

EXPLORING STUDENT VOICE FOR LEARNER-DRIVEN LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Current pedagogy has witnessed a paradigm shift towards a more learner-centred approach where the individual learner is the focus of teaching rather than the body of knowledge. As principles guiding learner-centred learning become more defined, therein lays a critical call to take heed of student voice for more effective delivery systems and teacher growth. Therefore, this paper explored student voice regarding the implementation of an English Language course offered to students under the Mengubah Destini Anak Bangsa (MDAB) programme in UiTM, Malaysia. The study involved 341 pre-diploma students from three UiTM branch campuses. Data were collected using a questionnaire and nine focus group interviews. Findings revealed that students held rather positive and favourable views towards the implementation of the program with regards to lecturer preparation, language use, lesson presentation, classroom management and classroom atmosphere. Inferential statistics revealed that there was no significant difference in the students' perceptions with regards to gender and discipline of study but a significant difference was seen with regards to language proficiency and campus locality. Students also highlighted concerns regarding student language proficiency, contact hours, the course curriculum, assignments, teaching staff and learning within a homogenous group. Students called for a more learner-driven curriculum that would address their needs and build upon their knowledge and skills so that they

could become more holistic and confident tertiary students. The findings implied that student voice cannot be ignored as it has a role for effective feedback and learner-driven learning.

Keywords: student voice, learner-centred learning, feedback, Pre-Diploma English language Course.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Malaysia has witnessed significant gains in terms of student enrolment in higher education. Access to higher education as a result of democratization and massification of education reached a gross enrolment rate of 48% in 2012 indicating a 70% increase in enrolment in the past decade to reach 1.2 million students (Ministry of Education, 2015). In a bid to provide greater access to higher education (HE, hereafter), numerous programmes have been put in place for all types of learners including learners at risk.

There is no denying that the most challenging and daunting task that educators have to deal with is addressing learner difficulties. These difficulties range from unmotivated learners to marginalized learners. Having to work with marginalized learners who face the risk of dropping out is a concern for educators in institutions of higher learning (IHL hereafter). Therefore IHL have taken various steps and implemented in-house programmes to help motivate such students at-risk of failure. Campbell and Ramey (1995), note that IHL that take a pro-active approach in early intervention programmes to address problems faced by at-risk students have better outcomes including a positive effect on improving student academic performance. One such programme taken by a local public university in Malaysia is the Changing the Destiny of Indigenous People or the *Mengubah Destini Anak Bangsa* (MDAB, hereafter) programme.

The MDAB Programme was established in July 2010 by the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM, hereafter). Its main aim is to provide educational opportunities for the qualified but poor indigenous students from both rural and urban areas who fail to gain entry into existing pre-university courses in Malaysian public universities. This program

serves as a platform for them to further their studies at diploma and degree courses thus enabling them to gain wider employability access. The program currently conducts three pre-diploma courses, which are Pre-Commerce, Pre-Accountancy and Pre-Science Programmes at sixteen (16) UiTM branches nationwide. Students undertaking all these three pre-diploma courses also have to take the compulsory Pre-Diploma English Language Preparatory Course as English is viewed as an essential 21st century skill in today's globalised economies. The Pre-Diploma English Language (PDEL, hereafter) Course is a six-credit unit course that is designed to upgrade the proficiency level of pre-diploma students. The primary focus of the program is on reading and listening with appropriate consideration given to speaking and writing. It also incorporates lessons on grammar which is taught incidentally through listening, reading, speaking and writing tasks.

Though the PDEL Course has been implemented for close to five years now, there has been no holistic evaluation of the course. Interviews with the lecturers teaching the course revealed that through the years slight changes have been made to the PDEL course curriculum based mainly on lecturers' feedback with little or no feedback from students. Moreover, there has been scant empirical evidence of a holistic evaluation of the course especially where student voice is concerned. According to Keane and Labhrainn (2005), course evaluation is important as it helps to improve the quality of course delivery and to provide direct feedback to teaching staff. Moreover, it also allows one to make comparisons between courses delivered within and across departments. Even expert researchers such as Hattie (2008), who have conducted decades of research, revealed that getting feedback from all stakeholders especially students had "the most powerful influences on achievement" (p. 173).

