TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPEAKING SKILL AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE) UNDERGRADUATES

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to develop a provisional framework of English language speaking skills for early childhood education (ECE) undergraduates. This study was carried out to identify the level of speaking proficiency among the undergraduates, ascertain the challenges faced by them in using English, and determine teaching and learning strategies to overcome the challenges. The study adopts the mixed-method approach. The method used for quantitative data was a survey and speaking test from 90 respondents. The method used for qualitative data was document analysis of 90 language test scores and semi-structured interviews with three students from each semester and five ECE lecturers. The English proficiency level was acquired through the respondents' speaking test scores. The online survey was conducted to ascertain the challenges faced by undergraduates. The semi-structured interviews of students and lecturers were conducted to determine teaching and learning strategies towards overcoming those challenges. The survey was analysed using descriptive analysis of the statistical data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data. The findings revealed that there were no significant differences in speaking proficiency levels between respondents from different semesters (p value=.400). This suggested that there had been no significant improvement in their speaking proficiency level as they progress in their semesters. The findings on the challenges were fear of criticism, limited vocabulary, shyness and no motivation. The findings on the strategies were communication-based language learning techniques, constant use of English and positive language exploration. In conclusion, the provisional Framework of English Language Speaking Skills was developed based on the challenges faced by ECE undergraduates and the strategies employed by them to overcome those challenges. The implication of this study suggests that the framework provides a vital reference for future researchers on how to improve ECE undergraduates' English speaking skills.

STRATEGI PENGAJARAN DAN PEMBELAJARAN UNTUK KEMAHIRAN BERTUTUR BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM KALANGAN MAHASISWA PENDIDIKAN AWAL KANAK-KANAK (PAKK)

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membangunkan kerangka kerja kemahiran bertutur Bahasa Inggeris untuk mahasiswa Pendidikan Awal Kanak-kanak (PAKK). Kajian ini dilakukan bagi mengenalpasti tahap kemahiran bertutur dalam kalangan pelajar, menentukan cabaran yang dihadapi oleh mereka dalam menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris dan menentukan strategi pengajaran dan pembelajaran untuk mengatasi cabaran tersebut. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Kaedah yang digunakan untuk data kuantitatif adalah tinjauan dan ujian lisan terhadap 90 responden. Kaedah yang digunakan untuk data kualitatif adalah analisis dokumen yang terdiri daripada 90 skor ujian Bahasa, serta temuduga separa berstruktur dengan tiga pelajar dari setiap semester dan juga lima pensyarah PAKK. Tahap penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris pula diperoleh melalui skor ujian responden. Tinjauan atas talian adalah untuk mengetahui cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pelajar. Temu ramah separa berstruktur kepada pelajar dan pensyarah dilakukan bagi menentukan strategi pengajaran dan pembelajaran untuk mengatasi cabaran tersebut. Tinjauan telah dianalisis menggunakan analisis deskriptif data statistik. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis data temu bual. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tidak ada perbezaan yang signifikan antara tahap kecekapan bertutur bagi pelajar dari semester yang berbeza (p value=.400). Ini menunjukkan bahawa tidak ada peningkatan yang signifikan dalam tahap kecekapan pertuturan walaupun mereka maju ke semester seterusnya. Hasil penemuan mengenai cabaran adalah seperti takut kepada kritikan, kurang perbendaharaan kata, malu dan tiada motivasi. Hasil penemuan mengenai strategi adalah seperti teknik pembelajaran bahasa berasaskan komunikasi, penggunaan bahasa Inggeris secara berterusan dan penerokaan bahasa secara positif. Kesimpulannya, Kerangka Kerja Kemahiran Bertutur Bahasa Inggeris telah dibangunkan berdasarkan cabaran yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa PAKK dan strategi yang digunakan oleh mereka dalam menangani cabaran yang dinyatakan. Implikasi dari kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa kerangka kerja boleh dijadikan rujukan penting untuk penyelidik akan datang mengenai kaedah terbaik untuk meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur pelajar.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter included a brief introduction, research background, relevant problem statement such as challenges that the Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduates faced due to lack of English Language proficiency and to find the problems behind the lack of English language communication (speaking) skills among undergraduates. It also stated the purpose of the study, research objectives, corresponding research questions, the study limitations and the research's operational definitions. This research also aimed to develop an English language speaking skills provision framework for future guidance based on both the ECE students' and lecturers' suggestions in overcoming the problem.

