students scored within the A range (4 with A+, 8 with A and 9 with A-). The rest of the students (32%) had the range of the lower grades (20 with C+, 20 with C and 2 with D+).

4.2  
**Research Question One: English Language Competency Level**

Research question one is:

1) What is the English Language competency level towards the Law subject, EMT119 in part two students of Diploma in Estate Management?

Part B of the questionnaire had 15 questions concerning English language competency towards EMT119, according to the students’ perception. The total mean scores for the overall English Language competency questionnaire is from 15 to 75 (refer Table 6). The total mean scores for English language competency is 44.32 (s.d = 7.97). This result is categorised in the medium level usage as the scores are within the 35 to 54 level. This means that the students think that English Language is important in their understanding of EMT119.

Students may find that in difficult subjects like EMT119, the need to master English is fundamental to help to understand and interpret technical concepts and jargons. Bruner also mentioned that language is a mental instrument and should be given more focus. Learning involves the usage of language. Language affects learning. This is where knowledge is obtained through listening and reading, understanding and then interpreted by speaking and writing (Jonassen et al., 1991). Thus language is the method to spread knowledge and is the key to obtain and spreading information or thinking.

According to Wongtrirat et al., (2010), if students are not adept in English, they may have difficulties in understanding instructions, answering questions, doing homework and responding to the examinations. If students are unable to acclimatize to the use and comprehension of English, they may face problems of misconceptions and confusion. Both the Social Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky et al., 1962) and the Linguistic Relativity Theory have indicated that language is a core criterion in the students’ quest for knowledge. Language skills and using a language expertly are important factors that could determine success in education (Wilheim, 1997). Therefore the students should place value in learning English and to improve their proficiency towards complicated subjects like EMT119.

4.3  
**Testing of Null Hypotheses from Research Question Two**

The focus of research question two is to find out the correlation between English language competency with the EMT 119 or Introduction to The Property Of Law subject. Research question two is:

2) Is there a significant relationship between English language competency
and Law Subject EMT 119, in part two Diploma in Estate Management students in UiTM Perak?

The null hypothesis for this research question is:

1) There is no significant relationship between English language competency and Law Subject, EMT 119 in Diploma in Estate Management part two students in UiTM Perak

The correlation value of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between these two variables, English Language competency and the Law subject, EMT119 is $r = 0.320^{**}$ and the p value is significant at the level of .01 ($p < 0.05$). According to the Pearson correlation scales, the r value in this finding indicates significance, and a medium, positive correlation. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected because there is significant correlation between the English language competency and the Law subject, EMT119. The increased value of one variable would also bring about increased value in the other variable and vice versa. This means that the students are aware that a knowledge of English to master difficult subjects like EMT119. Thus if English proficiency used is high, the understanding of EMT119 in the students would also increase. This is because the students are aware of the importance of learning towards the understanding of technical subjects like EMT119. Therefore, knowledge of English would significantly correlate with EMT119.

According to Wongtrirat et al., (2010), the proficiency in English language is very vital as it is difficult to predict that students would perform academically well if they are not able to understand the instructors, answer their questions, do their homework and respond in their examinations. This is because the non-native speakers might not have enough proficiency to fill in gaps or to predict what words are content words during lectures (Conrad, 1989).

Researches by Khatijah et al. (2008), Custar (2011), Wongtrirat et al. (2010), Maleki & Zangani (2007) and Haslina (2002) have also indicated similar results as they believed that English competency has a significant and positive correlation on academic achievement. They also believed that academic performance is closely related to the usage in English Language. A research done by Faridah (1996) supported this notion when 57% of the respondents preferred their lecturers to use English during lectures. These respondents believed that English can increase their comprehension/ability. Another research done by Heyland (1997) at five universities in Hong Kong which includes 1500 students has concluded that there is a significant relationship between language and academic achievement. Results show that a high achiever is a student with high language proficiency. The more proficient the respondents are in English, the higher their achievement are in academic subjects.
4.4 Testing of Null Hypotheses from Research Question Three

The focus of research question three is to find out the correlation between English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and EMT 119 or Introduction to The Property of Law subject. Research question three is:

3) Is there a significant relationship between the four English language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking and the Law Subject EMT 119, Diploma in Estate Management part two students in UiTM Perak?

The null hypotheses for this research question are:

1) There is no significant relationship between the reading skill and Law subject, EMT 119 in Diploma in Estate Management part two students in UiTM Perak.

