

THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS TOWARD LEARNING THE SPANISH LANGUAGE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstracts: Being multilingual is a common skill in today's world, especially among young people. Having the ability to speak a foreign language such as Spanish can enhance graduates' employability, making them more appealing to potential employers and improving their job opportunities. Spanish stands out as one of the most spoken languages globally, making it a favored option for university students keen on learning a foreign language. The study examines students' perception on learning Spanish at the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language, University Malaysia Sabah. To gather information, the researchers used an online questionnaire with three sections. Section A asked about the students' backgrounds, such as their age, gender, and previous language learning experiences. Section B focused on their attitudes toward learning Spanish, exploring their motivation, interest, and commitment. Section C delved into their perceptions, examining how they view the usefulness of Spanish in their future careers and their overall experience in learning the language. Fifty undergraduate students taking Spanish Level I during the first semester of the 2022/2023 session participated in the study. The questionnaire used a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. The researchers analyzed the results using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 25.0. The findings revealed important insights into the students' perceptions, which can help to improve Spanish teaching methods. By understanding these perceptions, educators can develop strategies to foster more positive learning environment, thereby enhancing students' motivation and ultimately improving their achievement in learning Spanish.

Keywords: multilingual; perception; Spanish language; undergraduate student; motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Spanish is becoming more popular among students around the world. People are learning it more because it's important for international communication and can help with job opportunities. Prof Dr. Noor Azizi Ismail, the Deputy Director of Higher Education, encourages learning foreign languages as it adds value globally (BH Online, 2018).

However, learning a foreign language like Spanish can be challenging for students (Bernama Online, 2022). Various factors can influence students' perceptions of learning Spanish, such as cultural influences, previous language learning experiences, and teaching methods. Dewaele (2005) showed that students' emotions and attitudes affect their language learning. Apart from that, students often find it easier to use their mother tongue compared to other languages, which results in them predominantly using their mother tongue in foreign language classes (Getie, A. S. (2020)).

These perceptions include how students feel, their approach, and their views on learning the language. Positive perceptions can motivate students to learn and improve their skills in understanding and using the language (Dörnyei, Z., 2005).

Although there has been some research on learning Spanish as a foreign language, it is still limited. This study aims to identify students' perceptions of learning Spanish as a foreign language. It also explores how these perceptions affect their learning performance and how teaching methods can be improved by understanding students' views better.

2. METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this research is to evaluate how students perceive learning Spanish at the university. The study employs a quantitative approach through a survey-based research method, using an online questionnaire adapted from Mohd Fauzi Mohd Kassim (2000) and Ainun et al. (2017). Specifically, the research focuses on students enrolled in the US00102 Spanish Level I course at the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language, University Malaysia Sabah. A sample size of 50 students was chosen using simple random sampling to ensure equal participation opportunity for all individuals in the study.

The student demographics in this study encompass factors like gender and field of study. Among the respondents, 34.4% (n=19) are male and 65.6% (n=31) are female. The study also includes students from various faculties. Most respondents are from the Faculty of Business, Economics, and Accounting, making up 30% (n=15), while the Academy of Arts and Creative Technology has the fewest respondents, at 4.4% (n=2).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To understand the data obtained, the researchers used IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.0 for data collection and processing. Specifically, the data were analyzed using a descriptive approach, focusing on measurements such as mean and standard deviation to provide a clear statistical overview. The information and results from this analysis were then presented in tables for ease of reference and better understanding. Additionally, the mean scores obtained in this study were classified into five different categories, providing deeper insights into the data. These mean score ranges were referenced and interpreted based on criteria set by Alias Baba (1999), as detailed in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0: Interpretation of Mean Scores for Students' Perceptions

Range	Mean Score Level
4.21 - 5.00	Very High
3.41 - 4.20	High
2.61 - 3.40	Moderate
1.81 - 2.60	Low
1.00 - 1.80	Very Low

Students' Perceptions Based on Gender

For the variable of perceptions in the Spanish language course, there is a slight difference between male and female students. Female students have a lower mean score of 3.72, while male students have a mean score of 3.83. However, the study results indicate that both male and female students have a very good perception. The mean value for the perceptions variable is at a high level. The differences in mean scores can be referenced in Table 2.0.

Table 2.0: Mean Scores Based on Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceptions	Male	19	4.03	0.351
	Female	31	3.86	0.410

Students' Perceptions Based on Faculty

When evaluating the differences in mean scores for perceptions based on faculty, the results show that students from the Faculty of Computing and Informatics (FKI) and the Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition (FSMP) have higher mean scores (mean = 4.00). The lowest mean score is found among students from the Academy of Arts and Creative Technology (ASTiF) with a mean of 3.58. The analysis indicates that, overall, students demonstrate a positive

attitude and perception towards learning the Spanish language course. The overall findings can be referenced in Table 3.0.

Table 3.0: Mean Scores Based on Faculty

Variable	Faculty	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceptions	Faculty of Tropical Forestry (FPT)	6	3.91	0.562
	Faculty of Science and Natural Resources (FSSA)	8	3.92	0.311
	Faculty of Computing and Informatics (FKI)	10	4.00	0.306
	Academy of Arts and Creative Technology (ASTiF)	2	3.58	0.217
	Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK)	5	3.99	0.464
	Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition (FSMP)	4	4.00	0.350
	Faculty of Business, Economics, and Accounting (FPEP)	15	3.85	0.382

4. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, studying the perceptions of students learning Spanish as a foreign language is crucial for improving teaching methods and boosting learning outcomes. By grasping students' perspectives, educators can create more captivating learning materials and methods, as well as nurture students' enthusiasm and drive to excel in language acquisition. In today's globalized world, multilingual communication skills are highly beneficial. Hence, research of this nature is essential to equip future generations with a strong basis to embrace and understand the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of the world.

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