1.2   Research Background

Language is a prime source of communication. It is the method used to share ideas and thoughts with others. The English language played a significant role as a medium of communication for business, technology and education. Throughout the world, people in Malaysia can speak at least two languages and sometimes three or more to its function in society. The global adoption of English is not a testament to the cultural supremacy of any one country or region, but rather a reflection of the need for a shared language in our deeply interconnected world. Education First English Proficiency (2017) stated that every year, countries/regions spend billions to improve their citizens' English proficiency. Mastering a foreign language takes years, if not decades, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Kim, Siong, Fei and Ya'acob (2010) indicated that in Malaysia, English had a somewhat complicated and ironic status. It was an "inherited" language, a British colonialist "legacy," an unavoidable consequence of its role in our national history. Among Malaysians, English is viewed rather equivocally. On the one hand, it is regarded as an important second language for instrumental purposes, a neutral language for social integration and a pragmatic one for professional growth and career advancement.

As indicated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), each student needs six key attributes to be globally competitive. Every student should have the knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics and spirituality and national identity. According to Malaysia's Education Blueprint (2013-

2025), every child will be, at minimum, operationally proficient in Bahasa Malaysia as the national language and language of unity, and in English as the international language of communication. This means that upon leaving school, the student should be able to work in both a Bahasa Malaysia and English language environment.

Abbreviated as CEFR, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages divides learners into three broad divisions that can be divided into six levels. C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency or advanced) is the 5th level. According to CEFR, language can be used flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes when a wide range of demanding, longer texts can be understood and implicit meaning can be expressed fluently and spontaneously without much obvious search for expressions. Finally, clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects can be produced, demonstrating controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices in language learners as Operational Proficiency.

English is regarded as the second language in Malaysia and all students have to learn the language as a core subject at schools along with the national language of Bahasa Malaysia, History, Mathematics and Science. It is compulsory for the students to learn the language for the duration of 12 years since pre-school until they finish secondary school. Improving students' skill is important to enhance the quality of English language ability and proficiency.

In the Salary Surveys 2016 by the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), it is found that more than 90% of respondents indicated the need for graduates to improve their English proficiency to become more employable. Below is the statement quoted

that shows the need for improvement in English communication skills among graduates:

> "In order to enhance the employability of graduates, he stated that 90.3% of the respondent companies were of the view that it was important to improve the proficiency of English to increase the employability of graduates followed by developing soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving and management skills (87%),"

(English Proficiency Critical To Enhance Employability Of Graduates, 2016)

As stated in employers' views on the importance of English Proficiency and communication skill for employability journal published in 2017, the employers in the private sector would rather employ graduates from transnational private universities because of their better command of English although graduates from Malaysian public universities were more familiar with local conditions, diligent, and have lower salary expectations (Cheong, Hill, Fernandez-Chung, and Leong, 2016).

Employers' perceptions of communication skills and English proficiency were investigated in a study (Su, Marzuki, Kee, Misieng and Jerome, 2017). When it comes to hiring people, the researchers discovered that employers place a high value on communication skills and English proficiency. These abilities are critical to the organization's work flow. From the mass media reports and research papers on graduate un-employability, it was clear that graduates need to have good communication skills and English proficiency to get employed.

These two skills were often mentioned together. This also questions if undergraduates are not prepared or trained well during school or higher education institutions on English Language proficiency focusing on communication skills (interaction). These skills boost their confidence level, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility and positive work ethics. Good academic background with these skills is required in graduates to be able to survive in securing advancement and career curing employment and career advancement, especially for non-native speakers.

1.3   Problem Statement

One of the discussed issues in the local news nowadays is the problem for fresh graduates to get a job in any sectors, as most companies are pinpointing their inability to speak effectively in English. In a column published in The Edge, Alias (2017) cited poor English proficiency as well as lack of experience and exposure to real-world situations as the two leading factors behind increased unemployment among graduates in the country, which had increased further over the years. This statement is relevant to the excerpt below:

"In terms of language proficiency, my discussions with industry employers revealed that foreign employers favour Malaysia over other countries because of our language advantage. We have a pool of workers who can communicate in English. It is therefore unfortunate that mastering English is still somewhat of a problem for Malaysian graduates. Many of them cannot express themselves adequately at job interviews. Not only do they struggle with the language but

they also lack confidence. These present issues for those seeking employment in the services sector, where effective communication is a key skill" reported by Alias, N. Z. (2017, November 11, para. 4).

This supported the notion that most tertiary level students are still struggling with their English language use even after years of learning English in schools. A vast majority of Malaysian students were still unable to gain a good mastery of the language (Jain, Sidhu and Lim, 2012). Even the former Higher Education Minister, Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh admitted that most of the current undergraduates who were enrolled in undergraduate studies mostly fall under the CEFR B1 level, which is, having the ability to use the language only with limited vocabularies and interact regarding familiar matters. (Star Online, 2017). The English competency of tertiary level students was not up to par compared to what is expected of them when they enter the universities and colleges. Johor English Language Teaching Association president, Vincent D'Silva (2018) said that the standard of English in the country was deteriorating with students who had been learning the language for 11 years, but still unable to speak English. He added that efforts were needed to address the issue immediately.

