

Enhancing English Communication Skills by Using the Newspaper as a Teaching Tool

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study was to describe the use of newspapers as a source for English Language Acquisition. Its aim was to investigate the extent of which newspapers can affect and enhance the learning of English language. The Technical English curricular aims to extent learners' English language proficiency in order to meet their needs, in everyday life including for knowledge acquisition purposes, and for workplace use. Effectiveness learning entails learning beyond the classroom. In this regard, newspaper may be a good resource that can be used to promote and enhance English language learning. With this in mind this study explored whether newspaper as an alternative to the textbook able to arouse learners' interests in learning English. Newspaper as a tool for language learning.*

This study was conducted in Institute Latihan Perindustrian Kuala Lumpur (ILPKL) to obtain students' views on using the newspapers and to access the effects of its use on their learning. The quantitative modes used for the data collections. The findings of the study indicated that the use of newspapers did indeed have positive effect on learners. For the benefit of learners, it is therefore hoped that there, would be greater usage of newspaper as source for English language acquisition in the classroom.

I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning of English is a great challenge in our context. In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language in which most of our students are of different ethnic groups and are proficient in their own native dialects or mother-tongues. Each student is unique in his or her own way. The studies highlighted here suggest two important issues regarding English language learning in Malaysia. First, Bahasa Melayu has a strong influence over the learning of English. Interference of mother tongue language system in some ways contributes to wrong use of English grammatical rules, morphology and syntax. Learners tend to refer to their first language system when writing in English, use direct translation and depend on dictionary meanings to comprehend English text (Ambigapathy, 2002; Nambiar, 2007).

This research attempts on enhancing the English Communication Skills by using the newspaper as a teaching tool among the Semester 2 Automotive Students in Institute Latihan Perindustrian Kuala Lumpur (ILPKL). This chapter outlines the statement of the problem, rational of the research, objective of the research, methodology and reflection of the research. This situation often occurred in an ESL mixed ability classroom which makes the English learning process dull and boring. In addition, the students do not have the opportunity to use and experience the language in their real life as most of them are living in the outskirts. On the contrary, using newspaper as one of their learning materials is authentic and sounds familiar to them. They have the chance of experiencing the language and get in touch with real life situations and matters.

The mixture of students with different learning backgrounds, attitudes, abilities, cultural differences and motivation make each other distinctive, as every teacher knows. Although textbook- writers have better resources than the ordinary classroom teachers, however, they are lacking in personal experience and knowledge

of the particular students. Although the lecturers do their best to choose an ideal material for teaching, it will never be exactly right for a particular class.

Students themselves have very low self confidence in using the English Language in their communication skills. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels (1998) studied the effects of self-confidence on oral performance. The results of their study showed that the learners' willingness to communicate was determined partly by their self-confidence. Park & Lee (2005) also examined the relationships between L2 learners' anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance. They reached a conclusion that self-confidence affected significantly on L2 learners' oral performance. They stated that if the learners were more confident, they would have better oral performance. That is the main reason why the students feel reluctant to use English in their communication skills.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research is to investigate on how to enhance the English communication skills by using the newspaper as a teaching tool and promote language learning which can be introduced and managed on an on-going basis using any of the local English language newspapers. The main objective is to encourage the students to use the communication skills in English in their daily routine. At the same time, students are provided with the opportunity to improve their reading skills as well as enhance their knowledge of current issues.

As newspapers is a rich and good resource for language learning apart from the use of the textbook and it is the intention of this study to investigate how newspapers smooth the progress and promote language learning. Especially this study attempts to:

- ❖ Examine how the newspaper may be utilized as learning input that can automatically stimulate learning and participation in the learners in the language classroom.
- ❖ find out if newspaper as a source of input would be able to highlight grammatical structure and language use that form part of every features and language use that form part of every feature for the benefit of learners.
- ❖ Highlight the relationship between the real-world experiences which can be found in the newspaper in relation to the learners' affective domain.

However, the main factors of study will be the students and not lecturers. It will include information on learners' response toward to use of the newspapers, and the extent to which newspaper usage may enhance language learning. A further extension of these students will be the area of how learners make connections between their lives and the real world experiences reported in the newspapers.

III. METHODOLOGY

Based on the various tool used in the data collection, some interesting findings were seen either in the answers or feedback given by the students or during the course of field work. Generally the students found the lessons with newspapers stimulating and of great interest.

The findings indicated many things about the learners and the material used. There was much creativity, spontaneity, and enthusiasm in learning with newspapers. Newspaper had been potent stimuli in this study that had encouraged the students to be thinkers and doers without much interference from the teacher.

