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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
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EMBRACING CHANGE: EMANCIPATING THE LANDSCAPE OF RESEARCH IN LINGUISTIC, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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MALAY CORNER: LEARNING MALAY THROUGH DISCORD

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ABSTRACT:

The concept of asynchronous online language learning has been recognised as an alternative learning method worldwide. This learning method has been utilised with the aid of many software applications to help students continue their learning journey remotely. Following the technological advancement, this project was executed to provide a platform for those who are interested in learning beginner-level Malay for free through an application called Discord. It also aimed to introduce Malaysia as a country through weekly posting on Malaysian festivities. Another objective of this project was to get fifteen participants, with at least three active learners in seven weeks. The members were facilitated through various forms of study materials such as videos, flashcards, exercises, and notes. The participants' comprehension level was then collected through verbal communication and quizzes.

Keywords: Independent online language learning, Discord, Malay language, beginner-level

1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely believed that online language learning is not an unfamiliar method of learning, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, with the exposure to this learning option, people are starting to attend online classes to equip themselves with new knowledge and skills available across the internet. One of the skills that can be taught online is language. Codre-Rado (2014) confirmed that this is true due to the soaring number of mobile apps and language learning software available online in these recent years. Consequently, these available sources smoothen the learning process for polyglots and people who want to learn a second or third language.

Since it may be harder for people with commitments to learn through the traditional setting, independent-style learning may solve this problem. This is because Stevie (2018) described independent language learning as having the freedom to fully customised one's learning experience and to take full responsibility with the learning progress on their own. Through this style of learning, people who are looking for a place to start learning will be interested in participating regardless of how occupied they may be with their usual routine.

a. Malay Corner

A formal classroom education often requires one to be available at a specific time and place and demands the students to schedule their day around the classes. Malay Corner aimed to solve this problem by providing a free-structured and semi-casual learning setting for foreigners who were interested in learning beginner-level Malay leisurely through Discord. This server comprised 13 different categories with nine of them being the weekly learning materials. In order to enter

the server, a participant must have a Discord server with a verified email linked to their account. The participants must also read the rules and agree to them before they are able to see a part of the server.

In Malay Corner, several different roles were created to categorise the members into their own respective groups easily. This was to ensure the server administrator and the rest of the Malay Corner's members could check on each other's progress and ask questions just by looking at the roles everyone had. To get the roles, Malay Corner's participants must react to certain messages. Previously-locked channels will then automatically appear for them as a response to their newly-earned roles.

Upon gaining access to the private channels, Malay Corner's members may decide to get started with the first week of learning materials right away or to do it whenever they were available in the future. If they decided to do it right away, they would have to answer a pre-test to test their level of knowledge regarding the topic they were going to learn in order to gain access to the learning materials. This step was repeated each time they would like to move on to another week's learning materials.

Malay Corner had nine topics: i) introduction and greetings, ii) family and friends, iii) numbers and time, iv) restaurant and food, v) places and buildings, vi) weather, vii) emotions, viii) directions and transportation, and ix) emergency situation.

Although the topics were uploaded weekly, Malay Corner's participants were given the opportunity to learn at their own pace. For every new topic, Malay Corner's participants must watch the videos, do the flashcards, complete the exercises and read the notes provided, before answering the post-test provided to test their comprehension level. This process was repeated until the participants had finished with all nine topics. Completing the post-test was also a required step in order to allow the server administrator to do a needs analysis based on the student's knowledge before and after they had engaged with the learning materials.

Malay Corner also introduced Malaysia to the participants by exposing to them about Malaysian festivities. This activity was carried out on a single channel called Malaysiaku. Its only purpose was to share information regarding holidays in Malaysia with every participant regardless of their roles in the server. This means an idle participant may still access the channel even if they had not been participating in any weekly lessons.

b. Project Objectives

The purpose of this project was to introduce beginner-level Malay to foreigners through a server created on Discord in a casual manner. Additionally, one of the hopes for Malay Corner was that its members could gather and learn Malay leisurely despite their busy schedules.

