



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER FACTORS AND MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATES' GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN WRITING

Khatipah Binti Abdul Ghani¹ & Soo Ruey Shing^{*2}

*sooruey@unisel.edu.my @ khatisj@unisel.edu.my

University of Selangor, Malaysia

Received : 20 September 2019 ; Accepted : 12 November 2019

Abstract

This study aims to analyse grammatical problems in writing encountered by undergraduates in Malaysian University English Test (MUET), and to determine whether teachers' teaching backgrounds and teaching methodologies had any impact on the undergraduates' errors in writing. 335 writing scripts were analyzed in order to identify students' grammatical errors. Additionally, to analyse the relationship between various teacher factors and students' grammatical errors in writing, questionnaires were administered to fifteen full-time English teachers in a Malaysian university. The analysis of the scripts revealed that the undergraduates had the most problem in using verbs, followed by nouns, pronouns, prepositions and sentence patterns. Statistical analyses indicated that teachers' teaching experiences, academic qualifications and teaching approaches had significant impact on the undergraduates' grammatical problems in writing, to a certain extent. Based on the findings of this study, language teachers are suggested to vary their teaching approaches according to the types of grammatical items and expand the contexts while teaching grammar. It is also recommended that teachers at all levels require retraining periodically for professional development.

Keywords: grammar, writing, error analysis, teaching backgrounds, teaching methodologies

Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in Malaysia has occupied a prominent and sometimes controversial position for decades, both before and after independence. The language policy adopted by Malaysia places Malay (or *Bahasa Malaysia*) as the national language and English as the most important second language. This effort continues in the latest language policy of 'Upholding the Malay language; Strengthening the English language' (*Dasar Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris*) implemented by the Ministry of Education Malaysia starting in 2010. The policy aims at making the Malay language as the medium of national unity and the instructional language in national schools; and at the same time, enhancing students' fluency and accuracy in the use of English (Ministry of Education, 2014). With its designation as the official language, Malay remains the dominant language in the education system and government administration; whereas English is widely practised in various professions, including tertiary education sector (Zuraidah, 2012).

Despite there is such concern in students' mastery of language, there have been swings for and against the teaching of grammar in the Malaysian ESL classrooms over the last forty years. There was a stage where, according to interpretations of the Malaysian Upper Secondary Schools' syllabus, no grammar was needed to be taught at all as it was to be integrated into the lesson. Nevertheless, teaching of grammar has made its return in the new school curriculum beginning with Year 3 through Year 6 (primary level) and Form 1 through Form 5 (secondary level) with effect from 2011. This move has, then, led to another argument with respect to its effectiveness in making students to internalise the knowledge of grammar.

In the scenario of ELT in Malaysia, although English has been offered as a compulsory subject across all levels of education, it is never made a compulsory pass in the public examinations particularly at the primary and secondary levels of education. Additionally, the entry requirements to most of the programmes offered in university do not take into consideration students' performance in English. Due to this inadequate emphasis, university students are found to be unable to write with competence, and they tend to make grammatical errors in their writing (Asmah, 1992; Charanjit, et al., 2017). Grammatical errors which are frequently committed in their academic writings are found unintelligible and indecipherable, causing the intended meaning being distorted. This situation is also reported by Maros, et al., (2007) in a study on the errors of 120 scripts, whereby only 60 scripts were analyzable as the other 50% were simply incomprehensible and the scripts could not put in any categories of error. This study also found learning English grammar being the major difficulty faced by many students. Likewise, another instance is related to Malaysian ESL students'