This chapter describes how the newspaper was used to enhance the English communication skills among the semester 2 automotive students. This study seeks to describe how authentic materials and situations are alternative to textbooks, where it is able to promote the communication skills in the classroom. In doing this a quantitative method was used. The quantitative instruments were two questionnaires. The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 15 will be used to tabulate the findings based on the given questionnaires.

The teaching of English communication skills has selected a class of Semester 2 Automotive students where they have a mixed of ESL abilities. This institute focuses more on the modules that has been prepared according to the curriculum and syllabus. Frequent cries of dissatisfaction among the language lecturers is that

the lessons are very monotonous and do not seem to generate interest in learners. Bearing the learner needs in mind, it is hoped that this study will be able to establish learners' motivation and interest especially in learning through authentic materials and situations. The entire study lasted 12 weeks.

IV. RESULT

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzed the data collected and reported the results of a study carried out on 35 Semester 2 Automotive students in Institute Latihan Perindustrian Kuala Lumpur (ILPKL). The students had undergone 12 weeks (July to September) of learning sessions using the newspaper as the source.

The objective of the study was to examine how the newspapers may be utilized as a learning input. Moreover, it was also to find out if newspaper as a source of input may be able to highlight grammatical structures and language use. Furthermore, the study was also to show the relationship of the real world experiences which can be found in the newspaper in relation to the learners' affective domain.

In view of the objectives and aims in mind the study focused on three research questions.

1. How do the students respond to the use of newspapers as a language learning input?
2. How does the newspaper help students improve second language learning?
3. How has the newspaper encouraged the development of the learners' affective domain through real world experiences?

4.2 Analysis of Data

In doing this study the quantitative instrumentations used were two sets of questionnaires. The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 15 was used to tabulate the findings based on the questionnaires. The data will be discussed extensively through various instruments used in the study.

4.2.1 Newspaper

The Star paper was used as the source for this study. For the entire duration of study (12 weeks) different sessions from the newspapers were used. The details can be found in Appendix 3 and 4. The lessons prepared using the newspaper article(s) as the source were closely based on the learning schedule, syllabus requirement and as instructed and guided by the class English language teacher (see Appendix 3 and 4)

4.3 Questionnaire

One of the main data collection instruments used was the questionnaire. A pilot questionnaire was first developed and administered to 15 students selected randomly. This was carried out during the two weeks orientation before the researcher embarked on the field work. It was done in order to test whether the intent of the questions was clear. It was also to iron out misunderstandings, ambiguities or inadequacies in the questions.

Moreover, it also gathered some comments and suggestions from the students so that the final questionnaires could be improved. Changes were made where necessary. The researcher was responsible for the administration and collection of the questionnaires. The answering of the questionnaires was done in class with initial explanation of the purpose and value of the study. The researcher provided assistance and explanations where deemed necessary.

4.3.1 Questionnaire 1

The questionnaire was administered at the end of the 12th week. Data from the questionnaire were analyzed based on percentages and frequency while comments and responses for open-ended questions were compiled, categorized and described accordingly. The questionnaire data were supplemented by responses from personal structured interviews with selected students. Responses and findings from the interviews will be discussed in section 4.4.6. Initially, all the data from the 35 respondents were tabulated to obtain a general view of the study. For the purpose of highlighting significant findings later on in this study only seven sets of

questionnaire 1 were chosen. They were the following samples from the R5, R10, R15, R20, R25, and R30 and/ R35 respectively.

The section 1 of the questionnaire (Appendix 1) provided the setting or the background to the students' perception and feelings towards the use of the newspaper. This section revealed whether the learners were exposed to the use of newspaper in their language learning. The following are the findings for item 1.

Of the total sample (N = 35), 27 students had agreed that they had attended workshops pertaining to the use of newspapers in their school. Only 8 students indicated that they had not attended any workshops. The researcher was interested to find out more from the 8 students. In an informal conversation the 8 students indicated that they were not selected by the teachers to attend the workshop which was carried out at two different times in that school by the NIE (Newspapers In Education) coordinators.

As for item 2, Figure 4.1 will explain the detail about the regularity of using the newspapers in their language learning.

