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A case study of English language Teachers perceptions towards secondary schools Students performance in the English language

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Abstract

The English language has been officially accorded as the second language status in Malaysia referring to article 152 guided by the language in Malaysian education policy. In retrospect to that, English has been made a mandatory subject for all Malaysian public schools from primary up to the secondary. However, the performance of students in the language is deemed below satisfactory despite them having formal education for 11 years. It has taken the Ministry of Education blood, sweat and tears to introduce several interventions to help increase students' performance, nevertheless there seems to be issues to bridge the gap between challenges and students' performance in the English

language. The purpose of this study is to explore teacher's perception, The challenges faced and the measures to improve the English language performance. Semi structured interviews were conducted through the lens of four experienced English language teachers of whom two of them are retired and in-service teachers respectively. It is hypothesized that the findings of the study will help contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining current challenges faced by English language teachers and measures to improve the performance of students in the English language through their lens of expertise.

Keywords: assessment, curriculum, instruction, English language, English language teachers

Introduction

According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2020, Malaysia was ranked 30th out of 100 countries and is classified as "moderate" in respect to competency in using all four language skills as opposed to the previous year which was ranked at 26th(high). This signifies that there is a sombre declination of performance among Malaysians in the English language (Talif & Edwin, 2017) ^[46]. The Ministry of Education in Malaysia had foreseen this and had introduced The Malaysian Blueprint in 2013 with several structural changes up to the year 2025 to rectify this issue at grassroot level which is through education. Malaysia aspires her students to be bilingual which is to be proficient in both Bahasa Malaysia and The English language as stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) under shift 2 of Education Transformation. There are 3 consequent structural changes or waves of implementation introduced under Shift 2 and it is highly dependant on the success of the former which will then determine the degree of implementation of the latter. The First wave (2013-2015) is to strengthen the elements of the existing system which one of the ways is to make the English language a compulsory paper for students to pass in SPM 2016 onwards; however, this has been reversed in the same year the announcement was made since students and teachers were not ready for the move to be implemented (Lee, 2020) ^[23]. Extensive training for in-service teachers, identification of schools with poor bands across the nation and improving communicative learning within the classroom are several other measures listed under the First wave. The Second wave (2016-2020) proposes change based on the success of the former which is to improve time of instruction for the English language in schools, employing innovative delivery options in class and to make English language as a compulsory paper to pass (Iber,2014). Although the suggestion to implement English as a mandatory pass has been in talks since 2015, nevertheless, the ministry had decided to postpone the initiative of the implementation of the policy in 2016 (Shuib et al, 2017) ^[42]. Third wave (2021-2025) is to scale up the structural changes because of the second wave which is to develop the four language skills mainly oracy and literacy skills towards excellence in the English language syllabus (Shah, Othman and Senom, 2017) ^[40].

The Ministry of Education like many other countries had adopted the use of CEFR in their education system to raise awareness of the standard of English that is needed to be on par with native speakers in terms of communication (MOE, 2015). CEFR is a globally recognised framework or benchmark for describing language learning and teaching as well as assessment (Don & Abdullah, 2019) ^[9].

It was introduced in conjunction to increase performance in the targeted language particularly in the KSSR (National Primary School Syllabus) and KSSM (National Secondary School Syllabus) syllabus as well as for development of language teaching programs (The RoadMap, 2015 p.62) ^[28] in Malaysia. Despite Malaysians being traditionally known as proficient users of English by other international countries (MOE, 2015) nevertheless, according to the research done by Cambridge Assessment Centre in the year 2013 against the CEFR (Common European Framework) standards, most secondary Malaysian students were reclining at level A2 whereas they were supposed to be at level B1 (Cambridge Baseline, 2013). Level A2 is accredited to the primary students and yet most secondary school students in Malaysia are still at the primary level. This is utterly disappointing as English has already been made a mandatory subject in schools and therefore students have had exposure to the language throughout their 11 years of formal education.

The Ministry of Education aspires to have more than 70 percent of students achieving a credit in the English language (MOE, 2013) and although there has been a slight increase in terms of performance of the English language particularly in secondary schools (Zulkefli, 2017) ^[52] according to MOE statistics, nonetheless, the results are questionable in terms of GCE-O Level administered to it. The GCE O-Level (General Certificate of Education-Ordinary) which recognizes students' level of English proficiency internationally, is an academic equivalent to SPM conducted by the Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia (LPM, the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate) (Yaakob and Yunus, 2019) ^[48]. The SPM English Language paper is usually graded separately by the LPM and by UCLES (University of Cambridge Local Examinations) respectively, and both grades are displayed on the result slips (Alias, 2012) ^[3]. Azizi (2017) ^[7] stated that grading of assessment papers is usually determined after obtaining all students' marks and in the case of SPM examination, students are awarded with grades based on the overall performance of the overall students for that particular year following a bell curve distribution. Reasoning from this fact, a student acquiring A in SPM may not necessarily attain A according to the GCE O level.

