

THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM (EnEP) IN ENHANCING POLYTECHNIC NILAI STUDENT'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY.

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Abstract

English language nowadays is a global language and it becoming a compulsory subject in every school, polytechnic and other education institution. In Politeknik Nilai, English subject is a must pass subject for students in order to graduate. Honestly, for some students, English is not their favorite subject so it is not strange when some students show lack of interest in English language because of their perception that English is difficult to learn and it is not the main language in Malaysia. In order to help students master the language, teachers of English need to be equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills to teach in school. Empowering English is normally related with classroom learning but we do need to remember that learning English sometime also a process beyond classroom learning. This study aimed on investigating what effect of English out of class activity would have on Politeknik Nilai students' English proficiency. 50 students were selected as the respondents of this study. A set of questionnaire was designed to collect data from the respondents. The findings of the study indicate that English out of class activities do benefits the students in enhancing their English language. As conclusion, some ideas have been made in improving student's proficiency

Keyword: out-of-class English learning activities.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Language learning can occur in any place, at any time and in any form. In Malaysia, though the majority speaks Malay, English remains an important foreign language taught at schools. In recent times, Malaysian ministry of education has promoting English language as an important language to be master whether at primary or secondary school level and also at higher level. Nowadays, English language also has becoming a must excel subject for students in continuing study or seeking for job. Students been prepared at school with in class English learning but sometimes students also been exposed to out of class English learning activities in helping them mastering the language. Out-of-class English learning activities are defined as students' activities in listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary learning, and grammar learning to improve their English outside of the classroom in this paper. Studies on out-of-class learning activities are not profuse (e.g. Benson 2001; Brooks, 1992; Freeman, 1999; Hyland, 2004; Pickard, 1996; Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002; Suh, Wasanasomsithi, Short, &Majid, 1999; Yap, 1998). Benson (2001) classified out-of-class learning into three categories: (a) self-instruction (i.e., students' locating resources to help them improve the target language), (b) naturalistic language learning (i.e., students' learning to communicate and interact with the target language group unintentionally), and (c) self-directed naturalistic language learning (i.e., students' creating or searching out a language learning situation). Pickard (1996) indicated that listening to the radio, reading newspapers, and novels outside of the classroom appear to rank highest in students' learning activities; however, students made little use of the facilities in out-of-class English learning, such as English newspapers, satellite TV, and self-study materials in the library. Freeman (1999) suggested that teachers spend some time to ensure their students' use of time wisely, since EFL students spent 88% of the time in out-of-class language learning, such as listening to the radio and chatting to foreigners. Researchers, such as Brooks (1992) and Suh, Wasanasomsithi, Short, and Majid (1999), observed that watching television, going to the cinema, listening to music and interacting with native speakers are the major out-of-class activities students do. Suh, Wasanasomsithi, Short, and Majid (1999, p.14) further emphasized that "Out-of-class leisure activities will probably never replace the need for in-class second language instruction"; however, some leisure activities are useful in the development of students' English conversation skills. This research is made to investigate the effectiveness of out-of-class activity held in Politeknik Nilai in improving students' English language skills and also to find out what attract students' to learn English language.

Objective

The questions to be answer for this research are to investigate the effectiveness of out-of-class activity to Politeknik Nilai students?

Does it really help improving students English language skills?

What are the factors influenced students in learning English language?

The objectives of the research are:

To investigate the English Language programs that can enhance students' proficiency.

To investigate the impact or benefits of out-of-class English Language programs in helping students' enhance their English language proficiency.

Significance of the Study

This study aimed to help lecturers to see the benefits of using out-of-class learning activities in helping students' improving their English and also in identifying the proper activity that bring big impact in improving students' proficiency. Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002) discovered that most activities adult learners engaged in are related to communication and entertainment, such as watching movies and television in English and using the internet. Additionally, Hyland (2004) noted that the activities students do in English are speaking with family members, talking to people in the stores, talking on the phone, speaking with friends, listening to the radio, attending meetings, reading novels, speaking with colleagues, listening to songs, reading newspapers and magazines, watching TV programs, watching videos, surfing the internet, reading academic books, and writing e-mails in ranking order. For years, more researchers have identified factors leading to EFL/ESL students' learning difficulties in English language (i.e., Chang, Chang, & Kuo, 1995; Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chen, 2002; Underwood, 1994; Yen, 1987).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Nowadays, out-of-class English learning activities has been an essential and popular component of language enhancing in the Malaysian English Second Language (ESL) context. Teachers and lecturers have come up with plenty of programme with one main motive which is helping students' improving their skills. Teachers and lecturers also realized that in class learning only is not enough so brainstorming ideas was held to find the right activity for the targeted students' and bringing big impact on students'. As a result, out of class activities such as Oh My English, Parliamentary debate, Speaker's corner, Fun with English and Poly got Talent being introduced as regular,

