



**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE MALAYSIAN ARMY**

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE MALAYSIAN ARMY

## AIM

1. The present project aims to underscore the significance of the English language as a primary mode of communication in the Malaysian Army. Effective communication is crucial in any organizational setting, and the Malaysian Army is no exception. The ability to effectively communicate in English can help the Malaysian Army to better coordinate its activities, improve situational awareness, and enhance operational effectiveness.

## INTRODUCTION

2. In general, the level of proficiency in English among members of the Malaysian Army is on par. This is based on the English language exam results, specifically in the Australian Defence Force English Language Profiling System (ADFELPS), taken by candidates nominated for local and overseas courses. According to a report in 2023 by the Education Directorate, out of 1,425 officers who sat for the exam, 348 failed.<sup>1</sup> The worst performance was by the Other Rank, with 475 out of 523 candidates failing the test.<sup>2</sup> The Malaysian Armed Forces has established the Perintah Majlis Angkatan Tentera (PMAT) 7/80, which states that English is the second language in the military.<sup>3</sup> This is due to the necessity of sending officers or soldiers to attend various courses or engage in joint exercises with other countries, such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), Staff College, etc.

3. In the military domain specifically in the Malaysian Army, the function of English extends beyond mere convenience.<sup>4</sup> It serves as a critical adhesive, bonding various branches of the armed forces within the nation's borders and, importantly, upon the international stage where cross-communication becomes paramount. The use of English in military communication channels is not just about efficiency and efficacy. It is a strategic imperative fundamental to maintaining a nation's sovereignty and securing its interests globally. This paper will explain how English is used for professional development and training, how it supports the smooth operation of joint international missions, and how important it is for assimilating technological advances. The continued relevance of English is not just a reflection of current military necessity but a forward-thinking investment in the evolving nature of global defence dynamics.

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<sup>1</sup> Jabatanarah Pendidikan, 'Analisis Keputusan ADFELPS Bagi Pegawai Dan Lain-Lain Pangkat Tentera Darat', Dis 2023, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Jabatanarah Pendidikan, 5.

<sup>3</sup> MAT, 'Perintah Majlis Angkatan Tentera (PMAT) 7/80', 1980, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Concepción Orna-Montesinos, 'English as an International Language in the Military: A Study of Attitudes', *LSP Journal-Language for Special Purposes, Professional Communication, Knowledge Management and Cognition* 4, no. 1 (2013): 56.

## DISCUSSION

### Professional Development and Training

4. The Malaysian Army provides a range of courses for its officers, which includes the Young Officers Tactics Course (YOTC), Company Commanders Course, Staff Duties Course, All Arms Tactics Course (AATC), Staff College, and Defence College. All of these courses are conducted locally and are delivered in English.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) has bilateral relations with several foreign countries, such as Canada, the United States of America, ASEAN countries, Australia, the United Kingdom, etc. These countries offer overseas training courses for officers and other ranks, which cater to the needs of the Malaysian Army and are conducted in English. For instance, since 1966, Canada's Military Training Cooperation Program (MTCP) has provided training for the MAF in language courses, peace support operations and military professional development to approximately 680 officers.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Army officers and other ranks selected to attend these courses must have a good command in English. Otherwise, they risk failure by either being sent back home, which may cause severe repercussions to the Army, or not getting the most out of the cause or training. This could affect their performance and the dissemination of knowledge throughout their service in the Army.

5. Proficiency in English allows Malaysian Army personnel to fully engage with these programs, ensuring they can accurately grasp complex concepts, actively participate in discourse, and contribute their perspectives. English fluency removes linguistic barriers that could otherwise impede learning and collaboration. For example, Staff College in Canada conducted discussion in various topics related to their field with a small group. The discussions were highly productive as each member actively exchanged ideas and opinions. The group was small, which allowed for a more intimate and focused environment, leading to a deeper exploration of the subject matter. From sharing experiences to proposing innovative solutions, the conversations were rich with insights and perspectives. Moreover, it fosters confidence in individuals as they navigate these learning platforms, participate in collaborative projects, and network with international counterparts. This linguistic competence is not merely about understanding and being understood; it's about integrating into a global community of defence professionals and drawing from the well of collective knowledge and experience.<sup>7</sup>

6. A proficient command of the English language not only amplifies the communication skills of Malaysian Army but also elevates their personal image and that of the organization they represent. Effective communication in English enhances officers' credibility, professionalism, and ability to engage with diverse audiences.<sup>8</sup> It instils

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<sup>5</sup> MAF, 'Armed Forces Committee Instructions (AFCI)', 1980, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada, 'Canada-Malaysia Relations' (2023).