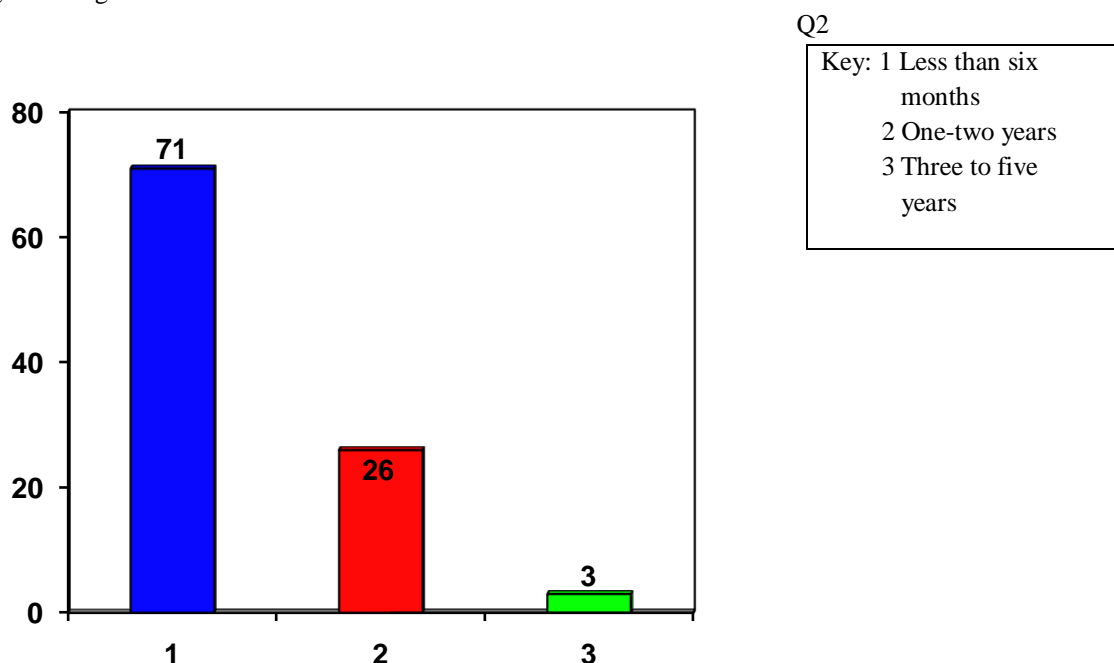


Figure 4.1. Have you used newspapers regularly for learning?

For the entire class there was a vast difference between their regularity of using the newspaper. Some 71% (N = 25) of the students indicated that they used the newspaper for learning for a period of less than six months only; 26% (N = 9) of the students used the newspaper for class work in the last two years; while only 3% (N = 1) indicated having used the newspaper for language work for the last three to five years.

The researcher was keen to find out about this one student. It happened to be one of the students interviewed. As such, it created the opportunity to further explain her choice. She explained that both her language teachers (Bahasa Melayu and English) used newspapers during class work regularly. She had been exposed to the use of newspapers when she was in primary school. At times, students were asked to find relevant articles based on a particular topic such as food, transport, vandalism and others. She has also mentioned that there was a separate exercise book use for newspapers work.

In section 2, the questionnaire provided findings on how the students were introduced to the use of newspapers in their language learning. The following are the findings for the items 3, 4, 5 and 6.

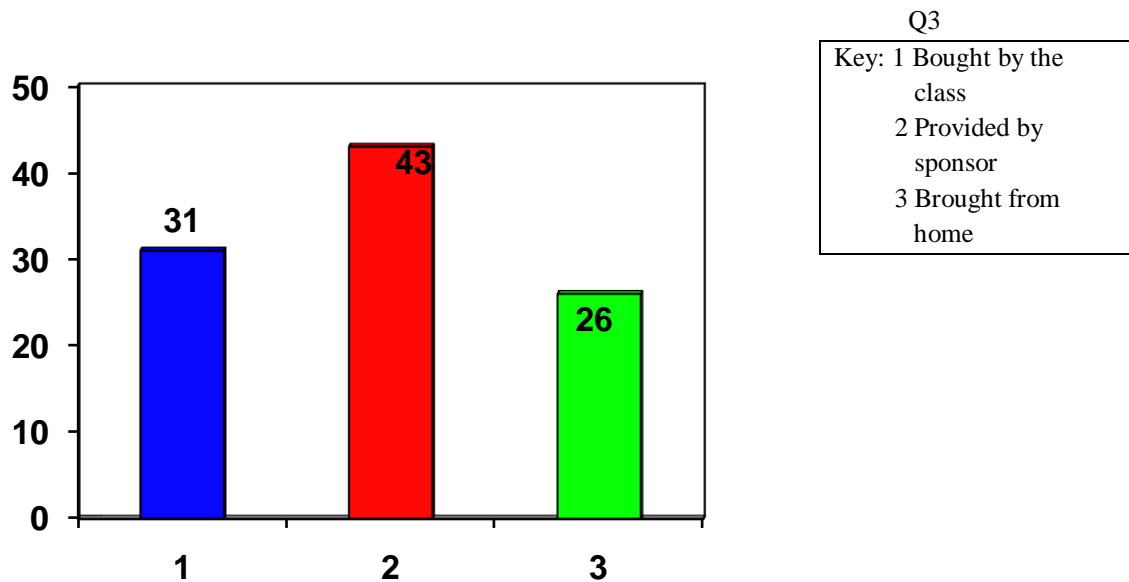


Figure 4.2. How newspapers were made available for your language learning?

