

The Impacts and Challenges of Implementation of Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) towards English Learning in Malaysian Primary Schools: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Proficiency in the English language is beneficial, mainly in Malaysia, where English is considered a second language. Despite this, Malaysian school pupils often struggle with English proficiency. To address this issue, the Ministry of Education has implemented the Highly Immersive Programme in the Malaysian education system. This initiative aims to improve language proficiency by exposing pupils in an English-rich environment. The Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) was introduced as part of Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2013-2025 to elevate English language proficiency among students. By immersing students in English through various activities and interactions, HIP seeks to create a conducive learning environment. However, the implementation of HIP faces numerous challenges that may hinder its success. This paper aims to review existing literature on the implementation of HIP in Malaysian schools, providing insights for policymakers and educators.

Keywords: Highly Immersive Programme (HIP), English Learning, Education, Malaysian Primary Schools

Introduction

English is the global language spoken worldwide. It has been adopted and integrated into the education systems of many countries, often introduced to children during their preschool and primary years (Mayo, 2017). Additionally, language proficiency is considered a valuable component of human capital, influencing labor market outcomes, consumption, education, healthcare, and investment decisions (Yao et. al., 2016). This approach aligns with the goals of English language education, which aim to equip students in primary school with the essential skills in English language and grammatical knowledge. The objective is to ensure students become competent and proficient in using English for various purposes and situations, both within and outside the classroom.

It's clear that English plays a vital role as an alternative way of communicating in countries where it isn't used as the national language (Cawagdan & Rivera, 2018). This aligns with

Malaysia's educational goals of producing well-rounded and competitive individuals capable of meeting the demands of 21st-century learning as stated by Jiew (2017). In Malaysia, the pupils will go through different stages of education (Man et al., 2019). Typically, a Malaysian student spends around 14 to 15 years receiving formal education in English from preschool to tertiary education (Azman, 2016). Despite this extensive exposure, many primary school pupils still struggle with English language proficiency. They struggle to master all language skills for a variety of reasons. Research shows that learners of a second language often encounter significant challenges and obstacles when it comes to speaking English (Nijat et al., 2019). Additionally, nearly 50% of children aged 10 to 14 years show a lack of interest in reading (Yusof, 2010). Low language proficiency in children also correlates with poor attention and listening skills.

To tackle the declining English proficiency among Malaysian students (Tampin, 2016), various initiatives have been put in place, including fostering a great learning environment at schools. Research by Chin (2007) and Yahaya, Yahaya, and Ismail (2011) highlights the crucial role of a supportive environment in learning a second language like English. According to Bunce (1995), it is important to create a highly immersive and language-rich setting involving a range of high-quality linguistic activities both in and out of the classroom. This extensive exposure ensures students are thoroughly immersed in English. However, building such an environment takes time, dedication, and a strong commitment from both teachers and students.

To help every student become proficient in English and to boost English language skills in Malaysian schools, the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) was introduced. As mentioned by Ansawi (2016), HIP's goal is to immerse students in English-rich environments through various engaging activities designed to spark their interest and passion for the language. The ultimate aim is for students to become confident and skilled in communicating in English. To meet the objectives of HIP, schools should create activities in four main categories: in-class, out-of-class, extra class, and outreach programs.

As for in-class activities, teachers can make their lessons more engaging by incorporating interactive games. Research by Sánchez et al (2007) shows that games do not only boost the motivation of pupils to learn English but also enhance their overall learning abilities. According to Gaines (2015), when it comes to out-of-class activities, ESL pupils often miss out on an English-rich environment once they leave the classroom. To address this, schools can create English-friendly spaces like an English corner, run the assemblies in English, or set up stages for student performances in English. Project-based learning is another effective method, as it provides students with the motivation and opportunity to learn English from their everyday surroundings and experiences. Foss, Carney, McDonald, and Rooks (2007) highlight the value of such projects, which Guo (2011) supports, indicating that these activities can significantly enhance students' language learning. For outreach programs, they are all about building partnerships between schools and other stakeholders, including other schools, universities, non-governmental organizations, and corporate bodies. According to Boothe (2018), outreach initiatives like home visits, peer buddy programs, school-community partnerships, and educational field trips can significantly improve English language learning outcomes. This paper will review how the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) is being implemented to improve English learning in Malaysian primary schools.

