

Special Education Undergraduate Students Perspective towards the Importance of Malaysia Sign Language Learning

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ABSTRACT--- *This study aims to identify the perspective of undergraduate students of Special Education on the importance of Malaysia sign language learning. The study involved the views and perspectives of 200 undergraduate students of Special Education at three public universities. These three Public Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA) offer special education and sign language courses as one of the compulsory courses for students. This study was conducted by distributing questionnaires to students and analyzed using Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. The results showed that all items achieved a high level of agreement with a mean score of 4.67 and standard deviation (SD) was 0.359. The highest mean values were shown and indicated that sign language enabled students to communicate with hearing-impaired students (mean = 4.74, SD = 0.359) in the third item. In addition, the second position indicated that sign language was a compulsory course for special education undergraduate students with a high level of agreement scores (mean = 4.72, SD = 0.450) on the second item. Therefore, the findings show that sign language learning is a very important skill that students need to acquire in order to become a versatile, skilled and quality special education teacher.*

Keywords--- *Importance, Perspective, Malaysia Sign Language, Special Education Undergraduate Students.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Sign language is one of the forms of communication used by the hearing impaired. In addition, sign language can be used by those with speech problems, those who cannot learn the language through speech, and those who cannot hear (Wilbur, 2013; Lieberman et al., 2014). This is because sign language is a non-verbal language or communication that does not involve speech. According to Maizatul Haizan and Noor Afzalza Nazira (2017), non-verbal communication is a way of passing on information or information to others without using words or words, instead gestures or signals are used.

The use of sign language gives the hearing impaired an opportunity to express their thoughts, opinions, ideas, feelings and so on. Sign language can be seen as unique when it comes to the shape or symbol of a hand that gives meaning to a situation (Loughran, 2013). In addition, body language and facial expressions become an attraction and intonation in the use of sign language (Wilbur, 2013). Sign languages, too, have their own grammar and the formation of sign languages is shaped by the environment, practices and culture practiced (William et al., 2005; Loughran 2013).

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In Malaysia, sign language is indeed used as the main communication for the hearing impaired. Therefore, the use of sign language has been used by them since the school days (Willoughby, 2010; Mohd Hanafi et al., 2017). Even, sign language is also used in teaching and learning for students with hearing loss (Mohd Hanafi et al., 2017), effective. As a teacher who teaches the hearing impaired learners, they need to master the sign language from the very beginning of higher education so that the lessons delivered to the hearing impaired learners can be effectively delivered (Mohd Huzairi et al., 2017). However, what is the special education students' view of the importance of learning the sign language courses offered by the university? Therefore, this study was conducted to look at the students' perspectives on the importance of sign language learning that they learned in university.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of formal sign language was identified when it started at the Federal Deaf Children's School in 1954 founded by Lady Templer. Although, at that time, the educational system for hearing impaired students used the method of oralism but students still used sign language outside of school hours. Then, in 1960 Tan Yap, who was a teacher and educational activist for the hearing impaired, traveled to the United States to learn the hearing impaired's sign language and culture there. Once back home, he spread the American sign language to the hearing impaired community and set up a social club and clubs to develop the hearing impaired community for 40 years until he was called the Deaf Father in Malaysia (Syar Meeze et al., 2017). Subsequently, in 1978 the code signature of the Malay language (KTBM) was introduced to help improve the coup and established a good Malay language (Abdullah & Che Rabiaah, 2009). However, the Malay language code signature is not a language but a code of hand formed and enacted to facilitate the hearing impaired to learn Malay language (Abdullah et al., 2009). This causes the hearing impaired to keep using a different signal structure and formation of the Malay verse.