common or a must activity mostly in every education institutions especially in Polytechnic Nilai. The introduction of this activities do create steer among teachers and lecturers especially on the effects or benefits of such activities to the students' in educational institution. Not much research has been undertaken seriously to investigate the effectiveness of its in Malaysian higher educational institutions.

English Language Program

There are no secret about the important of English language in our society nowadays, it may not be our mother tongue but it is as important as our main language. It is also has been recognized as an international language and one's who able to master it has advantage than other. This go for Malaysian higher educational institutions where English language has becomes one of core subject that students' must aces. In Polytechnic Nilai, especially diploma student' needs to pass English subjects such as DUE 1012: Communicative English 1, DUE 3012: Communicative English 2 and AE 501/ DUE5012: Communicative English 3 as a requirement for their graduation. Here, students' learn English as a skill before facing the 'real life', because of that the lecturers tried very hard to make sure that they are able to gather all information and knowledge in classroom learning. However, we tend to forget that there are different types of students' that the lecturer needs to face. As an example, we have active and passive students' and like it or not, the lecturer needs to treat them fairly. More importantly, not everything that being teaches by the lecturer can be digested by students' and honestly English language is not a famous syllable, especially among technical students'. Suh, Wasanasomsithi, Short, and Majid (1999, p.14) further emphasized that "Out-of-class leisure activities will probably never replace the need for in-class second language instruction"; however, some leisure activities are useful in the development of students' English conversation skills.

The introduction of English out-of-class activities initially is to help student mastering English language. Out-of-class activities are an activity that used to create a different environment than classroom environment. Where the students' can learn other language skills that limited to be teach in the class. An environment where students' where encourage to improve their potential without any burden put on their shoulder or in other word, it is a fun way to learn English. In out-of-class learning, students' can learn new skills from activities such as parliamentary debate, public speaking, drama and other English games.

Lecturers had introduced and conducted a variety out of class activities that form a path in enriching language learning. A sample of the activities that were held at Nilai Polytechnic included:

Oh My English program & Speaker's Corner

This program is designed to develop an English speaking environment to encourage students to speak using English language with friends and lecturers. It is not only for students but for all, and they are required to speaking 'only' English on the day. With this program, students can practice speaking with peers and also lecturers outside of

classroom learning without worrying making mistakes especially grammatical or pronunciations errors. This program also provided various activities that focusing on improving students' English learning skills such as speaking, listening and also vocabulary. Most attractive of all, students also being rewarded when the involved in this program.

Most modern language lecturers want their students at the center of communication. As Savignon stated, "communicative competence is acquired through communication" (1983, p. 65) and more recently Brown characterized teaching students to communicate in the second language as "the single greatest challenge in the profession" (1994, p.15). Unfortunately, during the communicative process of instruction, it is the lecturer who occupies the central role of imparting information and checking comprehension, releasing his students into student-centered learning exercises when he is certain that his lesson has been understood. Even his most carefully structured exercises, however, may be treated by the students as mere practice rather than a situation where the communication of something real is at stake.

Vygotsky (1962) introduced the concept of a zone of proximal development but did not provide guidance for its use in instruction, although he did claim that the larger this gap between the students' current ability and the problem their teacher assists them to solve the better they learn. Neo-Vygotskian learning theory asserts that effective learning takes place when teachers facilitate solutions for challenges beyond the students' current skill level (Driscoll, 1994) and that a teacher can model the appropriate solution, assist in finding the solution, and monitor the student's progress (Tharpe&Gallimore, 1988). Bearing in mind Brown's challenge to our profession, we are inclined to respond by challenging our students to communicate at the top of their zone of proximal development by replacing us at the center of communication and teaching their class themselves.

