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**ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE USING MULTILITERACIES  
PROJECT APPROACH TO AUGMENT EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS  
AMONG MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY GRADUATES**

*Meningkatkan Kualiti Kehidupan Menggunakan Pendekatan Projek Pelbagai  
Literasi untuk Meningkatkan Kemahiran Kebolehpasaran Pelajar Universiti di  
Malaysia*

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**Abstract**

The high unemployment rate among Malaysian university graduates is often associated to the lack of English communication and technological skills among the graduates. This study explores the utilization of Multiliteracies Project Approach in augmenting employability skills among the graduates. This qualitative study was conducted at a public university in Malaysia, involving 50 students in an English communication course. Data was collected through observation, interviews and reflective journals and data was analyzed using a thematic analysis. Findings show that the use of MPA developed the students' English language communication skills and technological knowledge. The findings also provide a significant pedagogical implication.

Keywords: multiliteracies, English language communication skills, employability skills.

**Abstrak**

Kadar pengangguran yang agak tinggi di kalangan graduan universiti di Malaysia sering dikaitkan dengan kekurangan kemahiran berkomunikasi di dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan kemahiran menggunakan teknologi di kalangan graduan. Kajian ini meneroka penggunaan Pendekatan Projek Pelbagai Literasi dalam meningkatkan kemahiran kebolehpasaran di kalangan graduan universiti di Malaysia. Kajian kualitatif ini dijalankan di sebuah universiti awam di Malaysia, yang melibatkan 50

pelajar yang mendaftar dalam kursus Bahasa Inggeris Komukasi. Data dikumpul melalui kaedah pemerhatian, temubual dan jurnal reflektif, manakala data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan Pendekatan Projek Pelbagai Literasi mengembangkan kemahiran komunikasi Bahasa Inggeris pelajar dan juga meningkatkan pengetahuan penggunaan teknologi. Penemuan ini juga memberikan implikasi signifikan terhadap bidang pedagogi.

Kata kunci: pelbagai literasi, kemahiran komunikasi di dalam Bahasa Inggeris, kemahiran kebolehpasaran.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In moving towards global excellence, Islamic higher education must ensure that education they provide enhances the quality of life of their graduates. It seems that the quality of life of some Malaysian university graduates is disrupted as the number of unemployed graduates is rising (Jobstreet, 2016; MIDF, 2018; The Economy, 2018). It was highlighted that from 2010 to 2013, the number of unemployed graduates had grown from 42,954 to 52, 282 whereas in 2016, up to 161,000 graduates or 8.8% of those aged between 20 and 24 are expected to be unemployed (Ooi, 2016). In 2018, according to a report by MIDF, the unemployment rate among Malaysian university graduates increased to 9.6% with almost 204,000 graduates. The Economy claimed that this figure made up 40.5% of the total unemployment percentage in Malaysia (Andrea, 2018). Studies indicated that the issue of unemployment among Malaysian university graduates may be caused by the lack of employability skills (Hairuszila, Hazadiah & Normah, 2009; MIDF, 2018; MOHE, 2011; Morshidi, S., Heng, C. L., Munir, Shukran, Seri Rahayu, & Singh, 2012; Nooriah Yusof & Zakiyah Jamaluddin, 2015; The Economy 2018; Yahya, 2006) which are sets of skills and knowledge that graduates are required to possess in order to meet the demands of employment upon completion of their studies (Nooriah Yusof & Zakiyah Jamaluddin, 2015).

This issue has received a considerable attention from the Malaysian government and a Graduate Employability Blueprint was introduced in 2013 to improve employability skills among university graduates through meeting the needs of the work industry (MOHE, 2011). The blueprint highlights the important role of education in addressing this issue by introducing Graduate Employability Competencies (GEC) to be included in all curriculum in universities. GEC advocates that all curriculum should include academic content alongside employable attributes (MOHE, 2011). Among the highlighted employable attributes were English language proficiency, communication skills, collaborative skills and technological competence.

Education is important in enhancing the quality of life of university graduates. It is imperious that a suitable teaching approach be adopted to ensure that the employable attributes set in the blueprint (MOHE 2011) can be achieved. This study explores the use of a new teaching approach known as the Multiliteracies Project Approach (MPA) in teaching English language in a Malaysian public university. This paper aims to answer the following question:

1. How does the multiliteracies approach enhance employability skills among Malaysian university graduates?

In order to answer the question, this paper will discuss the theoretical background of MPA, methodology of the study which includes the research procedures, data collection and data analysis methods as well as the MPA project. Next, the paper discusses the findings and concludes with a discussion of findings and the implications to the pedagogical field

