An Investigation into Universiti Teknologi MARA Pre-Commerce Students' Perspectives on Second Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an exploratory study which aims to investigate learners' perceptions on language learning in two UiTM campuses in the state of Sarawak. The researchers were guided by the research question – What are the ideas of UiTM students on language learning in terms of the following aspects: the usefulness of the various language learning activities; the nature of language learning; the ideal language learning situation; and how they learn English. The study also aimed to find out if there are differences in students' perceptions, in particular between male and female, and between students in Mukah and Samarahan campuses respectively. The findings indicate that the respondents from both campuses do possess diverse perspectives on language learning, thus reflecting their different learning styles and orientations.

Introduction

Findings on the ability of young learners to articulate views on learning and the lack of similar studies in language learning in UiTM see the need of carrying out this study among Pre-Commerce students in Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak. This is in order to understand language learning from the young tertiary students' perspective and within the context of MARA University of Technology as a whole.

It is indeed wise to gauge the Pre-Commerce learners of second language beliefs about the nature of language learning and for the lecturers to know what aspects are most important in the language learning process. There is also a need to establish Pre-Commerce learner's beliefs about language learning before the lecturer is able to develop autonomous learning. Beliefs and values influence every human action. In the same way as a lecturer teaching BEL 040 to the Pre-Commerce students brings into the classroom certain beliefs, assumptions and knowledge that influence the activities they choose to carry out; the same can be said of the Pre-Commerce students who have their own ideas of language learning. The Intensive English Proficiency course provided by UiTM, BEL 040, for the Pre-Commerce students also see the need of how the lecturer-fronted approach which does not really produce good students can give way to a more learner – centred approach based on the students' perspectives on language learning, thereby shifting heavier learning responsibility and autonomy to the learners themselves. Restricting the teaching of English to a mere memorisation of grammar rules at Pre-Commerce level has indeed reduced it to a mere obsolescence in the ESL pedagogy, and the fact that this trivializes the learning of English renders nothing more than a disservice to the students whose English Language proficiency is generally not very good.

Background of the Problem

Since the Pre-Commerce students, being active participants in the learning process, come into the classroom with their own perceptions, conceptions, and ideas about learning that may be at variance with those held by their lecturers, a situation which does not enhance or maximize learning is resulted. For lecturers, it is then important that they find out how their learners learn best, their learning preferences and see how their learners make sense of their learning. With this knowledge, they can at least better understand their learners; thus adapting and modifying their teaching to better suit their learners' needs.

Investigating learners' ideas or perspectives on English Language learning is therefore an attempt to bridge the gap between learning and instruction and to find answers to the question 'Why don't learners learn what teachers teach?' (Allwright; 1984 cited in Nunan; 1995: 133). The current emphasis on learner-centred approaches implies the need to take into account the learners' needs and perceptions. For the lecturers, gaining better knowledge of one's learning is a manifestation of the reflective

approach to teaching which will help lecturers in their self-development as educators.

Objectives of the Study

The main goal of this study is to investigate the Pre-Commerce students perspectives on learning the English Language. The main goal is further divided into 3 objectives:

1. To examine the students' perspective of learning the English language through activities associated with listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.
2. To examine whether there are differences between male and female Pre-Commerce students perspectives on second language learning.
3. To examine whether there are differences in the way students learn between those in Pre-Commerce UiTM Samarahan with those in Pre-Commerce UiTM Mukah.

Scope of the Study

The sample population of this study comprised 155 Semester November 2004 – March 2005 Pre-Commerce students of UiTM Sarawak. Out of this, 122 respondents were from Mukah Campus and the remaining 33 were from the Samarahan Campus.

Definition of Terms / Concept

An examination of past studies related to investigation of learners' perspectives on learning and language learning illustrate the use of various terms by researchers. Omaggio (1978: 2) cited in Wenden (1987: 103) wrote about good language learners' "insight into the nature of the task of learning" while Hosenfeld (1978) in Wenden (1987: 103) referred to students' "mini-theories" of second language learning. Others, such as Horwitz (1987) and Mantle-Bromley (1995), employed the term 'beliefs' when investigating learners perceptions of language learning. In educational psychology of research, the term 'conception' was used by Pramling (1983: 1988), Purdie, Hattie and Douglas (1996) while Berry and Sahlberg (1996: 22) use the term 'ideas' which they define as 'a combined set of conceptions, belief and views'.