Literature Review

Highly Immersive Programme (HIP)

Several studies have delved into the effects of the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) on the language proficiency of primary school pupils. Phon (2017) found a compatible correlation between students' levels of English proficiency and extracurricular activities that are tailored to meet their needs, thereby supporting their learning. Similarly, Racha and Yunus (2019) identified English proficiency as a critical issue influencing the success of HIP in schools. Addressing this requires teachers to be innovative in their teaching methods, creating a positive and supportive learning environment that helps students overcome challenges in language proficiency. One effective approach that has been used in Taiwan, as highlighted by Asrial et al. (2019), is outdoor teaching. This method has been applied by their elementary school teachers, which has been recognized for its ability to enhance learning experiences. To develop a highly immersive, language-rich environment in schools, it is essential to expose students to English through a variety of linguistic activities both inside and outside the classroom. Utilizing learning resources from outside the classroom can significantly aid students in developing their oral, written, and visual language skills (Asrial et al., 2019).

Moreover, regularly conducting enjoyable English learning activities using effective materials can greatly engage students in the HIP program. The effectiveness of the Highly Immersive Programme lies in its ability to create an English-rich environment that offers numerous opportunities for students to be exposed to, experience, and engage with the language (Ansawi, 2017). This comprehensive exposure is crucial in helping students build confidence and proficiency in using English in various contexts. The studies indicate that the success of HIP depends not only on the resources and activities provided but also on the dedication and creativity of teachers in implementing these activities. Teachers need to adopt innovative strategies and make use of diverse teaching methods to keep students engaged and motivated. Additionally, creating a positive learning environment where students feel supported and encouraged to participate actively in English-related activities is vital for overcoming language proficiency challenges.

Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) in Malaysian schools

The Ministry of Education has introduced the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) in all Malaysian schools with the goal of encouraging students to actively use English (Racha & Yunus, 2019). Originally launched in 1999, HIP aimed to reach students from as early as Year 1 to Form 5 as part of the *"To Uphold Malay Language and Strengthen the Command of English (MBMMBI)"* policy (Ministry of Education, 2016). The initiative required schools to implement various English activities to enhance students' exposure to and practice of the language. However, despite these efforts, the programme failed to achieve its primary objectives and gradually lost momentum over time (Saminathan et al., 2020).

Recognizing the need for improvement, the Ministry of Education reintroduced HIP with a renewed focus and greater intensity under the existing MBMMBI policy. The early phase of this revitalized initiative began in 2016, and by 2018, HIP was fully implemented across every school in Malaysia (Saminathan et al., 2020). The primary goal of HIP is to increase the pupils' English proficiency by increasing their exposure to the language (Jiew, 2017). Additionally, HIP seeks to foster positive attitudes towards English learning. To achieve these objectives, the programme engages students in a diverse range of English language activities inside and also

outside of the classroom. These activities are designed to create an immersive English-speaking environment that encourages continuous practice and application of language skills. The reintroduction of HIP emphasized the importance of consistent and structured English language activities (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). Schools were encouraged to organize various events such as English language competitions, drama performances, reading programs, and interactive language games. These activities aimed to make learning English enjoyable and engaging for students, thereby increasing their motivation and interest in the language. Moreover, the HIP framework was designed to integrate English usage into the daily routines of students. Schools established English corners, conducted morning assemblies in English, and encouraged the use of English in informal settings such as school cafeterias and playgrounds. This holistic approach aimed to create a language-rich environment where students could naturally practice and improve their English skills.

Impacts of HIP

The Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) creates a vibrant English-speaking environment by applying the principles of social learning theory, which focuses on attention, memory, and motivation among students (Matthew & Yamat, 2020). Numerous studies have shown the positive effects of HIP on primary school pupils' language proficiency. For instance, Ansawi (2017) noted that since its introduction in 2015, HIP has significantly improved students' language skills. One of the key benefits of HIP is increased engagement among both students and teachers. The program often requires students to collaborate with their peers during activities, fostering a sense of teamwork and shared learning. This collaboration also extends to teachers, who share ideas and strategies with colleagues within their own schools and beyond. This exchange is vital for the effective implementation of HIP activities. Peer cooperation helps students enhance their ability to tackle tasks independently (Ansawi, 2017).

Teachers can also engage in discussions with students to ensure the goals of lessons or activities are met. For example, in English competitions like "Story Telling," teachers and students can brainstorm ideas for costume design, story sequencing, and makeup application. This collaboration not only produces the best results but also increases the chances of winning the competition. Additionally, HIP helps to build strong relationships among all stakeholders. Everyone involved such as teachers, students, parents, and community members may collaborate and exchange ideas to find the best strategies for implementing the program. There has been active participation and cooperation from parents during HIP activities, further supporting its success (Ansawi, 2017). Many researchers have also found that parental involvement positively influences students' academic achievement, and this is acknowledged by school administrators, teachers, and policymakers (Graves and Wright, 2011; Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Wilder, 2014).

