

The Implementation of Dual Language Programme by Non-Option Teachers Among Rural Schools in Sarawak: To What Extend is the Efficiency

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Abstract

The full implementation of Dual Language Programme (DLP) in Sarawak is the first one in Malaysia. It is one of the initiatives done by the State government in gaining autonomy in its education by enhancing the English language proficiency among its communities. Allocations are given in order to support the implementation of the programme. One of the way the State education office support the implementation of this programme is by sending novice teachers to be posted in schools around Sarawak including rural primary schools. Novice teachers including the non-option teachers are being appointed to teach DLP subjects. This can bring in advantages and disadvantages in enhancing the English language proficiency of rural primary school pupils as most non-option teachers are appointed to teach just to fill in the void or vacancies.

Keywords: Dual Language Programme, English Language Proficiency, Implementation, Rural Primary Schools, Non-Option Teachers

Introduction

The modern world of the working industry integrates the usage of English language widely. In fact, as the world revolves, a better command and proficiency in the language itself acts as a major or vital requirements in order to progress in lives be it in the education field, sports field and working field. Day by day, more and more new terms are being coined and this requires ongoing mastery as well as practice in English language among the society. In Malaysia, there are various programmes that are being implemented in order to make sure Malaysians can get a grip of a good English language mastery in all aspects of their lives. This causes the government to allocate fundings to various fields in order to provide support to programmes intended to improve Malaysians' mastery in English language. In Malaysia, a good mastery or proficiency of English language will enable someone to communicate better and perform better in their work, school or basically in their day to day living. A good proficiency in English language will enable Malaysians to understand basic instructions in the language itself, able to communicate to tourists, able to comprehend complicated work stuffs, able to meet requirements in applying for jobs and enable to do so many things in lives.

In order to create a successful and thriving Malaysia, all aspects of lives and well-being of Malaysians need to be included including those living on rural areas. People living in rural areas are often neglected in exposure to the world other than where they live as well as in terms of development compared to those living in urban areas. This is due to the challenging geographical features and terrain which slows down any sort of development in that particular rural area. Rural areas are mainly surrounded by mountains, hills, rivers, jungles, logging camps, palm oils, farms, orchards and paddy fields which halts smooth transportation to rural areas from nearby towns. Most of them have to go by long distant driving, by boat or long hours of being offroad by the treacherous logging routes. In Sarawak, more than half of the population lives in rural areas particularly upriver areas, nearby logging camps and nearby palm oil plantations. These people live in a community where they live in longhouses or logging camps nearby where communication signals are barely there. This cause them lack of exposure to various teaching and learning materials as well as daily communications using English language as compared to the people who live in the urban. They have a difficult access to the internet, social medias, radio as well as international television channels which can deliver and portray how English language is being used in daily communications.

According to the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, if the future generations are being well-versed in English language which is the language of trade and commerce, then only a country can thrive in all aspects (Melor Md Yunus & Saiful Islam Ahmad Sukri, 2017; Joash, 2015). Despite being optimistic in the advancement in various aspects of development vital for the country, Malaysians' English language proficiency are deteriorating. Malaysians are getting too much influence by their first language or their mother tongue languages and this can be seen clearly among the rural communities. Rural communities tend to mix their first language which is their mother tongue in any language that they speak. One of the only ways that rural communities learn proper English language is through youngsters in school although most of the time still under the influence of their mother tongues. In Sarawak, most rural communities are made up of Iban, Kayan, Kenyah, Penan, Punan and other upriver tribes. Each race has their own dialect of languages and it differs from each other according to their geographical division. This makes it very time-consuming for the youngsters to be very proficient in mastering the English language.

In order to overcome this, the Sarawak government has come up with the Dual Language Programme policy (DLP). Dual language programme is a programme where pupils learn formally in both their first and second language. According to Sarawak's Education, Innovation and Talent Development Minister, Datuk Roland Sagah, this programme involves subjects such as Mathematics and Science being taught in English language (Ling, 2023). This programme is almost similar to the earlier PPSMI (Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English) in Malaysia where it started in 2003 where all Year 1 pupils all over Malaysia were the very first batch who went through teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics in English. Mostly the teachers who are selected to teach in DLP are teachers who are trained in teaching Science and Mathematics. In other words, they are option teachers. In some cases where they are no option teachers, teachers who have a good background in Science and Mathematics will be selected to teach in DLP. On another hand and according to the Datuk Roland Sagah, in some isolated cases especially in low-enrolment schools, a few teachers who are non-options and do not have Science and Mathematics background will be selected to teach in DLP (Ling, 2023).

The reason for why in certain cases non-option teachers as well as teachers who have no Science and Mathematics background to teach DLP is because the state Education

Department does not want any pupils in schools feel left out said Datuk Roland Sagah (Ling, 2023). In order to equip teachers to teach better in DLP, numerous courses and workshops are being administered throughout Sarawak. The Sarawak government itself full funded the initiative and according to Datuk Roland Sagah, RM15 million were being allocated by the state government on the training programmes for teachers (Ling, 2023). To aid teachers in making sure the programme is successful, the teachers are being monitored, assessed and guided by special task forces such as the school superintendents as well as district's School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+). These task forces will gather, combine, aid, assess and guide teachers in improving the qualities of teaching and learning in DLP.