After considering applications of cognitive psychology to education, Anderson, Simon, & Reder (1996) conclude that, "Among the processes that have been shown by recent research to have considerable power in speeding the learning process and encouraging the learner to achieve deeper levels of understanding are learning from examples and learning by doing." Thus, according to both the Neo-Vygotskians and Anderson et al., when we provide an appropriate example of teaching and assist the students with suitable communication strategies, they should learn well by doing it themselves.

Parliamentary Debate

This program is designed to exposed students to the format of parliamentary debate, how to debate and develop students' critical thinking.

Debate is an excellent activity for language learning because it engages students in a variety of cognitive and linguistic ways. The purpose of this paper is to elaborate upon this point by providing a step-by-step guide that will give teachers everything they need to know for conducting debate in an English class. So, why debate? In addition to providing meaningful listening, speaking and writing practice, debate is also highly

effective for developing argumentation skills for persuasive speech and writing. Davidson (1996) wrote that "with practice, many students show obvious progress in their ability to express and defend ideas in debate [and] they often quickly recognize the flaws in each other's arguments." Nisbett (2003) declares: "Debate is an important educational tool for learning analytic thinking skills and for forcing self-conscious reflection on the validity of one's ideas (210)."

Fun with English – Newspaper in Education

This program aims to develop students' interest on reading newspaper and also exposed them of utilizing newspaper and creates games through using newspaper so that they can learn English with fun.

Newspaper articles are a readily available way of introducing students to real and topical English in the classroom. In this article, I offer one way of exploiting newspaper articles based on a variation of the classic jigsaw reading technique in which the class is divided into groups and each group is given a different article to read which they then have to explain to others in the class. The variation on jigsaw reading presented in this article offers teachers a way of maximizing student involvement and of covering the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking)

Research by Dr. Dan Sullivan 2002, the University of Minnesota examined programs in 22 cities across the country. The study compared test scores of students who had used the newspaper in class with those who had not. In all 22 cases, those students who used the newspaper scored better on standardized reading test than did those who did not. Minority students and those who were not native English speakers showed the greatest achievement. (2002, NAA Foundation)

PNS X-FACTOR (singing and drama)

This program aims to develop students' talent especially with communication skills in areas of Drama, public speaking, debate and performance-singing. Besides that, incorporate with language games are also included.

This new area of focus, known as communicative competence, leads language teachers to seek task-oriented activities that engage their students in creative language use. Games, which are task-based and have a purpose beyond the production of correct speech, serve as excellent communicative activities (Saricoban&Metin 2000). On the surface, the aim of all language games is for students to "use the language"; however, during game play learners also use the target language to persuade and negotiate their way to desired results. This process involves the productive and receptive skills simultaneously.

In fact, games can provide EFL and ESL students more than that. Among several strategies used to improve students' proficiency such as visual aids, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), drama, role-play, and so on, games are another useful strategy to promote students' language proficiency (Richard - Amato, 1996)

Drama

This program is designed to develop student's talent especially in acting and using English as the main medium of expressing their ideas through story.

An attractive alternative is teaching language through drama because it gives a context for listening and meaningful language production, forcing the learners to use their language resources and, thus, enhancing their linguistic abilities. It provides situations for reading and writing. It is very useful in teaching literary texts as it helps in analyzing plot, character and style. It also involves learners more positively and actively in the text. As Wilga Rivers (1983) states, *'the drama approach enables learners to use what they are learning with pragmatic intent, something that is most difficult to learn through explanation'*. By using drama techniques to teach English, the monotony of a conventional English class can be broken and the syllabus can be transformed into one which prepares learners to face their immediate world better as competent users of the English language because they get an opportunity to use the language in operation. Using drama techniques also fulfills socio-affective requirements of the learners. Moreover, this learner centered approach makes the syllabus personally fulfilling

To quote Gavin Bolton (in Dougill J. 1987), *'drama is a unique tool, vital for language development'* as it simulates reality and develops self-expression. You need not go into a full-fledged production and public performance. You could begin with incorporating one-off and stand-alone drama activities stretching as less as five minutes in your class where students perform for each other. Drama activities or techniques are equally successful in making learners experience language in operation and provide motivation to use language embedded in a context and a situation. The simple "acting- out" requiring the learners to adopt a new position involves them creatively.