The challenge confronting the teaching of English in Malaysia is making the classroom germane to the current needs (Normazidah, Koo & Hazita (2012) ^[34], Khalid (2017) ^[20] stated that teachers in Malaysia are facing tremendous challenges in executing the mandate entrusted by the ministry to teach English especially on maintaining the students' interests. Not only that, they also often find themselves facing students who do not have the necessary oracy and literacy levels that is needed to handle the content of the curriculum (MOE, 2015) bearing in mind students come from all walks of life and possess diverse abilities, skills and disposition (Cambridge Baseline, 2013) ^[7] within the classroom. Therefore, the lessons and activities conducted may only be appropriate for one type of group and the rest may never attain the desired goals thus requiring the teacher more time, effort and energy to plough and achieve targets.

Time constraint is another crucial factor that discourages the performances of the students. This is because some of the teachers often find the syllabus is too extensive (Mirani, S., & Chunawala 2015) ^[26] resulting them to teach only on what is being tested and dismissing other content that may not be tested in exams (The Cambridge baseline, 2013) ^[7].

According to Noor (2014) ^[35] this teaching to the test which is still prominent in Malaysia ensures performance of the students to be more accommodating. Teachers are often pressured to constantly perform because this influences many decisions in terms of promotion and funding for schools (Herman et al, 1990) ^[16]. Apart from that, some teachers are required to go through courses, trainings and even meetings MOE (2015) that eventually disrupts the teaching and learning sessions in the classroom. In fact, some of the teachers are also required to teach other subject matter which may cause them to use the limited time that they have for other lesson plans and materials. This causes teachers to be burnout and be ineffective in delivering the required content. Students too are having difficulties in performing especially in speaking because they are taught to the test (MOE, 2015) in which they have been relying on memorization or rote learning on specific targeted presumed topics for examinations (Lababidi, 2015) ^[22]. Goh (2011) ^[12] highlighted that this conventional method of teaching by spoon feeding which is still practiced in Malaysia would only produce students who are only good based on answering questions according to the format, the Malaysian papers and standards, but weak in probably all aspects of English of the international standards. Khalid (2017) ^[20] claimed this causes difficulty in maintaining students' interest and therefore remains a daunting experience for teachers. Students require reciprocity between them and the teachers to facilitate learning (MOE, 2015). Although there are many qualified teachers teaching the English Language, statistics from The English Language Standards and Quality Council from the Ministry of Education (2015) shows that there is still a significant number of teachers who are not qualified. This is indeed alarming as some teachers Shamsudin, Abdullah and Noh (2018) ^[41] were moderately ready with their skills, knowledge, discourse competency and some even lack interest as a result of mismatch between curriculum and practices for the tasks given (Hazita, 2016). This is where the interference of mother tongue walks into the picture to compensate the inadequacy of the teacher in the language discourse (Pardede, 2018) ^[37]. This in a way contributes to students not performing in the language because their source of learning has been tarnished with impurities of other languages when the target language is supposed to be English. Besides that, lack of motivation (Ahmad, Choo & Eng, 2011) ^[1] and language anxiety (Sulistyorini, 2018) also affects the students' performance in the English language (Manan et al., 2017) ^[25]. Ghadirzadeh, Hastroudi and Shukri (2012) claimed that students disliking the subject for being boring and redundant could be one of the contributing factors for low performances in the English language. As for some students in Malaysia due to immigration, geographic location, history, SES (socio-economic standing), poor experiences in school, English may be regarded as a third language or even a foreign language which then may not be of use at all other than within the classroom context (Iber, 2016) ^[16].