The employment of varying terms by different researchers mirror their own understanding of what learners bring to the language learning

process. For example, the use of the term 'beliefs' by Horwitz mirrors the presence of firm opinion on language learning held by the students which terms like 'conception', and 'assumption' probably would not reveal. Another possible reason for the use of various terms is that they may be researching different facets of the issue.

For the purpose of this study the term 'perspectives' is used to describe students' understanding, notion and views of the language learning process and how they learn a second language. Hence, in this study terms like 'ideas', 'understanding', 'conception', and 'views', will be used interchangeably to mean students' perspectives on second language learning.

The Significance of Investigating Learners' Views of Language Learning

Willing (1988), Harmer (1991) Nunan (1991) agree that it is important for learners to take an active role in their own learning. The knowledge of learner's ideas of language learning is beneficial to both teachers and students. Harmer (1991) states that it would be good if students can be encouraged to concentrate on their own learning strategies and take charge of their own learning as far as possible. A language learner's awareness of the learning process and approaches to learning will consequently lead to self-assessment and eventually more self-directed and successful learning will result. To assist learners in making decisions with regards to learning, they first require knowledge about 'the language itself (through language awareness activities), about language learning techniques and processes (through experimentation and reflection) and about themselves as language learners (through regular self-assessment and introspection)' (Ellis and Sinclair:1989: 2). Wenden adds that for language learners, it includes "beliefs, insights and concepts that they have acquired about language and the language learning process" (Wenden: 1991: 34). Therefore, the present study hopes to gain insight into pre-commerce students' perspectives of language learning with the hope that it will assist in creating an appropriate language learning environment.

A knowledge of learners ideas about language learning will prove useful in narrowing the gap between teaching and learning. Numerous researchers have acknowledged instances of mismatches between learners' and teachers' perceptions of the teaching-learning process in

terms of such issues as the rationale for tasks (Kumaravadivelu: 1991; Block: 1996) and the usefulness of language learning activities (Nunan: 1988). These differences may have negative effect on the teaching and learning process whereby the learners may view given task negatively because they do not see the importance of the task. One example of this is the use of communicative based language activities which teachers prefer (Eltis & Low; 1985) but adult learners do not (Alcorso & Kalantzis; 1985). Therefore, a knowledge of the learning styles of language learners will help avoid a mismatch of teaching-learning strategies which could have disastrous outcomes. A comparative study by Nunan (1988) using data from Eltis and Low (1985) study and that of Alcorso and Kalantzis's (1985) showed that there exist obvious mismatch in what the students desire and what the teachers assume they prefer. Allwright and Bailey (1991: 144-145) also concurred with Nunan's views. They stated that some learners prefer to be quiet and listen in order to learn, while their teachers held an opposing view. A study by Slimani (1989) too illustrates this mismatch whereby it was discovered that some learners perceive that they benefit from listening to their peers speaking and not when they themselves are talking. The idea of mismatch between the learners' ideas of learning a language and those held by teachers has been brought up by many researchers.

Based on Brindley's findings (1984: 97) cited in Nunan(1988: 94), there is a strong basis for investigating learners' ideas of language learning. The issue of opposing ideas and suitability of language learning activities can be minimized if not eradicated completely. As stated in (Wenden: 1987: 113), having a knowledge of learners' ideas on language learning will provide insight into their learning difficulties and also provide a glimpse into the resistance learners may have towards certain activities. In other words, a knowledge of learners' ideas towards language learning, not only help the learner be aware of the way they learn but also help teachers to understand the differences in perceptions towards the suitability of learning strategies employed in classroom.

Research Methodology

Questionnaire

A set of questionnaire consisting two tasks was used to collect information on students' idea about language learning.

Task 1: The first section encompassed the demographic characteristics such as students' ethnicity, number of years they have been learning English, how frequently English was used at home, other languages spoken at home, other languages students were learning besides English, SPM grade for the English Language paper and whether or not the students attended English tuition in preparation for the SPM English Language paper.

The second section of Task 1 was a rating activity to investigate students' ideas of their preferred language learning activities. It was a ranking task where students had to rate the usefulness of various language learning activities on a scale of 1 to 5. One (1) being the least useful and Five (5) the most useful. There were 24 questions, with 6 questions for each dimension.

