# The Perception of Foreign Speakers Toward Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu (Prpm) in Improving the Learning of Malay Language

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**ABSTRACT**

*The Malay language is among languages that are usually preferred by foreign speakers to be learned due to its potential as an international language. The Malay language is the medium of learning in the Malaysian national education system. This study is focusing on the perception of foreign speakers toward the usage of the open access PRPM Online dictionary https://prpm.dbp.gov.my/) in improving their learning of Malay language. Quantitative approach in data collection is based on the distributed questionnaires to Universiti Malaya foreign students. The outcomes of the study showed that the students perceived PRPM as a useful learning tool to improve Malay language competency. It helps in grammar understanding, guides pronunciation and spelling as well as improving vocabulary. They mainly use the PRPM online dictionary to find meaning and definition of words. The PRPM online dictionary is not used as the main reference due to available alternatives online. The study also discovered several limitations in PRPM, especially the thesaurus corpus and user instruction aspects. Besides those issues, the PRPM online dictionary is still used by those students to comprehend Malay language. The right and suitable language delivery digital platform could assist users in the learning process of Malay language.*

**Keywords**: Malay Language, Second Language, Open Access Dictionary, Malay Lexicography,

**INTRODUCTION**

Pusat Persuratan Rujukan Melayu or PRPM (https://prpm.dbp.gov.my/) is a digital platform that provides an open access online dictionary of Malay language. It was developed by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). The platform was launched in 2008.

The main objective of PRPM is to provide an online reference for Malay language users. Based on user keywords, PRPM search engine will fetch definitions of words from Malay and English dictionaries and terminologies from several fields, Pantun, proverbs, and other resources. The PRPM collects, arranges, and distributes Malay literature worldwide via the internet. The data center of PRPM database is situated at Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka (DBP) headquarter In Kuala

Lumpur. The website has reached 4 million search hits online. On average PRPM receives 49000 visits monthly (Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka [DBP], 2012).

The Malay language is a prerequisite for all foreign students who study in the Universiti Malaya (UM). The students are required to take one semester introductory courses in Malay language. These courses are provided by the Faculty of Language and Linguistics. The courses entitled TXGZ61202 Bahasa Malaysia Asas (For postgraduate) and GLT1017 Bahasa Melayu Asas (For undergraduate). This is to equip them with basic communication skills in the hope that they could further understand Malaysian culture during their stay in this country. However, those students might be exempted from taking the course if they passed an exemption assessment.  As the online resource to learn Malay language, PRPM could be the most reliable platform in exploring Malay language due to its comprehensiveness. Hence those students' views and experience with PRPM can provide accountable information to understand its contribution in the learning process of the language.

**PRPM and Universiti Malaya Library**

Although PRPM is not part of subscribed UM Library online resources, it is still an essential tool for UM   students since Malay language is the official medium of learning and teaching in UM. There are several courses that use PRPM as the reference tool at the Academy of Malay Studies. For example, JIB 2017 Bahasa Melayu dalam Penyiaran dan Kewartawanan (Malay language in Broadcasting and Journalism) and JIB2015 Bahasa Melayu, Masyarakat dan Media Sosial (Malay Language and social media). These  are among the mobility courses that joined by  foreign students.

The PRPM is an initiative by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), a government body that is responsible for the Malay language planning and enforcement in Malaysia. DBP is empowered by a specific act known as Akta Dewan Bahasa (Pindaan Perluasan) 1995.This act has entrusted DBP to plan and enforce measures to uplift the Malay language as National language.  Hence It is a national duty of Universiti Malaya Library to encourage the use of PRPM in order to encourage the proper use of Malay Language. The usage of the platform is promoted to  students by the Malay Studies Library by using  social media such as Facebook and during the library information skill session.

**PRPM as an open access dictionary**

The PRPM online dictionary is an open access resource that provides   a   spectrum of Malay words information. It does not only give definition of those words but beyond what a printed version commonly   offers. In a single web page a user is also able to know the proper spelling of the word in Romanised   letters and in Jawi script.

Furthermore, it provides a phonetic   guide to assist the word pronunciation. Information about the word class is given whenever relevant. The variation of the word meaning is included if any.  In each of the meaning variations, usage examples within the context of given definition are supplemented. This information is mainly derived from the published DBP Malay dictionary entitled Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat (Fourth edition of Kamus Dewan).

Besides typical dictionary information, other additional information such as synonyms for a word is available in the thesaurus section.