We need to understand that current teaching pedagogy postulates a shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred education. According to Tudor (1996), learner-centered education is an approach where learners should play more active and participatory roles in their learning process. Consequently, students should no longer be viewed as passive recipients with teachers as the primary source of knowledge but rather as active learners who are capable of providing constructive feedback for sustainable, responsive and systematic approach to transform their own learning process. More importantly, encouraging student voice in a learner-centred approach is based on the

assumption that learners are actively involved in negotiating their learning process as they have unlimited potential for individual development. Liu, Qiao and Liu (2006) reiterate that the individual learner is the focus of teaching rather than the body of information whilst the instructor provides students with ample opportunities to learn independently and from one another. Engaging students to lend their voice in providing feedback gives students the opportunity to influence not only classroom activities but also curriculum and education policies (Harper, 2000).

Fletcher (2014) defines student voice as “any expression of any learner regarding anything related to education” (p2). Harper (2000) highlights, that student voice can be either the individual or the collective voice of students within the classroom learning context. It can also be viewed both as a metaphorical practice as well as a pragmatic concern. Fletcher (2014) a recognized expert on student voice stressed that “It is not enough to simply listen to student voice. Educators have an ethical imperative to do something with students, and that is why meaningful student involvement is vital to school improvement” (p.2). To this, Sidhu (2009) further reiterated that such a learning context calls for instructors to ensure students are coached with the appropriate skills so that they can manage (i.e. plan, organize, monitor and evaluate) their own learning. Such an approach will systematically help learners develop learner autonomy necessary 21st century life-long learning skill (Sidhu et. al, 2011).

This was also articulated by Scott-Webber (2012) who stressed that higher education today has been turned ‘upside down’ through the massive changes in ICT that are reshaping learner needs. Hence educators today need to adhere to this wake-up call to change and move towards a 21st century learning model where exploring student voice is as important as helping them make meaning of the learning process. Scott-Webber (2012) reemphasized that educators who see themselves as content experts and providers are redundant in today’s learning spaces as students can locate content anywhere and at any time. What is perhaps more important is listening to student voices and helping them make sense of their learning.

Therefore, getting feedback from students and getting their voice heard is of utmost importance. Seldin (1997), highlighted that giving students a voice to provide feedback and appraisals of courses is invaluable when

the right questions are asked. Students can be asked to articulate what they have learnt in a course and also report on aspects such as a lecturer's ability to communicate at their level, the lecturer's professional and ethical behavior in the classroom, student-teacher relationships and lecturer's ability to stimulate interest in the subject matter. Such feedback can lead to improvement of teaching. Lodge (2008) further reiterated that involving students in dialogue about their own learning can actually help them become better learners and consequently help teachers to improve their pedagogy. More importantly she pointed out that though schools and other institutions of learning have long involved students in obtaining feedback, student voice to date has been rather tokenistic or limited. This means that student voice was only heard on issues such as hostel accommodation, lockers, meals and uniforms with less than 12% attention been given to issues on teaching and learning. This again is a testimony that we need to engage student voice to improve teaching and learning.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to explore student voice on the implementation of the PDEL Course. Nevertheless, this paper will only address a section of a holistic study that was conducted and will seek to address the following research questions:

What are the students' perceptions of the implementation of the Pre-Diploma English Language course?

Is there any significant difference in student voice on the implementation of the Pre Diploma English Language course with regards to gender, discipline, language proficiency and locality?

What are the students' main issues of concerns with regards to the implementation of the Pre-Diploma English Language course?

