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## Career Opportunities in the Field of Malay Language

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### Abstract

This survey study was conducted to identify the knowledge of students in the Malay Language and Linguistics program on the potential and career opportunities in their field of study. A set of questionnaires was distributed to the study sample consisting of fifth semester students, a total of 63 people. However, for the purpose of writing this paper, only findings from open-ended questions, i.e. occupations in the field of Malay language known to the study sample are discussed. In addition, this data is supported by the results of interviews of 27 students who have done voluntarily. Overall, the sample studied has not been exposed to the potential and career opportunities in the field of Malay language widely. This is evident when most students know only four careers. In fact, there are those in the sample who admit that they do not know it and after graduation, just accept whatever career they get. In addition, there are among the sample who list careers that are not related to the field of language and not suitable for their level of study such as journalists/lawyers, literary, elected representatives, librarians, teachers, lecturers, administrative officers, tour guides and interpreters. As a result, only five types of careers were found suitable, namely as writers, translators, publishers and editors, linguists/language researchers and careers at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP).

**Keywords:** Malay Language Field, Malay Linguistics Program, Higher Education Students, Career Knowledge, Potential Malay Language Field

### Introduction

Careers sometimes start from ambition. Ever since primary school, teachers often ask about their students' ambition. These goals can be achieved with appropriate guidance. For example, an aspiring student wants to be a lawyer. However, due to inappropriate guidance, the child eventually became a teacher. Being a teacher was not his ambition, but the education he followed led him to choose this career.

Why is this happening? We often encourage every student to have ambitions, yet guidance towards achieving those ambitions is not done. What is observed is that education in the country provides education without pointing the direction of such education to the aspiring career. Students tend to choose to obtain as many A's as possible in the subjects they have studied or taken in an exam regardless of the subjects that lead to the dreamed ambition. This situation makes most of the ambitions unattainable instead of the career that

is pursued more to survival. This is because career education involves structured teaching and learning activities to provide a platform for students to understand their potential, the world of work and improve their specific skills in making future career choices (Mahmud et al., 2016). Without a structured education, these ambitions would be mere dreams. This is what can be observed in the education system in this country is different from other developed countries like Korea. Taking the example of the country of Korea, its students have to fill in the type of career of their choice before graduating. The teacher will guide these students by looking at the academic achievement and personal characteristics of the student. While there is no denying the role played by school counsellor, their role is not comprehensive to all students. This is evidenced based on the results of a study conducted by Ismail, Abdullah, Zain et al (2018) who conducted a study to measure the level of career maturity among secondary school students. The results of the study found that in general the level of career maturity of students is at low and medium levels. Of course, this matter needs to be given serious attention because in the future this country will produce workers who work for survival and not on the basis of interests and aspiring careers.

The same is true in the field of language. The Malay language has grown rapidly and is on the world stage in accordance with the opinion of Abdul Rashid and Abdullah (2015) who said that the influence of the Malay language in the archipelago has grown rapidly as a language of knowledge and economics. In fact, research on the Malay language has been conducted since the pre-independence era (Jalaluddin, 2015). This situation proves that the field of Malay language has grown rapidly and is a branch of knowledge that needs to be taught in a structured manner at the tertiary level. However, the views of some people who do not appreciate the national language and the language of knowledge often dispute the career opportunities that can be offered to students who take this program in institutions of higher learning. Newspapers often issue statements that most of the unemployed graduates are social science students and this includes Malay language program students. The public perception that the field of language is less economical and easy to master (Razak, 2007) often makes studies in the field of Malay language underestimated. However, the opposite is true based on a study conducted by the National Economic Action Council (NEAC) which argues, one of the factors that make it difficult for graduates to get jobs is due to lack of awareness about the existence of various job opportunities (Ismail, 2012). Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the extent of students' knowledge of the potential and career prospects in the field of Malay language.

### **Methodology**

Accordingly, a study using a quantitative approach using survey research methods was conducted. Questionnaires were used as data collection tools. This constructed instrument has acquired copyright by 2020. A total of nine open-ended questions and 57 items based on career knowledge constructs are contained in this questionnaire. This open-ended question includes demographic information of the study sample such as gender, race, semester of study, achievement of Malay language subjects during Sijil Persekolahan Malaysia (SPM) and Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM), selection of Malay Language and Linguistics program at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) is the choice of how much when filling out the application form for further studies, ambitions, employment in the field of Malay language known, career in the field of Malay language to be pursued, linguistic activities participated during studies at the university and the views of the study sample on the potential of the Malay language field.

