



UNIVERSITI
TEKNOLOGI
MARA

Cawangan Negeri Sembilan

ACADEMY OF LANGUAGE STUDIES

Edition: 16/2025

APB REMBAU E-BULLETIN



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Dare to Try: Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone

Written by: Dr Sazlin Suhalmie binti Mohd Shariff

Most of us live our lives doing what we already know how to do. We stick to what feels safe, our routines, our habits, our areas of strength, and while there is nothing wrong with that, staying in that space for too long can make us miss out on opportunities for growth and discovery. This year, I had an experience that reminded me how valuable it is to step outside that comfort zone.

On campus, as part of the Merdeka celebration, a poster competition was announced. At first, I didn't think much about it because poster design wasn't really my "thing." After all, I am a lecturer, not a designer. Sure, I had designed posters before, mostly simple ones for my team and the programs we organize, and while I enjoy it as a creative outlet, I never considered myself an expert, just an amateur who makes posters that look nice to my eyes. I had never joined a formal poster competition, and the thought of competing with others who might have more experience or talent made me hesitate. Then one day, with a playful tone, a colleague sent a message in our WhatsApp group chat that read, "Arahan boss... kita masuk pertandingan poster Merdeka." Somehow, I took it very

seriously. Without replying anything, I opened my laptop and started working. Before I even realized it, the poster was done and ready to submit.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized that my fear of not being good enough was the only thing holding me back, so I decided to go through with it. Honestly, I was nervous, almost too nervous to hit that submit button, and I kept thinking, "What if my work looks amateur? What if others do much better?" But then I reminded myself of something important, sometimes simply showing up is already a win. Taking part was about being present, learning, and giving myself permission to try, even if the result wasn't perfect. This brought me back to my student days, when I was the kind of student who often knew the answers in class but stayed quiet, too shy to raise my hand, only to feel frustrated with myself when someone else would speak up and be acknowledged by the teacher. Whether their answer was right or wrong, at least they were seen, while I stayed invisible. That memory became my turning point because I no longer wanted to be the quiet student who stayed on the sidelines. I wanted to be brave enough to take that step, even if it scared me, so I submitted my poster.

The experience itself was already fulfilling, but the result surprised me even more because when the winners were announced, I discovered that my poster had won second place. I felt so grateful, not

just for the recognition, but for the reminder that we don't have to be an expert to participate, and we don't have to wait until we are ready to try something new. Growth doesn't happen in theory, it happens when we take action, make mistakes, learn, and improve. Winning wasn't the main reward, the real prize was the confidence I gained and the lesson that fear should never be the reason we hold ourselves back. I share this story not to boast, but to inspire anyone who might be holding back from doing something they 'secretly' want to try. It could be as small as speaking up in a meeting, joining a competition, volunteering for a new project, or learning a skill outside your field. You don't have to be the best, and you don't even have to be fully prepared. What matters is that you step forward. Every time you try, you grow a little stronger, a little braver, and a little more confident in who you are.

Here are three lessons I learned from this experience. First, trying is already a victory because even if you don't win, you've gained experience and courage. Second, fear is not a stop sign because feeling nervous means you're about to do something that matters to you. Finally, growth starts where comfort ends because you will never know your full potential if you never take that first step. This is also a reminder to myself to keep trying new things, to not wait for the perfect moment, and to be brave enough to keep seeking out more "first experiences."



Picture 1: Merdeka Poster: The Spirit of Independence on Campus

Here I attach the poster that I made. *Does it look amateur? Shh... don't tell me, just keep it to yourself, okay? (Just joking!).* I hope this article serves as a personal reminder for me and for anyone reading it to keep trying, not to wait until everything feels perfect, and to be bold enough to seize opportunities as they come. We change, people change, and sometimes the best time to do something is now, when the opportunity is right in front of us. We should grab it while we still want to do it, because one day we might no longer have the same desire, or the opportunity might not come again. So, if there's something you've been thinking about trying, do it, not next month, not next year, but now. Sign up, show up, speak up, and you might surprise yourself with how much you can do once you let go of fear, because life's most memorable moments often come from the times we dared to step outside what we know and ventured into something new.