

## An Examination of Students' Perceptions of Class Discussions in 'Malay Language for Professional Communication'

### Analisis Persepsi Terhadap Perbincangan Kelas di Kalangan Pelajar 'Bahasa Melayu untuk Komunikasi Profesional'

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#### ABSTRACT

*Class conversation is a beneficial mechanism that involves students' listening, thinking, and speaking abilities. It is a tool used in most language classes to promote student involvement and solicit their feedback, allowing them to improve their comprehension of the lesson. While this student-centred method has its advantages, having students to actually engage in a debate can be difficult. This may be attributed to a lack of enthusiasm and curiosity among students, as well as language incompetency, to list a few factors. The aim of this study is to discover out how students feel about engaging in class discussions and voicing their agreement and dissatisfaction using the English language as the tool of instruction. The participants in this research are first-semester Malay Language for Professional Communication students. These students are majoring in Malay Language Studies, and they are required to take the English for Oral Presentation course as part of their degree requirements. This comprehensive research discovered that students' perceptions of engaging in class debates, as well as voicing consensus and opposition, were relatively poor to medium. Their negative impression suggests that the students could be confronted with barriers that prevented them from having productive class discussions. The findings of this research would have important consequences on how class discussions are used in language classrooms.*

*Keywords: Class discussion; general participation; expressing agreement; expressing disagreement; benefits of class discussions*

#### ABSTRAK

*Perbincangan kelas adalah proses konstruktif yang melibatkan pendengaran, pemikiran dan kemampuan bertutur pelajar. Ini adalah kaedah yang digunakan di kebanyakan kelas bahasa untuk mendorong penyertaan umum dan mengundang pendapat daripada pelajar; yang memungkinkannya mereka untuk meningkatkan pemahaman tentang pelajaran. Pendekatan berpusatkan pelajar ini mempunyai banyak faedah tetapi membuat pelajar untuk mengambil bahagian secara aktif dalam perbincangan boleh menjadi sangat mencabar. Ini mungkin disebabkan oleh kurangnya motivasi dan minat serta ketidakupayaan bahasa di kalangan pelajar, dengan menyebutkan beberapa. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka persepsi pelajar untuk turut serta menyatakan persetujuan dan penolakan mereka dalam perbincangan kelas menggunakan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa pengantar. Kajian ini dijalankan ke atas pelajar semester pertama Program Bahasa Komunikasi Profesional Bahasa Melayu. Pelajar ini mengambil jurusan Pengajian Bahasa Melayu dan kursus Bahasa Inggeris untuk Persembahan Lisan diambil sebagai sebahagian daripada syarat ijazah mereka. Kajian kuantitatif ini mendapati bahawa pelajar secara amnya mempunyai skor min rendah hingga sederhana pada persepsi mereka terhadap penyertaan, serta menyatakan persetujuan dan penolakan dalam perbincangan kelas. Persepsi negatif mereka menunjukkan bahawa pelajar mungkin menghadapi cabaran yang menghalangi mereka untuk melakukan perbincangan kelas yang berkesan. Hasil kajian ini akan memberikan implikasi yang menarik terhadap penggunaan perbincangan kelas di kelas bahasa.*

*Kata kunci: Perbincangan kelas; penyertaan umum; menyatakan persetujuan; menyatakan tidak setuju; faedah perbincangan kelas*

## INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the light of pedagogics, educational theorists and researchers of teaching composition in particular, have a long history of advocating replacing teacher-centred pedagogies with student-centred ones (Bruffee 1984; Rubin & Hebert 1998). The reason for this is due to the abundance of benefits that it offers, such as autonomous learning that helps to bolster students' academic achievement and encourage deeper learning (Leo 2007). In line with the student-centred approach, class discussion is commonly employed as a method of teaching in ESL classrooms (English as Second Language) (Thomas 2017). This method, in particular, aids in encouraging students' active participation in language learning that lays a solid foundation for them to acquire the target language successfully (Leo 2007; Asoodeh, Asoodeh & Zarepour 2012).

However, for some students of ESL, class discussion might be a challenging stepping stone to help them acquire the target language. Hofstede (1986) explicates that cultural differences may hinder students from conversing using the target language due to uncertainty when learners are not confident in the language. Other barriers such as peer pressure, students' socioeconomic background, and lack of exposure to the target language also exacerbate the situation, as stated by Ismail (1994).

