

Language Policy and Planning (LPP) for English in Malaysian Education System in the 21st Century

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Abstract - Language Policy and Planning (LPP) is defined as large-scale national planning, usually undertaken by governments, meant to influence, if not change, ways of speaking or literacy practices within a society (Baldauf, 2006 [5]). As a multilingual society, Malaysia is determined to preserve its linguistic diversity through its LPP. So far, Malaysia is still struggling to draw up a policy that encompasses the demands of all its linguistic groups across the country, which is shown by its constant policy revisions. Therefore, this paper aims to trace the development of LPP for English in Malaysian education, and it examines the reasons as well as the impacts of language planning and language policy to the competency and proficiency of English among Malaysians. The study is conducted based on secondary research, whereby materials such as journals, books and dissertations are used as references. Apart from gaining an insight of the implemented language policies in Malaysia, the findings reveal the social reality of contrasting LPP initiatives in Malaysia, in which English proficiency levels among students are experiencing a sharp decline, contrary to the amazing significance of the English language in the global arena. Indeed, the effects of LPP, such as the strengthening of nationalist ethos as well as the increasing burden of teaching staff, should be taken into consideration while drafting up and revising LPP to ensure the sustainability of a just and fair society.

General Terms - Language Policy and Planning; Southeast Asian Studies; Sociolinguistics; Bilingual Education Policy

Keywords - Malaysia; language; policy; planning; education; English

ABBREVIATIONS

BM: Bahasa Malaysia (Malay Language)

DBP: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Institute of Language and Literature)

ITBM: Malaysian Institute of Translation & Books

LINUS: Literacy and Numeracy Screening

LPP: Language Policy and Planning

MBMMBI: Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia, Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris (To Uphold the Malay Language and to Strengthen the English Language)

PAGE: Parent Action Group for Education

PM: Prime Minister

PPSMI: Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris (Teaching and Learning of Mathematics and Science in English)

1. INTRODUCTION

Language Policy and Planning (LPP), in academia, is defined as large-scale national planning, usually undertaken by governments, meant to influence, if not change, ways of speaking or literacy practices within a society (Baldauf, 2006) [5].

Moreover, LPP contributes to the vitalities of languages within a nation as it refers to deliberate efforts to influence behaviours with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes (Cooper, 1989) [9]. In other words, LPP would spontaneously influence citizens with their language acquisition and learning process of the mother tongue and the second language. The language codes' grammatical and syntactic structures would be affected without doubt, because one's mother tongue can interfere with the second language in magnitudes, and vice versa (Ellis, 1985) [14].

As a result of these influential efforts towards citizens, they would subconsciously shift or switch languages in different places or situations, and one language might be eroded by another (Baker & Jones, 1998) [4]. Hence, LPP must be understood in relation to macro imperatives such as socio-political, historical, and socioeconomic factors at the local or national level (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997) [26].

LPP contributes to the economic development and social progress in a knowledge-based nation. David (2009) [12] also stresses that LPP influences behaviours and ideologies through the structure, function and acquisition of language codes. As Gill (2005) [18] highlights, in Malaysia, the

decisions of language shift are made by the “top-down” model, which means that LPP usually is conducted and endorsed by representatives with power (e.g. the authorities) to make legislative verdicts for tribes of citizens, without consulting the end-users of the language. Furthermore, the influences will interact with the language choices and uses in the domains of education and culture, and these could be seen vividly in many countries including Malaysia.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country, with three main communities, namely, Malays, Chinese and Indians. Many other indigenous ethnic tribes also can be found in the territory of Malay Peninsula and East Malaysia. Regarding the background of Malaysian education pattern, Hazri and Santhiram (2012) [21] mention that “ethnic considerations remain central in the production and implementation of education policy in Malaysia” (p. 20). Hence, in Malaysia, Malay language has been adopted as the medium of instruction for many schools since the British colonial period. Meanwhile, the non-Malay communities like Chinese and Indians also invoke “strong sentiments and legacies in relation to mother tongue education” (Hazri, 2010, p. 4) [22], which has existed and institutionalised by “community involvement with policy practice of the British colonial era” (Hazri, 2010, p. 4) [22]. This tri-ethnic schema guarantees multi-dimensional developments of educations among different ethnic groups, and it carries decisive impacts on LPP towards the education system in Malaysia through consensus of building a national education system (Boulanger, 1996) [7].