Some of the activities listed for the students to rate have been adapted from Willing (1988); Eltis and Low (1985) and Alcorso and Kalantzis (1985) as cited in Nunan (1998). These activities are categorized as follows:

a. Listening Skills:

Listening to recorded conversations, cassettes, radio, lecturers explaining new words, lecturers explaining grammar rules, other students discussing in groups, other students reading and answering questions orally on a given passage.

b. Speaking Skills

Conversation in pairs or groups, acting in English, playing games in English, practice pronunciation in class and participating in public speaking.

c. Reading Skills

Reading and answering questions on a passage silently; Reading and answering questions on a passage aloud; Reading and correcting own mistakes in essays for grammar.

d. Writing Skills

Constructing sentences based on grammatical items, essay writing, report writing for projects, summary writing, script writing for drama and journal writing.

Task 2: A Likert-type rating scale to investigate students' perception of how they learn English language. The students were asked to rate statements based on a Likert-scale between 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong agreement and 5 indicating strong disagreement. These statements

have been adapted from Nunan (1995), Wenden (1991) and Oxford (1990).

Task 2 contained items related to a variety of statements about learning English. Those items were aimed at providing insight into the preference of students in learning English. In other words, task 2 aimed to answer the last research question: *What are the preferences of students in learning English?*

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected was analysed using SPSS version 12.01. Frequency distributions were used to identify the profile of the respondents. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics such as t-test and ANOVA were used to identify any significant difference that exist between the perspective on learning English and the various demographic characteristics at a significant level of 0.05. The statistics used in answering the eight research questions is as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Statistics Used in Answering Research Questions

No.	Research Questions	Statistics
1	What are the students' perspectives on learning the English language through activities associated with listening, speaking, reading and writing skills?	Descriptive (mean and standard deviation)
2	What are the differences between male and female pre-commerce students' perception on second language learning?	Inferential (T-test)
3	What difference is there in the way students of pre-commerce UiTM Samarahan learn as compared to their counterparts in UiTM Mukah?	Inferential (T-test)
4	Is there any difference in the way students who had attended English tuition classes in preparation for their SPM exams learn the English Language?	Inferential (T-test)
5	Does language used at home affect the way students learn?	Inferential (T-test)
6	Does SPM English grade affect the way students learn the English Language?	Inferential (ANOVA test)
7	Does the frequency of English used at home influence the way a student learns?	Inferential (ANOVA test)
8	To determine the preference of students in learning English	Descriptive (mean and standard deviation)

Research Question 1: To examine the students' perspectives on learning the English language through activities associated with listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Table 2: Overall Minimum, Maximum, Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of the Four Aspects of the English Language Skills

Skills	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Dev.
Speaking	2.17	5.00	3.63	0.56
Reading	1.83	5.00	3.57	0.59
Writing	1.67	5.00	3.52	0.67
Listening	2.33	4.50	3.38	0.53

On the whole, students feel that all the four aspects are useful. The mean scores ranges from 3.38 to 3.63, which is above the average score of 3 based on Likert scale of 1 to 5. Among the four aspects, speaking is viewed as the most useful (mean score 3.63) while listening, the least useful in learning English (mean score of 3.38).

Further analysis on the speaking activities reveal in Table 2.1 (See Appendix) that practicing pronunciation in class is deemed the most useful activity (mean score of 3.86), followed by playing games (mean score of 3.96). And among the activities listed, it seems that students do not like conversation in pairs if given a choice.

Based on the mean score in Table 2.2 (See Appendix), the most preferred reading activity is that which involves reading and finding meaning of new words using dictionary (with a mean score of 3.94). This is followed by reading short stories and articles in the class. Among those activities that are not much preferred by these students are reading and correcting own mistakes for grammar, reading and answering questions on a passage silently and reading and correcting own mistakes for essays accordingly. The least favoured reading activity is that of reading and answering questions on a passage aloud. This may very well reflect the general attitude of second language learners of English in Malaysia whereby they rather keep quite and not learn anything than opening their mouth and making mistakes thus embarrassing themselves in public.

The respondents in this survey indicated their preference for writing activities that require them to construct sentences on given grammar items. This is a positive finding as far as the Pre-commerce programme

is concern because its main objective is to provide students with a strong grammar foundation as it is believe that a comprehensive knowledge of the grammar rules will ultimately lead to students being able to express themselves well both in writing and speaking. On the extreme continuum (See Appendix Table 2.3) is Journal writing. With a mean of 3.32, it is the least preferred writing activities among the respondents. Many respondents were of the opinion that essay writing is quite useful to help develop writing skills. Summary writing and script writing for drama, with a mean of 3.43 and 3.41 respectively, is comparatively not much favoured by the respondents.