Newspapers were indeed made available for learning through various ways. The majority of students, that is 43% (N = 15) indicated that the newspapers used for language learning purposes were provided by a sponsor. Upon enquiring from the class English teacher, the researcher found out that the Star was sponsored by British Petroleum or BP. Both the companies sponsored 40 copies of the newspapers respectively every Tuesday and Friday. This program had been going on for the past four years, long before the “School Sponsorship Programmes” launched by the Star 15th August 2008. All the classes were given two copies, one of each type of newspaper. This information indicated that private organizations or sectors were aware of the usefulness of the newspapers in language learning.

When there was a need by a particular language teacher to use the newspapers, then the other classes may not have the chance to read the newspaper for that day. The remaining students either used the newspapers which was brought by the class 31% (N = 11) or brought from home 26% (N = 9). In short, all students did have an access to newspaper.

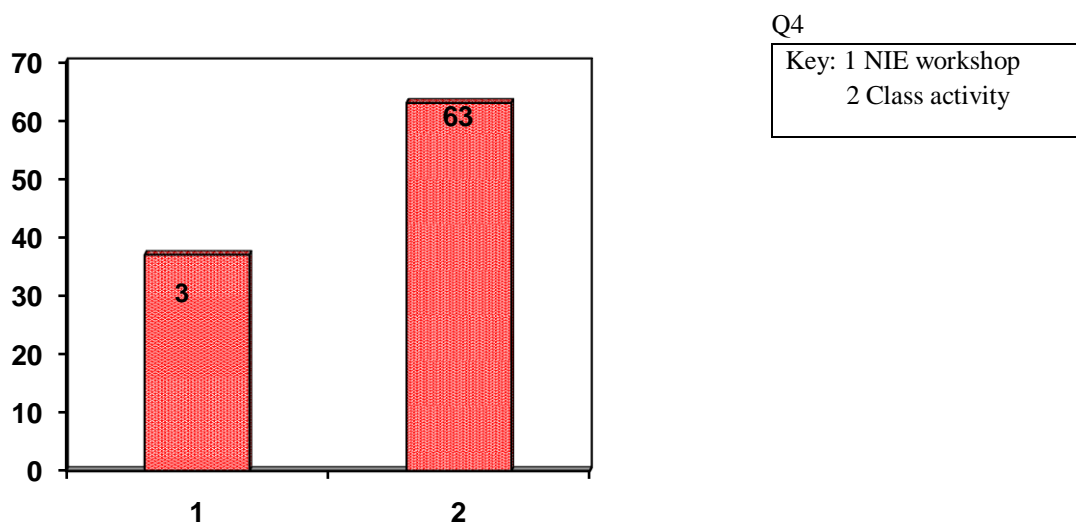


Figure 4.3. Where did you learn to use newspapers for language learning?

Basically all the students were exposed to the newspaper in their language learning. They were exposed to the use of newspapers either during the NIE workshop or during their class activity. While 37% (N = 13) students indicated using the newspapers during the NIE workshops, 63% (N = 22) used newspapers during the class activity. It was good to note that these learners had early exposure to the usage of the newspapers in class. As such, teachers and others like parents, siblings and friends do play an important role in introducing this resource for language learning.

Item 5 (Figure 4) showed the skills acquired by learners while using the newspapers in their language learning. The options were ranked accordingly by learners' choice of preferences from the most often taught skills to the least taught. As such, there are seven bar graphs to show the rankings. The bar graphs are for reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, language functions and critical thinking.

This explains the areas of strengths and weakness in learners when the newspapers were used as a learning resource in their class work. Reading and writing was an area that needed guidance. Listening and speaking was something that the learners had enjoyed doing. Many times the articles were use for discussion purposes in class. Listening skill was not taught or used for discussion in audio form but consolidated with other language skills.

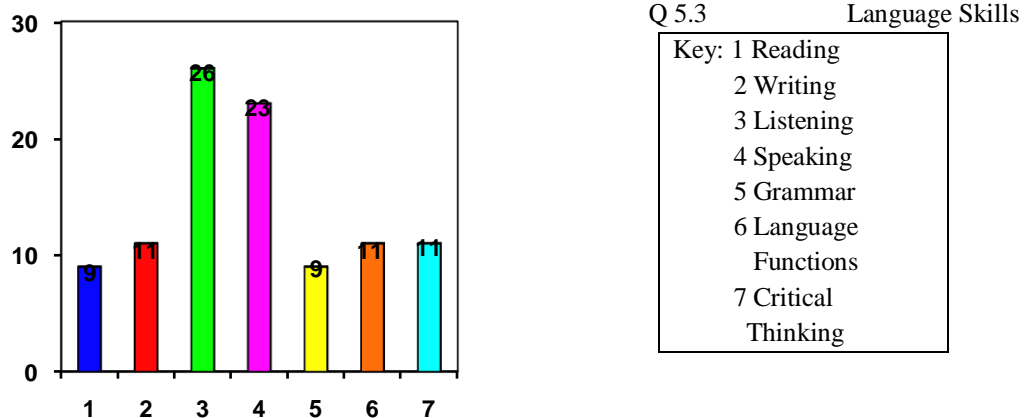


Figure 4.4. What language skills did you learn when using the newspapers in your language learning class?