Likewise, Gill (2007) [19] indicates that in the middle of the 20th century, English was the official language of colonial Malaya, where Malay, Mandarin and Tamil only performed as the vernaculars. The colonial government of Malaya had endorsed English as the official language during that pre-independence period, but other vernacular languages, such as Malay, were provided as one of the subjects in the schools. Nonetheless, all the subjects, except the vernacular languages courses, were taught in English. The flag of democratic movement for independence and nationalism had been waved for prompting the need to recognise the status of Malay language as the “national and sole official language” (Beer & Jacob, 1985) [6]. Thus, Malay was selected as the sole language for official purposes in Peninsular Malaysia in 1960s and later as the national language in both East and West Malaysia (Gill, 2007) [19].

Temporarily, although other languages including English were less prioritised, vernacular languages such as Mandarin Chinese and Tamil are used as the chief mediums of instruction in national-type schools in order to harmonise intercultural relations and stimulate national development. These languages are also taught as additional subjects in national schools, catering mainly for the vernacular communities. According to Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, every child is expected to be proficient in Bahasa Malaysia (BM) and English. BM is deemed as the national language as well as the symbol of unity, while English functions as a second language due to its colonial

background and factors of information diffusion and globalisation (Asmah, 1994) [3].

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It cannot be denied that each language planning or policy is constructed to benefit the nation and its citizens (Cooper, 1989) [9]. There are tremendous unseen efforts that underlie the inception of every language policy or language planning. In Malaysia, the multicultural background of the country is taken into account during the planning of language policies, particularly in the field of education.

Nevertheless, Malaysia is still struggling to draft up and implement a comprehensive policy that resonates with the voices and demands of every linguistic community. A matter of utmost concern here is the usage of English in Malaysian education system, whereby the status of English is experiencing a drastic deterioration despite the fact that it is the global language worldwide. In turn, this would deprive Malaysians of the linguistic capability they need to compete at the international level.

Therefore, this paper would justify the statement that LPP of English in Malaysia education system have brought impacts including incontrovertible positive and negative impacts towards Malaysians.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In relation to the launched purposes of the study about LLP in Malaysia education system in the 21st century, this paper investigates the following the objectives:

- To trace the historical development of LPP, especially the LPP in the 21st century for English in Malaysian education domain;
- To reveal the reasons why LPP in Malaysia has been changed in the 21st century;
- To discover the impacts of LPP towards the education system in Malaysia;
- To examine measures to governmental policy makers for improving English skills among Malaysian students.

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper is completed solely on secondary research. Through Universiti Sains Malaysia’s Perpustakaan Hamzah Sendut (Hamzah Sendut Library), various information and reliable resources have been referred and later utilised for this paper. Current educational journals, dissertations, legal documents (e.g. national acts, governmental policies) in light of background knowledge have been read in order to make this study better.

The knowledge of LPP has yielded insight into the evolution of the current LPP issues as well as into practices and approaches that are ineffective or unfeasible. In total, almost 20 journals are referred. Among them, 13 papers are written contemporarily in the 21st century, and others are related with language planning or policy for the 20th century. Besides, legal documents and acts like the Fenn-Wu Report, Constitution of Malaysia and National Language Act 1963/67 have been read and comprehended as the

bibliographies, and additional reading materials especially Prof. Dato' Dr. Saran Kaur Gill's books like Language Policy Challenges in Multi-ethnic Malaysia are utilised for this paper.

Some findings of this study are produced by using the design of historical research (Wiersma, 2009) [42]. Previous language policies and legislative acts were examined to compile historical information related to the current LPP scenario in Malaysia. While investigating the patterns in previous language policies, a deduction of the factors determining language policy changes and shifts can be achieved. This design also aids in providing a clearer picture of the effects of LPP, since the benefits and fallacies of recent policies can be traced based on recurring trends of its predecessors.

5. THE HISTORY OF LPP IN MALAYSIA

A thorough knowledge of the evolution of LPP in Malaysia is crucial for the sake of analysing the factors that influence the formation of LPP as well as the complications that follow. This section is dedicated to the tracing of the evolution of LPP in Malaysia starting from the 20th century until the first decade of the 21st century.

