

# Teaching Malay word Pronunciation Skills Among International Students at Universiti Putra Malaysia Using Colored Syllables

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## Abstract

The Malaysia Education Development Plan 2015-2025 (Higher Education) stated that language skills as one of the attributes that need to be in the students at the higher education level. Students are encouraged to learn an additional global language without sieving proficiency and proficiency in Malay and English (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). At UPM, local students need to learn additional global language skills such as Chinese, Arabic or German, while international students need to pursue Communication Malay (LPM2100) as a graduate compulsory requirement. Teachers in this LPM2100 course lasted for four months in two different classrooms (class A & Class B) that each consisted of 10 international students. Teachers adapted the use of colored syllables to help improve the mastery of Malay pronunciation skills for Class A students while Class B students are taught to spell and stick traditionally. At the end of the teacher semester found the overall performance of international students from Class A are at a better level compared to the overall performance of international students from Class B. This shows that Class A students have better, clear and understandable words spoken. Class A students also successfully 'detrminate' the syllables correctly. If viewed on Class B students' pronunciation skills, they have relatively weak, unclear and sometimes difficult to understand. Based on results can prove that the use of colored syllables is effective in helping to improve the skills of the Malay language pronunciation of international students. The use of colored syllables is easy to use by international students and is easy to operate by teachers in the teaching of Malay pronunciation skills. This way is simple and no maintenance costs are required as software applications or external technologies. Furthermore, the use of colored syllables is capable of attracting international students' interest and motivation to follow the Malay language PdP compared to their other language courses that only use one color tone, namely black. The use of colors in teaching pronunciation can certainly be of interest to international students.

**Keywords:** Use of Colored Syllables, Pronunciation Skills, Teaching Malay, International Students

### **Introduction**

The policy compulsory international students to study Malay language at the Institutions of Higher Education (IPT) has been implemented since 2014. Malay language learning is included in the concept of General Studies Points at every local university that accepts international students either public or private universities (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). In connection with that, the Malay Language Communication course (LPM2100) is formed based on the Second Edition MPU Guidelines, which focuses on communicating skills in Malay at the basic level in line with the requirements of the Ministry of Education.

The LPM2100 offered by the Centre for the Advancement of Language Competence (CALC) is a compulsory course taken by all international students and is made a condition for graduating for international students. International students will pursue teaching and learning (T&L) LPM2100 course for 2 hours per week in one semester only. They need to learn a variety of vocabulary words and basic expressions as well as simple sentences to communicate covering daily life situations. This is because international students can feel stressed because they need to learn Malay in a limited time period. This is supported by Mazlina Ahmad (2021) through a commentary space on the Berita Harian website, which is seen as being limited in terms of the learning period of two or three hours per week only for one semester. This is indirectly causing international students to still be fluent in Malay even though they are in the Malay culture environment (Ahmad, 2021).

Furthermore, Malay is a new foreign language that needs to be learned by international students. Of course, this international student has difficulty understanding and memorizing the Malay language words, let alone the international student is in the graduate level. Additionally, dependence on teachers fully to learn Malay makes international students less skilled to pronounce and read Malay language materials. Not only that, international students also do not have an online application that is suitable for use to help their pronunciation outside of class. Therefore, to assist and attract international students in learning Malay, the teaching approach using colored syllables applied in T&L LPM2100 course focused on pronunciation skills.

### **Literature Review**

Malay language teaching and learning covers various aspects such as language skills, how to present knowledge whether formal or informal teaching as well as students who follow this T&L process (Norfaizal, Yahaya, & Muhammad Saiful Haq, 2022). In this study, students following the Malay language T&L process are international students who are not native speakers of the Malay language. Non-native Malay speakers refer to students whose mother language is not Malay language (Juwairiah & Mardian Shah, 2021). This means the first language they learn and use in their daily lives is not Malay language. On the other hand, Malay language is commonly the third or additional language they learn after mastering the native language and global language namely Li Yan, Kamarulzaman, & Nordiana, 2022.