The participants carried out the activities in small groups and were later required to present some of the products of the activities to the whole group. Open discussions and comments were encouraged. At the end of the activities, the teachers were asked to reflect on the activities in which they participated and to comment on their feelings and reactions as an individual teacher and alternatively as a student. The lecturers were provided with references on books and other materials to which they could refer for more creative ideas on language learning tasks and activities

The lecturers' participation in the activities helped make them realize that English language learning can be interesting and fun using simple and useful tasks and activities that could be incorporated within in or out of any English language lesson. The lecturers were also made aware that even within an assessment task, such activities could be injected into the routine of "drill and practice" for the assessment. Students require a break from the monotony format exercises through short, fun-filled activities which at the same time help reinforce items learned in the drill practice sessions. The in-class and out-of-class activities have to be related and continuous. For example, in practicing grammatical items in role-plays, students can be further encouraged to use the language learned in a drama or short skit presented as part of a program or competition.

Students were also provided with general information about language learning such as the skills of communication, what Students think that they will be required to be fluent in communication. The lecturers will devote some time to reflect on some of the issues raised about their problems and their development.

Why use English out-of-class learning programs

Most English classroom instruction and activities in Malaysia adopt textbooks or pre-selected materials. While these materials provide valuable information to learners, students seem to have little interest in them. Textbooks often fail to achieve a meaningful level of involvement on the part of the learners; learning need not be confined to the classroom with set textbooks and practice (Griffiths & Keohane, 2000). Students need to develop the ability to acquire information that is available both inside and outside the classroom context (Field, 2007). In order for students to learn a language, they need a sufficiently large body of authentic material which they can understand to work from – material which Krashen (1982) refers to as ‘comprehensible input’. Therefore, Suh, Wasanasomsithi, Short, and Majid (1999, p.14) further emphasized that “out-of-class leisure activities will probably never replace the need for in-class second language instruction”; however, some leisure activities are useful in the development of students’ English conversation skills.

For years, more researchers have identified factors leading to English language students’ learning difficulties. This difficulty occurs in many aspects of English Language learning in form of aspect of speaking, listening, and also vocabulary.

In listening, Yen (1987) pointed out that students’ listening difficulties are in sound discrimination, sound stream division, stress and intonation, vocabulary, phrase and syntax and the seven potential difficulties in listening comprehension identified by Underwood (1994) are: (1) lacking of control over the speaker’s speed, (2) not being able to get things repeated, (3) the listener’s limited vocabulary, (4) failure to recognize the signals, (5) problems of interpretation, (6) inability to concentrate, and (7) established learning habits. Chang, Chang, and Kuo (1995) found that (1) fast speed, (2) a cluster of sounds difficult for segmentation, (3) obsession with the Chinese translation, (4) association of sounds with words and meanings, and (5) idiomatic expressions are the top five listening difficulties of the college students. Chao and Cheng (2004,) in reviewing Rubin and Thompson’s study, identified three common problems in listening to a foreign language; they are difficulty in catching up the fast speed, getting meaning from the TV, and comprehending the vocabulary. Moreover, Chao and Cheng (2004) found out that students’ problems in listening are limited vocabulary, unknown words in the text, little practice in English listening, flaws in text content design, speaker’s fast speed, poor competence, inability to catch the speed, lengthy sentences, linking sounds, and insufficient pauses. To sum up, it seems that pronunciation, fast speed, and limited vocabulary are common factors leading to students’ listening difficulties.

In speaking, Morley (1994) identified that nonnative speakers may experience such problems as complete breakdown in communication, ineffectual speech performance, negative judgments about personal qualities, anticipatory-apprehensive listener reactions, and pejorative stereotyping. In reading, Lubliner (2004) explained that proficient reading entails cognitive and linguistic skills, such as vocabulary, topic knowledge, ability to draw inferences, awareness of purpose, memory, fluency, ability to lift words off the page automatically and efficiently, and the ability to decode and comprehend simultaneously while moving through the text. In writing, researchers such as Chen, Yeh, and Yang (2004) and Chen (1999) all agreed that students had trouble in vocabulary, grammar, organization, and content while writing. McCarthy (1990, xiii) once pointed out that, “No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way.” Specifically, Nation (1990) indicated that getting learners to do language tasks when their vocabulary is inadequate for the task is a frustrating experience.