THE STUDY

This study was conducted in UiTM which is the largest public university in Malaysia. It has branch campuses in all the 14 states in Malaysia. In UiTM, English Language is the medium of instruction and a mandatory pass in English is a requirement for students to graduate. For this study, three UiTM branch campuses were randomly selected for the study – i.e. Melaka, Seremban and Kelantan. The final population sample comprised a

total of 341 Pre-Diploma students taking the PDEL course. The demographic profile of the respondents is provided in Table 1 below.

In this study, the respondents' English language proficiency was determined based on their results in the Secondary Five SPM (Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia) English Language examination. Based on their results, students who obtained a distinction A were categorized as possessing high language proficiency, students with credits B, C and D (20.5%) as average language proficiency whilst the rest were categorized as having limited English language proficiency (75.8%).

The data for this study was collected using two instruments, namely a questionnaire and focus group interviews. The questionnaire was administered to all the 341 respondents and respondents were coded based on their locality – e.g. R2M referred to Respondent 2 from Melaka

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	103	30.2
Female	238	69.8
Locality		
Melaka	147	43.1
Seremban	75	22.0
Kelantan	119	34.9
Disciplines		
Science	80	23.5
Non-Science	261	76.5

In each branch campus three focus group interviews were conducted. Each focus group was formed based on their language proficiency and they were randomly selected by their lecturers. The focus groups were labeled Group A (high proficiency), Group B (average proficiency) and Group C (limited proficiency). Each focus group comprised between eight to ten students and the students were coded based on their group – for instance RM-A3-Melaka referred to a Male (M) Respondent (R) number 3 from Group A (high proficiency). A total of nine focus groups comprising 85

students were interviewed from the three branch campuses. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics whilst the qualitative data was analyzed using both deductive and inductive analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Given below are the main findings of the study. The findings are presented based on the research three questions posed in this study.

Student Voice on the Implementation of the PDEL Course

Research question 1 in this study explored student voice with regards to the implementation of the PDEL course. Findings obtained from the questionnaires (Table 2), show that respondents held rather positive views towards the implementation of the PDEL Course ($M=4.20$, $SD=.545$). They were pleased with lecturer preparation, language use and lesson presentation. They also felt that lecturers were able to maintain good classroom management which exhibited a warm and open classroom atmosphere.

Based on the dimensions displayed in Table 2, it can be seen that students agreed with most of the statements. Firstly, most of them acknowledged that their lecturers have clear lesson plans when it comes to the preparation of the lessons ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .754$) and lecturers provided them with interesting exercises and activities ($M=4.39$, $SD .696$). Moreover, lesson presentation was viewed favourably by students as lecturers used English language effectively in the course ($M = 4.39$, $SD=.696$) and frequently checked on students' understanding ($M=4.32$, $SD=.745$). Besides that lecturers gave their students ample opportunities to speak ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .745$) and provided them with constructive feedback ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .745$). With regards to classroom management, lecturers used small groups/ pair work effectively ($M=4.28$, $SD=.692$), and the seating arrangement facilitated the learning process. Lecturers encouraged students to speak English ($M = 4.10$, $SD=.763$) and they provided constructive feedback ($M = 4.22$, $SD=.745$). On the whole, the findings revealed that lecturers were able to maintain a positive, warm and open climate as student participation was active ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .777$) and lecturers were sensitive to students' abilities and challenges ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.847$). Such positive behaviour shown by lecturers is often appreciated by students.

According to Samson and Collins (2012) including established routines, extending talk on a single topic, providing ample opportunities to converse and offering students with immediate and constructive feedback are all strategies to enhance student learning. They also added that teachers should speak slowly, using clear repetition and paraphrasing to support and check student learning frequently.