Vygotsky (1962) suggested that thoughts can be developed into words in several stages, starting from imaging to the inner speech and towards a speech act. Consequently, it is crucial to deliver a classroom condition that is loaded with discourse, since the learners should be effectively occupied with their reasoning. On the contrary, in Malaysia, it had been observed that Malaysian undergraduates had between 11 to 13 years of learning formal English lessons in schools, however, their language competence was still a long way from satisfactory (David et al., 2015). According to

the current Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, motivating Malaysians to ace English is a need for the government as to focus on the language that has a huge part in nation-building (Jantmary and Melor, 2014). In fact, according to the Malaysian Education Blueprint, the operational proficiency of English was much lower than expected. This proves that undergraduates need help or guidance with their low-ability of English language speaking skills.

Rohaty (2013) highlighted that preschool teachers had low proficiency in English, cannot speak fluently and had no self-confidence to speak in English. Early childhood teachers who were not well-trained in teaching English will have challenges to support children to acquire English as a second language. This article was relevant to this study because it indicated the need for multilingualism for preschool children. Children should be exposed to languages other than their mother-tongue. This supports that preschool teachers with proficiency in English are greatly needed for second language acquisition. She added that teachers do not have the self-confidence to communicate using the English language. An excerpt from her finding reads:

> "How can a preschool model teacher be good in the English language when they hardly can and able to use the English language without any errors" (Rohaty, 2013, page 153).

Goh (2019) emphasized that high-quality teaching was done through teachers who tend to possess high pedagogical competence (Blazer and Kraft, 2017; Goh, Yusuf and Wong, 2017; Goh, Canrinus and Wong, 2019; Goh and Canrinus, 2019). However, it had alluded in the literature (Butler, 2004; Mariage, Englert and Garmon, 2000;

Richards, 2017) that teachers do require a certain level of language proficiency to be able to be successful in their professional practice. Evans and Cleghorn (2010) surmise "… regardless of the particular context, language is the thread that ties teacher, text, activity, use of space and learner together in the overall process of meaning-making" (p. 142). It had been proven that preschool teachers in Malaysia do not often use the English language to teach or engage in activities that support English language use and development in the early years (Pandian, 2006).

Quite few research (e.g. Ramiaida, Fariza, Hazlina, Ramiza and Wahiza, 2018; Selvaraj, 2013; Wong, 2014) had indicated that teachers still lacked the proficiency to teach in the language and had resulted in poor English proficiency among Malaysian students. Also, some teachers were having problems to teach in schools through the use of English, particularly in rural areas. This indicated the lack of competence of teachers in teaching, leading to an unsatisfactory quality of educational performance (Halim, 2015; Ramiaida, Fariza, Hazlina, Ramiza and Wahiza, 2018).

Based on these past research, the study analysed that teachers are still long way from satisfactory when it comes to language proficiency. Teachers speaking inadequacy results in lower English proficiency among Malaysian students. Teachers are having difficulty in using English to teach in schools, particularly in rural areas. This suggests that a lack of proficiency has hampered teachers' ability to teach resulting in unsatisfactory educational outcomes. As such, the significance of this study lies in speaking capability of a teacher. Preschool teachers' poor spoken language are affected by many variables. As for undergraduates, it may also lead to more pressing issues in the future as it may affect negatively their chances of employability as future early

childhood educators. It is a fact an ECE student's graduate employability can be partly influenced by his or her English proficiency level since most Malaysian early childhood centres (nursery and kindergartens) are private-owned institutions that prefer English-medium instructions as to their main educational niche.

Not just that, the social interaction theory of Vygotsky (1962) included the nurture arguments which said that children can be influenced by environmental factors as well as by their care providers' language input. He thought the child was a small linguist assessing language from adult utterances that were arbitrarily encountered. Furthermore, one of the most relevant theories notifying this research was that of Krashen (1994), who discovered that understandable input via teacher talk was an important component for second language acquisition. The educator should just talk at the level of understanding of a learner, i.e., the learner must be able to comprehend what the teacher says (Nell and Muller, 2010).

The Malay language, or Bahasa Melayu, is the national language of Malaysia and widely used in Malaysia's education system as one of the main mediums of instruction, especially in the national schools and public universities. Because of the aspiration and the need to move into a new era of innovative and knowledge-based one, the government had allowed English to be used extensively as an alternative medium of instruction, especially in private-based Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Resulting from such emphasis, many public universities including Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and its academicians had already started taking initiative in delivering certain courses of studies in English. The English language is keenly being adopted by both students and lecturers since many of these programmes are now using

a dual-language medium in its classes. One of the many programmes that adopted such change in UPSI was Early Childhood Education (ECE), under the Faculty of Human Development.