In vocabulary, Chen and Yeh (2004) believed that the five most difficult factors affecting vocabulary learning are vocabulary abstractness, metaphorical meaning, formality (formal or informal usage), derivational complexity (difference between oral and written vocabulary), and register restrictions (in certain social contexts). In addition, phonetic irregularity, variable stress, homophone, and word length (or multi-syllable words) are all intra-lexical factors that affect vocabulary learning. In respect of grammar learning, *‘there are mountains of evidence that many learners, of whatever age or tendency in learning style, are unable to transfer good formal knowledge of grammar to effective use’* (Gerngross&Punchta, 1994, 2).

Little (2009) emphasized that if learners become more autonomous in language learning, their language use will escalate. If students are not motivated and do not take the initiative for self-learning, the lecturer can facilitate the learning process by setting up a task with directions that will enable them to attain targeted learning goals. In activity-based learning, the roles and responsibilities of the lecturers and students are different from traditional instruction-based learning (Mathews-Aydinli, 2007). The lecturer will act as a coach or a facilitator rather than an information deliverer, and students have to take a more active role when they cannot turn to immediate aid from the teacher. However, the lecturer is not free of responsibility while students are engaged in out-of-class work. Instead, the teacher needs to provide students with assistance in acquiring the necessary materials and approaches to accomplish the task goal.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The present study intends to investigate the effect of the out-of-class activities on students' language awareness in an English language learning environment. It incorporates students' voices, because students' feedback is perceived as an important source in determining how an activity or a program is to be run (Hsieh & Chu, 2006). The study considered the following questions:

1. To what degree does out of class English language activities are effective in improving students' proficiency?
2. Are students' aware of the benefits of participating in English out-of-class activities?
3. Did students' self-perceived language ability increase after their participation in out of class activities?

Instruments

In-class surveys can serve as a base for instruction decisions and provide feedback to lecturers for improvement (Davies, 2006). In order to investigate the effectiveness of out of class English language learning activities in improving Politeknik Nilai students' English language proficiency, a nine-item questionnaire was administered to gather the information needed. Three questions probed the degree of effectiveness of out of class activities in improving students' English language proficiency, three more questions on students' awareness on the benefits of out of class activities and another three questions examined students' attitudes toward participation in English language out of class activities

Participants and Procedures

A total of 50 Politeknik Nilai from first, third, fourth and fifth semester students were chosen as respondents for this survey. They were students' enrolled in DUE1012 Communicative English 1, DUE3012 Communicative English 2 and AE 501 & DUE5012 Communicative English 3. The proficiency of language among these students' varies. The respondent population is primarily Malay and Indian.

Students were given questionnaires regarding English Language program that being held at polytechnic Nilai. The questionnaire focus on the impact of English language program, students' opinion on the program, students attitude in participating those program and do their aware on the benefits of out of class English learning program. The entire respondent managed to give good cooperation in completing this research.

4.0 FINDINGS

Raw data has been collected and help to determine if were successful in reaching targeted goal. These results were mixed.