Regardless of the challenges that the nation has been facing, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the stakeholders have been progressive in addressing this situation. This could be seen when i-Think program or Thinking Maps was introduced in schools (2013-2025) as a tool for learning in order to promote thinking in writing skills (Omar, Zubiar & Goh, 2016) ^[36]. It is considered as a form of visual teaching

aid that provides students with the necessary skills to be successful thinkers, problem solvers, and decision makers (Hyerle, 2000) ^[18]. The English Language Literacy Program or Linus 2.0 (Yusuf et al,2019) ^[51] and sets for English were introduced as an intervention to help address literacy issues among students and help them improve the language (MOE, 2015). Moreover, the stake holders which are the teachers and the administrative staffs in schools relentlessly organize activities related to the English language such as English Language-themed corridors, speakers' corner, labels on furniture, having a mini library for reading and English Day or English Week which comprises fun and educative activities that help to boost motivation in learning the language (Silva, 2019) ^[43].

Apart from that, there were several initiatives that were done on behalf of the teacher's development such as the introduction of Pro-ELT (Professional Up- Skiling For English Language Teachers) (Sukri, Yunus & Rahman, 2017) ^[44], The Native Teacher Programme and School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC+) (Mobarak Ali, 2019) ^[27] which helps in improving proficiency and pedagogical skills of teachers (Senom, Othman & Siraj, 2016) ^[39]. Moreover, Fulbright Teaching Assistants (FTA) who are teachers from the United States are sent over for a period of 10 months to some underperforming public schools to help teachers with teaching, learning and extracurricular activities (FulBright Malaysia, 2020) ^[11]. On a national scale, The Ministry of Education introduced the MBMMBI (To uphold the sanctity of the Malay language and to strengthen the English language proficiency) policy as a step to further enhance the importance of the English language (Yamat, Umar & Mahmood, 2014) ^[49].

Findings and Discussion

Methodology

A case study design through qualitative approach was used to address the aim of the study which is to explore teachers' perceptions on students' performance as well as challenges and possible measures that could be beneficial in this field. The approach was considered suitable as the focus of the study was to describe what had taken place and is currently taking place, or it may be an intervention in suggesting changes to be studied and documented.

Purposeful sampling was used (Creswell, 2012) ^[9] by randomly selecting schools in Seremban, Malaysia (urban and sub-urban district) and the teachers of English with at least 20 years of experience. From the list obtained, 2 in-service teachers and 2 retired public school language teachers were randomly selected to avoid sampling bias (Alchemer, 2018) ^[2].

Semi structured interviews of 13 questions were employed which will then be proceeded with exploring and coding all data by re-reading the excerpts, interpreting the data to themes followed by member checking the findings with the participants to allow accuracy of the intended message stated. These themes then will be peer- audited to increase validity of the finding for precision.

Table 1: Details of participants

| No | Identifier | Gender | Age | Experience(years) | School |
|----|------------|--------|-----|-------------------|--------|
| 1 | A | Female | 62 | 33 | A |
| 2 | B | Male | 60 | 31 | B |
| 3 | C | Female | 56 | 27 | C |
| 4 | D | Male | 52 | 23 | D |

Table 2: Summary of findings

| | From Teachers' lens | Deteriorating | A,B,C,D |
|-----------------------------|--|--|---------|
| Perception | | Students uninterested | A,B,D |
| | | Only English speaking, upper- & middle-class students realizes the importance and shows interest | C |
| | | Important | A,B,C,D |
| | Importance of the English language. | Means to progress in life(career) | C,D |
| | | Tool to express | A |
| | | Keeping abreast with scientific and technology evolution | A,B,D |
| | Reasons of its importance | Familiar | B,D |
| | | Unfamiliar | A,C |
| | Familiarity with CEFR | A guide | D |
| | | Should be built upon students' needs | A,C,D |
| English Syllabus/Curriculum | Helpful | B,D | |
| | Familiarity and practiced in schools | A,B,C,D | |
| Teaching to the test | Time | A,B,C | |
| | Faced in the classroom | Students' moral failure | B |
| lack motivation | | A,B,C,D | |
| Anxiety | | A,B | |
| Limited exposure | | B | |
| Reasons | Encouragement deficiency (no motivation) | A,B,C,D | |
| | English serves no purpose | B,C | |
| | Lack of practice | C,D | |
| | Recruiting experts at the primary level | A,B,D | |
| Human Involvement | Parent's involvement | A,B,C,D | |
| | Teachers to encourage | A,B | |
| | Students to take ownership of their studies | A,B,C,D | |
| | Introducing alternative assessments as part of grading | A,B,D | |
| Assessment | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|---------|
| | | Raise the passing mark | C |
| | Curriculum & Instruction | Mandatory pass | A,B,C,D |
| | | Teach according to needs | A |
| | | Provide interesting materials in schools | B |
| | | Hire high qualified teachers | B,D |
| | | Improve infrastructures to facilitate learning | B,C |