Despite the barriers, it is a basic need for any ESL student to effectively know how to speak and communicate orally. According to Brown (2001), ESL learners "discover language by trial and error, by processing feedback, by building hypotheses, and revising these assumptions in order to become fluent". These are some prominent elements embedded in the class discussion method. While the method is valuable in helping students to learn and acquire the target language, to help students break the barriers, teachers need to invest time and assist students in working to enhance their speaking skills. This study, therefore, will bring forth the exploration of students' perception of participating as well as expressing their agreement and disagreement in class discussion using English language as the medium of instruction.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Acquiring a target language for ESL learners can be deemed complicated due to several barriers that hinder learners from using the target language (Hofstede 1986; Ismail 1994). In view of this, the challenge imposed for Malaysian ESL learners is deemed complicated too, especially for the Malay and Bumiputera students involved in the present study. These students are particularly majoring in the Malay language, whereby they pursue their studies in the Bachelor Degree of Malay Language for Professional Communication. Hence, most of the courses and classes they attend are delivered in the Malay language as its medium of instruction. English for Oral Presentations course is made compulsory for them in the first semester.

One of the common practices applied in the English for Oral Presentations course is a class discussion that is deemed necessary for encouraging students' participation in the language learning journey. The idea behind the class discussion in this language course is for the students to be able to understand the topic and issues, give verbal and non-verbal responses appropriately, express agreement and disagreement effectively, negotiate successfully and think critically. By taking account of the above details, the skills of participating as well as expressing agreement and disagreement in class discussions are worth exploring.

## OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of this study is to investigate students' perception in participating as well as expressing their agreement and disagreement in class discussions using English language as the medium of instruction. This study is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What is students' perception on conducting class discussions?
2. What is students' perception on participating in class discussions?
3. What is students' perception on expressing agreement and disagreement in class discussions?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

This section presents the traits and benefits of class discussion, and explores the concepts of assimilation and assumption. It also looks at class discussion strategies and delves into expressing agreement and disagreement in class discussions. Past studies related to these concepts are also discussed.

### CLASS DISCUSSION: TRAITS AND BENEFITS

The traits and benefits of a class discussion can be understood by associating it with the social learning theories. These help us to acknowledge how people learn in social contexts and on how we, as educators, construct active learning communities. Lev Vygotsky (1962), a Russian teacher and psychologist, first stated that we learn through our interactions and communications with others. Examining how our social environments influence the learning process, Vygotsky suggested that learning takes place through the students' interactions have with their peers, teachers, and other experts.

Class Discussion is focused on knowledge construction by using dialogues with a specific purpose of encouraging students' participation in their own learning. It is expected that students' increased participation will make them responsible for their own and other students' learning (Thomas 2017). In class discussions, students actively construct their understanding of topics, encourage general participation and invite opinions from their peers. In the context of the present study, class discussion is defined as oral interaction amongst students with the aim of developing knowledge on the topic discussed.

Class discussion is a learner-centred approach that is widely applied in most English as a second language (henceforth ESL) classroom to encourage students to become increasingly independent and self-directed in their learning (Green, Christopher & Lam 2008). This means that students are required to reflect on their own and others' performances rather than merely relying on the teachers to disseminate knowledge. When there is an active engagement between students and their learning, they will be

able to develop the ability to think critically (Pollock & Hamann n.d.), construct new knowledge and eventually evolve into effective life-long learners (Green, Christopher & Lam 2008).

For ESL students, learning the target language may pose some challenges, considering that each language has its own set of rules. The challenge is greater for ESL students who have limited exposure and access to learning English, as in the Malaysian context, where native English speakers are not always available. This is similar for some Malaysian ESL students, specifically the Malay students in the present study. Thus, they need continuous support and opportunities to engage in discussions and express themselves in the target language to assist their learning of English language. Class discussions in the ESL classrooms act as both a method to develop students' thinking skills and also a means for language acquisition.

One of the benefits of class discussion is that it contributes to higher level thinking through the questioning that occurs during the discussions. Generally, discussions will involve higher order thinking based on Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), provided that the lesson is planned with a higher-order thinking objective in mind (Collins 2014). Class discussions also offer a format for students to think critically and integrate information (Roehling, Lee, Dykema, Quisenberry & Vandlen 2011).

Additionally, class discussion also has an impact on students' affective development, including their beliefs and attitudes about various concepts (Thomas 2017). However, Meirovich (2012) mentioned that participative practices such as class discussions are useful only when students possess certain information and knowledge to partake in it; yet, even with these prerequisites they might have difficulty expressing themselves. This might be the case of Malay ESL learners who are mainly exposed to using their mother tongue in their daily conversation, thus when involved in class discussions in the English language classroom, they may have a certain anxiety and fear of being disapproved or even ridiculed (Weaver & Qi 2005). Hence, their participation in the class discussions may be affected by the emotional climate of the ESL classroom and their level of confidence in using the language.