5.1 LPP in the 20th Century

Before the introduction of a comprehensive language policy in Malaysia (formerly Malaya), schools were usually divided into two categories, namely the government-controlled English-medium schools and the vernacular schools (namely Malay, Chinese and Tamil-medium schools). It was only until the 1950's that structured educational proposals were drafted, like the Barnes Report in 1950 (which recommended the conversion of vernacular schools into national schools that will use Malay as the instructional medium) and the 1951 Fenn-Wu Report (which suggested the preservation of vernacular schools).

According to Gill (2005) [18], the basic framework for today's education system, the Razak Report, was produced in 1956. In tandem with the authority's intention to make Malay the national language, the report advocated the establishment of national schools which will use Malay language as the main medium of instruction, whereby English remains as a compulsory subject in the primary and secondary school levels. National-type Schools, in which the medium of instruction may be Mandarin, Tamil or English, are also proposed. The subsequent Rahman Talib Report 1960 supported the language planning notions brought up by Razak, and these policies were later incorporated into the Malaysian Education Act in 1961.

A gradual conversion of English-medium schools into Malay-medium took place in the 1970's (Platt, 1976) [38], which also marked the advent of the New Economic Policy in Malaysia. Following the enactment of the National Language Act 1967, the Malaysian authority took steps to convert all National-type English schools, both primary and secondary schools, from 1968 till 1982 (Lee, 2011) [28]. English was retained as a second language taught in all primary and secondary schools as well as a prominent

reading language in tertiary settings, though it functioned as the medium of instruction in very few settings (Platt, 1976) [38].

The language policies in subsequent plans and legal acts, such as the National Education Act 1996, remains stagnant, apart from the recognition of native indigenous languages like Iban, Melanau and Kadazan-Dusun in the education curriculum. English remained as a mere compulsory subject and the second language nationwide until the dawn of the new millennium, whereby the introduction of a new policy compelled the country to view English in a serious light.

5.2 LPP in the 21st Century

5.2.1 PPSMI (*Teaching and Learning of Mathematics and Science in English*)

Conceived by former Malaysian Prime Minister (PM) Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the policy of Teaching and Learning of Mathematics and Science in English (PPSMI, *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris*) was launched by the Ministry of Education in 2003. It involved the changing of the medium of instruction for these two subjects from BM to English in the primary and secondary level of education (Sopia, Marsh, Ong & Lai, 2009) [40]. The implementation of the policy was grounded on the awareness that English is an important lingua franca in the trade industry and in the transfer of scientific knowledge and technology. The concern over the deteriorating command of English among young Malaysians has also propelled the initiation of PPSMI (Gill, 2004b) [17]. It was anticipated that the PPSMI policy would equip students the capability to access the diverse sources of information on science written in English while developing their English proficiency (Jantmary & Melor, 2014) [25]. The government had indeed paid considerable attention to ensure the success of the policy, as depicted by Mahathir's announcement in the 2003 budget speech that almost RM 5 billion would be allocated for PPSMI over the course of 2002 to 2008 (Hwa, 2011) [24]. Apart from providing teaching aids (e.g. textbooks, CDs and teacher's guides) and physical infrastructures (such as computer labs and ICT equipment), teachers were given training and salary incentives to realise this gargantuan project as well.

While much deliberation and monetary grants had been invested throughout the execution of PPSMI, the policy was showered with a litany of criticisms from the community. Mohandhas (2015) [32] states that both the teachers and students were ill prepared, as they had to conduct their Science and Mathematics lessons completely in English just seven months after the policy's first announcement. The fact that the majority of the teachers (especially those who received their education since the 1970s locally) were trained in Malay further complicates the dilemma. The urban-rural gap was a compelling argument for those against the policy, since, as Hwa (2011) [24] points out, "poorer educational resources and lower exposure to English meant that residents of rural areas stood to lose under the language switch, at least in the short-run" (p. 35).

Besides, PPSMI was also claimed to violate Article 152 of the Federal Constitution (which stipulates Malay as the national language of Malaysia) and the Education Act 1996 (which declares Malay as the main instructional medium in schools) (Hwa, 2011) [24]. The allegations were supported by various movements, notably the Movement for the Abolishment of PPSMI (GMP, Gerakan Mansuhkan PPSMI), which was spearheaded by Hassan Ahmad, the former head director of the Institute of Language and Literature (DBP, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka). Such parties attributed themselves as “Champions of the Malay Language”, and deemed PPSMI as “a betrayal of the language’s (Malay) sovereign status” (Hwa, 2011) [24]. Additionally, vernacular groups such as the Chinese and Indian communities had also voiced their unhappiness over the policy, fearing that their native languages would be put at risk (Mohandhas, 2015) [32]. The policy was later accepted under certain compromises. However, Chinese National-type schools taught Mathematics in both Mandarin and English as two different subjects in the timetable, Tamil National-type schools assigned 58.6% of the teaching and learning time to be conducted in Tamil, and 41.4% would be in the Malay and English languages (Mohandhas, 2015) [32].