Table 2: Perceptions on the Implementation of the PDEL Course (n=341)

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Preparation		
Clear lesson plan	4.33	.754
Interesting exercises and activities	4.25	.756
Language Use		
The lecturer used English effectively	4.39	.696
Lesson Presentation		
Lesson was presented clearly	4.31	.671
Achieved the objectives of the course	4.16	.727
Time allocated for was appropriate	4.06	.799
Students were given opportunities to speak in English	4.10	.763
Lecturer gives frequent constructive feedback	4.22	.745
Lecturer asked different types of questions	4.17	.750
Lecturer checks for comprehension frequently	4.32	.745
Classroom Management		
Use of small groups/pair work was appropriate	4.28	.692
Seating arrangements facilitated learning	4.09	.748
Lecturer divided his/her attention appropriately	4.15	.781
Students were encouraged to use English	4.17	.791
The lecturer and students spoke in English	3.99	.815
Classroom Atmosphere		
Students' participation was active and lively	4.03	.777
Warm, open and pleasant atmosphere	4.12	.717
Sensitive to students' difficulties and abilities	4.20	.768
Promoted grammatical accuracy	4.25	.727
Appropriate teaching techniques	4.30	.705
Varied the tasks according to students' abilities	4.20	.740

Use of Technology		
Used appropriate technology	4.22	.847
Total	4.20	.545

Scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=almost agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Focus group interviews conducted also corroborated the above findings. Majority of the respondents spoke favourably regarding lecturers, their preparation, classroom management and ability to create a warm and open learning environment. For instance, student respondents from Seremban (RF-A2 and RM-B5) and Kelantan (RF-A1, RF-B3 & RF-C1) pointed out that their lecturers took time to attend to their needs and often coached them on a one-to-one basis. Respondent RF-A5-Seremban highlighted that, “My lecturer teaches us one-by-one. She focuses on every student in her class. So, she knows which students are weak and which one is good.” Besides that students also pointed out their lecturers used interesting books and always motivated them. Respondent RF-B7- Melaka further reiterated, that, “my lecturer uses interesting books and she uses a clear approach when she teaches us. She also always motivates us. This makes our English language classes fun and interesting”

Respondents from all three branch campuses also stressed that their lecturers provided them with many interesting exercises and activities in the course. Evidence can be seen in the following excerpts:

‘Lecturers see our fluency level in English and give marks through role play. We can write our own dialogue in that role play. Thus, we enjoy doing it.’ (RF- B3- Melaka)

‘In listening, we listen to the audio and answer question. It is interesting activity when my lecturer read clearly and we write. She pronounce the words and we have to write the spelling correctly. (RF – B7-Kelantan)

‘For listening, sometimes we do dictation. Our exercise is to listen and write, we know the word but we can’t spell it.’ (RF-B3-Seremban)

‘We first listen to the story from the novel. Then, we do a role play based on the story, in group around 3 to 4 per group. We write our own scripts from the novel and change it a little bit.’- (RF-B9- Kelantan)

Findings from the interviews conducted also revealed that a majority of the students used both English and Bahasa Malaysia (Malay Language) during their PDEL course. The use of code switching was considered a norm in almost all their classrooms. For instance, Respondent RM-B3- Melaka pointed out that:

'Students normally use mixed languages. But we often use Malay as we are more confident in using Malay language in expressing our opinion and delivering our message for others to understand. Although our lecturers use full English in class but we still respond using mixed languages. . .many of us do that I think it is ok'

All the above articulation by student voice concurs with literature on effective instruction and reflects what Ellis (2008) as cited in Rahman and Alhaisoni, (2013) highlights that current English language teaching methodologies should focus on the significance of providing learners with ample opportunities to communicate and activities that engage and encourage student participation.