Furthermore, cultural differences can also have a negative effect on ESL students' success in learning English language. Sangpanasthada (2006) listed specific examples of how cultural influence may lead to discouragement of using the target language. He noted that in oriental cultures, criticism is often viewed as confrontational, and therefore avoided. ESL students who are not used to giving or receiving criticisms may feel uncomfortable when asked to engage in critical thinking activities like class discussion, and avoid to judge or be judged, so they may not participate actively in class discussions. It is also acknowledged that in some cultures, expressing one's opinion in public is considered as being boastful or self-promoting, and this attitude often inhibits ESL students when they are required to participate in class discussions or interact with other students. Due to these cultural differences, it is important to ensure that ESL students are feeling comfortable to participate in class discussions with their peers.

Since class discussions have direct impact on students' cognitive skills, Piaget's (1952) cognitive theory is worth reviewing. The researcher explained that two processes are involved in cognitive development, namely assimilation and accommodation. Cognitive growth happens when assimilation and accommodation constantly interweave. Although Piaget's cognitive theory does not consider language as a constructive factor in cognitive development, he emphasised that cognitive structure is important for language acquisition. Also, Piaget (1952) did not explicitly relate his theory to education, but later researchers (Blake & Pope 2008) have explained how features of Piaget's theory can be applied to teaching and learning languages. The ensuing sub-sections elaborate further on the process of adaptation to the world, which happens through *assimilation* and *accommodation*.

#### ASSIMILATION

According to Piaget (1952), assimilation is the process of using or transforming the environment so that it can be placed in the pre-existing cognitive structures. In other words, assimilation of language occurs when a student encounters a new idea, and therefore s/he must 'fit' that idea into what is already known. Heick (2019) simplified this definition by mentioning that when assimilation happens, students are filling existing containers, or schema.

In classrooms, students will come in with diverse set of existing knowledge and experiences. When they participate in class discussions, they will be encouraged to comprehend a new concept. This new concept can be further developed provided that they are able to relate it to his/her existing schema. If that happens, students will be able to fill in more information regarding a certain concept, working on what they already know and add onto it.

#### ACCOMMODATION

On the other hand, accommodation is the process of changing cognitive structures in order to accept something from the environment. When accommodation happens, humans modify what we already know so the new information can fit better. Heick (2019) describes this process as more substantial, since it requires learners to reshape the containers. It is possible that there will be occasions where students face conflicts during class discussions, resulting from the different existing knowledge that the students possess. Thus, students are expected to make adjustments and accept the ideas of others, although these differing ideas contradict their existing schema. Knowing how to accommodate to new knowledge can be perceived as a social skill. Students should negotiate their ways by accepting the ideas of others and try to fit them into the existing. In turn, this will simultaneously increase the students' communication skills. Piaget also mentioned that accommodation require humans to be active learners, because higher thinking skills cannot be taught, but must be discovered. One of the ways to achieve this is through rediscovering and reconstructing knowledge during class discussions.

#### SPEAKING SKILLS AND CLASS DISCUSSION

According to Gumperz (1999: 101), speaking is jointly constructed by its participants based on contributions, assumptions, expectation, and interpretations. Since this type of discourse is cooperatively constructed, it becomes a negotiated, self-regulated process (Nunan 1999: 226) which is motivated by interactive rules and routines (Dornyei & Thurrell 1994). In the context of ESL teaching and learning, students are exposed to speaking activities in the classroom such as role-plays and class discussions, to name a few.



Despite that, class discussions have an impact on students' affective development (Thomas 2017), since they have to negotiate their beliefs and attitudes about various concepts. When students are discussing an idea, the discussion helps them to develop a tolerance for ambiguity, as consensus is often not met (Brookfield & Preskill 2005). This means that the students are often put into situations where they are asked to explore different views. Class discussion thus can help them to see their assumptions, which is valuable to develop sound arguments.

Other than that, class discussions also help students to improve students' critical thinking skills (Pollock & Hamann 2011). Students interact to construct new knowledge and in turn, their communication skills can be enhanced. Class discussions empower students to become good problem solvers, not only at the individual level, but also as a team. Furthermore, Rahmat, Rahman, and Yunos (2015) mentioned that class discussions are a platform where learners learn to solve problems through agreements and disagreements.

Although class discussions may pose certain challenges to ESL students, it is important to acknowledge that learning English language requires interaction as a practice in real life context. This means that students' participation in class discussions is crucial to ensure that the students are able to acquire new knowledge through the assimilation process, and at the same time, when faced with a conflict, students justify their reasons for disagreements through the accommodation process. Students' involvement in class discussions will prepare them for practising the target language, where there will be opportunities for them to show agreement and disagreement to keep the conversation going.