Teachers' perception on students' performance in the English language

All the teachers unanimously agreed that despite English being an important subject and ought to be learnt by all Malaysian students, nevertheless their performance in the language is far beyond satisfactory and therefore needs to be addressed. In fact, it is declining year after year in terms of all the four skills specifically in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Albeit in their view all students seem to be uninterested in the language, Teacher C further reiterated that this notion is especially common among students from the lower social economic background. The interview also highlighted that there are two categories of teachers of which one is familiar with CEFR as a point of reference and the other is not. Surprisingly each group consists of a retired and in-service teacher respectively. The teachers also stated that to them, the existing syllabus provided from MOE is a guide and indeed helpful. However, several teachers reiterated that syllabus or curriculum in general should always be built upon students' needs. When asked about the concept of "teaching to the test", the teachers claimed that they are familiar with it and agreed that it is practiced in schools.

Challenges

There were several challenges encountered by the teachers such as time constraint, classroom tension, students' lack of motivation and language anxiety mentioned by the teachers. All the teachers unanimously agreed that students lack motivation as they view the language as a subject of no or little importance.

"There is too much demand on teachers. You must complete the syllabus in certain time frame so actually it is very difficult for teachers to do it. Teachers were also sent to many meetings, then you know if they were sent too often then they will miss the teaching sessions."(Teacher A). "We do not have much time....we need to incorporate technology in our classroom, even to set those equipments take time." (Teacher B)

"There are students who are indiscipline and that's a challenge" (Teacher B). Teacher C finds it a challenge to keep interactive and collaborative types of activities going among advance, intermediate and weak students of different abilities in the classroom. Only the retired teachers claimed that students tend to be anxious in learning the language.

Several views attained when reasons were asked based on their experience pertaining the challenges for instance students limited exposure to the language, encouragement deficiency, lack of practice as well as the enforcement of the language itself in every aspect that is lacking or has no structure.

Measures

All four teachers agreed that English has to be made a mandatory pass in Malaysian secondary schools particularly for the centralised exams that is usually held annually.

A few teachers emphasized the power that parents have in creating awareness on the importance of the language

especially at home. "Parents can always emphasize the importance of mastering the language for children to excel in life. If they are proficient in English, it will be much easier for them to understand what they study at tertiary level. They have better employment opportunities too."(Teacher C)

The teachers also believed that students should take initiatives in developing interest and motivation in learning the language by engaging themselves in English related activities. "Weak students should develop interest and motivation to improve / master English by reading / watching more English programs. It all boils down to their own initiative to improve for a better future. They have to help themselves first."(Teacher B). Although the retired teachers stated that all teachers need to constantly encourage the students, nevertheless the in-service teachers stated that they had and are doing their level best to encourage their students. Teachers also stated that alternative assessments could boost students to learn the language better as this can be considered as a fun activity involving indirect learning. "Alternative assessments. Hmmm although this has been done for other subjects and not for English, this is certainly a good thing. They are exposed to different platforms so indirect learning takes place. Which may spur in language learning. I don't think its a harm to grade them and merge with their exam grade. I think it's a fair thing to do since its their hard work."(Teacher D). Only teacher C finds the necessity to increase the passing mark of the English tests and examinations.

Improving infrastructures as part of the initiatives to facilitate English curriculum in general is essential according to the teachers. Libraries is a good avenue for knowledge and having up-to-date resources help promote students' interest in learning the language. Supplying book vouchers and subsidizing books are other measures that the government should investigate as stated by teacher C.

In the aspect of instruction, Teacher D specifically said that one of the best way that the government can do despite all measures executed is to hire qualified teachers in schools. He further reiterated that changes should be made in the primary level where students are still young and are able to learn effectively and this most likely will create a snowball effect in the secondary level. "We need experts at primary schools not in the universities. Probably we have to get real expert teachers at primary schools."(Teacher D). Teachers also should teach according to the needs of the students as stated by Teacher A.