The PRPM dictionary also gives a reference of past DBP answered queries from the public regarding the usage of certain words. For example, there is a question about a proper usage of the word "Kalau" (if) that has been replied to by DBP. The record of the query will be displayed if a user is seeking the definition of the word "Kalau" in the PRPM dictionary. The record of the information is retrieved from the PRPM Khidmat Nasihat web service.

Moreover, the PRPM also provides a link to the "DBP Korpus". It contains a vast amount of Malay word corpus data. It provides a snippet of statement and source of a specific Malay word, for example: Statement: "Kalau ayah tak ada duit belilah basikal baru" ; Source: Mohd Fauzi Abdul . Kalopak Gugur. Keluarga, 2003. This data is freely available for anyone who wants to use it for research purposes.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are:

1. to study the perception of foreign speakers of Malay language among Universiti Malaya (UM) students toward the Malay language online dictionary which is known as the Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu (PRPM) in learning the language.

2. to study the usage purpose of PRPM Online dictionary by Universiti Malaya's foreign students.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The PRPM online dictionary is developed by DBP as an open access digital platform to help the Malaysian public to understand the Malay language. How the UM foreign students perceive the PRPM as a learning tool of the Malay language is still unknown. The information is useful as an input for improvement and future research on the platform.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been numerous studies examining how users utilize different types of online dictionaries to learn languages. However, the focuses of these studies are often scattered that it is difficult to organize them into a coherent scheme. Considering the differences in the focus on each study the literatures are divided into the following subsections:

1. **Perception of word definition in online dictionary**

Wijaya (2022) conducted a study on millennials perception of references of "perempuan" or woman in in Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI). The Online dictionary of Indonesian language is developed by Badan Bahasa. The study found the millennials still have the tendency of gender-based reference in the given definition in the KBBI. For instance, correlating matriarchal domestic responsibility of raising children in an event that view between man and woman. However, there is a growing neutrality over the previously male dominated terms, such as "hardworking" and "boss". However, the term perempuan is still associated with derogatory references such as "prostitute" and "slut". Millennials' perspective of the language differs from conservative views towards women to more progressive.

2. **Overview of online dictionary initiative in countries language planning.**

The book chapter by Kwary and Nor Hashimah (2015) discusses language planning. Of both Malay and Indonesian Languages which originated from the same language known as Melayu. The emphasis of the chapter is more towards sharing lexical activities in Malaysia and Indonesia When discussing the language planning, both authors highlighted several existing digital lexical initiatives in the countries. Kwary explained about Indonesia's initiatives of online lexicographical resources namely KBBI Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia and Glosarium which developed by Badan Bahasa. Meanwhile Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu or PRPM which is developed by DBP is described by Nor Hashimah as a one stop center for online users to find all information about Malay language. With PRPM, the user is able to retrieve information from twelve dictionaries in just one query. Another initiative known as the Gerbang Kata is another online dictionary service by DBP that enables users to interact with lexicography units to discuss, exchange ideas and introduce new words.

3. **Online dictionary as a language learning tool.**

Kit and Berg (2014) emphasized online dictionaries are essential in the language learning process. Furthermore, online dictionaries have superior properties over printed dictionaries, it is able to deliver fast responses and has reversibility in giving lexical help. However, it is seen as volatile due to its dependency towards network stability. They suggested online dictionaries and their specifications should be studied and tested on a regular basis. They proposed that teachers who teach a language course should seek suitable online dictionaries before using them as course reference tools. Furthermore, they also iterated the improvement of online dictionary by innovation of cognitive ability association of online dictionary based on queries analysis as inferences to help language learners to get the best translation in the context of user works.

4. **Online dictionary in teaching linguistic**

Campoy- Cubillo and Esbri -Basco (2022) explored the potential of online dictionaries and the multimodal affordances they bring to the teaching of metaphors and idiom in the language

classroom. This study views online dictionaries and their multimodal affordances as a powerful learning tool to guide   EFL students to understand complex English metaphoric language.

### 5. Perception of usefulness of online dictionary in learning language

In this study Li and Xu (2015) investigated the use of an online dictionary by Chinese EFL learners in identifying the meanings of verb phrases. The results of the study showed that learners have improved in doing the task after consulting the online dictionary. However, training in using online dictionaries is necessary to lead students to make correct choices.

### 6. Retrieval system of online dictionary

Cunliang et. Al. (2022) introduced Lit Mind Dictionary It is an open-source online generative dictionary. The platform can retrieve a word and context containing the word as input and automatically generates a definition as output. It supports not only Chinese and English, but also Chinese-English cross-lingual queries. The dictionary gives flexibility to a user to develop a vocabulary.