Student Voice based on Gender, Discipline, Locality and Language Proficiency

Research Question 2 in this study investigated if there was a significant difference in students' perception of the implementation of the English Language course based on the following variables; gender, disciplines, language proficiency and locality. To ascertain any significance different in the students' perceptions about the course based on their language proficiency, T- Tests and One Way Anova analyses were conducted to discover any correlations between these variables with their preferences

From the findings shown in Table 3, it can be seen that there were no significant differences in the students' perceptions of the implementation of the PDEL Course with regards to gender [$t(339) = -1.364, p = .173$] as well as their disciplines [$t(170.745) = -.428, p = .669$]. However, there was a significant difference in the students' perceptions on the implementation

of the PDEL Course with regards to language proficiency ($p=.695$, $p>.05$) and their campus locality ($p=.013$, $p<.05$) at the 0.05 level.

With regards to gender, female students displayed a higher mean score ($M=4.22$, $SD=.522$) compared to male students ($M=4.13$, $SD=.603$). Though this may reveal a more favourable response to the implementation of the PDEL Course the difference was not significant. Likewise non-Science students displayed a higher mean score ($M=4.20$, $SD=.578$) compared to Science-based students ($M=4.16$, $SD=.446$). Though this may indicate that non-Science students held better perceptions of this course compared to their counterparts in the Science disciplines, the difference was again not significant.

Nevertheless there was a significant difference in student voice with regards to language proficiency. Students with high proficiency held better perceptions of the course ($M=4.28$, $SD=.418$) when compared to their peers with low ($M=4.20$, $SD=.568$) and medium ($M=4.15$, $SD=.496$) proficiency levels. This was also articulated by students during the focus group interviews. For instance respondent RM-A9- from Seremban pointed out that he was happy with the course because his lecturer taught all components and emphasized two-way communication. He added: ‘I think the way lecturer conducts this course is really good. She teaches all components and indirectly includes grammar in her class. She also emphasizes two-way communication.’

Table 3: Correlation Tests on Students’ Perceptions of the Implementation based on Variables (n=341)

Variable		T- Test				
		Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Gender	Equal variances assumed	.142	.706	-1.364	339	.173
Disciplines	Equal variances assumed	3.907	.049	-.428	170.745	.669

		One Way ANOVA				
Variables		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Proficiency	Between Groups	.219	2	.110	.364	.695
	Within Groups	101.946	338	.302		
Campus	Between Groups	2.591	2	1.296	4.398	.013
	Within Groups	99.574	338	.295		

On the other hand, low proficiency students voiced out their concern about the pace of the course. Due to the fast-paced lesson, Respondent RM-C5- Melaka said he could not understand what have taught in the class and further reiterated that *“I can’t cope with what my lecturer teaches me because her way of teaching is a bit too fast.”*

A significant difference was also seen in terms of locality. Among the three branch campuses, respondents from Kelantan (M= 4.31, SD= .557), voiced the most favourable perceptions compared to respondents from Seremban (M=4.17, SD=.451) and Melaka (M=4.11, SD=.573). These findings were further supported by the data in the interviews. A majority of the students interviewed in Kelantan held good perceptions as to how the course was implemented. Respondent RF-A8 added that, *“My friends and I like learning English here we can practice and do many activities together. The English activities are fun and the lecturers are all very kind and understanding.”*

Though some significant differences were seen between groups, researchers such as Norton (2000) caution that variables such as gender, and the level of academic performance is not the sole determiner on whether a student can develop positive feeling towards learning depending on how they learn or not as language teaching and learning is *“a complex social practice that engages the identities of language learners.”* (p.132)

Student Voice on Issues of Concerns Regarding the PDEL Course

Focus group interviews which focused on listening to the students' voice on the implementation of the PDEL Course revealed that students had a number of concerns despite the rosy picture painted by the quantitative data collected via the questionnaire. In-depth interviews with the nine focus groups of students revealed that they had some issues regarding language proficiency, contact hours, the PDEL Course curriculum, assignments, teaching staff and learning within a homogenous group.