2) There is no significant relationship between the writing skill and Law subject, EMT 119 in Diploma in Estate Management part two students in UiTM Perak.

3) There is no significant relationship between the listening skill and Law subject, EMT 119 in Diploma in Estate Management part two students in UiTM Perak.

4) There is no significant relationship between the speaking skill and Law subject, EMT 119 in Diploma in Estate Management part two students in UiTM Perak.

The results show that the correlation value of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between these two variables, listening and EMT 119 is \( r = 0.195^* \) and the p value is significant at the level of .05 (\( p < 0.05 \)). According to the Pearson correlation scales, the \( r \) value in this finding shows a significant, low and positive correlation. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected because there is a significant correlation between the listening and EMT 119. According to Piper et al. (1998), the learning process has close correlation with cognitive abilities and language abilities. When a student learns and expands his/her language skills, especially in the area of rationalization, they not only use language to give out their opinions but also to manipulate their perceptions on what was being learnt. According to Anderson & Lynch (1988), a good student must be a good listener. Therefore a student must integrate the following skills:

1) Identify spoken signals from the midst of surrounding sounds

2) Segment the continuous stream of speech into units; which have to be recognised as known words

3) Group the syntax of the utterances; and understand the speakers’ intended meaning

4) An interactive listening, and to formulate an appropriate response to what has been said
According to Sally (1985) and Dunkel (1989), listening is an important criterion to lecture comprehension in institutions of higher learning. The ability to comprehend academic lectures is therefore an important process towards students learning technical subjects such as Law. Nunan (1997) added that learners faced great difficulty to determine the true value of statements requiring inferences than that those requiring direct extraction from the text. There is a need to conduct research whether the change of medium from Bahasa Malaysia to English gives rise to the urgency to provide valuable data to the development of training courses and programmes to help student maximise their comprehension of technical subjects like EMT 119. Currently ESL Lecturers at UiTM are using the general syllabus of English which is to prepare students for language exams but they do not cater specifically for examinations in major faculties. Thus students will need different levels of language skills for different academic majors (Light, 1987). It is also noted that while documentation in courtrooms is fast developing in the west, it is not so in Malaysia, part of it is due to the complexities of legal language that is fraught with difficult materials (archaic material, multi clause sentences) which are not easily assessable especially for the lay person (Noraini, 2008). The results also show that three skills of Reading, Writing and Speaking do not have any significant correlations with EMT 119. The correlation value for reading and EMT119 is r = 0.08 (p>0.05), between writing and EMT 119 is r = 0.160 (p>0.05) and between speaking and EMT119 is 0.03 (p>0.05). All the three correlation values are very low, positive and not significant. This meant that the null hypotheses are deemed to be true and accepted. The results of this research contradicts that of other researchers like Juriah et al. (1995), Haslina et al. (2002), Dunkel et al. (1989) and Custar et al. (2011) who maintain that there is a relative importance of these language skills towards learning.

5. Conclusion

This research has proven the perception that the English Language competency was significantly correlated with EMT119. Therefore the proficiency of English was considered decisive to establish the success rates of students’ learning. Thus, this research would like to suggest that lecturers must ensure that the students’ English proficiency be sufficient to comprehend law subjects. This in turn would boost the students’ motivation in learning. Further research on English Language competency should be conducted in UiTM to see their influence on other technical subjects. More courses on improving the listening skills of students should be organised and seriously taken into consideration.
References


pembelajaran dan kemahiran berbahasa Inggeris dengan pencapaian Kimia. (Masters Dissertation, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia).


Notes

Theoretical Framework
1) Social Constructivist Theory
2) Linguistic Relativity Theory

Dependant variable
Law Subject (EMT119)

Independent Variables
1) English Competency
   - Reading
   - Writing
   - Listening
   - Speaking

Diagram 1 Conceptual; Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale of Relationship</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.70 to 1.00</td>
<td>Very High Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.50 to 0.69</td>
<td>High Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.30 to 0.49</td>
<td>Medium Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.10 to 0.29</td>
<td>Low Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.01 to 0.09</td>
<td>Very Low Correlation</td>
</tr>
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</table>

TABLE 2 The Scale Of The Relationship In The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient

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<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131</td>
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</table>

TABLE 3 Research Sample Profile According To Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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</table>

TABLE 4 EMT119 Introduction To The Property of Law Results
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>100</td>
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**TABLE 5 BEL120 Consolidating Language Skills Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of English Language Competency</th>
<th>Total Mean Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>55 - 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>35 - 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>15 - 34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 6 Determination of level for overall English Language Competency**