UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

BULETIN APB

EDUCATION FOR BETTER FUTURE



EDISI 17

OKTOBER 2026

AKADEMI PENGAJIAN BAHASA
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA
CAWANGAN NEGERI SEMBILAN
KAMPUS SEREMBAN

Beyond Grades and AI: Developing Authentic English Skills for Future Employability

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In Malaysia, substantial alterations have transformed English language learning, leading to expectations that learners actively expand and employ the language. These changes have led to expectations that learners actively expand and use English. Back then, English learning was often associated with examinations, where achieving excellent results through reading and writing tasks was the primary focus. However, the current education system is moving towards a more practical approach that encourages learners to use English instantly. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is an undertaking to facilitate this transformation by emphasising different aspects of language proficiency, including communication skills (Council of Europe, 2018). Simultaneously, the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced new opportunities, but overreliance on these tools may impair learners' capacity to communicate autonomously. Consequently, English instruction must balance technological integration with practical language application. This article discusses how English education in Malaysia can transcend examination-oriented learning by promoting authentic language use, responsible AI integration, and stronger preparation for future employability.



Bringing English Authenticity Out of Examination

It has been a while since important examinations like UPSR and PT3 were abolished. English learning no longer depends on examinations, even though schools still run small tests. CEFR, or the Common European Framework of Reference, is used to measure language ability among learners from primary to tertiary education, defining six proficiency levels, from A1 (beginner) to C6 (near-native).

The implementation of CEFR suggests that speaking proficiency is as crucial as reading and writing (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 5). Not only that, educators are guided by the guidelines provided by CEFR to train learners in English language skills that cover the ability to use English not only in the classroom but also in the real world (Wok Zaki & Darmi, 2021). This is because the implementation of CEFR in terms of practice and topics covered ranges from basic to daily life communication. Language learning is encouraged to be collaborative and varied in activities; thus, learners will adapt to be proactive and responsive when participating in class (Ahmad Sukri et al., 2025). If CEFR is implemented correctly and actively, classroom learning becomes a fundamental platform to prepare learners to learn English authentically rather than relying solely on theories.

AI in English Learning

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now considered a pivotal part of learning in English classrooms. The use of AI, such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude, started as additional material for teaching and learning and has grown to be an important element embedded in English language learning. AI should not be the main tool, but its existence is undeniable. Educators have complained about the massive overuse of AI

in academic contexts, ranging from as basic as brainstorming ideas to completing assessments. Such a situation undoubtedly triggers an overreliance on AI, resulting in well-crafted written products but a lack of ability to produce fluent spoken and spontaneous outcomes. This situation has led to a unanimous agreement that we must regulate AI use and provide proper training for its implementation, ensuring that the assistant tool is taught effectively. The saying “if you can't beat them, join them” describes the current English learning situation in Malaysia. One way to cope with the advancement of AI is to incorporate its use in learning while maintaining control. Training or courses related to English learning that highlight academic credibility should be introduced so that learners understand that using AI is allowed but within a certain range, as long as the authenticity and credibility of the products are prioritised (Felice, March 12, 2026). For example, learners can use ChatGPT to generate ideas at the beginning of the writing process, provided they review these ideas and understand the framework they use to develop the content. This approach will encourage learners to have a sense of control over the content, learn pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and receive real-time feedback (Zhao, 2025).

From English in Classrooms to Employability

With the abolition of examinations and the implementation of AI in education, the idea that learning English is no longer needed begins to be indoctrinated among Malaysian learners. To some extent, learners start to believe that English learning does not require teachers or formal classes, as AI or Internet platforms can take the role. This propaganda has begun to show its effects, as evidenced by a deterioration in interest, attendance, and academic results. The situation not only negatively impacts English learners' proficiency in classes but also jeopardises their overall communication skills. The reliance on AI has resulted in learners having limited mastery of English, and their application of English is minimal. It significantly affects the employability of school leavers and graduates. This situation has raised concerns not only among academics but also among employers in Malaysia, as English is prominent as the second language and is treated as a lingua franca in the economy and international business apart from Bahasa Malaysia. To prepare students for employment, the Malaysian Education Ministry is now gradually amending and improving the policies. Educational institutions have also taken steps to embed workplace English courses, professional communication skills training, and related and systematic evaluations (Mustafa, July 11, 2018). It is critical to revamp undergraduate curricula to assess, balance, and strengthen English language skills, communication skills, confidence, and professional presentation skills among undergraduates (Nesaratnam et al., 2020). This effort is not just for the sake of academic achievement, but Zawawi et al. (2025) agree it will be an asset and investment for future employability, especially in the demanding labour market.

Conclusion

Future English proficiency among learners in Malaysia depends on the changes and improvements made to English language and communication skills offered in educational institutions, embedding AI application skills and highlighting authentic English use over examination-oriented English. The Malaysian Education Ministry and academics have tried all possible ways and are planning to ensure the success of improving the achievement of English learners. However, all these depend on learners taking English language learning seriously.

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