Firstly, the students voiced great concern regarding their limited English language proficiency. All students stressed that they were aware that learning English is important as it is a global and international language for knowledge business and commerce. More importantly, English is the medium of instruction in UiTM. As Dumaniga, David and Symaco (2012) posited, good communication skills especially in English language is expected by various stakeholders, and its acquisition signal better opportunities for job securement, both within the local as well as the global context. Student voice in this study unveiled that the greatest difficulty that they faced was understanding instructions and lectures conducted 100% in English. They felt that some lecturers spoke too fast whilst some used only English and refused to translate difficult words into Bahasa Malaysia. Yeh (2014) highlighted that comprehending lectures in a second language as a tremendous challenge for ESL students, which may negatively impact their learning of subject knowledge. Henceforth, the lecturers should take their time to not only clarify the students' understanding of what have been taught, but also allowing the students to process question and formulate proper responses in any discussion held (Wright et al., 2006).

Another issue of concern linked closely to student proficiency that was raised by a large majority of the students was the number of contact hours for the PDEL Course. Students from all three campuses highlighted that they were aware of their limited English language proficiency and they felt that the contact hours for the teaching and learning of English for the PDEL Course should be increased from the current 6 hours to 12 hours per week. Some students such as Respondents RF-A3-Melaka, RF-B2-Seremban and RM-A10-Seremban suggested that an immersion course

component be included during the semester break so that they can get more exposure to learning English. This probably calls for understanding the learner and catering to their needs. Cheatham, Silva, Wodrich and Kasai (2014) proposed that when more information about a student's language proficiency is provided, teachers are better able to identify the problems that their students face in language learning better, thus allowing them to pursue the correct intervention to be applied.

Focus group interviews especially with the three groups of high proficiency students and some students with average proficiency revealed that the PDEL curriculum left much to be desired. Students such as Respondents RF-A8-Melaka, RF-A10-Melaka, RM-A1-Kelantan, RF-B2-Seremban and RF-A2-Seremban, were rather vocal when they said that they felt that they learnt very little under the PDEL course curriculum in comparison to the language curriculum offered to them during their upper secondary school days. Further probing revealed that what was given to them was a watered down version of what they did in lower secondary school. Respondent RF-A8-Melaka felt she had learnt 'nothing' under the PDEL course and further reiterated that "I think I learnt more English during my school days and what we learn here is rather simple and not challenging". These students felt that too much focus was given to the receptive skills of listening and reading with little help in improving their productive skills of speaking and writing. To this Respondent RF-A9-Seremban added that during her secondary school days she had to "write long essays of about 300 plus words" but under the PDEL course she was only required and taught to write "short paragraphs". Another respondent RF-B4-Melaka further stressed that she needed help in grammar and what she learnt did not help much to improve her language proficiency. This finding is very much in sync with research which exhibits that very often students at risk such as those under the current MDAB run the risk of receiving a watered-down curriculum that may only emphasize basic skills and not getting students engaged in interesting and challenging learning tasks (Scharberg, 2006). Respondent RM-A9-Melaka further added that student voice should be given heard and called for a more learner-driven curriculum that would address their needs in language learning and soft skills that can help build upon their knowledge and skills so that they could become more holistic and confident tertiary students.

In line with the teaching and learning, respondents also voiced concern regarding the many assignments and ‘little tests’ that they had to do ‘almost every week’ during each semester. Respondents from all three proficiency groups (e.g. RF-A4-Melaka, RF-B5-Melaka, RF-A9-Seremban, RM-A1-Seremban) drew attention to the fact that since most of their classroom time was spent on working on assignments such as presentations and pop-quizzes, there was little or no time for effective learning and teacher instruction. This was succinctly put by RM-B10-Melaka when he said that:

“I think this course has too many assignments, pop-quizzes and tests . . .and I think the lecturers have no time to teach us . . .I felt I did not learn much because most of the time the lecturer is testing us and giving us work. . . .when do they really teach us?”