With regards to activities related to the Listening skill as listed in Table 2.4 (See Appendix), listening to lecturer explaining grammar rules seems to be the most preferred activity. This is followed by Listening to lecturer explaining new words and also listening to the radio. Generally, the majority of the respondents rather listen to the teacher as compared to their peers. This is reflective from the mean score assigned to the following two activities: Listening to other students discussing in groups (mean score of 3.35) and Listening to other students reading and answering questions on a passage orally (mean score of 3.01), as compared to Listening to lecturer explaining grammar rules (mean score of 3.85) and Listening to lecturer explaining new wordsn (mean score of 3.74).

Research Question 2: To examine whether there are differences between male and female pre-commerce students' perception on second language learning, Table 3 below presents the results of t-test related to the four aspects according to gender.

Table 3: T-test for Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing by Gender

Aspects	Gender	n	Mean score	Standard Deviation	T-test for Equality of Means	
					T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Male	77	3.34	0.52	-1.132	0.259
	Female	78	3.43	0.52		
Speaking	Male	77	3.58	0.64	-0.898	0.371
	Female	78	3.67	0.48		
Reading	Male	77	3.51	0.61	-1.250	0.213
	Female	78	3.63	0.57		
Writing	Male	77	3.43	0.71	-1.785	0.076
	Female	78	3.62	0.61		

The t-test was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference in the perspectives on learning English language from four dimensions according to gender. Table 3 shows that female students have relatively higher mean scores for all the four dimensions as compared to male students. However t-test reveals that these difference are not significant (p = 0.259, 0.371, 0.213 and 0.076, $\alpha < 0.05$). It therefore can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the perspective on learning English language between male and female respondents from all the four aspects.

Research Question 3: To examine if there exist differences in the way Pre-Commerce students of UiTM Samarahan and UiTM Mukah learn English.

Table 4: T-test for Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing by Campus

Aspects	Campus	n	Mean score	Standard Deviation	T-test for Equality of Means	
					T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Mukah	122	3.37	0.55	-0.750	0.455
	Samarahan	33	3.45	0.44		
Speaking	Mukah	122	3.62	0.61	-0.243	0.809
	Samarahan	33	3.65	0.36		
Reading	Mukah	122	3.65	0.61	3.493	0.001*
	Samarahan	33	3.26	0.39		
Writing	Mukah	122	3.52	0.71	-0.304	0.762
	Samarahan	33	3.56	0.47		

Table 4 illustrates the results of T-test based on Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing according to Campus. The mean score for listening, speaking and writing (3.45, 3.65 and 3.56 respectively) for students in Samarahan is higher than the mean score for students in Mukah (3.37, 3.62 and 3.52 respectively). However the mean score for the reading dimension (mean score 3.65) of the Mukah campus students is higher than the mean scores of students in Samarahan campus (mean score 3.26). Further t-test reveals that this difference is significant (p = 0.001, $\alpha < 0.05$). It can be conclude that there is a significant difference in the perspectives on learning English from the reading dimension between students of these two campuses. Students in Mukah view reading as more useful and beneficial.

Research Question 4: Is there any difference in the way students who had attended English tuition classes in preparation for their SPM exams learn the English Language.

Table 5: T-test for Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Based on Students'Attendance of English Tuition

Aspects	English Tuition	n	Mean score	Standard Deviation	T-test for Equality of Means	
					T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Yes	63	3.33	0.50	-1.017	0.311
	No	92	3.42	0.54		
Speaking	Yes	63	3.60	0.51	-0.486	0.628
	No	92	3.64	0.60		
Reading	Yes	63	3.59	0.62	0.427	0.670
	No	92	3.55	0.58		
Writing	Yes	63	3.52	0.71	-0.080	0.936
	No	92	3.53	0.64		

The analysis of data as shown in Table 5 shows that there is slight difference in the mean score for all the four dimensions. However the t-test reveals that there is no significant difference in the way students who had attended English tuition classes in preparation for their SPM exams learn the English Language as compared to those who did not. Therefore it can be concluded that having attended English Language tuition classes in preparation for their SPM English paper, does not have an influence on the way students learn the English Language whilst pursuing their pre-commerce programme in UiTM.