English proficiency is needed at various levels of the education of a student and with each level, and there is a distinct emphasis. Arshad (2018) added that schools must provide necessary skills for learners to interact in the language whereas academic institutions concentrate on their academics. Below showed an excerpt from the article:

"Universities often find that some students are unable to use basic interpersonal language (English) and therefore need to improve their ability before they can move on to the more demanding aspects of academic English" (Samad, 2018, para. 4).

This statement explained that undergraduates need to improve themselves on the aspect of English language competency, primarily on speaking skills. Such a situation further proved that tertiary students such as ECE graduates were indeed facing a problem in their ability to communicate (speaking) fluently when the English language is involved. Awang (2019) urged that there should be a study on students' poor English language proficiency. National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP), 2021, mentioned that all English language teachers should be at the minimum proficiency level of C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This supports this research where there is a need to review if the teacher's level of English proficiency is in line with the requirements set out in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

As of the last decade, limited understanding of the English language among Malaysian recent graduates was always the concern of decision-makers in education. The potential explanations for the appalling standard of English in the National education system were the poor language teaching of teachers whose own English proficiency was sparse (Ee, 2012), the widespread use of Bahasa Melayu in many other courses (Selamat, Esa, Saad and Atim, 2011), improper teaching methods (Mosha, 2014), educational shift patterns (Kamarudin and Long, 2014), (Souriyavongsa, Rany, Abidin and Leong, 2013). Nevertheless, researchers had underlined another important underlying factor – language learning anxiety (Darmi and Albion, 2012).

This research concluded that there is a need of a study on factors affecting students' poor English language proficiency. Statement by NUTP (2021) clearly shows that poor English capability among undergraduates has been one of the core issue. The purpose of this study would be to identify Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduate's speaking performance and to further analyse the challenges faced by these undergraduates in using English language to speak. Therefore, this study further investigated the challenges that contributed to low English-speaking proficiency among the undergraduates and suggested a provision of framework as a reference for solutions.

The provision of framework will be the contribution of this research. It is based on the students' perspective on their language need, teaching expectations, lecturer's viewpoint on student's need and teaching and learning strategies. The suggestion of requirements and suggestive comments were used as the core in the development of an English language speaking skills provision of framework, which was specified to cater

to Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduates that are trying to improve their speaking skills.

1.4   Aim of the study

The researcher aimed to develop an English language speaking skills provision framework among ECE students. The following research questions in 1.6 were developed to discover Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduate's speaking performance, and to outline the challenges faced by ECE undergraduates in using English language to speak. By figuring out the factors affecting these undergraduates in speaking English, language learning strategies were discovered to overcome each of the problems. Using these findings as a direction, the provision of framework was developed to be used as a guideline for future research and reference for the development of a book, such as English language handbooks or modules. This provision of the framework was constructed from the basis of challenges that the Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduates faced due to lack of English Language proficiency and the problems found behind the lack of English language communication (speaking) skills among undergraduates.

This research also included the suggestions or recommendation on overcoming those challenges. Based on previous research by Mat Saad, Sidek, Baharun, Idrus and Yunus (2016), a conceptual framework was developed to elucidate the interplay of the four notions and their connections to investigate international students' English language learning experiences in Malaysia. Based on another two previous research by

Khalid (2013) and Mikyung et al (2014), a framework was developed by breaking it down to phases and collecting the elements that can be used to design that framework. Therefore, this research applied similar methods in the development of the framework.

1.5   Research Objectives

Related to the scope of the research topic, this research aimed to identify the required element and design a framework that would help to develop the English language speaking skills among ECE undergraduates. The research objectives were created to reflect those elements in which the findings will be used to design the framework. The research objectives were as follows:

1.5.1   To identify Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduate's speaking performance.

1.5.2   To analyse the challenges faced by ECE undergraduates in using English language to speak.

1.5.3   To identify significant difference among English Proficiency Speaking result and their semester.

H0: There are no significant difference among English Proficiency Speaking result and their semester.

1.5.4   To determine teaching and learning strategies to overcome challenges faced by ECE undergraduates.

1.6   Research Questions

Related to the scope of the research topic, the research objectives were refined based on the focus and objective of the research:

1.6.1   How is the Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduate's speaking performance?

1.6.2   What are the challenges faced by ECE undergraduates in using English language to speak?

1.6.3   Are there any significant difference among English Proficiency Speaking result and their semester?

1.6.4   What are the teaching and learning strategies to overcome the challenges faced by ECE undergraduates in speaking English?