Even though students spoke favourably about their lecturers, there was a small majority of students who highlighted that some of their lecturers left much to be desired. Respondents such as RF-B4-Kelantan, RM-A6-Melaka and RF-C3 felt that her lecturers were ‘too young and lacked confidence’ in both classroom management and teaching approaches. To this respondents such as RF-B9-Seremban and RM-C7-Melaka added that young lecturers were ‘too lenient’ and ‘often the students took advantage’ such as not submitting assignments and “deadlines’ were not adhered to. Respondent RF-B3- Seremban felt rather disappointed as some lecturers were ‘not serious in doing a good job of teaching’. Respondent RF-B3-Kelantan felt she liked “senior lecturers because students cannot play the fool with them.” To this Respondent RM-B2-Melaka added that senior lecturers “are more concerned with teaching and if they are a little strict, we will learn more.”

An issue that received a mixed response by students was regarding the homogeneous learning environment in UiTM. As most of the respondents are Malays and of the Muslim faith a majority highlighted that they were now more ‘willing and confident’ to speak in English.” Nevertheless, there was a small majority who felt otherwise. Respondents such as RM-A1-Kelantan, RF-A4-Seremban and RF-B2-Seremban highlighted that though their peers had gained some confidence in speaking English, they were ‘afraid to speak in English’ once they were out of their ‘UiTM comfort zone.” RM-A1-

Kelantan highlighted that the homogeneous learning environment had in his opinion ‘some minus factors’ as his peers ‘dared not speak and function in English when they have to deal with other people.’ He felt that their lecturers should provide them with more opportunities to use English in a variety of contexts and people. Gil (2009) suggested the probability of not allowing the students to have liberal opportunities to use English in real life situations and a lack of exposure to authentic English language material can impede their learning. To this, Naryanan (2009) adds that diversity should be the way forward in today’s classrooms as everyone can profit from working in heterogeneous groups. Both students and teachers need to understand that diversity is not a drawback but has benefits for all.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this study revealed that students generally voiced positive and favourable opinions regarding the implementation of the PDEL course. They were pleased with lecturer preparation, language use and lesson presentation. More importantly, their lecturers were able to maintain a good learning environment with fun and interesting activities. This displayed a warm and open classroom atmosphere. Nonetheless, focus group interviews revealed that students voiced a number of issues and concerns regarding the PDEL course. They were aware of their limited language proficiency and sought to have more time allocated for the teaching and learning of English. Besides that some students felt that they PDEL course curriculum was a watered down version as they actually learnt less compared to their English language curriculum in secondary schools. They looked forward to more input for the acquisition of productive skills of speaking and writing. The concerns raised by students also revealed that there were too many assignments, leaving little time for effective teaching and learning to take place. Some students felt that the lecturers teaching them were rather young and inexperienced to maintain effective classroom management issues and hoped that more experienced and senior lecturers taught them. A few others highlighted their concern learning English in a homogeneous environment.

This study which explored student voice indicates that student feedback can provide rather valid and reliable information which can help enhance delivery of programmes offered in IHL. More importantly it can lead to

a learner driven curriculum which focuses on learner-centred education. Listening to student voice can help educators work collaboratively with students to decide what, how and in what time-frame effective learning can take place. This can also help lecturers decide on the types of activities, teaching approaches and techniques preferred by their students. When educators focus on the learner, their role changes from that of a 'sage on stage' to the 'guide by the side' to help student learning by utilising learner interests and needs. What we need to keep in mind in today's 21st century classroom is that student voice will direct a learner driven curriculum.

Therefore, educators should not lament that there is no time to listen to students as feedback from student voice can bring about change in learning and teacher growth. According to Wiggins (2012), in today's classroom there should be less teaching and more feedback as student voice is the key to achieving greater learning. This was also reiterated by Seldin (1997) who emphasised that teaching often falls short of a complete assessment but if teaching is to be improved, exploring student voice cannot be ignored. He put it succinctly when he said that "those who eat the dinner should be considered if we want to know how it tastes" (p.335).

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