#### SHOWING AGREEMENT

Agreement is defined as a speech act of explicitly or implicitly expressing similar opinion as an initiator (Wu 2006). Similarly, Eggins and Diana (1997) defined agreement as the willingness to accept the proposal and propositions of others. In other words, agreement occurs when one accepts the other person's view and it is done through an expression of approval of the idea. According to Rahmat, Rahman, and Yunos (2015: 1124), agreement in class discussion can be used by students to show that the discussion has met its conclusion. Agreement is

also expressed to give impact to the minority who disagree. Students also show agreement in class discussion to give in to the group members' better ideas or to show the ability to negotiate points. In class discussion, student use agreement expressions to show similarities in ideas, or as a base to compare points.

#### SHOWING DISAGREEMENT

Meanwhile, Wu (2006: 56) also defined disagreement as a speech act of explicitly or implicitly expressing opposition of that of an initiator. Along the same line, Malamed (2010: 200) defined disagreement as 'a conflicting view offered as a response to an expressed view of a previous speaker'. This means that when disagreeing to an idea, a speaker will express his or her personal preferences as a reaction or response to a previous proposition. Students may show disagreement in class discussion to express their dissatisfaction on a topic due to the differences in how they view things. Disagreement can also be used to express doubt or reservation and to seek clarification. Some students use disagreement expressions to refute a fact, dismiss an irrelevant point or refuse a suggestion or request.

#### PAST STUDIES

This section discusses past studies on class discussion and its benefits, highlighting on the agreement and disagreement as practised in class discussion.

#### PAST STUDIES ON CLASS DISCUSSION

Forman, Ramirez-DelToro, Brown, and Passmore (2017) found that students who actively participated in scientific argumentation often have improved their academic achievement due to the process or content reinforcement that happens when discussion takes place. This means that through their involvement in class discussions, students' acquisition of knowledge can also be supported.

Additionally, Smith, Wood, Krauter and Knight (2011) discovered that a class discussion when complemented by an instructor's explanation improved students' understanding of concepts presented in classroom. When students are given the chance to discuss ideas in the classroom, the development of their thinking skills can be enhanced. In turn, this will potentially boost their academic performance.

Another research studying class discussion such as Davis (2013) looked at adult students' ability to participate in strategic classroom discussion. He looked at the use of class discussions to practise critical thinking and found that students were independent and directly involved in the learning activities in the classroom. These studies were able to highlight the benefits of class discussion in the ESL classrooms and thus, it would be interesting to look at the Malay ESL learners' perception of class discussions in the ESL classroom.

#### PAST STUDIES AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS IN DISCUSSIONS

In a recent study, Hoang and Nooy (2019) who researched direct disagreement in Vietnamese students' ESL group work discussion found that this group of students tend to use direct disagreement, as in a direct 'no' as opposed to the common portrayal of the Vietnamese as favouring indirect communication. Interestingly, none of the direct 'no' had negative consequences on the interaction. They suggested that group work among EFL Vietnamese students was accepted as a context in which disagreement was expected and did not necessarily affect the harmony of the group.

Meanwhile, Maíz-Arévalo (2014) investigated how the speech act of disagreement is performed by students of English as a lingua franca. The findings demonstrated that students generally showed a tendency to avoid strong disagreement and they favoured mitigated disagreement of different types of strategies through the use of hedges, asking for clarifications and giving explanations, among others. It was also found that the students of higher linguistic proficiency discussed and negotiated more comfortably to fulfil their group tasks since they were familiar with each other, and the task assigned to them was highly collaborative in nature.

These studies are able to mention interesting findings on studies of agreement and disagreements in class discussion. However, Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury (2004) noted that relatively less research on agreements and disagreements have been conducted on English language learners and non-

native speakers. Hence, this study is carried out to explore the Malay ESL learners' use of agreements and disagreements when involved in class discussion in the Malaysian ESL classroom.

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative approach was utilised to gather data for the current study. This quantitative study was conducted on a total of 67 first semester students of Malay Language for Professional Communication Programme, who took the English for Oral Presentation course as a compulsory course. The participants involved in this study were chosen through purposive sampling due to its principle that allows identification and selection of information for limited resources (Patton 2002).