In 1996, the hearing impaired community agreed to start the Malaysian Sign Language Development (BIM) project because it was disputed by the hearing impaired overseas because there was no sign language of their own and for the fact that they even use the American Sign Language (Syar Meeze et al., 2017). The effort was successful until 2000, the Malaysian Sign Language was recognised as the official language of the hearing impaired in Malaysia and later recognised by the Ministry of National Unity and Community Development. The development of the Malaysian Sign Language was growing as the Malaysian Federation of Deaf (MFD) set up a Malaysian Sign Language Training Center aimed at facilitating communication between the hearing impaired and the normal people. To date, the Malaysian Sign Language has been widely used among the hearing impaired and even the normal group of people also wants to learn about the Malaysian Sign Language (Hasuria, 2009).

However, the Malay Manually Hands Code (KTBM) continues to be used in schools as a medium of communication in teaching to the hearing impaired. This is because, the Malay Manually Hands Code (KTBM) is not a language but a code of arms used in teaching Malay language. These codes are formulated according to the structure and grammar of the Malay language in order to facilitate the coup to learn the Malay language grammatically correct (Abdullah et al., 2009). Therefore, there are two forms of sign language that have been used in the schools of Special Education Hearing which are the Malaysian Sign Language and the code signature of the Malay language (Zulkifli, 2010). This is evidenced by a circular issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia

dated January 4, 2017 stating that both can be used as one of the forms of communication that can be used in the education system for the hearing impaired.

In terms of teaching and learning, sign language is used as one of the communication mediums for the hearing impaired. This is because, it is easier to understand the lessons conveyed using sign language (Wilbur, 2013). This is also supported by McKee et al. (2012) who stated that the use of sign language in teaching is not only easier to understand by the hearing impaired but also interesting for them to learn. Similarly, in a statement by Abdullah (2014) who stated that the hearing impaired can quickly master a lesson when it is explained using sign language.

In addition, the use of sign language in education is to facilitate the hearing impaired's communication with teachers (Abdullah, 2009). The use of sign language in teaching and learning enables the hearing impaired to ask, express opinions or ideas. In addition, by using sign language, the hearing impaired is more daring to communicate and even enhances student engagement in the classroom (Ross et al., 2009). This is also supported by Abdullah et al. (2009) who stated that communication using sign language can train, give confidence and increase the level of concentration of students like this to learn.

Therefore, it is clear that teachers who teach the hearing impaired must prepare themselves in mastering sign language so that communication and communication between teachers and students is not interrupted (Mohd Huzairi et al., 2017). In addition, Mohd Hanafi et al. (2017) has recommended that language learning for special education teachers with hearing disabilities should be initiated and their skills should be upgraded since university. This is so that when these teachers are placed in Special Education schools, they are already able to communicate better. In conclusion, it proves that sign language courses are very important for Bachelor of Special Education students to assist future teachers in learning sign language before they are placed in the Hearing Special Education school.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at three Institutions of Higher Education (HEIs) around Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Perak which have sign language courses for undergraduate students. This study used quantitative method which questionnaire form was used and then analyzed using Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. About 200 students from three different HEIs responded to the questionnaire. The sampling was using simple random sampling technique.

The instrument was based on previous research (Pajuzi, 2018) and expert views. This instrument was modified and validated by five experts from the teaching in sign language field. They have been teaching sign language for over five years.

There are two sections that students need to fill in which are: part A is the demographics of the respondents and part B is the students' perspective on sign language learning. For section A, descriptive statistics are used to describe respondents' demographic data in terms of frequency and percentage to provide information about the respondents' or students' background. Whereas for section B, five items are included in the questionnaire provided. Five-choice forms were chosen by the researcher in the questionnaire consisting of strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat agree, agree and strongly agree. The researcher has also made an analysis of the mean score based on Nunnally's (1994) mean score interpretation. The mean score of Nunnally (1994) has four stages of proposed interpretation of the score:

Table 1: The Level of Interpretation based on Nunnally Minimum Score Range (1994)

<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Level of Interpretation</i>
1	1.00 - 2.00	Low
2	2.01 - 3.00	Very Low
3	3.01 - 4.00	High
4	4.01 - 5.00	Very High

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

From Part A of the questionnaire was related to the demographics of the respondents involved in this study. This study involved a sample of 200 undergraduate special education students studying the sign language course. The demographic section consists of personal information that includes the gender, field, age, and age of the student. Table 2 shows the personal information obtained from 200 Bachelor of Special Education students.