Whereas, the question of potential and career prospects in the view of the study sample includes three constructs, namely cognitive, emotional and behavioural. A total of 15 items were designed to measure the respondents' intellectual knowledge regarding the potential and career prospects in the field of Malay language. A total of 17 items were constructed to measure respondents' feelings towards the potential and career prospects in the Malay language field and 22 items were constructed to measure respondents' behaviour or actions as a reflection of the Malay language field having bright career opportunities for their future. These items use a semantic difference scale, which is based on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree (STS) to 5 = Strongly Agree (SS).

In addition, semi-structured interviews were also conducted among the study sample. A total of 27 people from 63 study samples underwent voluntary interviews. The sample of this study consists of students of the Malay Language and Linguistics (BLM) program who are in the fifth semester of their studies at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

### **Discussion**

For the purpose of writing this paper, only the findings from open-ended questions regarding careers in the field of Malay language known by students of the Malay Language and Linguistics program, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, UPM will be discussed. For this open-ended question, the study sample was given space to list as many careers as possible in the field of Malay language that they knew. As a result, based on the analysis conducted, it was found that at most one sample of the study could list between one to four careers in the field of Malay language that they know. Almost half of the study sample was able to list four types of careers, namely 29 (48.33%). This was followed by three careers, of which 14 (23.33%) were listed by the study sample. Two careers of 12 (20.00%) and one career of 5 (8.33%). There were three sample who did not pursue a career in the language field they knew but instead stated that they were unsure, still searching and admitted not knowing a career that was appropriate for their field of study.

Based on the number of careers listed in the sample of this study, details of 14 careers were identified. Among the careers that have been listed by the study sample are teachers, lecturers, literary, translators, librarians, journalists/lawyers, careers in publishing and editing, linguists/language researchers, careers in Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), administrative officers, tour guides, interpreters, writers and elected representatives. The study sample was found to associate careers in the field of language as an educator when listing careers as teachers and lecturers. Students who pursue their studies at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, UPM in the Bachelor of Arts in Malay Language and Linguistics program are not provided with pedagogical knowledge. On the other hand, students in this program are equipped with a variety of knowledge in the field of language such as Phonetics and Phonology, Semantics, Grammar, Pragmatics, Jawi Writing System, Terminology, Vocabulary and so on. To become a lecturer, students need to further their studies up to the level of Doctor of Philosophy and become experts in the field of Malay language instead of Malay language education. In addition, careers such as librarian, journalist/lawyer, writer and elected representative are not included in the scope of career in the field of Malay language. To become a journalist/lawyer, students need to further their studies in the field of communication which leads to these two fields. A career as a literary was not obtained through education, but through creative talent and contribution in the field of Malay literature. In addition, the study sample was found to list job types that were not

equivalent to their education when listing careers as administrative officers and interpreters. This is because the conditions for appointment as an interpreter as stated in the official website of the Public Service Commission (SPA) Malaysia, the required qualification is Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) or Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia (STAM) or diploma level studies recognized by the government. Therefore, students at the bachelor's/bachelor's degree level should know the career field that is more suitable for their academic qualifications.

Overall, the study sample most often listed careers in the field of publishing/editing when stated 32 times. This was followed by a career as a lecturer 31 times and a translator 30 times. The study sample also listed a career as a teacher 25 times when the sample listed a career either as a teacher in the government or private sector. As already explained, students who follow the Bachelor of Arts in Malay Language and Linguistics program are not provided with pedagogical knowledge. However, if students are capable they can become tuition teachers. Students need to align the knowledge learned with the suitability and needs in the field of education. In addition, a total of 23 careers as a writer were indicated by the study sample. The study sample lists both types of writers, i.e. either creative writers such as novelists or scholarly writers by producing books.

Based on the list of careers written by the study sample, it can be concluded that the students studied have career knowledge as linguists. This situation is evident when the study sample lists a career as a linguist/linguist/language researcher. However, the scope of their known careers is very limited when they can only relate the field of Malay language with the study of the history of language and language among the aborigines.