The selected literature provided various information on the application of online dictionaries in language learning. Even though one of them is discussing users' perception, none of them is related to PRPM users' perception. Therefore, this study is important to provide information in the subject matter for future reference.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study used a quantitative approach for data collection. A questionnaire with 18 sets of questions is the main tool to gain insight. The questionnaire is developed based on four (4) constructs such as demography, experience, language, and learning. Likert scale rating with 5 answer statements (Strongly Agree to strongly Disagree) are used to measure the respondents' perception.

The rationale of the selection of the four constructs is described as this:

1. Demography
 Will give a brief background information of the respondents who participated in this study such as country of origin, gender, faculties, and level of study. 2. Experience: This construct consists of questions to get the insight of the respondents' experience in using the PRPM online dictionary. For example, the purpose of using the dictionary is. For this question six multiple options are provided for them to choose from.  Respondents also asked a general question whether they are using online dictionaries to learn a language, but not necessarily PRPM. Their preference over online or printed format dictionaries is also questioned. 3, Language: This construct tries to get respondents' perception of PRPM ability in helping them to improve their Malay language in these four aspects such as grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary. 4. Learning: The purpose of the construct is to attain

respondents' insight on how they perceive PRPM as a Malay language learning tool. Is PRPM useful in their learning? Do the respondents gain learning autonomy by using the platform? and whether the resources available in PRPM such as thesaurus and Malay proverbs enhance their learning experience? are included in the questions. All These constructs which are underlining the questionnaire are believed to be able to give some relevant data for this research.

Google Form is used to design the question platform. The questionnaire was then distributed to 100 respondents among the international students of the Universiti Malaya. The distribution of the questionnaire is done online via email and WhatsApp since the form itself is web- based.

The application of the questionnaire in this research is due to its advantage in collecting data from large populations with far distance proximity but with less budget and time (Majid, 1990). Since the study does not require direct contact with respondents the selected method is considered suitable. Baxter et al. (1996) emphasize questionnaires enable researchers to formulate precise questions for interested groups whose opinions or experience is investigated.

In support of this, Monette et al. (1998) listed out four advantages of questionnaires as a research data collection tool. Firstly, questionnaires are inexpensive and provide quick information gathering if compared to an interview. The research tool only takes a month or 6 weeks to accumulate data.

Secondly, questionnaires can collect data from geographically dispersed respondents. Distance and geographical boundaries are not obstacles. Thirdly, a question with a personal or sensitive nature may provide an accurate answer than an interview. Respondents are likely to respond honestly to questions if asked not to face a person that is possibly making judgements about them; Finally, questionnaires may eliminate the interviewer bias. It occurs when interviewers influence interviewee response by answering the question in a particular direction.

Majid (1990) stated Likert scale measures attitude. The approach proposes a list of statements with positive and negative values about individual attitudes towards certain institutions or issues. The basis of the Likert scale is on the assumption that all feedback scores retrieved from the designated list of statements reflecting one attitude on the issues, it also provides reliable measurement of the attitude under study. Mcleod (2023) pointed out the Likert Scale extent of respondent feedback from a simple Yes or No answer to a degree of opinion which then enables the respondent' s attitude to be measured.

According to Moura (2020), Likert Scale is a psychometric that is intensively used to measure attitude, perception, emotions, and intentions. The scale gives an opportunity to an individual to express himself in an objective manner. It measures abstract concepts which are tangible and seem impossible to measure before.

Hence in this research, a questionnaire with Likert Scale measurement schema was adopted as appropriate for data collection due to its ability to measure abstract concepts such as UM foreign students' perception towards the PRPM online dictionary.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Overall, there were 58 respondents (R) who participated in this study. The respondents were foreign students of the Universiti Malaya who are currently enrolled in various academic courses. Below are the selected tables and data analysis from the collected questionnaire from the four constructs: Demography, Experience, Language and Learning.

**Demography**

Table 1: Country of origin of respondents

| Country | Number of Respondent (R) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| China | 13 | 22.40% |
| Other | 10 | 17.20% |
| Indonesia | 8 | 13.80% |
| Pakistan | 7 | 12.10% |
| Bangladesh | 3 | 5.20% |
| UAE | 2 | 3.40% |
| Thailand | 2 | 3.40% |
| Iran | 2 | 3.40% |
| France | 2 | 3.40% |
| Brunei | 1 | 1.70% |
| Turkiye | 1 | 1.70% |
| Korea | 4 | 6.90% |
| Oman | 1 | 1.70% |
| Nigeria | 2 | 3.40% |
| Total | 58 | 99.70% |

The highest number of the respondents (13 R/22.4%) were coming from China. Most of the Chinese students are taking language courses at the   Academy of Malay Studies (APM) and the Faculty of Language Linguistics (FBL). The respondents from APM (18 R) also contributed to the highest response in faculty demography in this survey. This is probably due to the academy's reputation in accepting students from several countries such as   France, South Korea, China, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia to enroll in undergraduate and  postgraduate programmes in   Malay Language and culture. Besides that, the flexible mode of studying in APM known as "Mobility" has attracted students to join courses on Malay language remotely from their own countries.