Table 2: The Personal Information of the Bachelor of Special Education Students

<i>Item</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender	Male	48	24.0
	Female	152	76.0
Course	Special Education of Hearing	94	47.0
	Special Education of Vision	18	9.0
	Special Education of Learning	50	25.0
	General	38	38.0
Year	One	51	25.5
	Two	64	32.0
	Three	85	42.5
	Four	0	0
Age	25 Years Old and Above	12	6.0
	23 to 24 Years Old	82	41.0
	20 to 22 Years Old	106	53.0
	Less than 20 Years Old	0	0

Table 2 shows the personal information of Bachelor students of Special Education at the three Institutions of Higher Education (HEIs). In this study, the total number of respondents was 200 people comprising 48 male respondents (24%) and 152 female respondents (76%). The percentage of female students is higher than that of male students because the number of female students pursuing a bachelor's degree in special education is more favourable to female students than to male students.

In addition, of the 200 respondents in the special education area, 94 of them (47%) took the special education of hearing stream, 18 (9%) in the special education of vision stream, 50 (25%) in the special education of learning stream and 38 people (19%) who received special education in general. Respondents with a special education of hearing represented the most respondents in this study with a frequency of 47% ($n = 47$) while respondents with a special education of vision stream had the lowest frequency of 18% ($n = 18$). This is because, there are higher institutions that offer sign language courses to all special education streams, while there are higher institutions that offer sign language courses only to students who are taking a special education stream.

Subsequently, the respondents of this special education undergraduate student population consisted of the year one students which consists of 51 students (25.5%) and year two students with a total of 64 people (32%). Meanwhile, year three students are altogether 85 people (42.5%) and no respondents from year 4 students. The difference in the number of years this respondent is different is due to the number of students taking sign language courses at each HEIs. In addition, the absence of four-year respondents was that during this study, all four undergraduate special education students at each HEIs were doing their practical in schools.

On the other hand, as for age information, the respondents of the Bachelor of Special Education students aged 25 and above were 12 (6%), 23 to 24 years were 82 (41%), 20 to 22 years were 106 (53%) and no respondents for students who are less than 20 years old. The age difference is due to the different birth dates of the respondents and there are some students who have studied at Matriculation, sixth grade and preparatory centers before they continue their undergraduate studies.

Whereas section B presents the results of special education undergraduate students on their perspective on the importance of sign language learning. Table 3 provides insights from 200 undergraduate Special Education students.

Table 3: The Perspective of Bachelor of Special Education Undergraduate Students

<i>No.</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
1.	I'm interested in learning sign language.	200	4.53	0.500
2.	Sign language is a skill that Special Education Students need to learn.	200	4.72	0.450
3.	Sign language is one of the forms of communication used by hearing-impaired students in schools.	200	4.69	0.466
4.	By learning sign language I can communicate with the hearing impaired students.	200	4.74	0.440

5.	The use of sign language makes me more confident in teaching students of hearing impaired	200	4.71	0.455
	Average	200	4.67	0.359

Based on the findings of the views of 200 undergraduate special education students on the importance of sign language learning, the overall performance is at a high level of agreement with a mean score of 4.67 and a standard deviation of 0.359. It is found that all items measured have a high degree of agreement.

The highest mean values indicated the students' perspective of that sign language enabled students to communicate with hearing-impaired students (mean = 4.74, SD = 0.359, n = 200) was the fourth item. In addition, the second position in the second item indicated the students' perspective of that sign language is a skill that special education bachelor students need to learn with high agreement scores (mean = 4.72, SD = 0.450, n = 200). Furthermore, the third item, which is the fifth item where the students found that proficiency in sign language made them more confident in teaching special education students with high consent scores (mean = 4.71, SD = 0.455, n = 200). Then, in the fourth position, the third item shows the students' perspective that sign language is one of the forms of communication used by hearing-impaired students in schools with high scores (mean = 4.69, SD = 0.466, n = 200). Finally, the fifth item indicated the students' perception of that they were interested in learning sign language with a high mean score (mean = 4.53, SD = 0.500, n = 200).