Research Question 5: To examine whether there are differences in the way students learn according to language used at home.

Table 6 displays the analysis of data in relation to the language used at home and its effect on the way students learn the English Language. The findings reveal that students who speak Malay language at home have a higher mean score for listening, reading and writing but lower mean score for speaking. However the t-test indicates no significant difference in the way students learn based on the type of language used at home. Therefore it can be concluded that the language used at home has no direct influence on the way a pre-commerce student learns the English Language.

Table 6: T-test for Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing According to Language Used at Home

Aspects	Language used at home	n	Mean score	Standard Deviation	T-test for Equality of Means	
					T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Malay	109	3.40	0.55	0.671	0.503
	Others	46	3.34	0.45		
Speaking	Malay	109	3.61	0.56	-0.621	0.536
	Others	46	3.67	0.57		
Reading	Malay	109	3.62	0.57	1.741	0.084
	Others	46	3.44	0.62		
Writing	Malay	109	3.54	0.67	0.393	0.695
	Others	46	3.49	0.66		

Research Question 6: To examine whether the SPM English grade affect the way students learn English Language.

Table 7: ANOVA Test for Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Based on SPM English Results

Aspects	SPM English Results	n	Mean score	Standard Deviation	ANOVA	
					F	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Distinction	17	3.58	0.58		
	Credit	65	3.34	0.52	1.487	0.229
	Pass	73	3.84	0.51		
Speaking	Distinction	17	3.73	0.55		
	Credit	65	3.76	0.53	4.466	0.013*
	Pass	73	3.48	0.58		
Reading	Distinction	17	3.79	0.43		
	Credit	65	3.51	0.60	1.511	0.224
	Pass	73	3.57	0.61		
Writing	Distinction	17	3.86	0.67		
	Credit	65	3.52	0.54	2.582	0.079
	Pass	73	3.45	0.75		

Generally students who obtain distinction in SPM English tend to have better perspective (higher mean score) as compared to those who only obtain a pass in English at SPM level. Table 7 above shows that there is a slight variation in the mean score for all the four aspects among the three groups. ANOVA test demonstrates that the difference in mean score is only significant for the speaking aspects ($p = 0.013$, $\alpha < 0.05$).

It can be concluded that students who obtain only a pass in English have lower perspective on speaking when compared with those who obtain distinction and credit. ANOVA test also revealed that there is no significant difference in relation to the students' perspective of English language for listening, reading and speaking among the three groups.

Research Question 7: To examine whether the frequency of English used at home Influences the way a student learns.

Table 8: ANOVA Test for Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Based on the Frequency of English Used at Home

Aspects	Frequency of English used at home	n	Mean score	Standard Deviation	ANOVA	
					F	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Always	18	3.64	0.47		
	Sometimes	60	3.43	0.51	2.717	0.047*
	Rarely	62	3.27	0.51		
	Never	15	3.36	0.61		
Speaking	Always	18	3.80	0.54		
	Sometimes	60	3.74	0.54	3.020	0.032*
	Rarely	62	3.52	0.58		
	Never	15	3.40	0.48		
Reading	Always	18	3.54	0.71		
	Sometimes	60	3.40	0.60	3.414	0.019*
	Rarely	62	3.67	0.53		
	Never	15	3.84	0.47		
Writing	Always	18	3.58	0.79		
	Sometimes	60	3.53	0.61	0.831	0.479
	Rarely	62	3.45	0.69		
	Never	15	3.74	0.66		

Based on the mean scores illustrated in Table 8, it can be deduced that respondents who use English frequently at home (those who indicated 'always' in their responses), preferred listening and speaking activities. On the other hand, those who indicated 'rarely' and 'never', preferred reading and writing activities. This is reflected in the higher mean score for this group of respondents.

ANOVA test reveals that the differences in mean scores are significant for listening, speaking and reading activities ($p = 0.047$, 0.032 and 0.019, $\alpha < 0.05$).