### INSTRUMENT

The instrument used is adapted from the instrument used in the study Rahmat, Othman, Muhammad, Shirin, and Arepin (2019). It consisted of a set of questionnaire with a total of 32 questions. There were four main sections in the questionnaire; Section A and B looked at students' perception on General Class Discussion and the General Class Participation respectively, whilst Section C and D investigated students' perception on Expressing Agreements as well as Expressing Disagreements. In addition, the questionnaire was structured with a multiplicity of statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Always (5)', 'Very Often (4)', 'Sometimes (3)', 'Rarely (2)', to 'Never' (1) that would help in tapping the three research questions areas. Cronbach Alpha conducted for the 32 items with score of 0.931 indicates a high level of internal consistency.

### METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

In this study, the questionnaire was distributed via Google form and forwarded to the class WhatsApp

group. The students would be able to complete the questionnaire in approximately 10 minutes. Results were then generated from the google excel spreadsheet.

#### METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Based on the research questions which guided the study, mean scores of the results were generated and graphs were also formulated for ease of reference.

#### FINDINGS

##### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study on perception of the Malay Language for Professional Communication students on class discussions. It focuses on four categories namely, perception on general class discussion, class participation and expressing agreement and disagreement.

Research Question 1- What is students' perception on conducting class discussions?

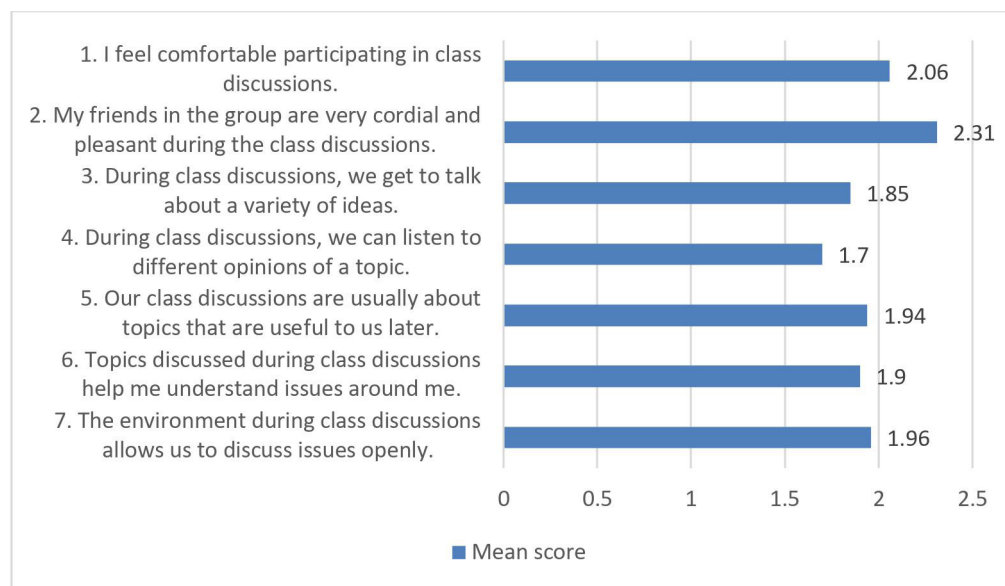


FIGURE 1. Mean scores of students' perception on general class discussions

Figure 1 presents the mean scores of students' perception on 7 statements related to general class discussions. Pleasant environment, useful topics, exchanging ideas and listening to opinions are mentioned in the statements. The results show rather low mean scores of less than 2.31. The statement, "During class discussions, we can listen to different opinions of a topic." had the lowest mean score of 1.7. This indicates that students felt listening to different types of opinions was not experienced during class discussions. In other words, they generally might not contribute much to the class discussions in terms of sharing ideas and exchanging opinions. However, they thought they were quite comfortable

having class discussion with friends in a friendly environment with mean score of 2.31.

These findings suggest that whilst acknowledging the importance of positive learning environment in a classroom discussion, the students were not fully satisfied with them, and this somehow impedes their involvement in the discussion. Vygotsky (1962) examined how our social environments influence the learning process. He suggested that learning takes place through the students' interactions have with their peers, teachers, and other experts.

Research Question 2- What is students' perception on participating in class discussions?