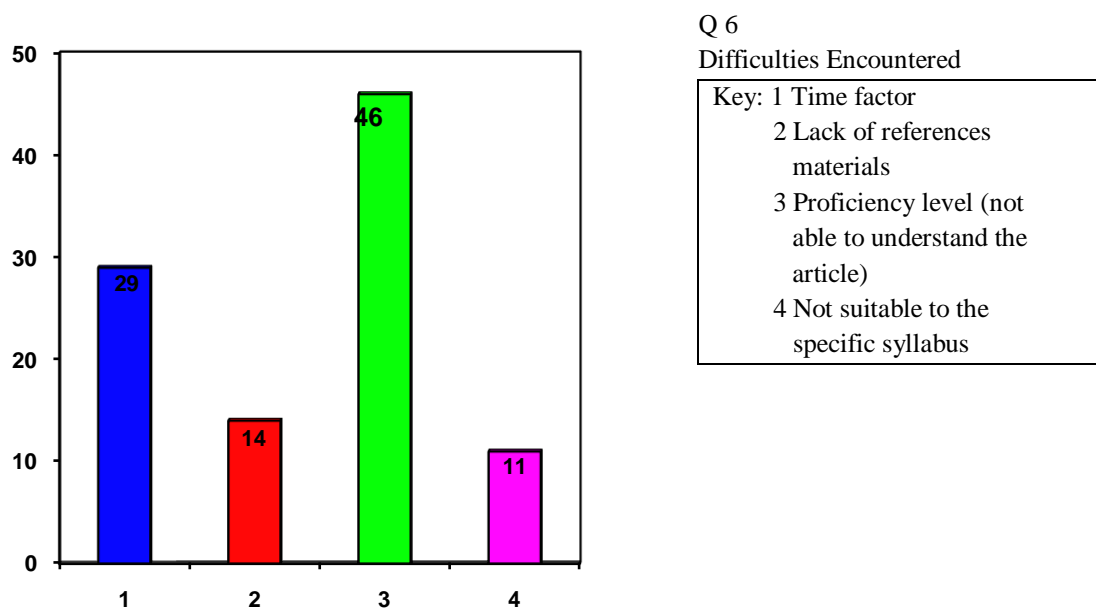


Figure 4.5. What difficulties did you encounter when using newspaper instead of textbook in your lessons?

With reference to Figure 4.5, among the difficulties faced by students, time factor was indeed a step back for 29% (N = 10) of them. They were unable to complete the work within the given time. This was in reference to the tasks provided before the study. Lack of reference materials were mentioned by 14% (N = 5) of the students. They had no dictionary to aid them in their learning. This was especially so when looking out for the meanings of difficult words. The proficiency level in the newspapers was found to be difficult by 47% (N = 16) of the students. They had difficulty understanding the given article. About 10% (N = 4). All the four students were of average proficiency level and they had indicated no interest in the change of learning source used. They were comfortable and secure with the use of the hand-outs. They expressed that they felt a little lost when newspaper were used.

In section 3 the questionnaires sought information on the frequency of usage of the newspapers in their language learning. The following are the data for items 7, 8, 9 and 10.