**Experience**



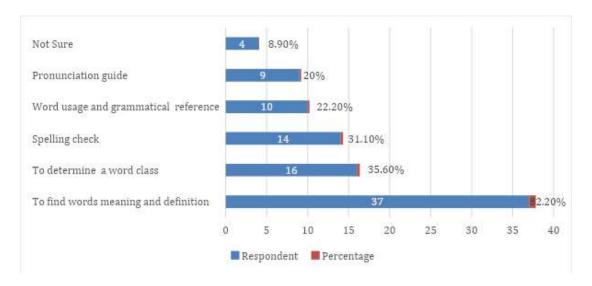Figure 1: The Usage Experience Of Prpm Online Dictionary

Figure 2: The Usage Purpose of PRPM Online Dictionary

77.6% (45 R) of the students were in favor of using online dictionaries to learn Malay language. This showed that the online tool has its own advantages. Especially in the aspect of its format flexibility. There is no longer a lump of dictionary to be carried everywhere, but a smartphone as a medium and internet connection. It is still believed that an online dictionary is a crucial supporting resource in learning a language. A formal learning session with a professional instructor is undeniably the best approach. However, the study showed that 20 students have never used the PRPM (Fig. 1). This is conceivable since there are several available webs- based and apps of Malay dictionaries instead of PRPM. For example, Carikata, Malaycube, Malay English Best Dictionary in Malaysia, English Malay Dictionary, to name a few. Although PRPM could offer better description of Malay words, it is subjected to users' preference of choice and convenience.

Even though PRPM is providing comprehensive information to its users, as reflected from the result (Figure 2), their main purpose of using PRPM is to find the meaning of words. In other words, they only utilize the basic function of the PRPM dictionary. This situation normally happens to a non-native speaker who wants to instantly acquire the meaning of the foreign words in their mother tongue in order to understand the whole context of a text or conversation. In any respect, this activity is a part of the language learning process.

Surprisingly, the study found 45 respondents still prefer to use printed dictionaries over the online format. What could be interpreted from this is, not all online dictionaries are able to provide comprehensive information as in printed. Users still need to go back to the original format for complete information. Secondly even if they did, they still lack the feel and touch as the physical format. Thirdly, using a digital device for a long screen time to access an online dictionary or any digital text may cause a health hazard such as eyes and musculoskeletal system stress (Moulick, 2023).

Hence considering these factors, an online dictionary is still necessary but may be used as a complimentary reference with a physical dictionary in learning Malay language.
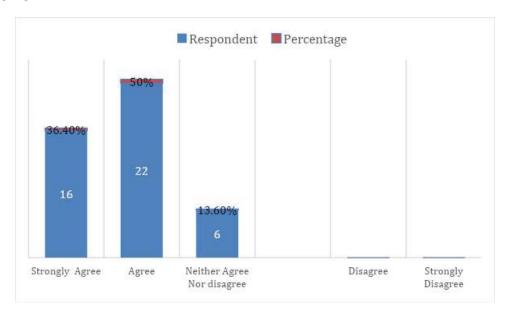
**Language**



Figure 3: The PRPM Online Dictionary Helps with Malay Language Grammar Understanding
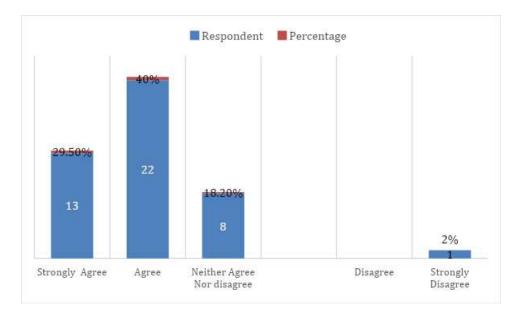


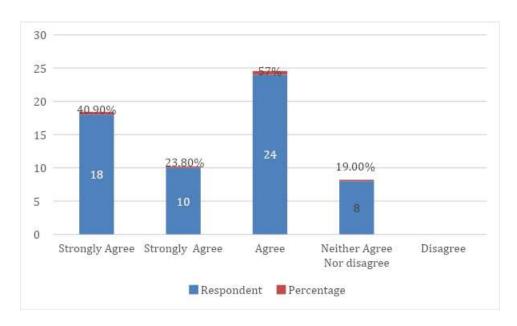Figure 4: The PRPM Online dictionary helps Malay language pronunciation.