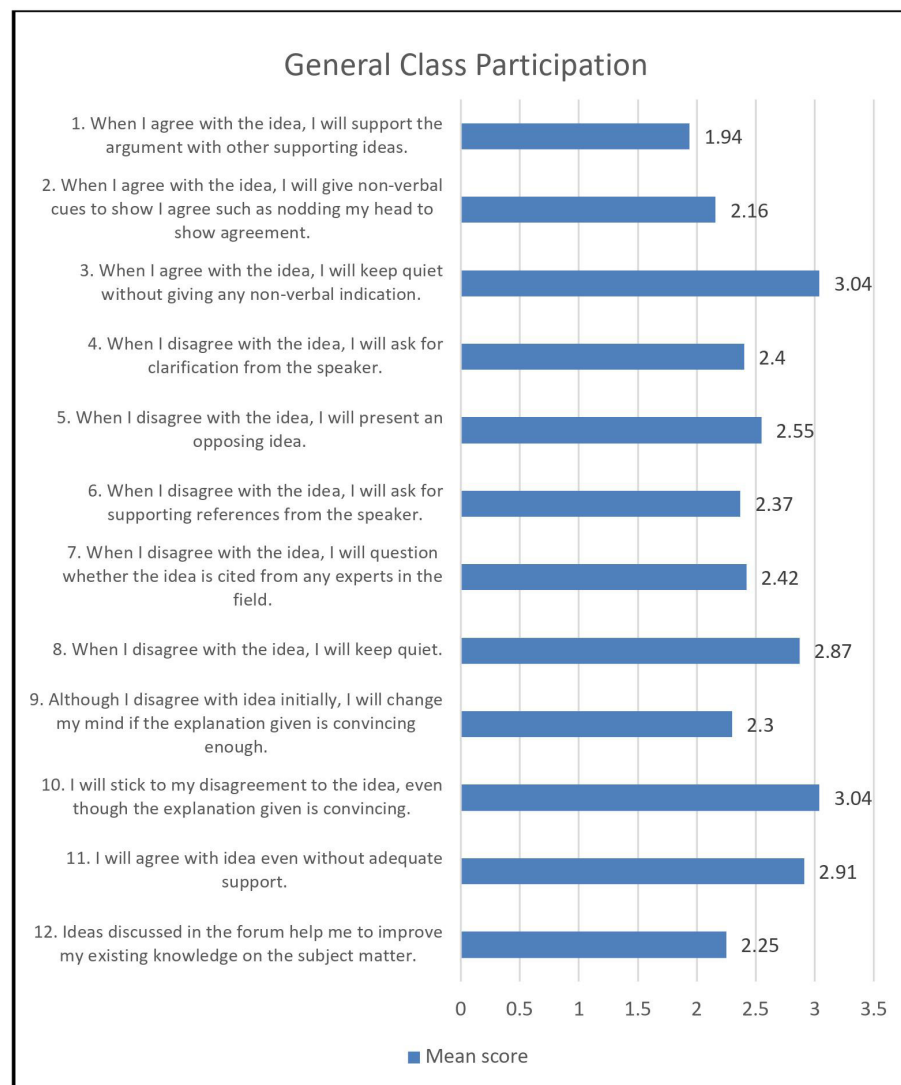


FIGURE 2. Mean scores of students' perception on general participation focusing on assimilation and accommodation in class discussions

The mean scores of students' perception on general participation in class discussions are presented in Figure 2. In order to benefit from class discussions, students need to assimilate to comprehend a new concept, which can be further developed if they are able to relate it to their existing schema. This will enable students to work on what they already know and add onto it. In this study, students gave their perception on statements 1 to 9 that describe the ways they responded in class discussions when they agreed or disagreed with an idea. The findings show that generally, the Malay Language for Professional Communication students had low (1.94) to medium (3.04) mean scores on assimilating in class discussions. They felt that when they agreed with an idea, they would keep quiet without giving any non-verbal indication (3.06). In addition, they thought they would support

their argument with other supporting ideas when they agreed on an idea (1.94). This result indicates that students were probably more inclined to keep to themselves than share their thoughts with others.

However, being silent does not always indicate lack of opinion. It is interesting to note that students consider silence and/or responding non-verbally as functional cues in discussions. They see non-verbal responses as a form of classroom participation. This finding supports the study carried out by Elise J. and Dallimore (2004) who found that students define participation as a variety of non-oral participation behaviours. Importantly, the observations revealed that some students actively participate in the classroom through means of oral engagement, while others remained silent. This finding is consistent with the studies carried out by Meyer (2007) and Meyer and Hunt (2011). Some students claimed



they chose not to participate as they felt that they learned more by listening and keeping quiet.

This silence for cognitive processing is difficult to identify, but during observations, silent pauses which were likely to be due to cognitive processing occurred among students. Students' view that they could be cognitively engaged while being silent could be taken into consideration by educators as silence is valued and expected in Malaysian culture. Thus, it would be wise for instructors to recognise participation as a broader concept than mere speech and consider putting importance on both participation and silence because they have their roles in classroom learning.