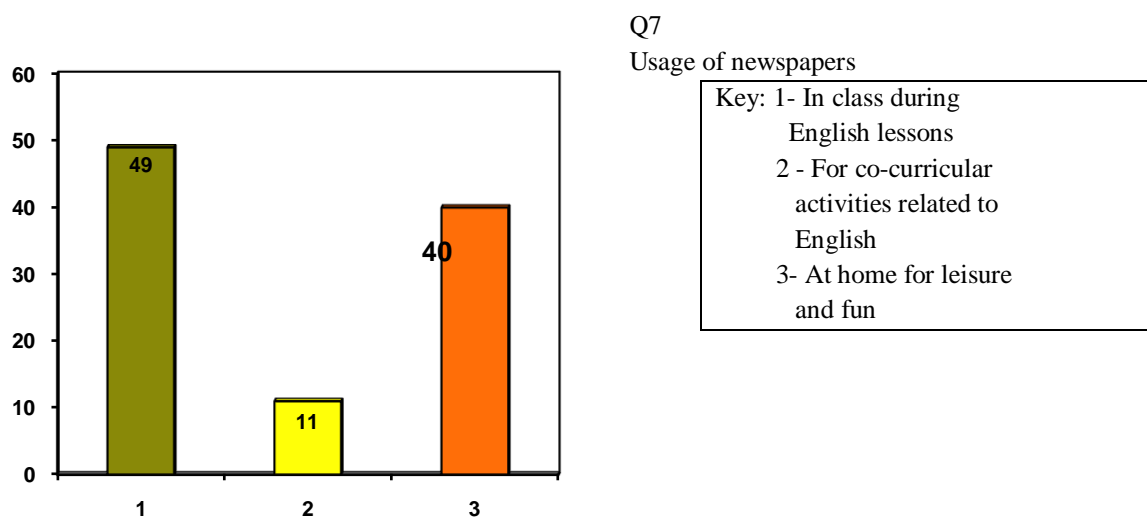


Figure 4.6. When do you use the newspapers for language learning purposes?

A majority of the students, that is 49% (N = 17) had indicated that they used the newspapers in class during English lessons. It is followed by 40% (N = 14) of the students indicating that they had used newspaper at home for leisure and fun. The remaining (N = 4) used the newspaper during their co-curricular activities related to English. They were the members of the school English language club.

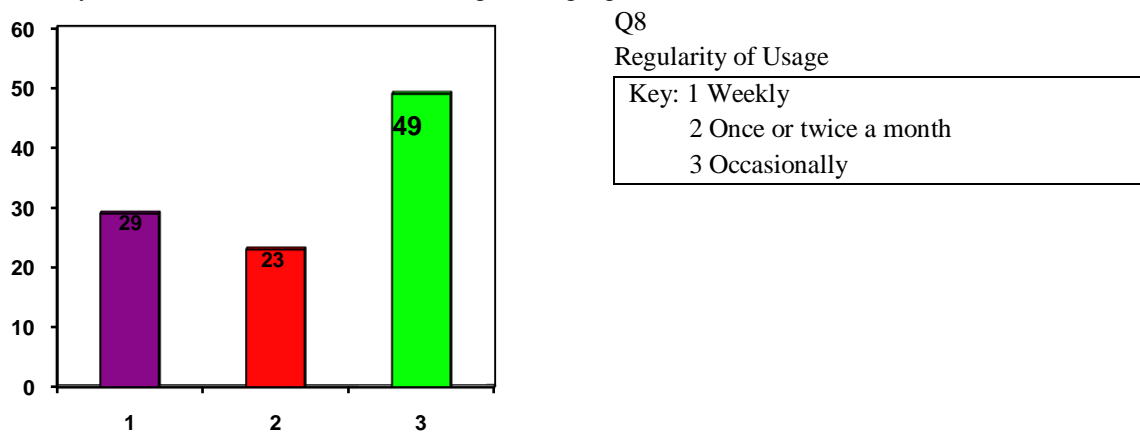


Figure 4.7. How often on the average, do you use the newspapers in language learning?

Generally, all students did use the newspapers for learning. A majority of students 49% (N = 17) occasionally used the newspaper for language learning. When asked by the researcher, some of the students mentioned that when newspapers were used they were assigned tasks which had something to do with newspapers. Otherwise it

was seldom used for their language work learning. Some 29% (N = 10) of the respondents mentioned that they use newspapers weekly for their language work.

When enquired further, these 10 students lived in the school hostel and were assigned work by their hostel administrator that used the newspapers as learning input. This information was useful to the researcher as it shows the importance given by a non-teaching staff towards language acquisition. The remaining 23% (N = 8) said that they only used the newspapers once or twice a month. They indicated they were not keen to use the newspapers.