5.2.2 MBMMBI (To Uphold the Malay Language and to Strengthen the English Language)

Following heated debates and harsh opposition from anti-PPSMI factions, the Malaysian government reviewed the PPSMI policy in 2009, and decided to replace it with a new one, namely MBMMBI (Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia, Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris, which is literally translated as “To Uphold the Malay Language and to Strengthen the English Language”). The new policy aspires to heighten the students’ proficiency and confidence in using both Malay and English, thus building a society that stands united, which in turn produces competent Malaysians (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014) [31]. Malay was reinstated as the chief medium of instruction in education, i.e. the language of knowledge (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013) [30], putting an end to the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English. The subjects would be conducted in Malay in national schools, and Mandarin or Tamil in National-type Schools.

Nowadays, MBMMBI is still in its transitional phase, in which a soft landing approach is employed to minimise issues of inadaptability among students and educators. Teachers are still allowed to conduct their lessons in English or bilingually should the students are more comfortable with such settings, though a gradual change in the language usage is expected. The reversion process is estimated to be completed by 2021 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014) [31].

Various plans are drawn up in order to accomplish the goal of endorsing the status of Malay as an intellectual language. For instance, scholars are encouraged to publish their works in Malay, and the Malaysian Institute of Translation & Books (ITBM) is expected to play a larger role in translating dissertations and terminologies into Malay. At the school

level, a new curriculum for the Malay language subject is designed to accommodate students whose first language is not Malay, and teachers will be further trained to ensure that they meet the competency level to teach the language effectively.

On the other hand, English is still recognised as a key language in this era of globalisation. As in the case of Malay, the syllabus for the English language in schools will also receive a transformation to arm students with the linguistic know-how of using the language with merit. To reinforce the pedagogical capability of teachers, English educators will be assessed and up-skilled based on the Cambridge Placement Test and the Aptis Test. Should a shortage of qualified staff arises, secondary sources, such as retired teachers, will be exploited to resolve the predicament. The government is also expanding existing initiatives such as the LINUS (Literacy and Numeracy Screening) programme, which serves to identify children from Year 1 to Year 3 who do not possess basic literacy skills (reading and writing) in Malay and English as well as arithmetic knowledge. Remedial lessons will be given to the targeted group of students so as to provide them a solid foundation in the aforementioned aspects and incorporate them into the mainstream syllabus.

Despite the fact that MBMMBI was set up to replace the highly-reproached PPSMI policy, criticisms from the public waged on relentlessly. PAGE (the Parent Action Group for Education) Malaysia (2011a) [36], an organisation which is established with the aim of gathering feedback on educational issues from Malaysian parents and transmitting them to the Ministry of Education, has been a longstanding supporter of PPSMI. While the organisation does not reject the MBMMBI policy per se, they argue that the Science and Mathematics subjects should be taught in English since Malay has relatively low commercial value in the industrial and technological sector. Hence, in a memorandum which was submitted to the PM in 2011, PAGE (2011b) [37] requested that PPSMI should be provided as an option for parents instead of abolishing it entirely.

As depicted in the chronology of events regarding the development of LPP in Malaysia’s education system, it is evident that the country is still struggling to strike a balance between nationalism and internationalisation. In the next section, the influential factors of the LPP in Malaysia in the 21st century will be discussed in detail.

6. FACTORS LEADING TO CHANGES OF LPP FOR ENGLISH IN MALAYSIA

6.1 The Emphasis on English

Asmah (1987) [2] mentioned that Malaysians including the ruling governments realised that there were voices about improving Malaysians’ English skills, and the gap between demands and reality regarding citizens’ English proficiency was still quite huge. Besides, Wong and James (2000) [43] also highlight that the students’ mastery of English could be expected with high level easily unless English is functioned as the medium of instruction for academic purposes.