In this study, students also gave their perception on statements 10 to 12 that describe the ways they accommodated in class discussions. When students accommodate in a class discussion, they are expected to adjust and accept the ideas of others, although these differing ideas contradict their existing schema. The finding shows that students felt reluctant to change their disagreement even if a convincing argument had been presented (3.04). In addition, they perceived that ideas discussed in

the forum helped them to improve their existing knowledge (2.25). It can be inferred that the Malay Language for Professional Communication students might not be able to accommodate well in class discussions; thus, lacking in negotiation and communication skills.

While it is highlighted that speaking is one of the basic means of learning (McCroskey & Richmond 2005), it is challenging for ESL students since speaking is culture-bound, considering that conversational routines are implemented differently in different countries (Richards 1980: 419). In the Malaysian ESL context, lack of exposure to the target language also aggravates the situation, which may lead to students' feeling reluctant to speak in English. According to Ali (2007), reluctance can also be due to avoidance in certain cultures due to uncertainty when learners are not confident communicating in a specific language.

Research Question 3- What is students' perception on expressing agreement and disagreement in class discussions?

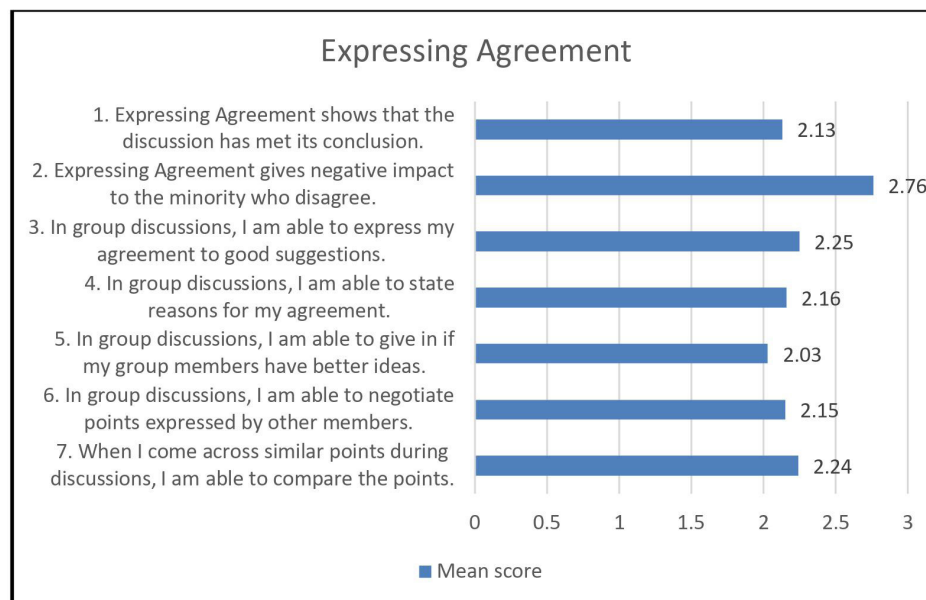


FIGURE 3. Mean scores of students' perception on expressing agreement in class discussions

Figure 3 presents the mean scores of students' perception of expressing agreement in class discussions. The low mean scores, which are less than 2.76 for all 7 statements, indicate that, generally, the Malay Language for Professional Communication students might not be able to express agreement effectively in class discussions using English as a medium of instruction. Students perceived that, "In

group discussions I am able to give in if my group members have better ideas" with a mean score of 2.03. They also felt that expressing agreement had a negative impact on the minority who disagreed (2.76).

This can be linked to the Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) as studied by Gregerson and Horwitz (2002). Gregerson and Horwitz (2002) FNE

influences the behaviour of learners directly during communication-oriented situations as they tend to limit their participation in any types of tasks that expose them to peer or teacher evaluation. The way a learner manages spoken interaction in L2 may be the foundation for other people to develop a general negative view of a particular learner, although he or she might be proficient in other language elements

or skills. Nevertheless, the problems with oral skills can influence the entire image of a learner among his or her peers. Moreover, should a learner perceive that he or she cannot accomplish the same level of performance in speaking as he or she does in other skills, then the person does not make any effort during speaking-oriented tasks.