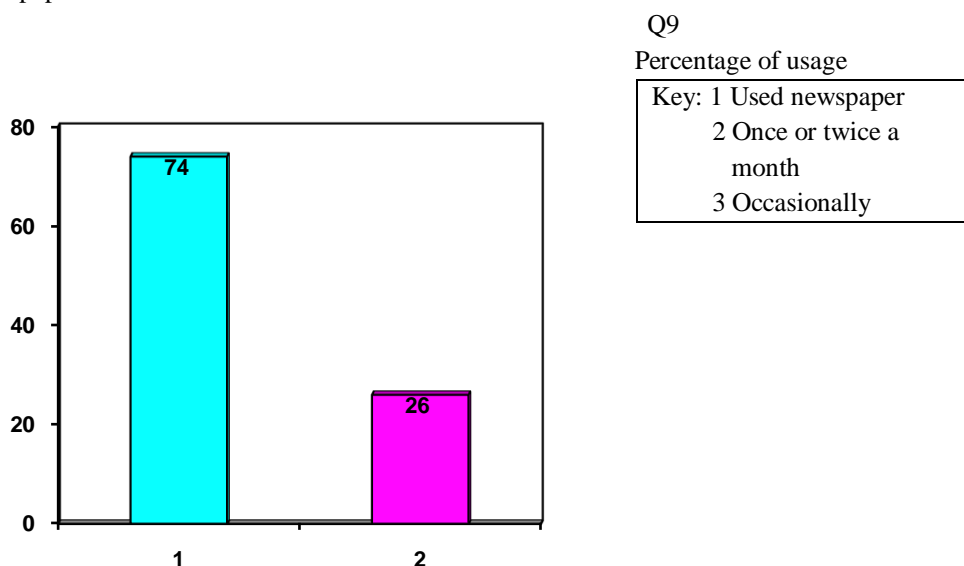


Figure 4.8. Estimate the percentage thus for in using newspapers in language learning?

A majority of the students, 74% (N = 26) only used the newspaper for about 25% for their language learning. This is followed by the remaining 26% (N = 9) of the students who had acknowledge up to 50% usage in their language learning. Item 9 strengthens and supports what has been mentioned in item 8.

4.3.2 Questionnaire 2

This questionnaire was administered after Questionnaire 1. The purpose of this questionnaire was to find out students' experiences after the 12 weeks of using the newspaper in their language learning. This questionnaire had two sections (see Appendix 2)

Section A was to find learners' perception in using newspapers for their language learning. It had had 11 items. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10 were closed questions. The learners had to make choice or decide their opinion based on a Likert-scale. Items 7 and 11 were open questions, where the learners wrote their answer. Section B was to seek the learners' feedback pertaining to the use of newspapers. It had 18 items, 7 items (closed questions) and 11 open questions, where the learners wrote their answer.

Section B was to seek the learners' feedback pertaining to the use of newspapers. It had 7 items all were closed questions. Students had to indicate their choice on the given Likert-Scale. The scale five-point scale was as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly disagree

Every item in the questionnaire too had been analyzed based on percentages of frequency. Comments and responses for open-ended questions were compiled, categorized and described accordingly.

For the purpose of this study only seven were chosen and they make up 20% of the sample used. The samples were from R10, R15, R20, R25, R30, and R35 of the roll call respectively. The students were selected based on random sampling.

In Table 4.2 learners have indicated several reasons for preferring to use the newspapers in the language learning.

Table 4.2 Reasons for Using the Newspapers

Items	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly% Agree (N)	Disagree% (N)	Neutral% (N)	Agree% (N)	Strongly% Agree (N)
Responsible for my own learning	Nil	3% (1)	31% (11)	51% (18)	14% (5)
Decided my own reading topics	Nil	Nil	17% (8)	43% (15)	37% (12)
Decide my own pace	Nil	11% (4)	29% (10)	49% (17)	11% (4)
Own area of language need	Nil	11% (4)	37% (13)	40% (14)	11% (4)
Materials in authentic	Nil	3% (1)	29% (10)	29% (10)	40% (14)

Several reasons were stated by the students for using newspapers in their language learning. In Table 4.2 basically 51% (N = 18) of the respondents agreed and 14% (N = 5) strongly agreed that they could take charge of their own learning. This was followed by 31% (n = 11) and 3% (N = 1) indicating that they were not certain. When asked or enquired further they had stated that they could not take this responsibility well. It was an awkward feeling all together. But with peer support they manage to follow the learning session.

There was a total of 60% (49%+11%) who had actually indicated that they could decide their own learning pace based on their proficiency. Some had mentioned that the selections of article of a particular given task were independently chosen by the students. They looked at the length of the articles. Short articles were easy to manage by the learners in terms of content, length and vocabulary. As the learning time was limited students needed to be wise in setting the article for the tasks. This was seen by the researcher when they carried out activity on article 'Earth Hour'.

In total 51% (40%+11%) (N = 10) of the learners had responded by stating that they could work for their own language needs. They added that the newspapers were seen as reference materials and also as reading material for them during leisure time. As the newspapers were easily available in class and at home, they were comfortable in accessing and using them in their language tasks.

About 40% (N = 14) and 29% (N = 10) of the respondents have agreed to support the fact stated by Howell (1986, p. 40), because of the authenticity of content, the newspapers provided for motivated reading in learners. Being motivated is important in a student's life. The intrinsic and extrinsic motivation provides learners with the drive to learn and acquire knowledge. According to Harmer (1984), "motivation in some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action". If we perceive the goal and that goal is sufficiently attractive, we will be strongly motivated to do whatever is necessary to reach that goal'. Chan (2001) had also reached a similar conclusion in her project that had used newspapers to encourage motivation in learners. Truly, the newspapers are able to spread the inner drive in learners.