A study conducted by Nurul Ain & Nik Nur Athirah (2021) found that the influence of this mother tongue could be a challenge to the Malay PdP because non-native speakers had a tendency to apply grammar, pronunciation and sentence structure of their native language in Malay. This tendency can cause an error in the use of the Malay language. For example, students will often translate words in Malay directly from their language which can eventually make mistakes in grammar and phrase use (Mardian Shah & Mashrom, 2019). The grammar structure and rules from non-native speakers' native and English can interfere with the proper use of Malay language grammar such as subject arrangement, predicate and objects. In fact, the use of remunerations such as 'me-', 'be-', 'to-' and 'an-' may be difficult to understand and apply correctly by non-native speakers (Li Yan, Kamarulzaman, & Nordiana, 2022).

In terms of mention, non-native speakers always face problems in sounds of the Malay language that may not be found in their native languages such as 'ng' and 'ny' because they are not familiar with this sound (Fikri & Sa'adiah, 2020). Furthermore, the Malay language has vowel letters and consonants that may not be in the native language of the speaker. For example, the vowel e- has two sounds: e-pepet and e-taling. If the teacher shows the word 'sepak', then students should know the vocal sound of e which they should use. If international students don't know whether to use 'e-pepet' and 'e-taling', it certainly means the word 'sepak' is also disturbed. This certainly causes a mispronounced when reading words and sentences in Malay.

Moreover, the lack of opportunity to practice speaking or communicating with native speakers of Malay languages or difficulties in real situations can prevent non-native speakers enhancing their pronounced skills (Jasah Jumayza, Syafika Atika, & Sharifah Raihan, 2020). This limited oral training will make students difficult to achieve fluency in pronunciation. Most local students when facing international students, they tend to practice their English rather than speaking in Malay (Cho, Mazlina, Noor Rohana, Roswati, & Nurul Ain, 2020). In fact, the findings of a study by Li Yan et al., (2022) stated that international students focus more on when someone speaks Malay as they want to try to understand more clearly the sentences in Malay. Based on the literature highlights performed, many studies relating to the problem faced by international students in learning the Malay language were generally conducted. Therefore, it is expected that an approach to using colored syllables in international student pronunciation skills can provide one added value in the field of T&L in Malay language.

### **Methodology**

Through the observation method performed during the T&L LPM2100 is conducted, international students are seen quite difficult to read the syllables by using the correct sound especially words that have more than 2 words. This will be a bit of disruptive proficiency in the Malay language of international students especially their pronounced skills. In fact, Malay is certainly a new foreign language in the life of international students, most of them do not have early knowledge of the Malay language. Therefore, the use of colored syllables was introduced to help international students master the Malay language pronunciation while attracting them to continue motivating to learn Malay.

The use of this colored syllables was adapted from one of the teaching approaches in the Literacy and Numeracy Screening (LINUS) program through the National Transformation Programme (NTP) introduced in August 2009 aims to help overcome the problem of mastering the basic 3M skills (reading, writing, calculating) among primary school pupils (Sulaiman, 2021). The National Transformation Programme (NTP) report in 2017 stated that

the language level of Malay language was at 98.3% (Bungga, 2018). Even through the LINUS program, the number of students who earn A in Malay language subjects is increasing. This is proved by the achievement of the Primary School Assessment Test (UPSR) in 2018 (Bungga, 2018). The teaching and learning of the LPM2100 course using colored syllables is not a problem to apply to international students at higher education levels as they are also at a low level in mastering its special Malay language and new languages are generally in.

Colored syllables use is continuously used on all eight topics of LPM2100 courses. This is because students need to learn the vocabulary and new words for each topic. Two colors are used in the syllables which is red and blue. The selection of red colors that symbolize the strength and selection of blue colors can stimulate the communicating individuals and stimulate positive thinking (Abdullah, 2018). The use of these colored syllables can be shown on the vocabulary and word section. The effectiveness of the use of colored syllables is seen through a comparison between two classes. Class A uses colored syllables and Class B does not use colored syllables. A total of 20 students were made as a study sample, 10 respondents from Class A and 10 respondents from Class B. The study time period is for one semester, which is 14 weeks. Students are exposed to 20 Malay language vocabulary available in LPM2100 courses. The word vocabulary used has the same number of syllables as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