Students were also found to have listed careers under Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) which is a body set up specifically to develop Malay as the national language and the official language of the country. However, only 4 times this career is mentioned among students. Based on the list, it can be concluded that the students studied are not exposed to the scope of careers available under this body when there are students who list careers as clerks and there are also those who only write DBP without more specific career fields.

Thus, it can be concluded that although these studied students are in the fifth semester or third year of their studies at the university, they are still not exposed to the scope of careers in their field of study. This situation makes them not clearly aware of the potential careers that they can pursue once they graduate. Without knowing the potential of a career in the field of study followed will make students unable to make the best planning in determining future careers. Knowledge about this career should be disclosed from the beginning, that is, before they continue their studies in institutions of higher learning. This is because to enable future career planning and be actively involved in career fields that want to be actively pursued at the university. For example, if students are interested in the field of writing, they need to stand out by actively writing by getting guidance from lecturers who are experts in this field. This will give students a bright chance to succeed in this field. Not only do students receive guidance from lecturers, they are also known to be actively involved in writing activities. Next, allow students to have bright career opportunities upon graduation.

The issue is that when students do not know the potential and career prospects in their respective fields of study, students only focus on lectures alone without being actively involved in linguistic activities. This situation makes students in the field of Malay language unknown to the outside community. This situation can be attributed to the issue of unemployment and the field of employment they are engaged in is not related to the field of study. Based on the curriculum review conducted every five years at UPM, the Malay

Language and Linguistics program graduates are expected to have career opportunities as language planners, language editors, translators, creative writers, scriptwriters, professional writers, language researchers, correspondence agents, coffee writers and publisher. Therefore, students of this program should be inclined to choose or engage in careers as outlined here. However, based on the findings of the study, there are also a number of students who say that they do not choose a job and accept whatever job opportunities are given after graduation.

To get a clearer view, a voluntary interview was conducted among the study respondents. As a result, students informed that this program is their choice due to the factors of interest, attractive, responsibility and their awareness to continue to uphold the Malay language by learning it in more depth at the tertiary level. Students stated that they have been interested in this field since school and are interested in language diversity. For example, as stated by the following respondents R11, R22 and R27:

Yes, this program is my first choice. This is because I am a student who is very interested in the subject of Malay language and literary writing when I was in school. So, this is definitely my top choice. (R11)

Yes, this program is my first choice because I have been very interested in the Malay language since school days. Furthermore, the selection of this program is also the main field to improve and further develop the ability of the Malay language to a higher level. God willing. (R27)

Yes. This is because I really want to venture into the field of language where I am very interested in the diversity of languages found in this world. (R22)

In addition, the respondents of the study stated that they are interested in the field of Malay language because this field of language is attractive to them, especially in the field of phonology and dialectology. This situation makes the respondents of this study have been offered the same program in two different universities. Respondents also think that this field is interesting to learn when through the language, race and culture of the community can be known. This is as explained by R1 and R21 as follows:

Yes. Malay linguistics is my first choice. This is because, the field of language is very interesting especially phonology and dialectology courses. In fact, I was also offered the same course at UM and UKM. (R1)

Yes. Because I feel that the Malay language is a fun field to venture into and we can get to know our race and culture after we learn our own language. (R21)

Students also think that language needs to be studied because of a sense of responsibility. The attitude of some people who demean the mother tongue with negative perceptions such as this field of language does not provide career opportunities that should have prompted respondents to choose to pursue studies in this field. This is as stated by R18 as the following statement:

Yes. This is because I am interested in deepening my knowledge of my own mother tongue. Apart from that, I would like to increase my knowledge

about the Malay language because many in our society often belittle their own mother tongue so that the field of Malay language is considered to provide less employment opportunities. Once I have deepened my knowledge in this field, then I am able to refute such statements. (R18)

Furthermore, due to the factor of respondents' awareness of the importance of maintaining the dignity of the Malay language as a mother tongue. This is acknowledged by R16 as the following statement:

This program is my main choice because I see the Malay language as a field of knowledge that is very important to me Malaysians who are Malays. This is because Malay is our own mother tongue. Therefore, my love for the Malay language is still strong and feels worthwhile to learn. As such, the choice I have made in this field as a primary choice is right as there are various interests and benefits. (R16)

However, there are also among the study respondents who stated that they are not interested in learning Malay due to the factors of ambition, scope of employment, negative perceptions and supply. The respondents of the study stated that they did not make the Malay language program as an option due to their ambition to become an educator. For example, as stated by R3 who aspires to be a lecturer. However, the respondents of the study stated that the study program applied for is Malay language education and not Malay Language and Linguistics program. Based on this statement, it is clear that the study respondents are not clear with their aspired career path. This is because to become a lecturer, it is not necessary to further one's studies in the field of education. A career as a lecturer is obtained after a person completes his doctoral studies in various fields. Applications for positions as lecturers are open throughout the year at both public and private universities.