V. DISCUSSION

The findings show that 200 undergraduate students feel that learning sign language is a necessary skill for them. This is because, if they are able to master the sign language they will be able to provide understanding to the hearing impaired to understand the lessons that are being delivered. In fact, the mastery of a language that is easy to understand in a community will have a positive impact on communication (Maizatul et al., 2019). Sign language is a visual language that fits into the context of semiotics (theory of signs), which is the knowledge of signs and symbols (Faridah et al., 2012). Therefore, sign language can effectively convey visual imagery that shows signs or symbols in interpreting information easily. In addition, the hearing impaired's understanding of the teaching and learning sessions using sign language is because sign language is a non-verbal language of non-verbal communication. Although sign language does not involve speech, it is still part of the communication process that is the process of communicating information (Abdullah, 2014).

According to Watson and Hill (2003) based on the Jakobsons Communication Model, among several functions of communication are as tools (acquiring something), control (controlling behavior), information (acquiring and explaining information), expression (expressing intentions) and social relations (involved in the community). This function can be done not only in the spoken language but also through the use of sign language. Therefore, the teaching delivered by teachers to the hearing impaired using sign language has fulfilled the five functions of communication. First, sign language has created an easy way of communicating the teaching lesson to the hearing impaired. Secondly, looking at the control aspects of sign language use, the hearing impaired behaviour can be controlled when they understand what the teachers are saying. Third, the informational aspect of sign language usage has provided much useful information to the hearing impaired. The four expressions, which are from the

aspect of the use of facial expressions and body language used in communicating, it also allows the hearing impaired to focus and reach their hearts. Fifth, social information, which is sign language, has benefited the hearing impaired to understand and communicate effectively with teachers.

The findings also show that students have the desire and interest to learn sign language skills. To acquire these skills, students need to be passionate about learning sign language. According to Roshidah (2017), a person who learns the language should show a high degree of enthusiasm and even have a passion for learning a new language. This is because language learning not only emphasizes the meaning and matches two or more words, but it is appropriate to put the meaning in the context (Lily Hanafarezan et al., 2018). Therefore, students need to demonstrate a high level of commitment so that the sign language they learn can be used correctly and appropriately by their practitioners.

Learning sign language is a new language that enhances human intelligence. This is in line with Howard Gardner's theory of various intelligences (1938) in linguistic theory (Nuzulul Faidah et al., 2019). According to Howard Gardner (1938) in Nuzulul Faidah et al. (2019), he says that learning a language is an aspect of the development of human intelligence that is closely linked to linguistic intelligence. Therefore, learning sign languages can require special education undergraduate students to be more active in learning and developing the linguistic intelligence that everyone has. To enable the development of linguistic intelligence within their students, they must work hard at mastering this unique language, which is not only a language but a lot of mental and physical force to communicate (Roshidah, 2017). Therefore, it is appropriate for sign language to be learned by every student of special education because it can make them more active and active and develop their existing talents.

VI. IMPLICATION

Based on the findings of this study, there are several implications that should be noted which firstly, every university in particular that offers a bachelor's degree in special education or social science should provide sign language courses in syllabus for all students to communicate with the hearing impaired whenever they encounter this group. The university should make the language of sign language as a preferred subject at the university for all staffs and students so that the exposure and knowledge of sign language can be developed as well as becoming a new language skill for university students.

VII. CONCLUSION

Overall, the undergraduate students of Special Education's perspective on the importance of sign language learning is high and positive. This is because students feel that sign language skills is a skill that they need to master. In addition, these skills enable students to communicate and teach the hearing-impaired learners better. In addition, mastering these sign language skills can make them to be more ready to teach the hearing impaired if they are placed in a special education school.

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