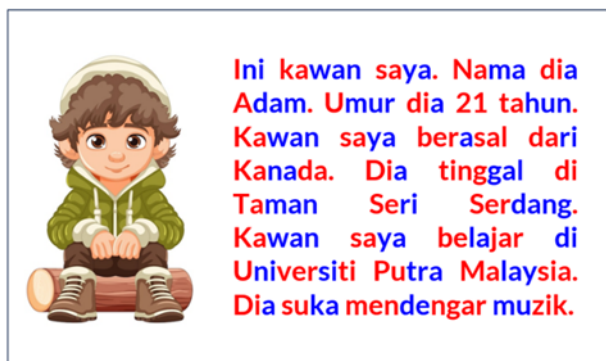
*Use of colored syllables in the Malay language pronunciation vocabulary*

There are 20 vocabulary words used during pre-test session and the same vocabulary reused in post-test session after 14 weeks ended. The selection of 20 vocal vocals based on previous observations found that international students have a tendency to pronounce the vocal letter /a/e/i/o/u/ using the English sound pronunciation. Similarly when they want to pronounce consonants like /c/ also get the influence for English sound /k/.



<b>api</b>	<b>bola</b>	<b>cili</b>	<b>bunga</b>
<b>ibu</b>	<b> baca</b>	<b>kucing</b>	<b>daging</b>
<b>meja</b>	<b>baik</b>	<b>cikgu</b>	<b>sangat</b>
<b>ubat</b>	<b>udang</b>	<b>cawan</b>	<b>nyanyi</b>
<b>awan</b>	<b>sepak</b>	<b>kawan</b>	<b>tarik</b>

## Photo 1

*Use of Colored Syllables in Pronunciation Words and Verses of Malay Language*

**Photo 1** shows an example of the use of colored syllables in words in paragraphs or short sentences. As on **Table 1**, students can also read and sound words according to the colors of the syllable. Indirectly, students can be exposed to meaning and diversify pronunciation in speaking.

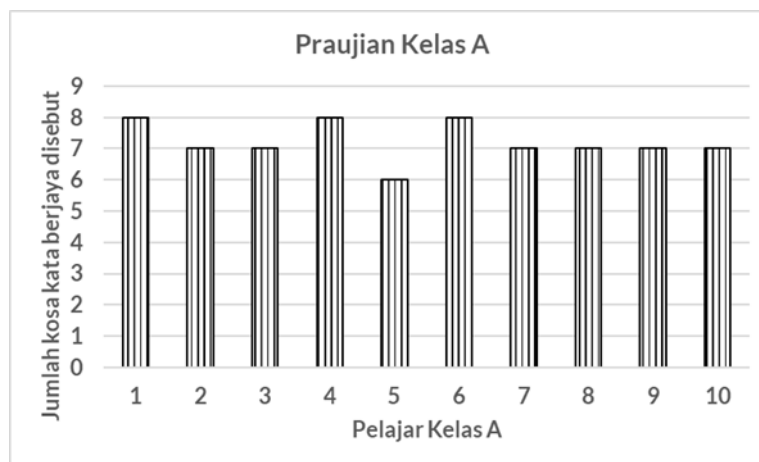
**Finding and Discussion**

Before the colored syllables approach was used in T&L, a pre-test session was carried out to ensure that all respondents were at the same level. The vocabulary in **Table 1** is used first randomly during pre-test session are conducted. During this pre-test session, colored syllables approach is used for Class A, which is the experimental class and only one tone of colors is used, the black color for Class B, which is the control class. The pre-test results found that all 20 respondents were low and there was no basic knowledge in Malay. After the pre-test session was conducted, respondents in Class A followed the T&L course LPM2100 using a colored syllable, while Class B respondents maintain black tone as permanent. After the study time period ended, post-test were conducted to find out the effectiveness of the use of colored syllables for Class A and compared to Class B using only one color tone. Pre-test and post-test results are compared between the two classes and are shown on the bar chart below.

**Graph 1** shows the number of words that were successfully pronounced and accurately by respondents from Class A during pre-test session were carried out. Graph 2 shows the number of words that were successfully pronounced and accurately by respondents from Class B during pre-test session.