<sup>7</sup> Malaysian Army Doctrine, MD 0.2.1A TD, Doktrin Kepimpinan Tentera Darat Malaysia 2005, 3-3.

<sup>8</sup> Siti Haizam, Mohd Zin and Mohammad Nazri, 'The Mediating Effect of English Self-Efficacy on the Relationships between Motivation to Learn, Intention to Share Knowledge, and Job Performance Among Military Personnel', *Advances in Business Research International Journal* 7, no. 2 (2021): 77.

confidence in their competence and fosters respect among peers, superiors, and international partners.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, articulating ideas and strategies fluently in English signifies a global mindset and adaptability, positioning officers as multilateral forward-thinkers. The positive image projected by officers proficient in English reflects the Malaysian Army as a modern, capable institution, reinforcing its standing in the global defence community and enhancing its reputation for professionalism and excellence.<sup>10</sup>

### **Supports the Operation of Joint International Missions and Exercises**

7. English is vital for communication in the Malaysian Army, especially for supporting international missions and exercises. Collaborating with foreign military forces and participating in multinational operations require seamless communication, coordination, and interoperability. Joint international missions demand high coordination and cooperation among participating military forces.<sup>11</sup> Whether engaging in peacekeeping operations, multinational exercises, or allied coalitions, transparent and efficient communication is essential to align objectives, synchronize movements, and execute tasks seamlessly. For example, the Malaysian Army participated in a peacekeeping mission in Lebanon and served as observers in other countries such as Sudan, Western Sahara, Liberia, the Republic of Congo, the Philippines and Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> Also, the Malaysian Army has participated in several exercises with other countries, both locally and overseas. For instance, the Malaysian Army is hosting Keris Strike, which is a bilateral exercise funded by the U.S. Army Pacific.<sup>13</sup> The exercise aims to improve readiness and tactical interoperability and strengthen bilateral relationships between the two armies. Besides that, in 2015, the first official exercises of a comprehensive training exchange program were executed by military special forces from Canada and Malaysia to enhance their operational capabilities.<sup>14</sup> The soldiers from both countries trained each other in a jungle environment during their joint cooperation. Meanwhile, Malaysian Special Forces are training in cold weather operations and combat techniques in Canada.

8. English proficiency enables Malaysian Army personnel to engage in meaningful dialogue and exchange information with foreign partners during joint international missions and exercises. Effective communication in English is vital for sharing insights, lessons learned,<sup>15</sup> and best practices with allied forces, as well as for building professional relationships and fostering companionship. By communicating clearly and articulately in English, Malaysian Army can contribute their expertise, learn from diverse

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<sup>9</sup> Siti, Zin and Nazri, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Malaysian Army Doctrine, MD 0.0 TD, Command, Leadership and Management (Provisional) 2007, 40.

<sup>11</sup> Malaysia Ministry of Defence, 'Malaysia Ministry of Defence, Defence White Paper: A Secure, Sovereign and Prosperous Malaysia', 2020, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Asri Salleh and Asmady Idris, *Malaysia's United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (1960-2010)* (Springer, 2021), 36.

<sup>13</sup> Malaysia Ministry of Defence, 66.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Canada, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Katharine H. Greenaway et al., 'Shared Identity Is Key to Effective Communication', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (February 2015): 12.

perspectives, and enhance the collective knowledge and capabilities of the multinational force. Proficiency in English allows Malaysian Army personnel to understand and adhere to established protocols, communicate effectively with their counterparts, and align their actions seamlessly within the multinational force, enhancing overall efficiency and effectiveness.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, English serves as a line for disseminating critical information, intelligence, and situational reports during joint international missions and exercises. Practical and straightforward use of the English language enables speedy and precise conveyance of crucial information, expediting instantaneous decision-making and elevating the collective situational awareness of the multinational force.<sup>17</sup>