Discussion

Teachers' perception on students' performance in the English language

The English language is known as the "*lingua franca*" of this world and to master it is guarantees you a passport to almost any part of the world thus proving the substantial value ought to be mastered by people from all walks of life. In Malaysia, the English language is valued as a language of importance and needs to be mastered by Malaysians (Pillai & Lok, 2018)^[38]. According to MOE (2015), English is important as a

means to empower Malaysians to compete in today's globalization. It is also to keep abreast with scientific and technology evolution in the world as to participate meaningfully in international trade and commerce (Government of Malaysia, 1976 p.391) The language has always been the crux of the matter in the education system as teachers relentlessly witness gradual decline of its performance (MOE, 2019). English being a language of four skills are thought to intertwine with each other which means reading produces writing and listening helps in speaking, therefore the output is determined by the degree of input being applied. The focus of the English language in Malaysia is more towards reading and writing as this can be seen in the government exams conducted which emphasizes more on pencil and paper examinations. This directly brings an implication on the speaking and listening abilities of students as these skills are often neglected. Even though emphasis has been given on the writing and speaking skills, nevertheless, there is still a need for improvement as the performance of the students are still below satisfactory especially when it is compared to CEFR standards that has been a framework of reference introduced in Malaysia in 2013 (MOE, 2015). Despite the framework has been introduced as early as 2013, 1 retired and 1 in-service teacher are not familiar with it being as a reference point. The retiree (Teacher A) has retired in 2014 has however sat for the CEFR test conducted by the MOE compulsory for all English language teachers. In terms of English syllabus, it can be deduced that these participants agree that the syllabus is appropriate which is consistent with the finding of Mohamad Uri and Abd Aziz (2018) ^[32] who had stated that the ministry has aligned the syllabus and the curricula in accordance with the CEFR framework to help improve students' performance. Teaching to the test on the other hand has always been in practiced as the participants claimed which is consistent with the findings of Noor (2014) ^[35] that stated teachers in Malaysia tend to gear towards what is tested in the examinations so that performance of the students could be more accommodating. The pressure to constantly perform influences many decisions in terms of promotion and funding thus driving the teachers to teach to the test (Herman et al, 1990) ^[16]. Thus, it is evident that teaching to the test is a problem because at the end of the day, students are not going to produce what they are supposed to and what the government aspires to. This is why we see there is a huge difference in the performance of students based on the SPM results where to Malaysian standards, it is rendered good but on GCE-O as well as the international standards it is not very pleasing to the eyes.

Challenges

Time has always been expressed as a crucial factor among the teachers. The implementation of the subject matter in the classroom requires tremendous preparation time. However, the timetable extracted from several public schools in Negeri Sembilan shows that all forms taken only had 180 minutes of English lessons per week in classes. This shortage of 30 minutes per week for the rest of the year could have been put to good use in learning the language. Teachers were also sent to various meetings and courses and that too takes up most of their time to teach and often causes difficulties to compensate the lesson for the day. With the limited time given to fulfil the syllabus requirements they therefore resort to "teaching to the test" to fulfil the KPI (Key Performance Indicators) of the school. This immense pressure to perform by teachers

defeats the whole purpose of learning the second language in schools. English learning should be fun but when it is engrossed with the pressure to perform in a conventional way, then students will only be able to produce poor results. Therefore, in concordance with what is reported in MOE (2015), time is indeed one of the biggest contributing factors that affects the quality time of teaching in the classroom. On the other hand, students lack motivation (MOE, 2015), possess language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986) ^[17] as well as poor behavior in classroom play a role in contributing the unwarranted challenges faced in the classroom. Students are not motivated because they fail to acknowledge the relevance of the language in their daily context. In fact, they prefer to use their own mother tongue to communicate. This is because the language itself has not been given enough emphasis despite the introduction of the law pertaining the perusal of the language itself. This could be seen when the language has been introduced in Math's and Science for several years only to have it revoked resulting the use of the national language in those two subjects. Mandatory pass for the language has always been on the table but to be finalized. Moreover, the community does not use the language apart from the teachers in schools who fail to use the language as a means of communication. Some teachers are also not qualified in teaching English as stated in The English Language Standards and Quality Council from the Ministry of Education (2015) ^[4].

Alico (2016) claimed that when students are motivated, then the anxiety level decreases thus enabling them to perform better. This is backed up by a research done by Khodadady & Khajavy (2013) ^[21] only to find out that students with no motivation are more anxious than students who are motivated. Therefore, it is vital to take students' language anxiety into consideration when dealing with their performance related to all four skills of the language. According to Yerkes Dodson law, if anxiety arousal in an individual becomes too high, there is a tendency that his/her performance will decline (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). Indiscipline students are indeed challenging for any teacher as this disrupts the classroom flow, however, more research should be conducted whether anxiety and lack of motivation promotes bad behaviour in the classroom.

