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English-Students (News Focus)

STUDENTS APPRECIATE NEED TO MASTER ENGLISH

By: Zurina Yusof

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 2 (Bernama) -- Calls for students to master the English language have been hailed by many people, not least the students themselves.

Students feel that mastering English is vital as it can help them excel in their academic pursuits and their working careers later on.

However, some students claim that teachers are partly to blame for their lack of proficiency in English.

Several students interviewed by Bernama said the use of "mixed languages" by teachers when conducting English lessons discouraged students from communicating in the language.

Student Wan Khaliah Wan Hussain said the cause of the problem could be that teachers rarely communicated in English.

"The cause may be the teachers themselves who rarely communicate in English in school. Furthermore, they speak in a mixture of languages -- English, Malay and sometimes even Chinese when talking to students," she said.

She recognises the importance of mastering English because it is an international language.

"I know that many people especially Malays don't know how to speak English. I think they should know the importance of the language," she said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has repeatedly stressed the need for Malaysians to master English.

He said Malaysians would not become any less patriotic just because they mastered English.

The Federation of Peninsular Malaysia Malay Students (GPMS) has also suggested that efforts to improve students' command of English be made a national agenda.

GPMS president Datuk Suhaimi Ibrahim recently called for the revival of English-medium schools to provide a strong foundation for students to master the language.

He attributed the problem of poor command of English to a "mistake of history" and said political will on the part of the national leadership was needed to rectify the situation.

Another student Siti Suraidah Mazlan said teachers should also be blamed for the problem as they often conversed in their mother tongue in school.

Student Roslinda Abdul Hamid also acknowledged the importance of English, saying while classes are conducted in Malay, many reference books are in English.

Teacher Noryani Abdul Ghani agreed that teachers did not use English as much as they should have, but said the problem boiled down to students' poor understanding of the language.

It was impossible to use English fully as most students did not even have basic knowledge of English, she said.

"I do understand why teachers use Malay during classes because students' command of English is so low that you can't use English (fully)," she said.

"English is such a foreign language to them, and they could not understand a simple word, like happy or sad. If they can't understand an everyday word, how can you teach that class fully in English?" said Noryani

who teaches English at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Seksyen 18 in Shah Alam.

Noryani said she found that Malay students are more reluctant to use English compared to the other races, while boys have a tendency to tease their friends who communicate in English.

-- BERNAMA

ZUE ARA ES YBY