### **MULTILITERACIES PROJECT APPROACH**

Multiliteracies Project Approach (MPA) is a pedagogical approach that combines two established teaching approaches which are: the multiliteracies approach (New London Group, 2000) and project-based learning (Blumenfield, 1991). The notion of multiliteracies was established due to the transformation and advancement of technology and global economy, (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a, 2009b; Gee, 2002; Kalantzis, 2006; New London Group, 2000). In the 21<sup>st</sup>. century, learning is about possessing the knowledge and skills that are necessary for learners to understand, discuss, reflect and use multiple representations of texts, such as in current technological resources to participate effectively in a variety of formal situations such as economy and work, and social situations such as leisure and cultural activities (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a, 2009b; Fariza Puteh Behak, Ramiaida Darmi & Yuslina Mohamed, 2015; Kalantzis, 2006; New London Group, 2000). Multiliteracies approach emphasizes the knowledge process such as experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying that is significant to function effectively in the 21<sup>st</sup>. century (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a, 2009b; Gee, 2002; Kalantzis, 2006). In addition, the multiliteracies approach also emphasizes the use of multimodal resources that incorporate print, audio, visual, gestural, and spatial representations; which are present in the digital texts of the 21st century (Charles, 2008; Iyer & Luke, 2010).

Meanwhile, project-based learning emphasizes learning activities that are student-centered and interdisciplinary (Chalermchai, 2013; HQPBL, 2018; Markham, 2011). The main emphasis of project-based learning is engaging students in authentic

situation and meaningful learning situations (Chalermchai, 2013). In project-based learning, students learn knowledge and elements of the core curriculum, but also apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce relevant results (Markham, 2011). In the course of the project, students were engaged in diverse knowledge process such as asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artefacts (HQPBL, 2018).

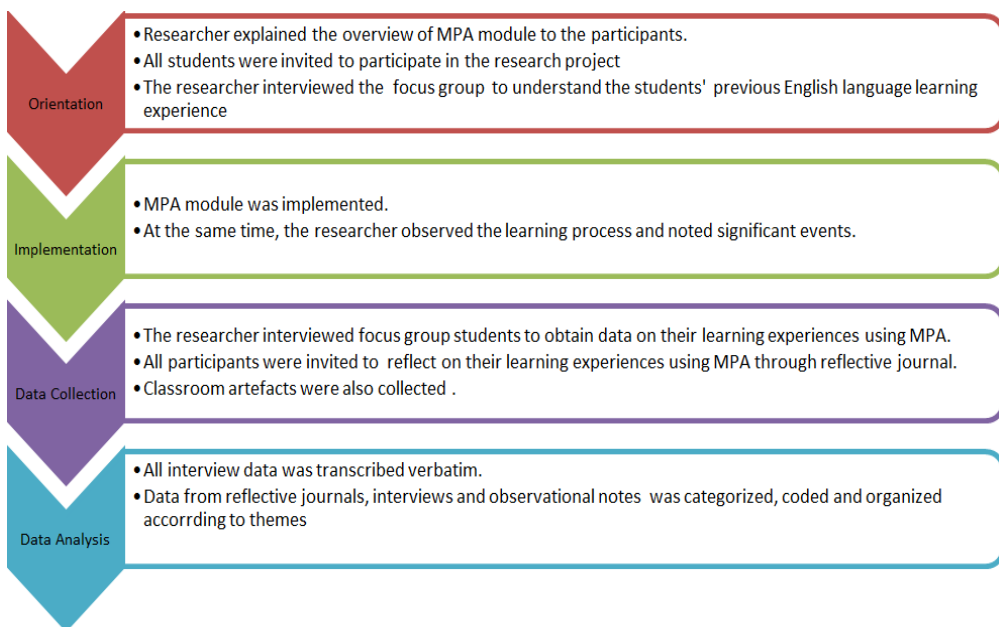
MPA combines both the core elements of the multiliteracies approach and project-based learning. The main feature of MPA is the interconnectedness between all lessons in the classroom, curriculum requirements, knowledge process and the use of technological tools. All lessons are connected to the completion of one MPA project. This is to ensure that the students will have a meaningful learning. In the course of completing the MPA project, students will use relevant tools, including traditional and technological tools. At the same time, students will participate in activities that cultivate 21<sup>st</sup>. century knowledge process.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was a qualitative study. It was conducted at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Malaysia, involving 50 students who were enrolled in two English for Communicative Purposes classes. The age of the students ranged from 19 to 20 years old and they were in their first year of undergraduate study in the Faculty of Quran and Sunnah. All students had intermediate English language proficiency level as they scored Band 3 in the Malaysian English University Entrance Test (MUET). This study also had a focus group which consisted of 10 students from each class.