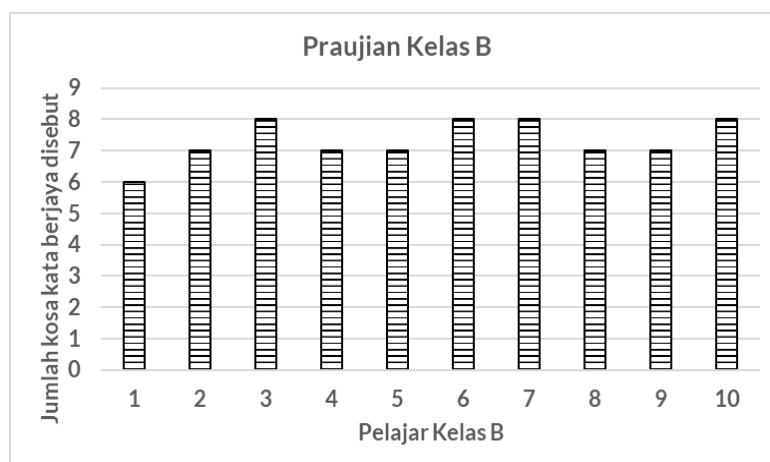
Graph 1

*The Number of Vocabulary was Successfully Pronounced by Class a Respondents During Pre-Test*



Graph 2

*The Number of Vocabulary was Successfully Pronounced by Class B Respondents During Pre-Test*

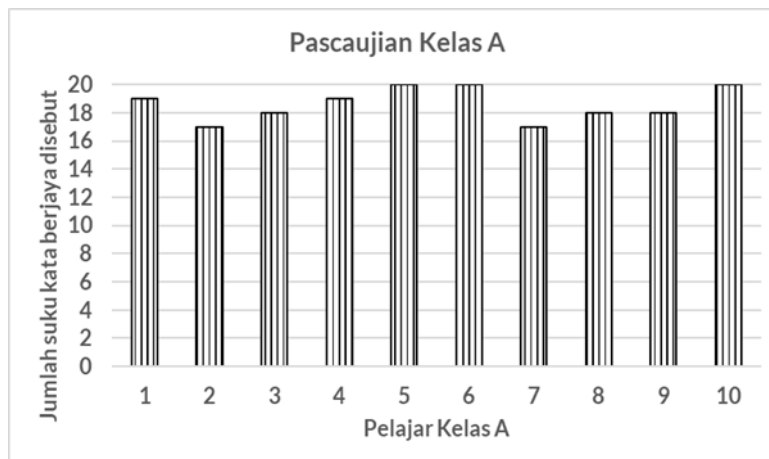


Based on the pre-test results, Class A and Class B respondents overall were at a similar level before the Malay language T&L began. Respondents can read and sound simple vocabulary, but many of them have problems in sounds /c/. For example for the vocabulary of the 'cawan', the respondent will mention as /ka/wan/ instead of /cha/wan/. This is due to the influence of English that sounds /c/ as /k/. Additionally, respondents also face difficulties when asked to pronounce the vocabulary that there are syllables /ng/ and /ny/ because their native tongue has no such syllables. For example, for the 'sangat' vocabulary, many respondents unable to pronounce it with the right sound. The respondent will sound either /san/gat/ or /sa/nat/. This not only leads to the misconception but also makes it different meanings. Therefore, colored syllables are used in Malay language T&L to help improve the Malay language pronunciation skills for Class A. Meanwhile Class B will maintain the use of one tone of black colour in learning Malay language pronunciation skills. After the 14-week period ended, the same respondents from both classes will undergo post-test using the same 20

vocabulary used during pre-test. The results of Class A and Class B post-test can be viewed on **Graph 3** and **Graph 4** below.

### Graph 3

*The Number of Vocabulary was Successfully Pronounced by Class A Respondents During Post-Test*