1.7   Operational Definitions

1.7.1   English Language at Tertiary Institutions

Language is primarily speech. In the world, a very significant number of languages are only spoken with no template for writing. The majority of languages used their spoken forms more than those written, even with writing scripts. It was an accepted fact that, after listening to sounds, words, phrases and sentences from the surroundings, a language was learned by speaking it first (Anuradha, Raman and Hemamalini, 2014). It is also supported by Shen and Chia (2019) that English speaking seems intuitively to be the most important skill compared to the others. Language for communication has

been globally recognized by the EFL learning context as an essential skill that the use of English as a tool for international communication has obviously been continuing for several decades.

The Ministry of Higher Education's latest Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) stated that all university students in Malaysia must be "proficient in Bahasa Melayu (the national language) and English, as well as encouraged students to learn one additional global language" (p. 15). The importance of Bahasa Melayu, the national language, and English is equalized, indicating that the latter's role in developing knowledge and communication skills among university students is recognized. Too (2017) explained that the importance of the English language in the National Education Philosophy is reflected in Malaysian higher education institutions' admission requirements. In Malaysia, the ability to communicate in English is a requirement for admission to almost all tertiary programs.

As the language of knowledge in tertiary education, English has long held a place of significance, with much work and numerous resources spent on improving the proficiency of students in that language. Predictably, the emphasis of universities' English Language (EL) education had primarily been on allowing students to perform well in their learning achievement. However, the aim and scope of EL learning have progressed to include and outfitting their learners with language ability for the workplace. In particular, universities were now bound to make their graduate students employable and marketable in terms of language (Mardziah Hayati Abdullah, Ho Sook Wah and Wong Bee Eng, 2015).

A Malaysian child was introduced to the English language as early as elementary school. The child needs to be taught in the national curriculum at primary (6-12 years), secondary (13-17 years). It then continues at a post-secondary and tertiary education level and also in other mandatory courses (18 years onwards). In summary, the estimated number of years of English language teaching for ordinary Malaysians who fulfilled their formal education from pre-school to tertiary level (undergrad degree) totals in-between 14-15 years.

The studies above, provide valuable information on importance of learning English language not only during early years but in tertiary institutions. The inclusion of English as a subject in Malaysia's national education syllabus are required, and language experts in the field of education policy are constantly steering the process. The policy of adopting English as the second language has resulted in a situation in which students must cope with learning new content in a language other than their mother tongue, and teaching staff must deliver their courses in English, which is often not their first language.

For this research context, the reference of English Language or language proficiency only emphasised on the speaking skills of undergraduate students who are currently pursuing their undergraduate studies in Early Childhood Education. All the sample participants' other English language skills such as writing, reading and listening were not inclusive in this study's scope. This was due to the researcher's choice to focus and be specific to the requirement of the study, based on the problem statement.

1.7.2   Speaking skills

Rajendran Mahajan (2017) said one of the most interesting facets for achieving the goal of desire was effective communication. Interaction happens verbally or non-verbally on a regular basis at each and every stage of life to convey ideas, thoughts and emotions. The studies suggested that of all the four language developing skills, listening and speaking were taught and learned about in rapid succession. The instructor needs to present the language item in the lesson and situationalized it to the students. According to Shafaat Hussin (2017), the speech was the perfect guide to other language learning abilities whereby learning by speaking was a natural way to learn another language. He also said the speech was essential because it provided an opportunity for the practical use of a foreign language, bringing fluency, correction and accuracy among L2 learners.

Traditionally, good communication aids in achieving desired goal in any environment. Human speak with each other for give respond to or to understand context of discussion. Therefore, it is mandatory for students to speak in English at the territory level. The effort will vary depending on the skills and capabilities of each student. When it comes to the facilities and technology available, everyone should work on improving their English language skills to a sufficient level. Insufficient commitment to improving English as a secondary language and as a communication method in the current context is demonstrated by a student's lack of proficiency in the English language.

This research focused on Early Childhood Education undergraduate's speaking skills in classroom activities. Speaking skills look into student's performances in

applying the English language orally in class. The setting for English language use for speaking includes any forms of oral presentation, mock teachings, and common utterances in ECE classrooms such as asking and responding to questions or sharing opinions and thoughts. Such situations were the main point of reference for participating students and lecturers who would be sharing their thoughts on the problems faced in speaking and their suggestions in overcoming such problems.

1.7.3 Early Childhood Education

"Early childhood" is defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as taking place before the age of eight, and it is throughout that time that a child goes through some of the most rapid rates of development and growth. Their brains are developing faster than at any other stage of life, so it would be crucial these years. Throughout these years, the roots for their social skills, self-esteem, world perception and moral view are set, and perhaps even the development of the cognitive domain.