Figure 1 illustrates the research procedure of the study. The research project began with an orientation session where the researcher introduced the study to the participants and all participants were invited to participate in the research project. Then, an interview was conducted with the focus group to obtain data on the students' previous English language learning experiences. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. At the implementation stage, MPA was implemented in the classroom for one semester (14 weeks). At the same time, the researcher observed the students' learning process and noted significant events. The researcher took up the role of a participant-observer (Creswell, 2005) as she was also the teacher in the two classrooms. Next, after the MPA project was completed, the focus group was interviewed to obtain data on their learning experiences using MPA. Simultaneously, all participants also reflected their learning experiences using MPA in their reflective journals. In addition, data was also collected from classroom

artefacts which include their classroom documents and assignments as well as the students' video documentaries. Finally, data from the interview were transcribed verbatim and all data was categorized, coded and organized into significant themes. All data was then analyzed using thematic analysis approach.



**Figure 1. Research procedure**

For this study, qualitative data collection and analysis were utilized. Data was collected through interviews with the focus group. Two interviews were carried out; one in the beginning of the semester and the other one at the end of the semester. The first interview was conducted to get data on the students' previous English language learning experiences. Meanwhile, the second interview was conducted to get data on the students learning experience through using MPA. All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Another tool to collect data was classroom observation.

In addition, data was also collected through reflective journals, in which all participants recorded their learning experiences in using MPA. Classroom artefacts such as classroom documents, assignments and video documentaries were also collected as data. Then, all data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. First, audio data from the interview was transcribed verbatim using play-script transcription technique (Midgley, 2012) where emphasis was given on 'what' was

said rather than ‘how’ it was said. Next, all data was categorized and coded and later organized according to significant themes.

MPA focuses on the cultivation of 21<sup>st</sup>. century skills as well as providing a meaningful learning process for the students. In order to do so, all students were required to complete an MPA project. The MPA project for the current study was creating a video documentary on a current issue. For this project, the students were required to conduct a mini research project and present the findings of the research in the form of a video documentary. Students worked in groups of four to five members to explore an issue within their community or campus. The video documentary should include a brief background on the issue, survey results and interview section with community members. In the process of completing the project, the teacher facilitated learning by encouraging students to explore the use of online tools such as Google Form, Google Drive, PowToon, and Movie Maker.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Data shows that the use of MPA provided opportunities for students to enhance employability competence such communication, technological, and collaborative skills. This paper focuses on two main themes of the study which were development of communication skills and enhancement of technological competence.

### **Development of communication skills**

Firstly, in the process of completing the MPA project, the students had the opportunity to communicate with other people. A participant indicated that completing the MPA project helped him to improve his communication skills: *“Yes, because I like to learn about the multimedia things and this activity helped me in my communication skills”* (Reflective journal, BS20). This point is supported by another participant as she mentioned that MPA activities improved her soft skill, which was communicating effectively with other people. It is interesting to note that she thought that she was a better person in terms of communicating with other people: *“It made me a better person in front of the public. I could improve my soft skill every time I speak to other people. I also got to communicate with other people”* (Reflective journal, BS20). Furthermore, AS13 also thought that in the process of completing the MPA project, she learned effective techniques in communication such as eye contact and appropriate body language: *“I learned how to express my behaviour, eye contact, body language and many things while recording the video”* (Reflective journal, AS13).

Furthermore, BS1 claimed that through MPA activities, she learned the skill to interact with a person she had just met. She mentioned that she learned how to break

the ice in starting a conversation and she described the experience as an excellent experience: *“I need to break the ice and approach the people that I don’t recognize at all. It is an excellent experience for me”* (Reflective journal, BS1). This point was supported by BS24 as she also mentioned that MPA activity helped her to approach people that she does not know. In order to complete her MPA project, she had to interview several people such as street vendors, some seniors and lecturers in the university. She stated that this experience made her felt more confident to approach and communicate with other people: *“Because through research and survey, I become braver to face the public in order to pose questions to street vendors, seniors and lecturers that doesn’t teach me”* (Reflective journal, BS24).

In addition to learning effective communication skills, the students stated that they had a platform to practice public speaking skills. Due to the nature of the MPA project, the students had opportunities to speak in front of the camera and BS10 described it as a joyful experience. She enjoyed the activity as she had the chance to speak to the camera like a television host: *“Thirdly, I like it because I experience like on actress. Speaking in front of camera, talking formally, talk about student issue. That’s really joyful”* (Reflective journal, BS10)

Meanwhile, BS13 stated that MPA activity gave her the courage to speak in front of people. She claimed that the experience made her more confident and felt less shy to speak in public. *“Apart from that, by producing video I have more courage to speak in front of the public. It also eliminates the feeling of shyness/self-inhibition in me”* (Reflective journal, BS13). AS22 also talked about her experience in overcoming shyness in speaking. She claimed that she was shy in talking in front of an audience; however, she appreciated the learning experience: *“Despite being really shy to speak in front of audience and camera, personally speaking, I like the learning experiences”* (Reflective journal, AS22).