Honestly, the first program of choice is Malay language education. I have got the fifth option. Why this program is not my first choice is due to my ambitions. My ambition is to become a lecturer in the field of education. Nevertheless, life planning is constantly changing and life must go on. (R3)

No. This is because my first choice to enter Universiti Putra Malaysia is Physical Education. This is because, before continuing my studies at UPM, I studied sports science at the Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School and I have skills in that field. With this, I also feel proud to be able to further my studies in the field of Malay language because it can give me a new branch of knowledge. (R17)

Students also acknowledged that a career in the field of Malay language education opens up clearer career opportunities compared to the field of Malay language. This is because after graduating in the field of education, these students will be offered to become teachers in schools across the country. However, students need to be aware that the current education system is open, i.e. not necessarily students who graduate in the field of education are offered to become teachers. This offer is subject to the vacancy and passing of the interview that has been conducted. This clearly shows that the study respondents did not do initial research on

the scope of career in the field they want to pursue. This can be observed through the following statements:

Not because I prefer the field of Malay language education because the field has a clear scope of work compared to the field I am studying now.  
(R25)

In addition, the attitude of some communities also influences the selection of study programs among the study respondents. This is because there are people in the community who are low on language programs with the notion that the Malay language has been learned since childhood. This makes everyone have mastered the language and there is no need to learn it in more depth at the tertiary level. This in turn leads to the perception that this field of language is uneconomical and provides less career opportunities. If there are no career opportunities in this field, how can this program continue to be offered until now. This is as stated by R7 when after investigation it was found that this field is not as described and made the respondents choose this program.

Honestly, this Malay Language and Linguistics program is not my first choice. This is because I am often haunted by the fact that this field has a small and uneconomical scope of work. Even so, after getting an offer for a language program at UPM and a Fine Arts (Graphics) program at USM, I have researched the scope of my career by doing research and searching on the website and asking seniors who specialize in language at UPM. Apparently they gave a positive response and this made me choose to continue my studies in the field of language at UPM. After continuing studies in this field of language, it turns out that the public's perception that this program is not productive is not true at all. During the study in this program, students have studied various branches of language such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, semantics, phonology and stylistics. Thus, with this complex knowledge can provide opportunities for students to venture into various fields of employment in the future. (R7)

There were among the respondents who admitted that they pursued their studies in this program due to supply factors. For example, as described by R19 and R23 as follows:

No, because I only meet the UPU requirements which require me to choose one program for each research university. This selection was done randomly because I had already set up several other programs related to the field of computing, which I had selected based on the propensity of my matriculation exam results. This selection was made because I listened to the words of my lecturers who gave the opinion to choose in different fields for each university choice, to increase the probability of being admitted to the university. (R19)

No. I am the only student who gets a chance to study here. After not getting a place at another university, I just chose to continue my studies here. (R23)

The factors discussed are among the reasons why students do not know the scope of employment in the field of Malay language. This is because not all students who pursue their



studies in this program are due to their own choices. If the students themselves choose this program, they are already aware of the career they will pursue in the future. The issue is when they are not interested and study on the basis of supply or the need to further their studies in institutions of higher learning alone.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded here that the respondents studied are not exposed to a variety of careers in the field of Malay language. Although students can list various careers in the field of Malay language, however, the careers mentioned are either not related to the field of language or general careers such as teachers and lecturers. Therefore, it is highly recommended that career education can be disclosed to students from school onwards and not just focus on every student's ambitions. Early education needs to be given so that these dreams are not just unattainable dreams. Difficulty in making career choice decisions is an issue that is often experienced by individuals (Ibrahim, Arip & Bustamam, 2015). However, with guidance from the beginning, this issue can be overcome and able to prepare employees who are interested in the career they are pursuing. When working on the basis of interest, performance will also increase.

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