Kapur, R (2018) mentioned that ECE is considered to be of utmost significance that was realized by all the members of the community, irrespective of their backgrounds and occupations. The first three years of the life of a child are considered to be crucial. At this stage, the child develops the connections to lead to advancement. Whether the parents are educated or not, it is vital for them to possess efficient knowledge, regarding how to implement the functions of growth and development and

recognize the significance of education. They must be able to make an effective contribution once they are aware of various child development strategies.

That one study has shown that Early childhood is defined as the period from birth to the age of eight. One of the reasons that early childhood is considered until the age of eight is to allow him or her to gain a thorough understanding of the entire educational process from playgroup to pre-primary, and from pre-primary to primary. Early childhood education is, for the most part, well-organized. Teachers and other pre-school staff members who are involved in this education must be systematic and methodical in their work and behaviour. It necessitates efficiency in terms of both format and application.

As mentioned earlier in the problem statement, previous research by Rohaty (2013) highlighted that preschool teachers had low proficiency in English, cannot speak fluently and had no self-confidence to speak in English. Specific to this study, the Early Childhood Education courses and its participating ECE students were chosen from a public university. Early childhood undergraduates are chosen to crosscheck if they were not well-trained in teaching English because that will result in having challenges to support children to acquire English as a second language. Any reference to the curriculum or any other relevant information regarding the ECE may only apply to this public university or any other population that are similar. This is because private institutions that provide ECE courses may vary in such aspects. It also applies to the types of problem faced by ECE students in this study and the suggestions recommended in overcoming and developing the provision framework.

1.7.4   Undergraduates

Min, H. W. (2021) mentioned that parents expect qualified staff to care for their children and the Diploma course in Early Childhood Education at university caters for this growing demand. Undergraduates with this educational experience would help shape themselves foster their growth in becoming future global leaders. Therefore, these undergraduates will learn all aspects of early childhood education throughout their course.

This research was limited to the scope of only Early Childhood Education students who are currently pursuing their Diploma at a public university. The participants for this study were from a public university in Malaysia that focuses on teacher education as its niche. This study selected students from semester 2 till semester 5 (different semesters) to answer the research questions.

Selection of students from only certain semesters was purposive. The researcher was able to identify and determine their English proficiency level because, by this semester, the students would have taken the compulsory English proficiency subjects required by the university. Completion of all the English Proficiency subjects was regarded as one of the pre-requisites for the selection of sample participants. They were suitable for this study since they already have English proficiency scores, especially for speaking skills.

1.8   Significance of research

The study was conducted with few significances in mind. There are four main beneficiaries of the study. The findings of this study will redound to the benefit of society considering that communication (speaking skills) plays an important role on daily basis to convey ideas, thoughts and emotions. The results from this research were generally expected to be the source of information on finding current challenges faced by ECE undergraduates in using English language to speak. As mentioned above, this provision of framework was developed to use it as a guideline for future research and development of books such as English language handbooks or modules to improve undergraduate's English language speaking skills.

ECE undergraduates will be the main beneficiary of this research. The results of this research outlined the challenges and suggestions to overcome those challenges. Undergraduates may use it to gain positive feedback for themselves. They can look back and refer to this research to overcome and deal with those challenges with help from lecturers or peers. According to Nazareth (2018), students are fragile and face many obstacles at such a young age which are sometimes extremely difficult to tackle. This study will also help students to prepare for their required practicum or internship in nursery and kindergarten. By overcoming the problems they face in speaking English, they are able to use the language comfortably with children. The language can be used as daily routines or throughout classroom activities. The framework shall guide the undergraduates who are about to undergo an internship right after they finish their education. Their communication skills will no longer be about issues in education. Thus, these undergraduates will continue to help young English language learners to

grasp knowledge of language acquisition. Suggestions in the provision of framework to overcome the each of the challenges will contribute in making sure these undergraduates are ready to face real-time scenarios in their future jobs. That way, undergraduates will become more confident and enhance their self-esteem.

As the undergraduates will become future teachers, the impact they have on children is immense. Their interaction during daily routines and classroom activities is an exposure, an opportunity for children to acquire language, as it had been stated by many second language acquisition theories. When these teachers themselves are not proficient in English language speaking skills, the children will be affected as learning occurs mostly through social interaction. The sociocultural theory suggested that human learning was largely a social process. Sociocultural Theory (1962) was an emerging theory in psychology that looked at the important contributions that society made to individual development. This theory stressed the interaction between social development of people and the culture in which they lived. According to Vygotsky (1962), learning had its basis by socialising and interacting with other people.