### **Enhancement of technological competence**

Secondly, MPA cultivates interest in learning the English language among the students because the lessons combined the use of technological tools and English language. Many students claimed that this approach was a new learning experience for them. In a Reflective journal, BS4 stated that he liked being involved in MPA as it was a new experience for him: *“I like it. Sort of. Because it taught me and made me have experiences on hosting, interviewing and video making (for the first time in my life and in a last minute condition)”* (Reflective journal, BS4). This view was also shared by BS6 as she confessed that she loved learning English as MPA exposed her to new experience such as producing a video documentary for an English language subject: *“Yes! I really like! It was my first time on producing video presentations in English lesson. This experience makes me really, really loves*

toward English subjects” (Reflective journal, BS6). Another student, BS15 described that in completing the MPA project, she felt more motivated to learn the English language as she taught that it was a suitable way to learn the English language: *“This activity lifted my spirit to go on learning the English language, through this approach”* (Interview 2, BS15).

Also, some participants expressed that they enjoyed the experience of producing videos in learning the English language subject as it further enhances their video production knowledge. BS3 stated that he was very interested in video editing and the learning experiences helped him to further improve his video production skills: *“I like producing video because I have a deep interest on video editing and such. Thus, this experience help improve my video producing skills for future use”* (Reflective journal, BS3). This point was also noted by BS7 as she stated that she enjoyed producing documentary in a learning setting and the experience improved her skills such as video production skills: *“I do like this type of learning experience. Because it can help us improve our skill and experience in doing documentary and speak in front of the camera”* (Reflective journal, BS7). In addition, another student claimed that she liked the video production activity as the activity was interesting and it provided her the training to produce good videos: *“I really like the video activity because it is so interesting and it also gives training to produce a good video”* (Reflective journal, BS16).

It seemed that MPA assisted the students to explore relevant technological tools in completing their video documentary assignment. BS11 mentioned that the documentary production activity helped her to explore possible tools in producing a good video documentary: *“I like the learning experience through research/survey and producing video presentations because I can explore and gain more knowledge about how to make the good video presentations”* (Reflective journal, BS11). BS19 explained this point in greater detail in an interview. She said that in order to complete the video documentary, she had to explore the use of many online tools: *“I learn more how to make videos by using many ways like Power Director, Powtoon, Sony Vegas, App Photoshop. Have to try all to see which one to use”* (Interview 2, BS19).

Meanwhile, AS7 mentioned that since it was her first experience in producing videos, she explored the use of several technological tools in creating the video documentary: *“Actually, it is my first time I did it. I’ve learn many new things such as MovieMaker, Google Form, PowToon”* (Interview 2, AS7).

Data also shows that MPA enhances the students’ technological competence. In an interview AS17 stated that she appreciated the experience of learning Google Form



to create a survey in order to complete her MPA project. According to her, creating surveys using Google Form was a new experience for her and she found it useful for her in the future: *“What I learn from doing the research was the way we gained the information as we doing the survey. Especially the Google Form. It was my first time using Google Form. I was thinking to myself, why in the past I used Microsoft Word to create questionnaire. Why I must do the boxes on my own. It was very hard to adjust it and I think Google Form is going to be beneficial for me in the future.”* (Interview 2, AS17).

In short, MPA provided a platform for the students to practice communication skills in authentic situations, and also opportunities for students to enhance their technological competence.

## CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the implementation of MPA in the English language classrooms in a Malaysian university has resulted into two main outcomes; development in participants' communication skills and enhancement of technological competence. Firstly, the findings show that there were positive effects of the MPA on students' communication skills as it provides a platform for participants to improve their communication skills as they are required to interact with peers and even strangers. In addition, data also shows that students also had a chance to practice their public speaking skills. These findings suggest that MPA has successfully immersed the students in authentic situations that enhanced their communication skills.

Secondly, results of this study also confirm that the MPA facilitates students' technological competence. Despite learning in the 21<sup>st</sup>. century, many students claimed that using technologies in the English classroom was a new experience for them. Utilizing technological tools in completing the MPA project has made learning the English language more interesting. MPA encouraged the sense of exploration among the students in choosing the best technological tools to complete the MPA project. Students not only used technological tools that they were familiar with, but also discovered new technological tools. In a way, these findings show that through MPA, students also enhance their technological competence.

It was evident that MPA equips students with necessary employable attributes as outlined in the National Graduate Employability Blueprint. It seems that MPA is an effective pedagogical method to be implemented in the English language classrooms in Malaysian universities.

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