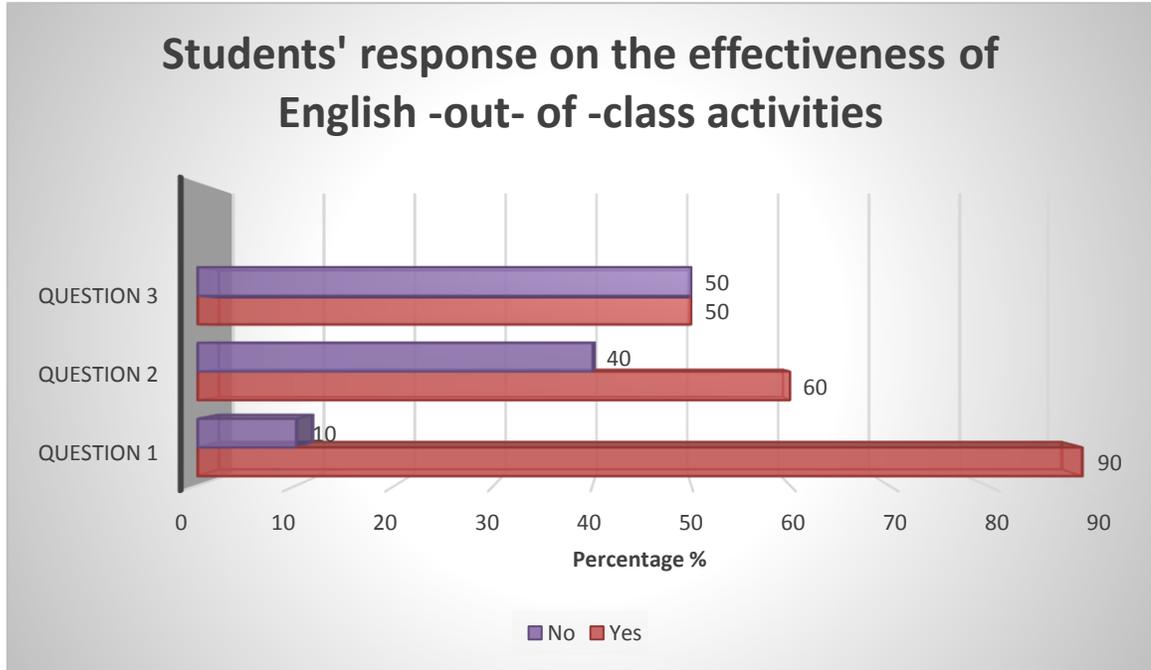


Figure 1.0: Students' response on the impact of English language program.

A total of 50 surveys (100%) were returned. Around 90.0% students claim that English language program is effective in helping them improving their English language proficiency and only 10.0% students disagreed. Next, around 60.0% students agreed that various English language programs can help them improve more and 40.0% students disagreed. Around 50.0% students mentioned that the program provided from English language program is interesting and another 50.0% disagreed.

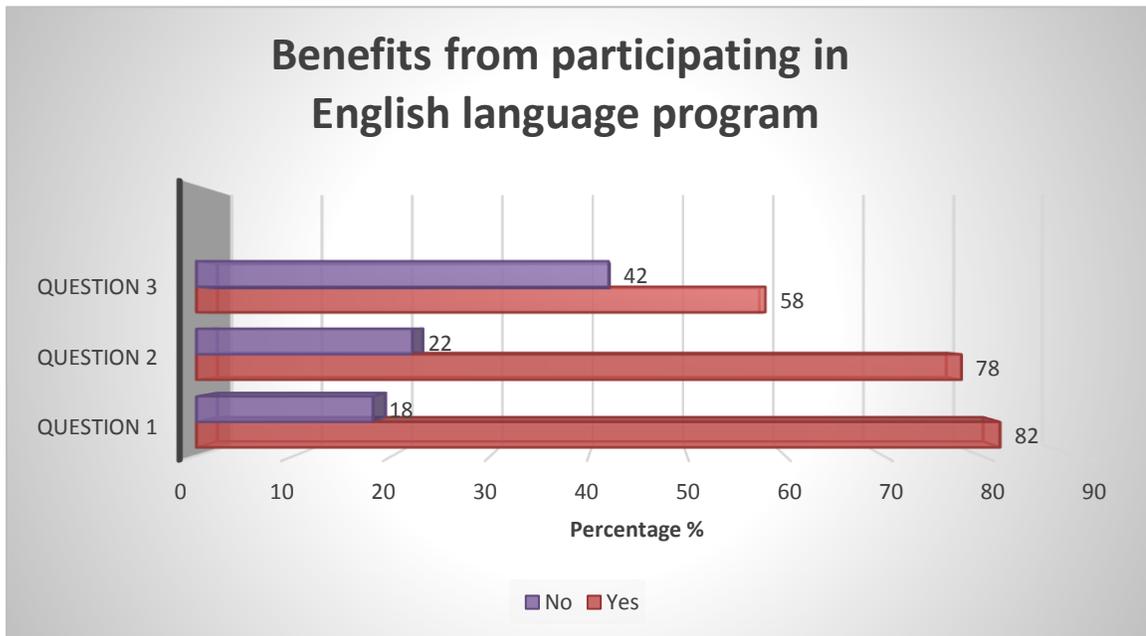


Figure 2.0: Benefits from participating in English language program.

From the surveys, it showed that around 82.0% of students agreed that they received great benefits from this English language program and only 18.0% students disagreed. Then, 78.0% students mentioned that this program helping them in facing language learning difficulties and 22.0% disagreed. Next, 58.0% student's claims that with the activities, their listening, speaking and vocabulary are improving meanwhile 42.0% disagreed because they don't really feel that their language is improving.