The next beneficiary would be ECE lecturers and the university itself. The lecturers will be aware of factors affecting undergraduates' limited speaking using the English language in classroom activities. Lecturers can plan suitable activities and programmes that will encourage and relax the shy students to speak using English more often. Lecturers also will be able to improve the undergraduates' vocabulary and fluency in speaking skills so that it can be applied during classes. Universities can design or review their curriculum or offer courses to create interesting teaching pedagogy, thus creating quality students. Future researchers also can benefit from the

proposed provision of framework to develop English speaking skills. Module or handbook writer can refer to the provision of framework to guide development or structure of their book.

In general, the researcher of the study found that there was a need of a study on factors affecting students' poor English language proficiency. By distinguishing ECE undergraduate's speaking performance and analysing the challenges faced by them in using English language to speak, the study will further prove that there is a gap for improvement. Therefore, this study would also further aid in finding solutions for each of the challenges that contributed to low English-speaking proficiency among the undergraduates.

1.9   Study limitations

The sample participants of this research were taken from undergraduate students who are currently doing Early Childhood Education course in a public university. The study also required the researcher to obtain permission, responses and information from a local university to carry out this study. The provision of framework was based on sample participants who are currently in semester two, four and five. As mentioned above in operational definitions; by selecting students from these particular semesters, the researcher was able to identify and determine their English proficiency level because, by the fifth semester, all the students would have taken the compulsory English proficiency subjects required by the university.

Another limitation of the study was the choice of the sample population. Sample population involved in the study only represented by one public university. This was due to the research design selected by the researcher which was a case study. A case study is an intensive study which focuses only on one specific location, person, group or situation over a period of time. The factor of time and convenience for the researcher was limited and the researcher was unable to expand to represent a bigger population.
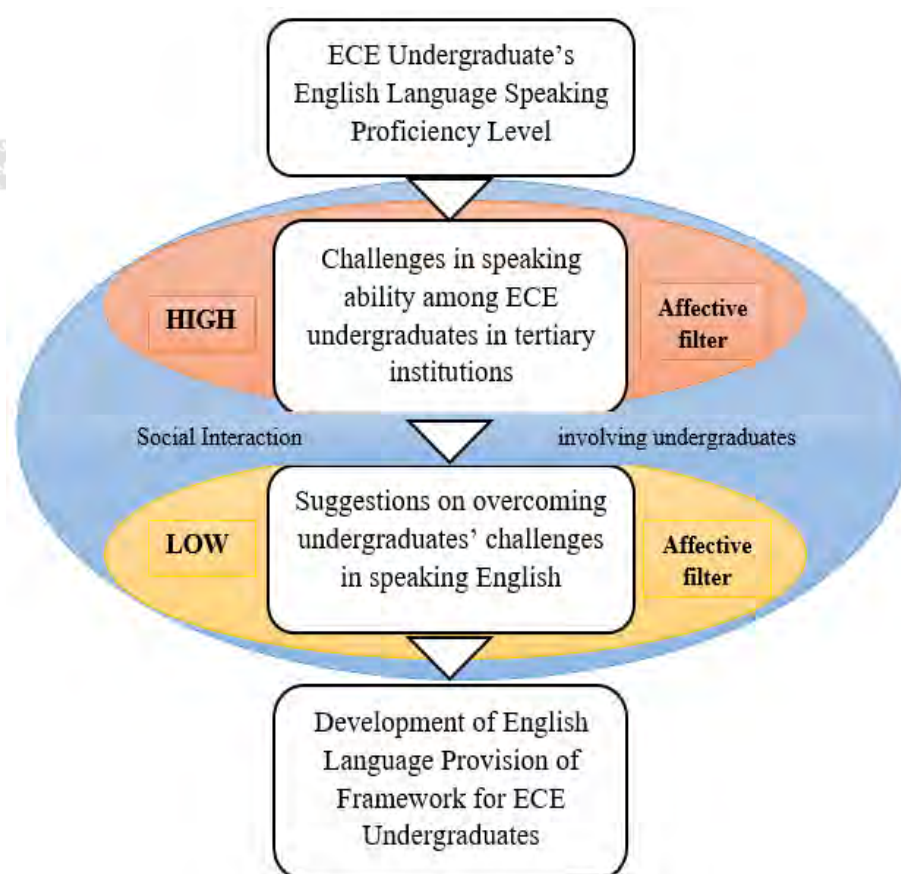
1.10   Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework

Krashen's (2013) viewed that a quantity of 'affective variables' plays a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition, which embodied the meaning of Affective Filter hypothesis. The factors include inspiration, self-confidence, anxiousness and personality characteristics. Krashen (2013) argued that students with high motivation, self-confidence, good self-image, low anxiety and extroversion were best equipped for successful second-language acquisition. The Affective Filter can be raised by factors such as lack of motivation, low self-esteem, nervousness, introversion and inhibition and a mental block' that inhibits the acquisition of understandable input. It obstructs language acquisition when the filter is 'up'.

