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The Readiness of Mathematics and Science Lecturers to Teach in English from Students' Perspective

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Abstract

The policy change of teaching Mathematics and Science from Malay to English language, which started in 2003 in schools, has given an impact to the teaching and learning process in Public Higher Learning Institutions, including Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Consequently, UKM administrators have directed all faculties offering Mathematics and Science courses to follow the change starting with the first year courses. It is suggested that 30% of the courses is to be conducted in English while 50% and 70% of the courses offered in the following second and third year, respectively would be conducted in English. This study aims at gauging the readiness of lecturers from the School of Mathematical Sciences (PPSM) to conduct courses in English from the perception of students. Questionnaires are distributed to first year students from the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) and also from the Faculty of Education (FPEND) for the academic session of 2009/2010. From the results of the study, it is found that the students are generally satisfied with the teaching and learning conducted in English at the School of Mathematical Sciences.

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1. Introduction

The government policy of changing the medium of instruction of ‘teaching and learning for Mathematics and Science in English (PPSMI¹) from Malay language began in the 2003 session with the pioneer are pupils in Year 1 in primary schools and Form 1 and Lower 6 in secondary schools. This policy is fully implemented in secondary schools in the year 2007 while that of primary schools was put into practice in 2008 (Wikipedia 2010).

The rationale for the shift of the medium of instruction is the basic concern to the government towards human resource development in achieving a developed nation status by 2020 and as a first step to compete in the era of globalization. This is because English is the language of international relations, thus mastering English will facilitate the acquisition of knowledge in the field of Mathematics and Science.

In order to ensure continuity of PPSMI in schools, the Senate has fixed the implementation of PPSMI by stages in UKM from the 2004/2005 academic session. The implementation is established proportional to the ability of the faculty with at least 30% of first year courses and the percentages of the course can be increased to a maximum of 50%. Beginning from 2009/2010 academic session, all Sciences and Mathematics courses in first year are to be taught 100% in English (Implementation Guidelines for Teaching Mathematics and Science in English UKM 2007). This ruling directly involves Mathematics and Statistics courses offered by the School of Mathematical Sciences (PPSM).

Since PPSMI has started at the school level, there are many studies on the effectiveness of PPSMI in schools, among them are by Pillay (2003), Foong (2004), Ong and Tan (2008), and Yahaya et al. (2009). In general, their studies showed that majority of the teachers supported PPSMI but some are facing difficulties in implementing those policies. To date, no comprehensive study on PPSMI has been conducted at the university level. One of the earlier studies on PPSMI in the university is by Tan and Chan (2003) at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

The study of “The Readiness of Mathematics and Science Lecturers to Teach in English from Students’ Perspective” is a part of UKM’s main driven research project titled “PPSMI Implementation Effectiveness Study in UKM” (UKM-GPP-PPKK-9-2009) and it is carried out to achieve one of the objectives of the study. This paper discusses the findings of the sub-study from the perspective of first year students in 2009/2010 academic session in the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) and the Faculty of Education (FPEND). Findings of the other two sub-studies can be referred to Zaidi *et al.* (2011) and Wan Rosmanira *et al.* (2011).

2. Methodology

This study aims to determine students' perceptions on the readiness of School of Mathematical Sciences' lecturers to teach in English. To meet the objective of the study, questionnaires are distributed to FST and FPEND 2009/2010 session students and analyses have been done on the data obtained from the questionnaires.

2.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaires distributed consist of three parts namely Part A on the demographic data, Part B on general information and Part C on the perception and tendency of students. Types of questions in section A is the open ended and multiple-choices questions. Section B contains Likert scale, open-ended, and multiple-choices questions, while all questions in section C are in the form of Likert scale (scale 1 - 10). Questions in section C consist of the following six objectives which are to:

- i. identify students' tendency towards medium of instruction used,
- ii. determine whether the teaching of English is capable of improving English proficiency among students,
- iii. determine the effectiveness of English in increasing the mastery of mathematics and science among students,
- iv. determine the readiness of lecturers to teach in English,
- v. observe the trend of the students' results in selected courses (before and after implementation of PPSMI)

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