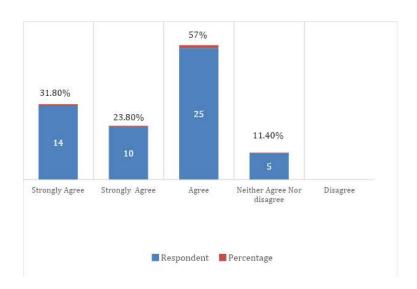Figure 5: The PRPM Online dictionary guides Malay words' spelling.



Figure 6: The PRPM Online dictionary improves Malay vocabulary.

Overall most of the students gave positive views (Strongly Agree and Agree) toward the potential of the PRPM online dictionary to help them in learning all aspects of Malay language such as grammar (38 R), pronunciation (43 R), spelling (52 R) and vocabulary ( 54 R) as in Figure 3 to 6. This is possible because PRPM is designed in such a way to be the one stop

center for its users to get all information about the Malay language. It is fully supported by the Malay language experts (DBP, 2015).
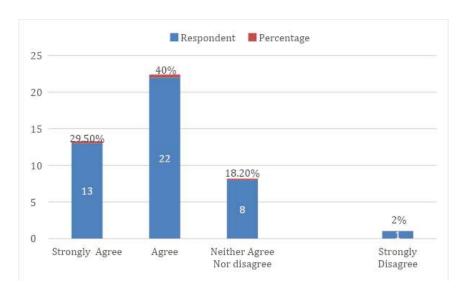
**Learning**



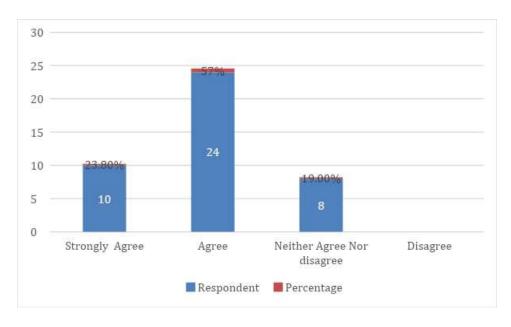Figure 7:  The PRPM Online Dictionary gives Learning Autonomy



Figure 8: The PRPM Online Dictionary is Easily Accessible

35 respondents acknowledged that the PRPM has given them learning autonomy (Figure 7). This is the strength that most online applications could offer. This advantage indirectly promotes the PRPM usage. They also perceived the PRPM to be easily accessible (34 R) that allows them to learn the Malay language with their own time and pace (Fig. 8).

31 students also agreed that (the additional features such as the Malay Pantun (Pantoum) and Peribahasa (Proverb) in PRPM have enhanced their Malay language learning process.

## FINDINGS

The conducted research highlighted several findings:

1. The students perceived the PRPM as a useful learning tool to improve Malay language competency. It helps in grammar understanding, guides pronunciation and spelling as well as improving vocabulary (Fig. 3 to 6).

2. The students mainly use the PRPM online dictionary to find meaning and definition of words.

3. The PRPM is not the main online dictionary referred to by those students. There are other alternatives.

### Limitation of PRPM

Besides amicable analyses of PRPM, there are few noticeable limitations which are considering for rooms of improvement:

1. The thesaurus tool contains less word corpus. For example, synonyms for common words such as "Angkat" (Lift), "Baca" (Read) and "Cari" (Find) are unavailable.

2. Bilingual instruction such as the English language is not available. The PRPM is totally in Malay language. This option could facilitate foreign speakers in using the PRPM.

3. Word phonetic guide is not accompanied with pronunciation sound samples. Therefore, users that understand phonetic symbols may have difficulty pronouncing the word correctly.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the study, the PRPM online dictionary is practically useful for the foreign students to improve their Malay language competency. It provides a lot of information about the language at their fingertips. It is an excellent initiative by the Malaysian government to uplift the proper use of Malay language. However, some of the foreign students are hindering it due to the availability of alternatives. Thus, it is the role of Lecturers and librarians to encourage its usage in the classes and libraries to promote the resource to its users.

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