The PPSMI policy, which had lasted from 2003 to 2009, was the solution generated in response to enhance Malaysian citizens', especially the students' proficiency of English, a drastic and sudden shift about the language for Malaysian education was endorsed. According to Gill (2007) [19], Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad announced a decision that science and mathematics subjects would henceforth be conducted in English started in the first year of primary school. As a result of this shift, the prestige of English in Malaysian education domain has risen much higher than the 20th century, because English's role as the tool "with corpus to develop as a language of knowledge for the field of science and technology" (p. 109) is highlighted. Based on Gill (2007) [19], Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad insisted to alter the medium of instruction of science and mathematics in the schools because "it is an uphill challenge to keep up with knowledge proliferation in English" (p. 109).

The mentioned decision has revealed one of the main reasons that drew impetus for this change in language, which is doing pedagogical syllabus in Malay has its difficulties to "keep pace with the proliferation of knowledge in the field of science and technology in English" (Gill, 2007, p. 109) [19]. According to Crystal (2012) [11], English is the "medium of a great deal of the world's knowledge, especially in such areas as science and technology, and access to knowledge is the business of education" (p. 162). Furthermore, Crystal (2003) [10] says that science researches and inventions are moving at very fast paces, and they are mostly reported or interpreted in English. This echoes that English, the global lingua franca, connects laymen, researchers and their intellectual properties. By using English, reports could be written and achievements could be showcased, and the results are able to emerge on papers. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad emphasises that "thousands of papers on new research are being published every day, practically, all of them are in English" (Gill, 2007, p. 109) [19], which proves that English is vital for education in terms of academic researches and inventions. The Malaysian government recognises that by achieving significantly higher levels of English proficiency, the quality of teaching would be improved, because reference resources and additional reading materials could be obtained easier. Only by enhancing students' language skills, more advanced and cooperative activities, such as exchange programmes among Ph.D. engineering students between Malaysia and United States, could be done smoothly. Gill (2004a) [16] also underlines the influence of globalisation, internationalisation and the knowledge economy on the selection of English as the domain of science and technology. Thus, the Malaysia Education Blueprint indicates that in the medium-term, the Ministry will also consider introducing structural changes to support greater instructional time in English.

6.2 Aversion towards English

The awakening of nationalism prompted views that English is a threat towards the development of patriotic values. Gill (2014) [20] finds that since the 1970s, Malay communities

had begun to notice their "frustration over the implementation of Malay language" (p. 45), which could be concluded as "the disparity of Malay in comparison of non-Malays" (p. 47). Malay language, such an inviolable totem of Malaysians' national and ethnic identity, was moving slowly regarding to the implementation the language in domains like education and business. According to Gill (2014) [20], the status of English in Malaysia context had overpowered BM in multiple disciplines particularly in education and business context. Malay was developing slowly due to the little attention. Kelman (1971) [27] noticed that the powerful Malay groups became aggrieved due to the fact that "political and economic power are concentrated in the hands of those who speak the more favoured languages (like English)" (p. 35). This has impeded the flourish of Malay's nationalism.

In response to the ill-received PPSMI policy, the Ministry of Education has launched the MBMMBI scheme, which relocates the language focus from English to Malay. In order to rectify the imbalance between the Malays and other ethnic groups, the majority of Malay communities felt strongly for Malay to be the language for official purposes especially in education and administration. The legislation that clarified and guaranteed the status of Malay language in administration and education would develop the language to a higher status, so that the social and occupational mobility could be provided to Malays. The implementation of the MBMMBI policy is a manifestation of such nationalist sentiments since 2009.

Meanwhile, English, as the legacy of British colonisation, still displays its vitality although the status and usage of it has been limited for decades since Malaysia's independence. Gill (2014) [20] illustrates that the implication of Malay language's official dominance could be reached by providing it with two capitals, namely, education and administration. Therefore, it would lead to better implementation of the change in the medium of education.

Ong and Tan (2008) conducted a research which revealed the difficulties that were faced by teachers and students under the PPSMI scheme. Teachers who were educated or trained in BM found that it was tough to conduct teaching and learning activities in English. Students were not able to comprehend fully the teaching and learning processes due to their inadequate English proficiency. During classes, teachers had to clarify their messages via simple English instead of the sophisticated terminology from textbooks. As a last resort, some teachers took on the role of translators – by reinterpreting the whole lesson in BM after teaching them in English, thus hindering the learning processes.