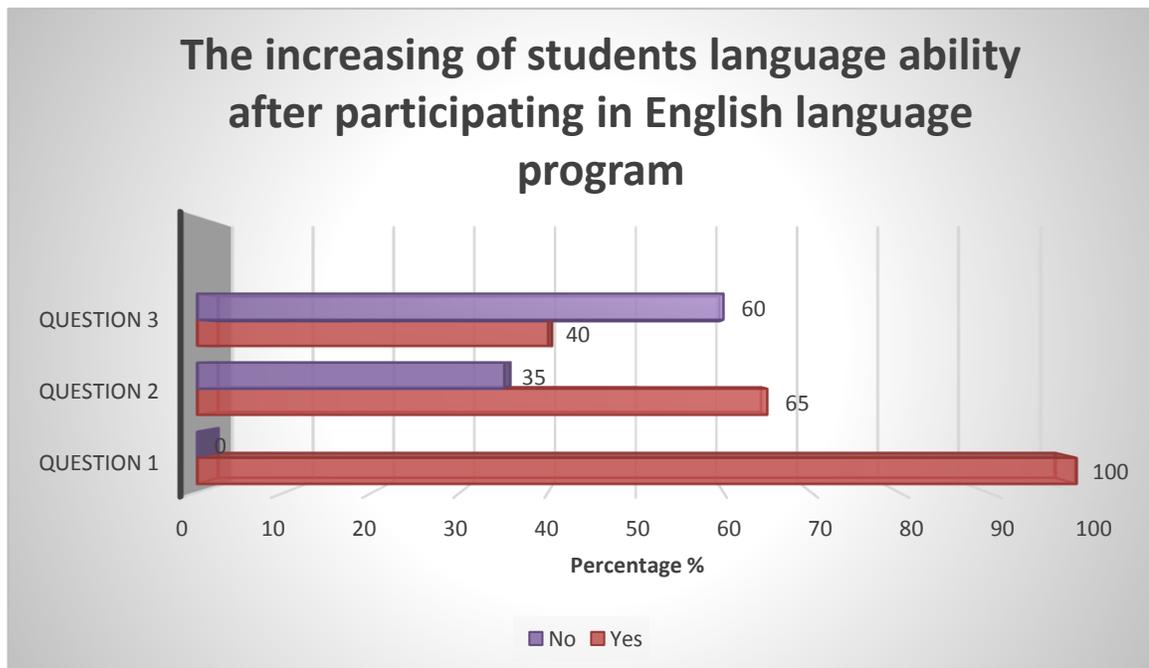


Figure 3.0: The increasing of student's language ability after participating in impact of English language program.

The data in **Figure 3.0** shows that 100.0% students agree that their language ability is increasing. Around 65.0% students believed they are able to gain confident to use English after participating in English language program whereby only 35.0% disagreed. Finally, 40.0% students stated that their participation is voluntary meanwhile 60.0% disagreed because the lecturers make it compulsory for them to join the program.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

The results from the surveys clearly show that the usage of English learning language program bring positive effect to the student's. It is believes that this program could be a good supplement for student's in improving their language ability because of the various activity offer. Overall, students showed interest to learn English language with interesting method and especially out of class learning. It is recommended that polytechnics and lecturers encourage or practice this English language program because it not only improving student's English language ability such as listening, speaking and also vocabulary but it also providing a fun and enjoyable way in learning English language which sometimes difficult to apply in classroom learning. As an educator, the responsibility in teaching doesn't end at the classroom but it beyond that. So, multiple activities can improve multiple skills that probably the lecturer or even students didn't know they have it. Further research is needed to find out if certain activity can be apply in current classroom learning because the positive impact of this activity will definitely make English learning interesting.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The English language program is intended to help students realize that although they are not learning English language in the classroom, they can still improving their language outside of the classroom. The present study demonstrates that this activity encourages students to expand their language experience to outside the classroom by making them aware of interesting way in learning English language. Instead of presenting only formulaic English in textbooks, an out-of-class activity can increase students' exposure to English learning in interesting ways. This study shows the potential value of incorporating out-of-class activities for enriched learning outside of classroom and for autonomous learning. Need to bear in mind; each student is different from one another other so their language ability or proficiency is also different. It is difficult to measure student's competence in the classroom other than identifying group of students such as active and passive students. Certain method is needed to make sure that English language ability can be share equally for both groups of students. Lecturers need to play important roles, not just teaching in the classroom but also out of the class by planning activities that targeting students' English language ability. This English language program maybe not is perfect way in improving students' English language ability but it brings more good than harm. So lecturers should do whatever it takes in fulfilling their responsibility as an educator.

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