In order to achieve the aforementioned purpose, three objectives based on the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-based) formula were created. The objectives were as follows:

- i. to develop 7 weeks' worth of study materials and post them on the server for Malay Corner's participants,
- ii. to get at least 15 participants, with at least three active learners by week 12 of the semester, and
- iii. to expose foreigners to multicultural Malaysia by posting information on Malaysian festivities once a week for seven weeks.



c. Entrepreneurial Opportunities

This project was designed to operate for free; therefore, it had not generated any monetary profit. However, there were several other entrepreneurial traits that had been developed from creating and managing this project.

First, managing this project as a server developer and an administrator required one to develop an entrepreneurial creativity trait. Kaur (2022) defined this trait as one's capability to think ahead and provide solutions for possible problems. This is an important ability in ensuring one's success as an entrepreneur as it allows one to refine existing ideas into a better one. In order to attract Malay language learners to join the Malay Corner, the server must be presented in an organised and interesting manner. This required the server administrator to have an entrepreneurial creativity mindset in making sure the server stayed relevant and interesting.

Second, managing this project promoted decisiveness due to the need for fast responses to changes required to achieve the best outcome. For example, this project was the result of several rounds of brainstorming with the end result being something different than what was initially proposed. Due to time constraint, a decision had to be made before a certain date. This aligns with what Shariff (2019) said about decisiveness which includes the ability to make a decision despite the risk of being wrong since indecision is not an option. Ultimately, coming up with a project and proceeding until the end would have been hard if one is indecisive.

Third, administering this server cultivated tenacity since failure was inevitable in executing big projects. Although Malay Corner did not involve a large group of people yet, it has the chance of becoming one. Therefore, in the pursuit of growing the server, one expected to encounter a rough period of growth. Suster (2009) stated that tenacity can only be harvested when failure is accepted as something you have to go through before achieving success. This was why the ability to stick with the project even when it had not received as much response as anticipated was important. According to McCoy (2020), she was able to grow her business by 20% by displaying tenacity towards her business that was going through a growth plateau. Therefore, the effort of managing this project despite the low number of participants pushed the server administrator to be tenacious.

Viewing this project from a financial perspective, it was believed that this project could turn into a profitable business. One of the ways to achieve that was to offer dedicated one-to-one tutoring classes. This would cover assistance in teaching how to pass the Malay language exam, a personalised study plan, or someone they can practice conversing with. Furthermore, once this server gains enough tract, it opens up the possibility of collaborating with companies and content creators to expose the members to exclusive content like Malay poetry classes and Malay theatre experiences.

2. METHODOLOGY

Malay Corner was the result of two weeks' worth of brainstorming after the first three proposed ideas were rejected. Through multiple testing over the course of two weeks on multiple website builders, Malay Corner was then proposed to be created on a social media platform called Discord. Since Malay Corner involved teaching foreigners how to learn Malay, lesson plans had to be structured before the actual course became available to the public. Through meticulous planning, weekly materials were posted in accordance to the designed lesson plans. This included reading up materials as to what would be appropriate to become the beginner-level topics, conducting library research to find any relevant information as well as creating pre-test and post-test to test the practicality and the effectiveness of the lesson plans.

In order to slowly introduce Malay Corner to its participants, multiple bots were utilised. Upon entering, participants may only see a few channels and must read the rules and instructions

before starting with the first week's lesson. This had proven to be useful as it allowed both the participants and the server administrator to monitor participants' learning progress and avoid information overload.

Since Malay Corner aimed to help its participants in acquiring language in the most effective way possible, the study method called 'active-recall' was exercised through quizzes, flashcards and exercises. This was because this particular study method received an outstanding rating when compared to other study methods and had been recommended by countless figures like Ali Abdal (2018) and Med School Insiders (2022). Therefore, the operation of Malay Corner relied heavily on applications like StudySmarter and Quizziz which revolved around active recall. Malay Corner also utilised YouTube as research had stated that the drilling method using YouTube worked.

Furthermore, Malay Corner's participants would get feedback every time they submitted an exercise. This was done through private messages on Discord in order to help the participants learn better. Moreover, they may also do consultations with the server administrator through the voice channel in the server during working hours. The working hours for the public administrator were from 10 AM to 11 PM UTC/GMT +8.