In a nutshell, the importance of enhancing English language proficiency is one of the ways to propel our qualities of lives. The advantages of having a good English language proficiency will guarantee a better prospect in jobs, education as well as daily communications. However, in making ways to enhance the language's proficiency among our society, the stakes are much higher than what we could expect. Professionalism as well as incompetencies are at risk in order to fulfill vacancies especially in rural schools as non-option teachers are the ones who are teaching DLP subjects and are expected to master the content first before teaching.

Background Study

Dual Language Programme (DLP) encompasses Science and Mathematics being taught in English language in order to improve pupils' proficiency in the language itself by learning terminologies related to science and mathematics to enrich their vocabulary. The implementation of the DLP is now reaching its fourth year in Sarawak where the implementation is state-wide including in rural schools.

Pupils in urban schools may pick it up instantly during the teaching and learning sessions as in urban schools, the number of qualified teachers or option teachers teaching DLP are adequate as well as proportionate to the number of pupils in a school. Other than that, pupils in urban schools also are very much exposed to all sorts of technologies and teaching aids in order to aid in their understanding of terminologies. They have easy access to Youtube, DeLIMA and other digital learning platforms at anytime and anywhere. At the same time, pupils in urban schools also have a first-hand experience on how English language is being used in their daily communication whenever they go around in big cities. This condition is very different in rural schools or in low enrolment schools where the number of option teachers qualified in teaching DLP are much less compared to urban schools. Other than that, pupils in rural schools also experience much less exposure to almost all sorts of daily communications in English language as well as online platforms which can aid their understandings. This has created a big margin in terms of the language's proficiency between urban and rural schools. As mentioned before, the number of option teachers qualified in teaching DLP in rural or low enrolment schools are very much less compared to urban schools. This also affect how teachers who have less to no background in Science and Mathematics to be selected to teach DLP. Other than that, this also will affect how the understanding toward terminologies are being dissipated. The consequences of non-option teachers teaching DLP subjects are more courses and workshops has to be conducted in order to train them. This will definitely be a burden to the State as unnecessary expenses will be allocated for this.

Pros Of Having Non-Option Teachers Implementing Dual Language Programme to Enhance English Language Proficiency Among Rural Primary School Pupils in Sarawak

Dual Language Programme (DLP) involves the subjects Mathematics and Science. The implementation of DLP in Sarawak has reach its fourth year. Throughout the course of four years, a lot has been going on in the state itself which encompasses courses, meetings and workshops in order to improve teachers' professionalism as well as qualifications in their job scope of teaching DLP. In fact, this programme is also fully supported by the State government. In fact, according to the Sarawak Premier YAB Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri (Dr) Abang Haji Abdul Rahman Zohari bin Tun Datuk Abang Haji Openg cum State Financial Minister during the budget speech, Sarawak is the only state that fully implements Dual Language Programme and the State government has allocated RM1 million in addition to RM13 million that has been allocated for the past 4 years in improving the standard of English language proficiency through DLP. Therefore, the fund allocated for the implementation of DLP bring forth a lot to improve the professionalism of non-option teachers teaching DLP.

One of the pros of having non-option teachers in implementing DLP to enhance English language proficiency among rural primary school pupils in Sarawak is that each of them has basic English language knowledge and vocabulary and they are qualified to teach DLP subjects with minimum level of vocabulary in English. As they teach, they themselves also undergo the process of learning new vocabulary through reflective mind. Having a reflective mind means teachers constantly re-check their methodologies, basic principles as well as trainings (Deocampo, 2020). As non-option teachers, they will constantly find ways to improve in all aspects of their teaching and learning beforehand. They will register for courses, doing independent self-learning before entering their classes and preparing materials suitable for teaching. In terms of enabling themselves to master the concept, non-option teachers are always being aware of what is going on in the classroom so therefore, reflecting on their own performance as well as keep on enhancing their professionalism can lead to their own personal and professional growth. As Renandya and Widodo said teachers have the needs for training in order to meet the needs of pupils (2016). For this case, non-option teachers will keep on training themselves to meet the needs of rural primary school pupils and once they have discovered the best way to enhance pupils' English language proficiency through teaching DLP subjects, rural pupils are quick to follow especially by drilling.

The second advantage of having non-option teachers in implementing DLP to enhance rural primary school pupils' English language proficiency is that they are able to remember basic terminologies easier with the help of concrete objects and without complicated explanations. This is in line with Piaget's theory of cognitive development where pupils from the age of seven to eleven years old are in their concrete operational stage. With this, non-option teachers will make full use of their creativities in teaching as most of them are dealing with pupils from this stage. Non-option teachers will create a wide variety of teaching aids in order to help them dissipate content better in English language such as realia, flashcards, concrete objects, pop-up books and many more. In fact, teaching aids are one of instructional materials that can facilitate classroom instruction as well as motivating pupils to learn (Ordu, 2021). This will act as a medium of training for non-option teachers to improve their professionalism in terms of teaching as well as a medium for themselves to reflect on their teaching practices. Since non-option teachers have less exposure to the content of DLP subjects, they rely much on the vocabulary in the content and therefore can reflect on what the rural primary school pupils need without complicated explanations.