7. EFFECTS OF THE LPP

7.1 Positive Impact: Nationalism Promotion for the Malaysian Society

Fishman (1968) [15] states that Malay imparts as the nationalist language for national unity and identity. Gill (2004b) [17] invokes that by stipulating BM as the official language of Malaysia, its status in education has been

emphasised. Malay language and culture become the identification of a particular ethnic group with school achievement like Malay literature, and it also helps to reduce the inequality of opportunity among ethnic groups including that in education.

Since the middle of the 20th century, Malay has functioned as the national language of the country, safeguarding the development and unity of Malaysia. This could be successfully done without any drastic change for more than five decades. Gill (2004b) [17] illustrates that English had been restrained for a few times in the 20th century, and Malay's status has been increased in strength through legislations. There is no problem for Malay as a medium of instruction as it has been used for more than twenty years. The changes in the language policy, especially to remove Malay's usage in education, should not be deliberated. Alis (2012) [1] claims that during this period of education where Malay is adopted, there were developments in many fields including medicine, aerospace, science and technology.

7.2 Negative Impact: Unnecessary Burdens to the Teaching Staff

As Ong and Tan (2008) [35] indicated, in order to insure students against school-weariness and lecture-incomprehension, some teachers had to manage daily translation and interpretation – by preparing bilingual notes with both Malay and English explanations and reinterpreting the whole lesson in Malay after teaching them in English. It had brought unnecessary burdens to the academic staff. “In an effort to prepare efficient teachers, Malaysia intends to implement its teaching program both in Bahasa Malaysia and English” (Hazri, Nordin, Reena & Abdul Rashid, 2011) [23]. This is indeed a gargantuan task due to the difficulties among translations with English-Malay Glossaries.

Zakaria (n. d.) [45] from Malay Interpreters' Section of Singaporean State Court has pointed out that when they are discussing the idiosyncrasies of translation, the complexities and intricacies of the legal language, such as terminology and jargon, can be a grappling affair. For example, the official translation of the item “annulment of marriage” in Malay is “pernikahan yang diisytiharkan oleh mahkamah sebagai tidak sah di sisi undang-undang” (p. 10). This shows that translation and interpretation is an arduous process that requires expertise and skill; it dictates meticulous procedures and approaches to create a precise and accurate piece of work. On the other hand, unlike translators and interpreters, teachers are trained in the field of education rather than translation. Thus, it may be inevitable that fumbles and miscommunication would occur should the teachers decide to impart their lessons by means of translation. Eventually, this would bring about extra burdens on the teachers as they confront time constraints and hamper learning outcomes in the classroom.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Adopt English as one of the Official Languages in Malaysia

On a nationwide basis, although the government considers the English language as secondary importance and BM as primary importance, English is being used as a second language only in a few domains including education, and it still does not receive the due respect and prestige it deserves (Jantmary & Melor, 2014) [25]. Retrieving the Constitution of Malaysia, the only official language of this country is BM except in Sarawak, in which English has been recognised as one of the official languages in the state (Sulok, 2015) [41]. From 2015 onwards, Sarawak has adopted English as the official language alongside BM. It is obligatory for all government servants to be fluent in English under this adoption as government administration and documentation can be in English correspondently with the Malay language. This adoption is beneficial in all aspects, thus building a good English speaking environment for students as English has no more only been spoken in class but also widely used in daily lives including civil services (Sulok, 2015) [41].

Singapore, on the other hand, has set four official languages, namely Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil, and English. It is noticeable that a country with a similar historic background as Malaysia could have more than one official language. Despite the existence of four different official languages, Malay is still one of the official languages that contributes to Singapore's culture diversity and national development (Ng, n. d. [33]; Wong & James, 2000 [43]). The population of Singapore comprises of Chinese Singaporeans (76.5%), Malay Singaporeans (15%), Indian Singaporeans (8.5%) and other minority groups (Ng, n. d.) [33]. Singapore has been emphasising on the importance of English since its independence; it views English as a universal language instead of a colonial language.

Singapore is a suitable benchmark country for Malaysia. According to Chew (2007) [8], Singapore is one of the few non-native English-speaking countries that has adopted English as a working language. It is able to construct its language policies into building a population that is highly fluent in English and other official languages (Dixon, 2005) [13]. Hence, Malaysian LPP makers can imitate what Singapore has done in line with language policies.