9. In the context of joint international missions and exercises, English proficiency not only supports the operational aspects of military endeavors but also contributes to enhancing the Malaysian Army's reputation and standing on the global stage. Effective communication in English demonstrates professionalism, competence, and a commitment to international cooperation, shaping a positive image<sup>18</sup> of the Malaysian Army as a reliable and respected partner in multinational security initiatives. By actively engaging in joint exercises and missions with foreign forces, and communicating proficiently in English, Malaysian soldiers showcase their capabilities, build trust with international allies, and strengthen bilateral relationships, ultimately advancing Malaysia's strategic interests and diplomatic relations on the world stage. The Malaysian Army's English proficiency in joint international missions and exercises is crucial. It promotes collaboration and interoperability with foreign partners, enabling shared objectives in multinational contexts. Soldiers can overcome linguistic barriers and foster unity through clear communication in English. This competence enhances relationships and upholds Malaysia's commitment to global security cooperation and peacekeeping efforts.

### **Assimilating Technological Advances**

10. The Malaysian Army has purchased new technologies, such as the Armour Vehicle 8x8 called GEMPITA<sup>19</sup> and the MD530G attack helicopter,<sup>20</sup> which represents significant advancements in its operational capabilities and combat readiness. The main difference in terms of technologies between GEMPITA and the previous Armour Vehicle, Radpanzer CONDOR 4x4, lies in the communication system. The GEMPITA uses an Operating Integration Communication System (OICS),<sup>21</sup> which integrates all the platform systems like engine, oil, hydraulic, etc. and communication systems throughout. The OICS is a complex system that needs to function correctly. Thus, English proficiency among Malaysian Army personnel plays a crucial role in assimilating these new

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<sup>16</sup> Najjah Salwa Abd Razak et al., 'Language, Communication and Intercultural Understanding in Peacekeeping Operations', *International Journal of West Asian Studies* 10 (2018): 88.

<sup>17</sup> Razak et al., 93.

<sup>18</sup> Yuni Elisdawati, Rahmad Husein, and Eddy Setia, 'Teachers' Politeness Strategies in Motivating Students to Learn English', *KnE Social Sciences*, 2018, 968.

<sup>19</sup> "PARS Alpha 8X8, the Next Gen Gempita", Marhalim Abas, *Malaysian Defence*, last modified 8 February 2024, <https://www.malaysiandefence.com/pars-alpha-8x8-the-next-gen-gempita/>

<sup>20</sup> "Malaysia to Receive Six MD 530G Light Scout Attack Helicopters", *Army Technology*, last modified 17 January 2022, <https://www.army-technology.com/news/malaysia-receive-six-md-530g-helicopters/>

<sup>21</sup> Malaysian Army Doctrine, MP 3-2.1.1 TD, The Cavalry Regiment, 2019, 4-5.

technologies effectively, ensuring seamless integration, operational proficiency, and mission success. The ability to understand technical specifications, communicate with foreign manufacturers, and access technical manuals in English is essential for maximizing the potential of these advanced systems and leveraging them to enhance the Army's overall combat effectiveness.

11. The introduction of the GEMPITA and the MD530G attack helicopter into the Malaysian Army's inventory signifies a transition towards more modern, capable, and versatile platforms for land and air operations. These new systems bring advanced capabilities in terms of mobility, firepower, survivability, and situational awareness, enhancing the Army's ability to respond to a wide range of operational requirements, from conventional warfare to counterinsurgency operations. One of the variants of GEMPITA is Armoured Fighting Vehicle (AFV) Surveillance GEMPITA.<sup>22</sup> This specific variation is primarily designed for surveillance purposes and is equipped with advanced sensors and communication systems to provide real-time intelligence to military personnel. Soldiers tasked with this vehicle must know how to operate, maintain, and employ technical systems and must have a strong proficiency in English. Technical documentation, training materials, and operational procedures are often provided in English. Understanding the technical specifications and capabilities of these assets is essential for optimizing their performance on the battlefield.<sup>23</sup> Malaysian Army need to interpret complex engineering diagrams, system configurations, and operational parameters outlined in technical manuals and user guides. By mastering the language, soldiers can familiarize themselves with the functionality, features, and maintenance requirements of these advanced platforms specifically in these assets, ensuring they are operated effectively, maintained efficiently, and employed strategically in various operational scenarios.