Measures

The English language should be made mandatory to pass in schools as stated by MOE in its plan to further accelerate the importance of the English language by strengthening the English language proficiency among Malaysian students (Yamat, Umar & Mahmood, 2014) ^[49]. It should be carried out accordingly without delay so that the community would recognize the importance of the language which plays a large role in shaping the mindset of the students. The Malaysian students were indeed proficient during the pre-independence era due to the use of English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools as well as the thorough use of the language within the community. Many of them were able to converse in the language proficiently before the Malay language was made the sole medium of instruction for all schools from 1983 onwards (MOE, 2015). This as a result caused the next generation to be completely educated in Malay which thence made them had very little access to the English language and subsequently became incompetent as opposed to their parents. The unavoidable consequence resulted a decline in national standard of proficiency in English. This shows that

when the language is regarded as important and is used, then it is easily acquired and when it is neglected, it is easily forgotten. This somehow has connection with time. In other words, when the time allocated as per the procedure from MOE is adhered to, then students can have more quality exposure of the language. Furthermore, parental involvement and the community which once played a vital role in practicing the language then could also emulate the same mechanism in the current situation which will then create an atmosphere of promoting the perusal of the language thus accelerating the efforts and aim of MOE in increasing the students' performance in the English language.

Furthermore, suggestions that the MOE should investigate getting experts at the primary level by hiring professionals as well as qualified teachers will help students to have a strong foundation when they reach secondary level. This could be an effective measure as the problems should be tackled at the grass-root level where students are easier to mend and are more open to learning in the primary level as compared to the secondary. Perhaps more existing in-service teachers are given training to help them improve their command of English. In the most recent news as of June 2021, MOE decided to hire more English language teachers for both primary and secondary schools from October 2021 onwards (MOE,2021) due to shortage of teachers. This is regarded as something new and sudden announced by the MOE amidst the current online learning due to the pandemic. The former minister of education did acknowledge the problem of lack of teachers in schools and said that it was bearable, however there is no empirical data that was shared pertaining to that. Till date, no specific data of vacancy for English language teachers has been revealed. This unexpected move proves that the shortage of teachers has been a prolonged problem that has been shoved under the rug for many years and MOE has let the cat out during these trying times.

Albeit the education in Malaysia is geared towards exam oriented focusing on attaining A's (MOE,2015), the ministry had shown interest to slowly move away from this practice to a more developmental and holistic oriented assessment practice which is coherent with the 21st century learning (Malakolunthu & Sim,2010). SBA (School based assessment) was introduced in classrooms as a form of formative assessment that focusses more on students' oral speaking, however their results do not contribute much to the centralized exams (Wong,2015). Despite the little effort shown, it is imperative to consider the introduction of alternative assessment as part of grading in the centralized exams which can be conducted in the English language classrooms such as debate, projects and presentations as this which may help boost students' interest in the language and motivate them to perform (Nasri et al., 2010).

Pertaining student's motivation, language anxiety and students' attitude in classroom is challenging as students come from various walks of life and therefore has different experiences, backgrounds, and abilities (Razali, 2021). Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that teachers can only create awareness, provide a safe learning environment, and motivate them but it is the responsibility of the students to take ownership of their own education. They need to communicate if they are having anxiety so that further actions can be executed systematically.

Conclusion

From this study we must acknowledge that public secondary school students are having issues with their English language proficiency. Nevertheless, the ministry and the teachers are trying their best to help improve students' performance. The teachers interviewed who clearly have different personalities were all proficient in their language which proves that they are experts in their field. Furthermore, they have had more than 20 years of experience and therefore are familiar with the process of teaching and learning. Students come from all walks of life and therefore have their own backgrounds and personalities. It is also imperative to note that they may have different abilities to learn and therefore is difficult forces the teachers to adapt and learn about them in a very short period, this time that they had, they had to use to prepare lessons according to their students' needs and that although is unique, may require tremendous effort and commitment. I believe the ministry and the teachers are working around the clock ensuring the best for their students. However, the teachers' suggestion must be taken into consideration as they are the ones who are ploughing the field and knows what is exactly going on in their schools. Therefore, the right task to be carried out is to accept the notion that there is an issue, to rightfully address the challenges and to work towards measures that had been proscribed by the teachers to possibly rectify the situation. All in all, the effort to improve students' performance in the English language should be consistent as per the national philosophy of education that states: The Education in *Malaysia* is an on-going effort, whereby it is working towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner (MOE,2019).

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