Table 9: Frequency Distribution of What Students Think
Language Learning is Like

No.	Learning the English Language is like ….	Frequency
1	Learning to play a musical instrument	31
2	Solving a puzzle	30
3	Learning words in a play	22
4	Learning mathematics formulae	13
5	Learning to drive a car	15
6	Learning to play chess	8
7	Learning to swim	5
8	Learning to use the computer	5
9	Learning to play badminton	3

Table 9 shows the frequency distribution of students' choices relating to their ideas of the nature of language learning which is basically a metaphor task adapted from Hadfield (1992). The above activities fit into three broad categories indicative of the different views of language learning namely: A developmental process, with risk taking involved (activities such as learning to play a musical instrument, learning to walk, eat etc.); A cognitive activity involving looking for patterns, attending to form as well as content, memorization and understanding (activities such as solving puzzle, learning dates, learning maths formulae, learning words in a play…etc.); A form of procedural knowledge, involving the acquisition of skills and tactics, requiring effort and practise (activities such as learning to ride a bike, swim, play badminton, play chess…etc.)

The majority of the respondents (31 respondents) indicated that they view language learning similar to that of learning to play a musical instrument, as a representation of a developmental process with risk taking involved. An almost similar number (30 respondents), liken language learning to solving a puzzle, indicative of cognitive activity involving looking for patterns, attending to form as well as content, and memorization and understanding. Twenty-two respondents liken language learning to learning words in a play, followed by thirteen respondents choosing the metaphor of learning mathematics formulae; both of which reflect the cognitive view of language learning. The remaining respondents were of the view that language learning is a form of procedural knowledge, involving the acquisition of skills and tactics, requiring effort and practice. The majority of the remaining respondents (15 of them) chose the metaphor of learning to drive a car, followed by 8 respondents who selected learning to play chess, 5 respondents each indicated learning to

swim and learning to use the computer, respectively. Only three respondents liken language learning to learning to play badminton.

Research Question 8: To determine the preference of students in learning English

Table 10: How do I Learn English – Sorted According to Preferences

No.	Activities	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I like to be told the reasons for my mistakes in writing	4.83	0.74
2	I prefer the lecturer to correct all my mistakes in speaking	4.48	0.82
3	I prefer the lecturer to correct all my mistakes in writing	4.36	0.95
4	I like to be told how I can do better next time	4.35	0.75
5	I pay special attention to grammar	4.34	1.60
6	I like to be told the reasons for my mistakes in speaking	4.29	0.81
7	I like the lecturer to explain everything to us	4.25	0.84
8	I like to have my work graded	4.22	0.85
9	I try to identify the problems I face in learning English.	4.12	0.76
10	I try to do something about my problem in learning English.	4.12	0.84
11	I pay special attention to pronunciation	4.12	0.91
12	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	4.10	0.79
13	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.09	0.85
14	I try to continue learning English outside the classroom	4.06	0.74
15	I try to think I English.	4.05	0.83
16	I like to speak English with my friends and classmates outside the classroom	4.04	0.78
17	I pay special attention to vocabulary	4.04	0.91
18	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	4.03	0.92
19	I try not to get upset if I make mistakes	4.01	0.79
20	I think about my progress in learning English.	3.98	0.88
21	I have reasons for improving my English.	3.97	0.88
22	I compare what I say with what others say to see if I am using correct English.	3.95	0.76
23	I think about what I have learnt in the classroom	3.95	0.78
24	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.93	1.00
25	I ask people to correct me when I make a mistake	3.92	0.88
26	I look for clues that will help me understand how language works	3.83	0.87
27	When I don't know the meaning of a word, I guess it.	3.76	0.96
28	I learn more when I study in a group	3.67	1.13

(Cont'd)

(*Continue Table 10*)

29	I learn better when the lecturer is teaching me compared to learning in a group without the lecturer.	3.59	1.11
30	I have good techniques to learn English.	3.54	1.11
31	I prefer the lecturer to let me correct my own work	3.50	1.47
32	I prefer the lecturer to allow me to discover my own mistakes	3.32	1.56
33	I learn better by doing work by myself than listening to the lecturer.	3.27	1.06
34	I like to study English by myself	3.07	1.19
35	1 prefer to let other students correct my written work	2.94	1.18
36	I only need the lecturer and classroom activities to learn English.	2.80	1.21

Table 10 displays the findings in relation to students' preferences with regards to certain statements about learning English. The objective of this task is to identify students' views on how they perceive given statements which are representative of the following categories:

- Attitude towards error correction
- Attitude towards autonomy
- Attitude towards group and individual work
- Goal setting behavioural statements
- Role of affective state
- Attitude towards feedback

Based on the mean scores of each item in Table 10, it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents like to be told the reasons for their mistakes in writing (mean score of 4.83). They also indicated their preference for having the lecturer to correct all their mistakes in speaking. Generally it can be stated that statements representative of attitude towards error correction have revealed higher mean scores, indicating that the majority of respondents are of the view that error-correction is an important aspect of learning a language.