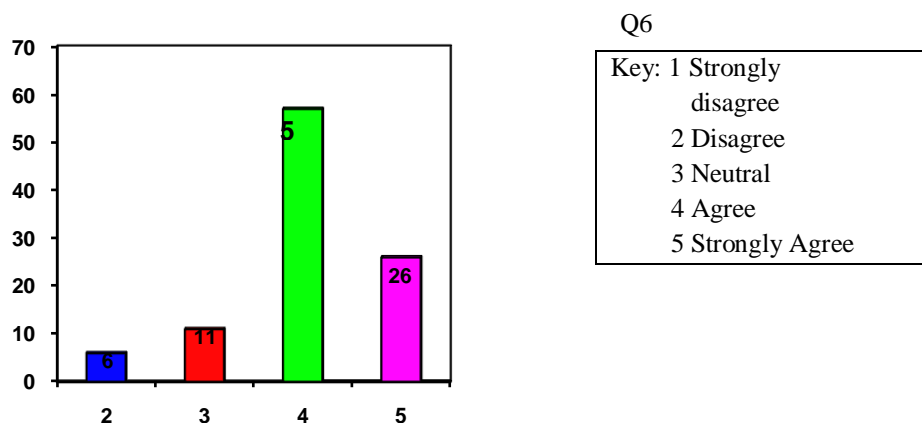


Figure 4.9. I think newspaper reading is good for classroom learning.

As large number of the respondents have agreed that newspaper reading was a good supplement to classroom learning 57% (N=20) and 26% (N=9) have supported this stand. Some students had indicated that apart from other available reading materials, newspapers are seen to go easy with learners. This may be due to the fact that every class received a copy of The Star and the copies were readily available to the students.

Some learners (N = 2) has also indicated their reasons for not using newspapers for the purpose of language learning. These were further explained and supported in the following table.

Table 4.3 Do Not Prefer Newspaper as Approach for Language Learning

Item	% (N)	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagreed	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
Use book		40% (14)	54% (9)	6% (2)	Nil	Nil
Material is different		29% (10)	37% (12)	26% (9)	9% (4)	Nil

Students have indicated varied respondents for their preference in using the newspapers (Table 4.3). Learners generally have shown great interest in using the newspapers. In fact, 94% (54%+40%), (N=3) have indicated that they actually liked using newspapers as an approach towards language learning when compared to the existing textbook used in the classroom. The researcher was keen to get further information from the remaining 2 students (6%) who have indicated otherwise. They preferred the textbook as they found the material to be equally good. Moreover, the textbook is a compulsory learning material compared to the newspaper. Every student had a copy whilst the newspapers were regarded as an optional tool or source. They felt very confident and secure in having the textbook with them.

The level of difficulty of the English found in the newspaper had not in any way hampered the learners' learning experience (Table 4.3). Most of the students 66% (29% + 37%), (N = 23) had disagreed with the statement that the material was too difficult for their level of English. The students in this study were of mixed ability. Their English proficiency level was based on their semester exam results. Looking at their class performance doing observation, the researcher felt that learners had ended challenged them with the challenging text. Some articles were long but they were able to handle them well. Towards the end of the study the students

were able to manage the language in the newspapers on their own. The related tasks such as ‘Article Search 1 and 2’ were useful for them in strengthening their language skills.

V. CONCLUSION

The use of newspaper in the acquisition of English language undoubtedly would benefit language learners. However, it is of utmost importance to carry out careful planning in the selection of articles, adoption of articles and the designing of appropriate tasks based on the syllabus. Being an area which is not widely explored by teachers, it is important that there is a clear understanding and familiarization of the purpose and conditions of language to ensure that it yields positive results. The newspaper plays a dual role of improving language skills as well as educating the readers; these roles pave a way in learners towards self-improvement in language learning. It encourages creative thinking, easy and quick learning and successful application. The mastering of English language will in turn strengthen a developing country like Malaysia.

A wealth of endless possibilities and surprises await the teachers and students who would use this approach to language learning. The use of newspapers is strongly recommended because it surely encourages language learners. On-going efforts by the Star, via its Education fund sponsorship program, are timely and needed to be supported by all quarters. Many from the public, the public sector and NGOs have come forward to support this program. It is encouraging to know their concern. Educators have to view the strength of English language as a tool to assist Malaysia to excel in the fields of Science and Technology, to meet the growing demands of the country in this endeavour towards visualizing its stake in the world. It is never too late to use the newspaper as a tool for language learning. The newspaper has been said to be an endless resource for innovative teachers and learners besides invigorating routine lessons (Howell, 1986).

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