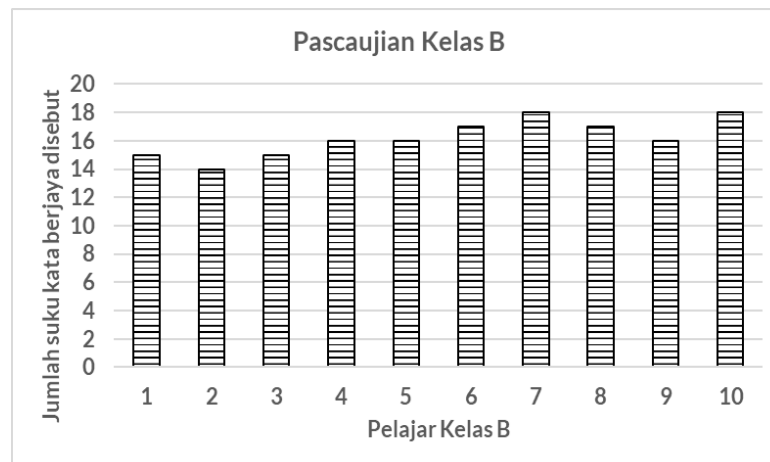


Based on the post-test results obtained, **Graph 3** showed Class A respondents could pronounce over 17 words with accurate and correct pronunciation using colored syllables. For example, the vocabulary of 'api', the respondent will mention the sound /a/ and the sound followed /pi/. If the colored syllables are not used, the respondent may mention the sound /ap/ and followed the sound /i/. This not only causes the respondent to sound the wrong syllables, but the vocabulary also has no meaning. Additionally, respondents were found no longer confused between sound /c/ and sound /k/, and respondents were also able to break or dismantle the syllables by themselves without the help of teachers. However, there are two respondents who still have difficulty sounds the /ng/ syllable. This may be due to the influence of the mother tongue that has no syllable /ng/. The respondent was also seen more confident to pronounce the 20 syllables shown compared to the pre-test, where the respondents were seen less confident and there was no strong voice throwing when the syllables were sounded.



## Graph 4

*The Number of Vocabulary was Successfully Pronounced by Class B Respondents During Post-Test*



**Graph 4** shows the performance of Class B respondents during the post-test. There was an increase in which the respondents managed to pronounce at least 14 syllables correctly and accurately after following the T&L for 14 weeks using a syllables one tone color. However, there are still some confused respondents with consonant sound /c/ by mentioning the word /ba/ca/ as /ba/ka/. This response's pronounce is definitely wrong and the meaning of words is also something else. In addition, there are still respondents who still don't know distinguishing /e/ whether it should use e pepet or e taling for the word 'sepak'. According to the topics of the learner, the syllables 'sepak' refer to the hobby i.e. playing football. Therefore, respondents should use e-taling sound to refer to football hobbies. However, there are still confused respondents and sounds e pepet for the /se/pak/ and lead to the other meaning of the word.

In conclusion, post-test conducted for both classes found that the achievement of Class A respondents was better than the achievement of Class B respondents. Class A respondent following T&L using a colored syllables has better, clear and understandable pronunciation of the word spoken. Class A respondent also managed to pronounce the Malay words syllables correctly. If you look at Class B respondents, there is an increase compared to their pre-test. There are still Class B respondents who follow T&L using a syllable one tone color has a relatively weak, unclear and sometimes it is difficult to understand. Following the results of the number of respondents who have better performance are from Class A compared to the performance of Class B respondents, it can be concluded that the use of colored syllables can help improve the skills of international student Malay pronunciation at UPM.

### Conclusion

The use of colored syllables is easy to use by international students and is easy to operate by teachers in the teaching of Malay pronunciation skills. This is due to the absence of maintenance costs as required by applications or external technologies. Furthermore, the use of colored syllables can attract international students' interest and motivation in accordance with the Malay language T&L. If compared to their other courses using only one color tone, namely black, then the use of color in their Malay language notes can certainly attract international students. There will be a chance that students are tired of learning using colored



syllables because they think they are children, but after being asked by teachers each time in T&L sessions, students give feedback that they love to learn using colored syllables. They also stated that they were stressed to read notes for other courses that only use black tone colors, so by reading the Malay language notes that there are very colored syllables that help them in the learning process.

Additionally, the use of colored syllables can provide a new breath to improvement in the teaching of Malay language. If the Malay language T&L was once focused only on the instructional filling so now the Malay language T&L can create sensory during the learning process. Next, publication of Malay language books can also use colored syllables. This is because the use of color certainly attracts students (Abdullah, 2018) especially international students who do not have basic knowledge of the Malay language. Indirectly, the use of colored syllables not only helps students but also helps to strengthen the teaching methods of Malay language teachers from time to time. In fact, the use of colored syllables allow teachers to diversify their teaching methods to be more effective. Additionally, teachers should not worry if they want to ask international students to learn independently after class hours because with a colourful syllable, students can break and read the Malay word correctly. Therefore, the use of the syllable is highly encouraged in the Malay language T&L either at primary school level or to foreign speakers who want to learn Malay at the basic level.

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