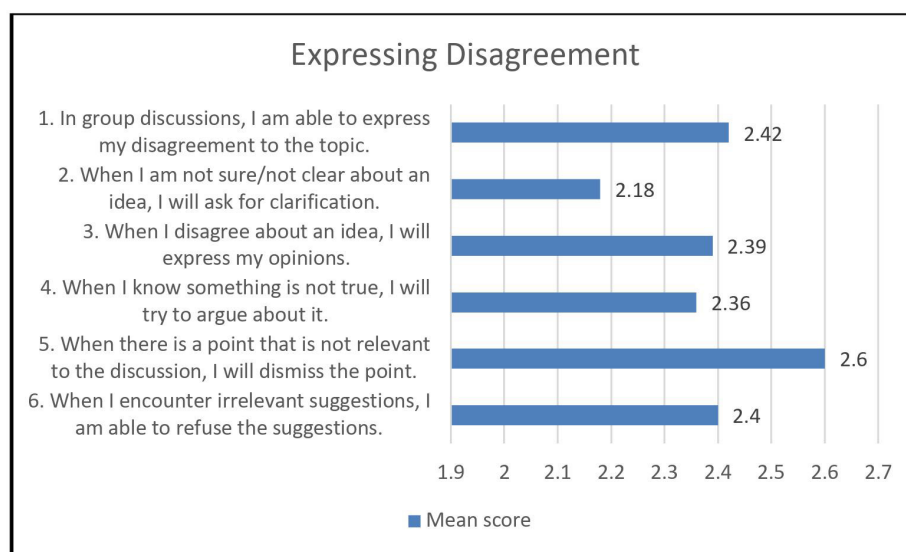


FIGURE 4. Mean scores of students' perception on expressing disagreement in class discussions

The mean scores of perceptions of the Malay Language for Professional Communication students on expressing disagreement are presented in Figure 4. Based on the findings, students perceived (with a mean score of 2.36) that they would try to argue if they knew something was not true. Furthermore, when they were not clear about an idea, they felt they would ask for clarification (2.18); and they thought that when they disagreed with an idea, they would express their opinions (2.39). Generally, the low mean scores of 2.18 to 2.6 for the 6 statements indicate that students might feel quite reluctant to express disagreement in class discussions.

This reluctance could be due to lack of confidence in expressing own ideas. Park & Lee (2005) examined the relationships between L2 learners' anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance. They reached the conclusion that self-confidence affected L2 learners' oral performance. They stated that if the learners were more confident, they would have better oral performance.

## CONCLUSION

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In general, this study revealed interesting findings of perception on class discussions in English as second language (ESL) classrooms among Malay Language for Professional Communication students. Firstly, students had a negative perception of general class discussions which were related to pleasant environment, useful topics, listening to opinions and exchanging ideas. Secondly, in terms of general participation, students had a negative perception of assimilating in class discussion through agreeing and disagreeing with an idea. It is worth mentioning that the students felt that when they agreed to an idea, they refused to give verbal and non-verbal indications. The finding indicates that the students were more inclined to keep to themselves than share their thoughts with others. In addition, students also had quite a negative perception of accommodating in class discussions; thus, it can be inferred that they might be lacking in negotiation and communication

skills. Thirdly, students had a negative perception of expressing agreement in class discussions. It is interesting to note that they thought that expressing agreement had a negative impact on the minority who disagreed. Similarly, they also had a negative perception of expressing disagreement. Their reluctance to participate in ESL class discussions may be associated with lack of self confidence in communicating in English, besides cultural and emotional related reasons.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

As previously addressed by scholars, class debate has several advantages. Cognitive development is one of these advantages since it allows students to think creatively and study differently in order to gain new skills. Via the use of class discussions, it will act as an effective connection to connect their awareness to new ideas and help students make sense of the changing of ideas and viewpoints. It also has an effect on students' affective growth, which contributes to the mastery of soft skills including negotiation and tolerance. This student-centred approach is often used in ESL classes to improve listening and speech skills. Students, on the other hand, would not be willing to learn from class debate if they cannot or would not consciously engage in it.

As a result, lecturers must prepare the groundwork for a successful class conversation by creating a relaxed, friendly atmosphere to increase students' enthusiasm and trust to engage in the target language, to name a few. This can be accomplished by fostering a learning atmosphere that encourages students to engage with one another through dialogue, cooperation, and input. As a result, ESL teachers must provide students with prior awareness and details about the discussion subject, as well as useful phrases and vocabularies, in order for them to begin and sustain a conversation. Lecturers must ensure that the social environment of the classroom is conducive to a discussion, as cultural factors can obstruct active involvement in a class discussion.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The perceptions of 67 Malay Language for Professional Communication students in ESL classrooms were examined in this research. A larger number of students from two separate programmes, such as Malay Language Studies and English

Language Studies, could be included in future studies. A larger field of research that aims at how students really interact and engage during class discussion is therefore possible, in addition to discovering what the students understand during class discussion. Observing and comparing students' behaviour in ESL classrooms and engaging in class discussions would be interesting. It's also interesting to look at the causes that lead to this type of behaviour.

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