Challenges of implementing HIP in Malaysian schools

Racha and Yunus (2019) identified low English proficiency as a critical factor contributing to the poor performance of the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) in schools. Several challenges have been pinpointed in the effort to improve English proficiency among pupils in primary school through HIP. One significant issue is the lack of resources and materials in schools. Effective language teaching heavily depends on the availability of teaching and learning materials (Harmer, 2007). Many schools, particularly those in remote areas, lack the

necessary facilities and materials to support HIP activities. In today's ICT era, adequate facilities are essential for maximizing students' learning processes (Racha & Yunus, 2019). According to Young (2003), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) greatly influences language learning and literacy environments. Poor learning environments make it challenging for teachers to plan and conduct activities, demotivating them from designing effective programs to enhance students' language proficiency.

Another major challenge is the overwhelming workload of teachers. Thwala (2015) emphasizes that teachers need sufficient time to thoroughly explain their lessons, highlighting the implication of allowing more time for both teachers and students to ensure successful learning. Teachers often struggle to complete the syllabus within the given timeframe and need to provide additional support for students with learning difficulties. Beyond teaching, they handle daily administrative tasks, especially class teachers. They also manage students with poor attitudes and behaviors, oversee extracurricular activities outside regular hours, monitor attendance, and evaluate homework during their free time. These numerous responsibilities negatively affect teachers' work-life balance (Noor et al., 2020).

Motivation is crucial to a teacher's performance and involves various desires, rational thinking, and cultural identity (Dornyei, 2001). While HIP aims to improve the English learning experience, it is likely to fall short without the appropriate materials (Racha & Yunus, 2019). To address this, the school administrators must ensure that all necessary learning and teaching resources are adequately prepared. Teachers should also seek other solutions to overcome resource limitations. For instance, they can propose fundraising initiatives for the English program during the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. Additionally, teachers can work with parents to create learning materials or organize activities, such as setting up an English garden or English zone. Moreover, teachers can collaborate with parents who are financially able to donate English learning resources, such as newspapers, magazines, and story books.

Implication

Previous studies on the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP)'s findings are essential for teachers who are addressing language proficiency issues among primary school pupils. Those studies have delved into the nature of the proficiency of the language, the factors that influence it, and the specific challenges pupils face. They highlight both the strengths and the challenges in implementing the HIP in Malaysia. However, many studies don't provide a comprehensive picture of overall language proficiency resulting from HIP in primary schools. They often focus on specific language skills rather than looking at language proficiency as a whole. Additionally, some studies focus on HIP at higher levels of ESL learning, such as in tertiary education, which may not be relevant for primary school pupils.

The limited research on the implementation of the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) in schools results in a lack of comprehensive understanding of its actual outcomes. This deficiency in detailed insights hinders the ability to make informed improvements to current practices in educational institutions (Kamsin & Mohamad, 2020). This gap makes it challenging to identify effective teaching and learning strategies for HIP in primary schools. From the studies on HIP implementation in Malaysia, it is clear that collaboration among all stakeholders including the school administrators, the teachers, pupils, the PTA, and the community is crucial for creating an effective, English-rich environment (Abdullah & Mohamad, 2020). This collaboration aligns with HIP's goal to enhance pupils' English

proficiency as well as their confidence level and motivation in using the language. While teachers play a critical role in HIP implementation, its effectiveness is influenced by several factors. Therefore, all stakeholders must work together to find alternative methods and solutions to address these issues.

Conclusion

In summary, the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) plays a vital role in improving English language proficiency among pupils in primary schools of Malaysia. Addressing the challenges of the implementation of HIP demands a collaborative effort from all stakeholders such as the school administrators, teachers, parents, and the community. While there are gaps in the research, particularly regarding the overall level of the proficiency of the language outcomes of HIP in primary schools, these gaps present opportunities for further exploration. Future studies should focus on comprehensive assessments of language proficiency and identify effective strategies for different educational levels. The implications of this paper are significant for planning and implementing strategies that develop language proficiency among pupils in the primary school. By addressing the challenges with appropriate measures, the language skills of these pupils can be significantly improved through HIP. Ultimately, the goal is to foster a love for English and build confidence in using the language daily. This paper aims to raise awareness among pupils, parents, teachers, and administrators about the importance of English proficiency. By encouraging the development of creative and innovative ideas, we can motivate students to confidently use English in their everyday lives, preparing them for future academic and professional success. The insights from this paper are valuable for teachers and other stakeholders in planning effective strategies to develop English proficiency among the pupils in primary schools. By tackling the identified challenges with appropriate measures, the language proficiency of these pupils can be effectively enhanced through HIP. Ultimately, this paper aims to raise awareness among pupils and foster the development of creative and innovative ideas to boost their confidence level to use English every day.

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