In terms of its promotion, a Canva poster was created and shared with the public. This poster included what Malay Corner had to offer and a QR code that would bring people into the server. Aside from that, Malay Corner was also consistently promoted on Disboard, an online library for all of the Discord servers that were registered with the website.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Malay Corner's Participants

Malay Corner was able to garner 13 members (1 Sudanis, 1 Iranian, 3 Filipinos, 1 Siamese, 4 Americans, 1 Saudi Arabian, 2 Japanese) with one of them being an active participant. The number fluctuated almost every week due to several possible reasons. Since one of the objectives was to have at least 15 idle participants, this objective was not achieved. To explain, idle participants refer to participants who are not necessarily involved in any learning activities but are present in the server. Active participants, on the other hand, refer to participants who must at least participate in any weekly activities or try to communicate in Malay through the voice channel in the server.

The server only managed to get one active learner which was a foreigner from Sudan studying in Malaysia. This participant managed to complete five weeks' worth of materials in the span of a month. There were other active participants in the beginning but due to personal circumstances, they did not manage to complete the exercises provided. However, these participants were active on the voice channel as they would engage in conversation with other members at least twice a week. Nevertheless, since the objective was to get at least three active participants, this means the server developer also was unsuccessful to achieve this particular objective.

3.2 Possible Impacts

Malay Corner has the possibility of uniting a number of participants worldwide in the server for the purpose of learning beginner-level Malay. This is because all servers start from zero and many of them now have over hundreds and thousands of participants. Therefore, with the right mindset and strategy, Malay Corner has the ability to gather more participants as time goes on.

Additionally, Malay Corner may collaborate with other servers, content creators or well-

established organisations once it reaches a certain number of participants. A good starting point before commercialising Malay Corner would be around 200 to 300 hundred participants. Malay Corner would also be able to offer paid monthly subscriptions as the server grows bigger.

Although it can be hard to find participants to enter the server at first, the attention will only bring the server bigger opportunities and challenges. This means Malay Corner will have the opportunity to make a profit and create a bigger impact on the community. Malay Corner could also be further developed to provide learning materials for intermediate and advanced-level Malay in the future.

3.3 Limitations

The whole project initially was thought to be cost-free but it was found later at around week 6, that it required some monetary investment. This was because the server could be more efficiently managed by upgrading one of the applications used which was Quizziz. However, due to insufficient funding, the plan was revoked. As a result, the application has to be monitored closely in order to ensure the participants were always able to access the quizzes made to test their level of comprehension after each week's lessons.

Furthermore, because of how reliant Malay Corner was on Canva, a premium subscription could not be avoided. A premium plan ensures the materials posted and used were free of Canva's watermarks as well as allow as much as flexibility and endless option in editing. This was proven to be true as without the premium features, almost all of the materials posted on Malay Corner would have Canva's watermarks. Ventura (2022) stated that everyone can agree that watermarks can be distracting and therefore the premium subscription was a good investment.

Additionally, Malay Corner also had trouble finding participants due to several reasons. Although Discord was fairly well-known among gamers, older generations had trouble familiarising themselves with the app. This was evident as each social media has a different intended audience and age group. Choudhury (2021) revealed that people born from the year 1946 until 1964 prefer applications like Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn. Alternatively, the majority of people born from the year 1996 onwards prefer sites like Snapchat and Instagram. However, to overcome this problem, Malay Corner was mainly promoted among those who were already familiar with Discord. A couple of different servers were approached for the purpose of promoting Malay Corner but due to the expensive imposed fee, that plan was also cancelled.

The bot management for the Discord server also proved to be challenging since the bots can be very helpful but only once the server owner was aware on how to actually use the bots. This was an especially vexing task due to the nature of this project which had to be completed in 7 weeks.

4. CONCLUSION

Although not all objectives were successfully achieved, Malay Corner still served as a great starting point for a bigger-scale project. The creation of the server itself was an accomplishment, alongside the materials that were posted consistently for seven weeks. These learning materials include quizzes, flashcards, videos, exercises as well as extra notes. The server administrator managed to upload the learning materials according to the devised plan. This means all nine topics had been successfully uploaded.

Additionally, managing this project allowed the server developer to gain the entrepreneurial traits that were stated in 1.3. This server also provided an insight on how to build and maintain a Discord server. In turn, this allowed the server developer to be equipped with technological knowledge as well as how instructional communication works.



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