Using Krashen's (2013) Affective Filter Hypothesis as the basis, this study related the research objectives to create a conceptual framework that acted as the theoretical guidance for this study. This study investigated the challenges that contribute to low English-speaking proficiency among the undergraduates and suggested a provision of framework that would act as the solution. The provision of framework was designed based on the students' and lecturer's perspective regarding ECE students' language need and teaching expectations. Those suggested requirements and suggestive comments were the elements that help the language acquisition filter to be 'down', allowing easier learning for students. The suggestions were used as the core in developing an English language speaking skills provision of framework, which was designed specifically to cater the Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduates that through challenges in English speaking skills.

The researcher's core aim of this study was to develop an English language speaking skills provision framework for ECE students. To do so, the researcher started

by finding out the current level of ECE students' speaking skill and determined if it was truly at a low level, through document analysis (students' scores for English Proficiency subject). Subsequent to that, the study required the researcher to use any suitable data collection methods (mixed method chosen) to find out the challenges and problems faced by the current ECE students' in using English for spoken interactions, especially during their course of study in the university.

These challenges and problems that were derived from the ECE students are what the Affective Filter represents. All the challenges and problem that students listed out represent the 'filters' or barriers that prevented them from acquiring language and utilising them in their daily lives, especially for speaking. It can be categorised under 'High Affective Filter' (as shown in the chart below) whereby the students were viewing these challenges as the main causes for having their 'filter' up when learning and using English during their ECE studies.

Contrastingly, the other part of the study reflects towards the representation of 'Low Affective Filter' which was represented by the ways ECE students could reduce their challenges in using English for spoken interactions. The study considered all the possible ways (suggestions) in overcoming the challenges for the development of the provision of framework. The researcher included all the suggestions and recommendation by ECE students and lecturers derived from the study as it can be associated with the meaning of 'lowering' the Affective Filter, as it helps the students' to solve and reduce their challenges and problems that hindered them from acquiring and speaking in English. With a low affective filter, students' English speaking

tendencies were believed to increase as the students would be more prone to English language acquisition.

After lowering the Affective filter through suggestions and strategies, undergraduates should be able to communicate with everyone, and then incorporate that interaction into teaching and learning. Supported by the Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which is primarily a social process in which the support of parents, caregivers, peers, and the larger society and culture play a critical role in the development of language learning. His theory verified that language acquisition is obtained when children engage in social interactions with others. In this research, others are referred to these undergraduates as they will be associating with this children. These undergraduates will influence a child's potential to learn and acquire English language.

The relevance of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in the conceptual framework also refers to how the social interactions that the undergraduates go throughout their ECE studies. Throughout their ECE course, the interaction that they get involved during their teaching and learning influences the challenges that they face in speaking. It also contributes to the interactions that are suggested to be followed by these undergraduates in order for them to improve their speaking capabilities in English. Overall, all the interaction that the undergraduates participate will impact the student's development either to lower their affective filter or raise their affective filter.

All the data collected contributed to the development of the provision of framework will be used as a guideline for future research such as English language handbooks or modules, catering specifically to future ECE students in UPSI. That was

how the Affective Filter hypothesis was used by the researcher to justify the research procedure and how it catered to the theoretical basis of this research. The following chart portrays the conceptual framework of this research and further simplify the relevance of Krashen's (2013) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky Socialcultural Theory as the base theory.

1.11   Summary

This chapter focused on the introduction of this research in general. It elaborated on the research topic of this study regarding the emphasis on identifying English language use and problems faced by undergraduates in the Early Childhood Education course. This section also introduced the core research questions that were studied throughout this research together with the description of the context where this research took place. Four main research objectives were created to describe what the study is focused on. Firstly is to identify Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduate's speaking performance.

By finding out current undergraduates speaking performance, the study will be able to confirm if the study can continue to further analyse the next research objective which is to analyse the challenges faced by ECE undergraduates in using English language to speak. The third research objectives is to identify significant difference among English Proficiency Speaking result and their semester. Since the undergraduates are required to learn and take up compulsory English courses in the

public university, the study will further confirm if there are no significant difference among English Proficiency Speaking result and their semester.

Finally, with all those findings, the study will determine teaching and learning strategies to overcome challenges faced by ECE undergraduates with its suitable data analysis. These objectives are fixated to further assist the study to find out teaching and learning strategies for English language speaking skill among Early Childhood Education (ECE) undergraduates. Each of the research objectives contribute to each other and fill in the research gap that were stated in the problem statement and significance of this study. At the end of the study, it is expected that undergraduates speaking capabilities should improve.