8.2 Emphasis on Improving Oral Skills in the Classroom

A major problem faced by Malaysian students in learning English is speech anxiety, whereby they lack the confidence to speak the language in their daily lives. Such diffidence usually stems from their fear of being jeered by their family and friends in case they perform grammatical errors in their speeches. They are also concerned that they may not be able to articulate their thoughts and intentions effectively due to their limited vocabulary in English. As a result, Malaysians tend to code-switch or use their native language instead, thus losing the opportunity to practise English even though

English is taught and recognised as a second language in the country (Melor, Ainil, Mohd Hasrul & Noriah, 2013) [29]. Therefore, campaigns emphasising on improving oral skills should be intensified. The education system in Malaysia is exam-oriented, whereby learning methods such as completing worksheet exercises and referring to past-year exam questions remain common. Students who have undergone such arrangements “have no problem writing or speaking” (Woodward, 2012) [44]. However, as pointed out by Li Yang, an entrepreneur and expert in education who has developed the Crazy English programme in China, it is important to “trigger the power of speaking” among students (Woodward, 2012) [44]. Li has implemented various unconventional measures to improve English pronunciation skills among his students, such as shouting out English words, slogans and expressions loudly, quickly and clearly in public (Schneider, 2010) [39]. While the Crazy English programme may not suit Malaysia’s education context, Li has not made one thing clear, which is to dispel feelings of bashfulness in order to utilise the English with confidence. Apart from parental encouragement, teachers should also create the paradigm shift and place more importance on practical speaking skills instead of focusing too much on examination achievements. Speaking sessions in classrooms should be intensified, in which teachers may organise activities such as forums and public speaking programmes on a more frequent basis. According to Nur Ilianis (2014) [34], public speaking programme is an effective tool for increasing speech confidence and allowing students to convey ideas with assurance. Forums, on the other hand, require students to generate critical viewpoints and express them concisely. In other words, teaching and learning sessions in schools should be conducted in an interactive manner, in which students should be the central participants instead of passive recipients of exam-based knowledge.

9. CONCLUSION

There is no denying that all Malaysians desire their children to obtain the linguistic competency and knowledge in order to triumph on global platforms. Thus, both planners of language policies and Malaysian citizens ought to think of contributing to the nation, which can guarantee success in international competition, gaining confidence and trust with human capital development necessary for globalised eco-systems (Gill, 2014) [20].

In short, the sequence of events in the history of LPP in Malaysia portrays the dilemma faced by language policy planners throughout the years, which is the awkward selection of favouring either the English language or the Malay language. While Malaysia is fully aware that English is a priceless asset in producing individuals with global competence, Malay is also deemed as a native legacy associated with values of nationalism and patriotism. As Malaysia attempts to strike a balance between these two parallel ideals, numerous language policies have been drafted, typically retaining the principle that Malay plays a

role as the main instructional medium in schools, while English is taught as a second language.

The approach of the 21st century compelled the policy makers to shift their attention towards the English language due to its ballooning prestige in educational and scientific domains (Crystal, 2012) [11]. However, the emphasis swerved back to the Malay language again following concerns over the violation of the Malay language’s sovereignty. Throughout the research, it is noticed that these language policies brought about various impacts in the education sector, and it is also linked to sentiments on nationalism. In other words, the LPP setting in Malaysia indicates that nationalistic pride and language policies have a mutual influence on each other.

Several recommendations have been suggested in order to improve, if not resolve, the issue at hand. The admission of English as one of the official languages in Malaysia would provide a substantial degree of prestige for the language, which would compel Malaysians to place importance on mastering the language. As English oral skills are also found to be weak among Malaysian students, classroom sessions focusing on speaking proficiency should be prioritised to strengthen their language ability and to develop their confidence.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude and the deepest appreciation to lecturers at the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation (SoLLaT), Universiti Sains Malaysia. Their exceptional instructions in academia, with their high-standard and harsh instructional objectives have ensured the competence of this journal article.

Besides, we should highlight our thanks to Professor Dr. Ambigapathy Pandian, a prestigious professor at the SoLLaT, for his constant guidance through the course *LEM 214 English in Society*. This enlightening course in the field of sociolinguistics has aroused our intense scholarly interests to conduct research about Malaysia's Language Policy and Planning for English in the Education System.

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