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## The Challenges of Teaching English in Malaysia Education Institutions

*By Hazwati Hashim*

Expanding on the challenges of teaching English in Malaysia involves considering various factors that influence language education in the country. The historical context of language policies, such as the reintroduction of Science and Mathematics in English and the MBMMBI initiative, reflects the government's efforts to enhance English proficiency. However, challenges persist, including the lack of qualified English teachers, inadequate resources, and students' limited English competence and negative attitudes toward learning the language, particularly in rural areas.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in early year 2020 has further exacerbated challenges, particularly in online teaching and learning for English educators in Malaysia. Additionally, the low proficiency levels of Malaysian students in English highlight the importance of mastering the language from an early age. Efforts to align English language standards with global benchmarks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), demonstrate Malaysia's commitment to improving English proficiency.



**Image 1: Malaysian School**

Issues like large class sizes, inadequate teaching materials, negative student attitudes towards English, and limited practice time continue to hinder effective English language instruction in Malaysian schools. Students' language needs, especially in technical fields like ICT, underscore concerns about the declining standard of English in Malaysia (Hasani, 2023). Reforms in English language education in primary schools, focusing on task-based approaches, aim to address some of these challenges.

Large class sizes can make it difficult for educators to provide individualized attention to each student, especially in language learning, where personalized feedback and practice are crucial. Students may have limited opportunities to engage actively with the language in such settings, hindering their language acquisition progress.

This is because effective language instruction requires appropriate teaching

materials that cater to the diverse learning needs and interests of students. Inadequate or outdated teaching materials may fail to engage students or adequately address their language proficiency levels. This can result in a lack of motivation and hinder the effectiveness of language learning.

Negative attitudes towards English among students can stem from various factors such as cultural perceptions, lack of relevance to their daily lives, or previous negative experiences with language learning. These attitudes can create barriers to learning and impede students' willingness to participate and actively engage with the language in the classroom.

Language learning requires consistent practice and exposure to the target language. However, limited practice time in school settings and other academic demands may restrict opportunities for students to develop their English language skills effectively. Insufficient practice time can lead to slower progress and lower student proficiency levels.

In addition, the declining standard of English, particularly in technical fields like ICT, raises concerns about the ability of Malaysian students to compete in an increasingly globalized and technologically driven world. Proficiency in English is often essential for

success in these fields, as much of the technical literature and communication are conducted in English.

For instance, reforms in English language education in Malaysian primary schools have been focusing on task-based approaches to address these challenges. Task-based language teaching emphasizes real-world tasks and meaningful and engaging activities for students. Educators aim to foster greater motivation and engagement in language learning by incorporating tasks relevant to student's interests and future career prospects.

Additionally, task-based approaches provide opportunities for students to practice and apply their English language skills in authentic contexts, helping to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication needs.

Moreover, technology integration in English language teaching faces barriers, including teachers' digital skills and challenges in technology integration in the classroom. The use of ICT in ESL teaching at secondary schools in Malaysia has been met with skepticism, with concerns raised about its effectiveness (Mohamad et al.2018).



**Image 2: Teacher and the needs for ICT**

Many educators may lack the necessary training and proficiency in using technology effectively for teaching purposes. Without adequate digital skills, educators may struggle to incorporate technology into their lessons meaningfully, limiting its potential to enhance language learning outcomes.

Even for educators with sufficient digital skills, integrating technology into the classroom can present various challenges. These challenges may include limited access to technology resources, such as computers or tablets, inadequate infrastructure, such as reliable internet connectivity, and time constraints within the curriculum.

The skepticism surrounding the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in ESL teaching at secondary schools in Malaysia reflects concerns about its effectiveness. Some educators and stakeholders may question whether

technology truly enhances language learning or if traditional teaching methods are more effective. Concerns may also arise regarding the potential drawbacks of technology, such as distractions, inequalities in access to technology resources, and the need for additional teacher training.

Furthermore, implementing CEFR-aligned English language textbooks in Malaysian schools has raised issues regarding cultural content, lexical density, and alignment with Malaysia's language program objectives (Shak et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, integrating CEFR-aligned English language textbooks in Malaysian schools aims to standardize language education and ensure consistency in learning goals and evaluation criteria.

Therefore, textbooks must include relevant cultural content, balance comprehensibility and complexity, and meet the specific educational objectives of Malaysia to enhance their effectiveness in the local context.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of teaching English in Malaysia requires a comprehensive approach considering policy frameworks, teacher training, resource allocation, student attitudes, and technology integration. By acknowledging these challenges and implementing targeted

strategies, Malaysia can enhance English language education and improve students' proficiency levels.

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