The results in Table 10, also provides a clear indication of respondents attitude towards autonomy; the majority is of the view that they do not prefer to correct their own work (mean score of 3.50), to discover their own mistakes (mean score 3.32), and doing work on their own without having to listen to the lecturer (mean score 3.27).

The lowest mean score among the 36 statements is assigned to the statement "I only need the lecturer and classroom activities to learn

English" (mean score of 2.80) indicating the respondents acknowledgement of the importance of using the target language beyond the limits of their classroom.

Implications

An important finding in this study is that some students even made clear that they believe practice should come only after listening and that speaking in class may be beneficial to one's classmates who are listening.

Thus the implication for UiTM's classroom practice is that lecturers should ensure they provide enough input as required by their learners, perhaps through using the target language in classroom management and when organising classroom learning. However, it is not intended that lecturers revert to high amount of lecturer talk as some students also show that they need to practice and learn speaking with their peers and that they do not require lecturer input all the time.

Recommendations

The findings of this study show that learners possess varied views on language learning and are generally aware of how they themselves are learning. However, we should also bear in mind the fact that learners in this study come to UiTM after passing their SPM and knew the importance of learning English. However, a reasonable number of these students studying in UiTM were from the urban areas like Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, Penang, Johor Bahru and Kota Bharu. It is suggested that in future a comparison be made between the perspectives of the students between those who come from the urban and rural areas be made so that a more accurate picture be known about the perspectives of UiTM students towards learning the English language.

It is also suggested that lecturers' perceptions of the usefulness of language learning activities be investigated to find out if there are any mismatches between their views and those of the learners. Lecturers carrying out the study could also be asked to evaluate the usefulness of this exercise to gauge their perceptions towards learner training.

Conclusion

Investigating learners' perceptions about language learning has a dual purpose of raising learners' awareness of how they themselves are learning and for the lecturers, to gain a better understanding of their learners' perceptions of the language learning process which may perhaps translate into more useful and effective classroom practice. For the learners, it is a step towards developing their metacognition and understanding of how they and others are learning with the ultimate aim of discovering more effective ways of language learning.

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Appendix

Table 2.1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Speaking Aspect

No.	Activities	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Practicing pronunciation in class	3.86	0.86
2	Playing language games in English	3.69	0.91
3	Participating in public speaking	3.69	0.97
4	Conversation in groups	3.55	0.85
5	Acting in English	3.51	1.01
6	Conversation in pairs	3.47	0.97
	Overall	**3.63**	**0.56**

Table 2.2: Mean and Standard Deviation on Reading Aspect

No.	Activities	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Reading and finding meaning of new words using dictionary	3.94	1.00
2	Reading short stories and articles in the class.	3.85	0.84
3	Reading and correcting own mistakes for grammar.	3.55	1.08
4	Reading and answering questions on a passage silently.	3.52	1.00
5	Reading and correcting own mistakes for essays.	3.30	1.09
6	Reading and answering questions on a passage aloud.	3.29	1.05
	Overall	**3.57**	**0.59**

Table 2.3: Mean and Standard Deviation on Writing Aspect

No.	Activities	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Constructing sentences based on grammar items.	3.79	0.89
2	Essay writing.	3.67	0.94
3	Report writing for projects.	3.55	1.14
4	Summary writing.	3.43	1.05
5	Script writing for drama.	3.41	1.12
6	Journal writing.	3.32	1.06
	Overall	**3.52**	**0.67**

Table 2.4: Mean and Standard Deviation on Listening Aspect

No.	Activities	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Listening to lecturer explaining grammar rules	3.85	0.93
2	Listening to lecturer explaining new words	3.74	0.92
3	Listening to cassettes/ radio	3.40	0.99
4	Listening to other students discussing in groups	3.35	0.96
5	Listening to other students reading and answering questions on a passage orally	3.01	1.02
6	Listening to recorded conversation	2.99	1.07
	Overall	**3.38**	**0.53**