Cons of Having Non-Option Teachers Implementing Dual Language Programme to Enhance English Language Proficiency Among Rural Primary School Pupils

Despite having many pros and advantages of having non-option teachers teaching DLP subjects in rural primary schools, it is also undeniable there are also cons or disadvantages. Appointing non-option teachers to teach DLP subjects are risky with the fact that they do not have a strong pedagogical background related to any of DLP subjects. Some of the non-option teachers rely on their basic knowledge of the DLP subjects that they have back in their school days but do not know how to dissipate the contents in English language. This become a problem to non-option teachers especially those who are not from the PPSMI era where the era was the pioneer of the DLP. Most non-option teacher who are teaching DLP subjects have to do a lot of preparations in before teaching and non-option teachers will have time management problems. A great time management among non-option teachers will impact pupils positively in terms of their learning and outcomes of any particular lesson (Adham Alyami, et. al., 2021) but for non-option teachers teaching DLP subjects, this can affect pupils' proficiency. Due to time constraint, non-option teachers will have to master the concepts first and at the same time finish the syllabus. Pupils will then take time to master a concept without bothering to master the usage of the vocabulary from the content in their daily lives. As English language proficiency relies on knowledge of vocabulary and how to apply it in daily lives, this will cause problems among learners (Afzal, 2019) as the non-option teachers' readiness are questionable.

Another cons or disadvantages of having non-option teachers teaching DLP subjects to enhance English language is that the State government will have to spend unnecessarily yearly for workshops and courses for teachers who are teaching DLP subjects and this involve a huge number of non-option teachers posted in rural school areas who are selected just to fill in the vacancies in each school respectively. Since they have little to no background related to DLP subjects, a lot of allocations for continuous training are needed. This shows that the non-option teachers' competencies are insufficient as compared to option teachers who are trained to dissipate contents of Science and Mathematics in English language (Ashairi Sulaiman, Mohamed Yusoff Mohd Nor & Melor Md Yunus, 2019). Instead of allocating money tp train non-option teachers to teach DLP, allocations should be emphasized on training option teachers or adding on the number of option teachers being posted to rural schools to teach DLP subjects in which they are trained earlier in Science and Mathematics or English options back as teacher trainees. In terms of readiness, option teachers are proven ready to teach DLP subjects as well as proficient and having high self-efficacy in enhancing pupils' level of English language proficiency compared to the non-option teachers. Past researches have proven that there is a positive relationship between teacher's self-efficacy and their behaviours. Among the behaviour that teachers with high self-efficacy portray are in terms of their teaching practices, delivery of content, questioning and classroom management strategies (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001; Cantrell & Callaway, 2008; Tran, Duran, Richard & Burchinal, 2012; Kaygisiz, Aragon & Karaan, 2018; Ozdemir & Ozkan, 2018; Vidwans, & Faez, 2019; Zaleha Endot et. al., 2021). By not having those behaviours from non-option teachers, rural primary school pupils will not feel demotivated to enhance their English language proficiency through the teaching and learning of DLP subjects.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, there are both pros and cons in appointing non-option teachers in implementing the Dual Language Programme to enhance rural primary school pupils' English language

proficiency. Being non-option teachers who jump into the bandwagon of filling in the void so that no pupils are left behind takes in a lot of creativity and upskilling. Non-option teachers are the ones who should always be ready to adapt to any changes being posted in rural primary school in Sarawak. Other than that, allocations should also be consistently provided in upskilling non-option teachers' professionalism in teaching DLP subjects due to their lack of background related to any DLP subjects or even the English language itself. Despite that, non-option teachers need a lot of time to prepare for their teaching and learning sessions and this will affect rural primary school pupils' motivation to enhance their English language proficiency through DLP subjects. On the other hand, non-option teachers are not fully ready in terms of implementing DLP to enhance the English language proficiency of rural primary school pupils as unnecessary spending of allocations keep on flowing for them instead of providing intensive training for option teachers.

If only non-option teachers are posted and filling in the void according to their options, the education field would not be full of teachers asking to retire early due to the pressure of trying to live up to the flip flop standard of education. Non-option teachers also should be given more freedom in teaching according to their options or being posted according to their options in order to avoid novice teachers suffering from early burnout. To ensure this from not happening, more quotas for teacher trainees opting for Science and Mathematics education should be opened in the teacher training institute to fill in the void of teachers teaching DLP. Other than that, allocations should be emphasized more on curating quality trainings for option teachers in order to prepare them in teaching DLP subjects especially in terms of enhancing teachers' English language proficiency.

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