12. Moreover, English proficiency enables Malaysian Army personnel to communicate effectively with foreign manufacturers, suppliers, and technical support teams responsible specifically for these assets. Collaborating with international partners in the procurement, integration, and sustainment of these platforms requires clear and concise communication<sup>24</sup> in English to convey operational requirements, address technical issues, and facilitate knowledge transfer. By leveraging their language skills, soldiers can engage in productive discussions, troubleshoot complex systems, and leverage external expertise to enhance the performance and reliability of these advanced technologies. Accessing technical documentation, training materials, and best practices related to the GEMPITA and MD530G attack helicopter in English is crucial for ensuring operational proficiency and safety. English-language resources, such as operational manuals, maintenance procedures, and safety regulations, provide essential guidance on operating and maintaining these platforms effectively. By being proficient in English, Malaysian Army personnel can navigate these resources with ease, acquire the necessary

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<sup>22</sup> MP 3-2.1.1 TD, 2-5.

<sup>23</sup> National Research Council, *Making the Soldier Decisive on Future Battlefields* (National Academies Press, 2013), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Greenaway et al., 22.

skills and knowledge to operate advanced systems safely and adhere to best practices to prevent accidents, ensure mission success, and enhance the longevity of the equipment. By mastering the language, soldiers can access technical documentation, engage with foreign manufacturers, communicate effectively during joint exercises, and leverage international expertise to maximize the potential of these new technologies. English proficiency not only enhances operational proficiency and safety but also fosters collaboration, interoperability, and knowledge sharing with international partners, ultimately contributing to the Malaysian Army's readiness, effectiveness, and professionalism in leveraging advanced military capabilities for national defense and security.

## **CONCLUSION**

13. English proficiency is a critical component within the Malaysian Army, particularly for officers and soldiers engaging in professional development, joint international missions, and assimilating technological advancements. Proficiency in English is essential for officers and ranks attending local and overseas courses to effectively communicate, participate in collaborative projects, and access a wealth of English-language publications. English serves as a channel of clarity and cohesion within the military, supporting seamless execution of multifaceted operations and international engagements. In joint international missions, English proficiency enables effective communication, coordination, and interoperability among foreign partners, enhancing the Malaysian Army's reputation and strategic engagements on the global stage. Moreover, mastering English is crucial for assimilating new technologies like the GEMPITA and MD530G attack helicopter, ensuring operational proficiency, mission success, and collaboration with foreign manufacturers. Overall, English proficiency plays a pivotal role in enhancing the Malaysian Army's readiness, professionalism, and effectiveness in navigating modern defence dynamics and global security challenges.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

14. It is recommended that a language school be built to provide comprehensive English language training for the Army in the long term. This school could become an all-in-one English Language Training and Examination Centre, offering all levels of English programs from elementary to advanced under one roof. Incorporating English language training into the regular professional development curriculum of the Malaysian Army can help build a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Language schools can also provide access to language resources, such as online courses, language labs, and immersive language experiences, which can empower personnel to strengthen their English proficiency at their own pace and convenience. Additionally, this training centre could be programmed to develop a Bilingual Section to prepare soldiers, especially officers, who are nominated to serve under the United Nations Flag as observers or peacekeepers and study overseas as well.

15. Malaysian Army, specifically the officer, required the ADFELPS test to determine the necessary level of English for their subsequent career courses. In this particular scenario, the number of individuals subjected to testing is limited, and the



corresponding percentage is approximately 38%.<sup>25</sup> It is highly recommended for all the officers to undergo the ADFELPS every year. This measure ensures that their English language skills are acceptable, which is essential for their professional growth and development. It is a crucial tool that helps the officers identify their language strengths and weaknesses and work towards improving them. By undergoing this test annually, the officers can be confident that their English language skills are up to date and capable of performing their duties effectively and efficiently. Additionally, the Army and Directorate require Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) to take the ADFELPS test as part of their official duties. This is to ensure that the NCOs have the necessary language skills to carry out their roles effectively and efficiently. It is significant to note that the ADFELPS test is a standardized assessment tool that evaluates an individual's reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in English.

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<sup>25</sup> Jabatanarah Pendidikan, 4.

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