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The Relationship between English Language Fluency and Learning Engagement: A Case Study among First-Year Undergraduates

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Abstract

The notion that learners with lower English language fluency tend to be less engaged in university classes still lacks further investigation. Evidence from previous studies was not conclusive and seems to suggest students with lower proficiency in the language are at risk of dropping out. This study aimed to explore the relationship between English fluency and learning engagement among first-year undergraduate students in a Malaysian university. A total of 144 students from 10 faculties participated in the study. Data were collected through a self-reported questionnaire about their English fluency, Malaysian University English Test (MUET) band and their level of engagement in the classroom. Statistical analyses revealed significant correlations in language fluency and learning engagement in which students with higher fluency were more engaged in the classroom. This study also showed students who reported higher level of perceived English language fluency and learning engagement obtained higher grades. In addition, regression analysis revealed that listening and writing skills significantly contributed to the model, which implies fluency in these two skills are more important in university settings.

Keywords: English Language Fluency, Learning Engagement, Proficiency, Muet, Classroom Instructions

Introduction

The English language is no longer limited to a linguistic and cultural phenomenon but a socio-political reality. English is also known as the language of information and international affairs (Andrew, 2017). In education, factors such as globalization and internalization of education and the desire to compete internationally have given rise to the growth of the English language in higher education worldwide (Gill & Kirkpatrick, 2013). This phenomenon has led many non-English speaking countries to adopt the English language in their education systems (Andrew, 2017; Gill & Kirkpatrick, 2013). Galloway, Numajiri and Rees (2020) also reported how English has become an important criterion in the hiring of academic staff in Asian universities even in