

Highly Immersive Programme and Factors Contributing the Success in Primary Schools: A Literature Review

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Abstract— The importance of English language is given priority in Malaysia's National Education Curriculum and the education policy guides the curriculum. Since Malaysian student's proficiency in English language became a debate among the experts, Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) under the policy of Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening the English Language was introduced in the year of 2016. The program is believed to be able to enhance students' proficiency in the language in and out of classrooms. A formal learning of English must be supported by a highly immersive English-rich environment. This paper provides a literature review on the factors contributing to the success of the HIP in primary schools. By identifying the factors engaged by the stakeholders, educators may manage to create a feasible English-rich atmosphere in their own schools.

Keywords— English Language, Highly Immersive Programme (HIP), Factors of Success, Primary Schools.

I. INTRODUCTION

Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 [1] has highlighted bilingual proficiency as one of the various skills and attributes that our students should master, to be holistically successful to meet the needs for 21st century, which is in compliance with the National Education Philosophy (1996). English language as the international language of communication, is important for each individual to survive in the fast-growing era as its demands are essential in the globalised economy. Thus, realizing its importance, Highly Immersive English (HIP) was introduced in Malaysia to make sure every student in primary and secondary schools is competent in using the language.

In 2016, Ministry of Education introduced HIP in both primary and secondary schools in Malaysia as to support the schools and language teachers in learning and teaching English language and to encourage students to take part in English language activities. Moreover, the purpose of this program is also to improve the language proficiency among students in and beyond classrooms. The HIP was introduced and implemented in all public secondary and elementary schools in Malaysia, in accordance with Malaysian education policies. This programme is also aimed to provide best practices for school leaders and to inculcate positive behaviour towards learning and practising the English Language.

When HIP was first introduced in 2016, only 1200 selected schools were involved for the pilot study. They were divided in 2 phases in which the first phase involved 94 primary

schools in Perak, Perlis, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, Sabah and Sarawak (March -December 2016). Later, the second phase (December 2016) involved another 1106 primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. In 2018, the latest report by the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) indicates that this programme has been implemented in 10000 schools throughout the country.

HIP is based on the whole school approach. Schools are provided with a toolkit to guide them in the implementation of the programme. The success of HIP largely depends on the combination of four fundamental factors which involves the school heads, teachers, students and parents and community. On the other hand, the HIP Guidebook provides suggestions to implement activities that could create a highly immersive environment for English language. The Guidebook is a compilation of hands-on activities that schools can adapt and adopt to enhance English language proficiency. It consists of four categories of activities that can be used both in and beyond classrooms, during after-school activities and for outreach programmes.

The goal of in-class activities is to increase students' participation in English language lessons. A repertoire of best practices fun learning activities has been documented to support a non-threatening environment for pupils to use English creatively during lessons. This will increase the confidence and drive of students to use English. The goal of the out-of-class activities is to maximise English language acquisition by creating an immersive English language environment outside of the classroom. The activities should be carried out in a fun learning environment that builds the self-confidence of students to use the language more frequently. This will create a positive behavioural change towards learning English in schools. The out-of-class activities encourage active participation from the community and parents to be involved and support their children.

The suggested extra-curricular activities are oriented toward offering remedial and enrichment activities that adapt to the unique needs of students in order to improve their proficiency. Extracurricular activities attempt to establish a support system, such as peer learning and increased parental and community involvement. The outreach programmes aim to increase English immersion in schools through community outreach and various collaborations. These programmes require the development of strong linkages between the

schools and other stakeholders such as universities, non-governmental organisations and corporate bodies. In terms of cash, experience, and sponsorship, these stakeholders aid schools in undertaking HIP programmes.

However, this programme and its implementation still seem vague. The case is that there are schools witnessing poor participation of non-English implementation of HIP whereas some schools are highly successful in HIP. To date, not many studies have been conducted in this field. Therefore, the researcher finds it necessary to identify the factors contributing to the success of the HIP. Some of the approaches and activities in and out of the classrooms are discussed in this paper. Therefore, this paper provides a literature review on the factors contributing to the success of Highly Immersive Programme in primary schools in Malaysia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Research of English Proficiency

Language is the primary basis of communication and instrument of thought. Learning a language in an individual occurs since they were born till the end of their life. Language is used to communicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences, strengthen relationship between family and their peers and strive to make sense and order of their world.

As English is an establish language around the world, it has been given importance in many areas and sectors in most of the countries around the world including Malaysia. However, some findings have reported a low level of English proficiency among Malaysian students and lecturers [2]. A study has reported clearly the aforesaid, although the language had been taught since primary level in all the schools in Malaysia. Thus, our students failed to achieve the competency level required in the curriculum outline. In 2003, a report stated that less than 50% of the students that had completed their primary education were literate in English language [3].

In consideration of the above-mentioned situation, [4] believes that English language teachers often get discouraged when young learners exhibit a lack of motivation to learn English and frequently fail to understand their lessons. As a result, the English proficiency of young learners suffers. Nevertheless, [5] hypothesize that employing different teaching strategies can help teachers provide an improved learning environment and experience to young learners who may have a variety of learning capacities in the classrooms.

As the 21st century is known as the century of digital era, learning English is not based through textbooks and activity books only. Therefore, language teachers should introduce the fun-learning activities with the assistance of parents and community around. In creating a good vivid language-rich condition at school, students are purposely and repetitively presented with English through various language tasks in and out of the classroom [6].

As to administer reliable guidance in the English language, the teachers must be ready to incorporate the language teaching into the teaching of the various practices and norms [7],[8],[9]. The top proficient programmes focusing on educational language guidance are instilled into professional learning networks and are well footed via school and district

leadership. They can assist to upgrade improvements in student achievement. [10],[11],[12].

B. Overview of The Highly Immersive Programme (HIP)

The HIP is a programme imported under the To Uphold Malay Language and Strengthen the Command of English (MBMMBI) policy that will improve the English proficiency of students through increased exposure to the English Language. It also seeks to instil favourable attitudes regarding English language acquisition and usage. HIP is in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025, and it supports the MEB's five shifts, which are as follows:

1. Provide equal access to quality education of an international standard.
2. Ensure every child is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English Language and is encouraged to learn an additional language.
3. Develop values-driven Malaysians.
4. Establish partnership with parents, community and private sector.
5. Empower JPNs, PPDs and schools to customize solutions based on needs.

HIP was previously strengthened in the 1999 circular (Pekeliling Aktiviti Sokongan Bahasa Inggeris di Sekolah 1999) that enforces that schools in Malaysia should organise language-based activities for students of all levels. Therefore, HIP is not a new exposure for teachers and students. HIP is a supplement to the National Education Philosophy, which states;

“Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal wellbeing as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society, and the nation at large.” [13]

In correspondence to [13], education in Malaysia intents at producing learners who are holistic and competitive in the 21st century. This requires creating individuals who are equipped to meet the demands of the worldwide economy where English Language is used as the global communication language. To attract competent people to use English, it is necessary to introduce a highly immersive English-speaking environment in schools. In ensuring better pupils' outcomes, partnership between schools, parents and communities are equally critical to expedite English proficiency amongst Malaysian primary pupils. Partnerships between parents and communities have clearly shown to improve English proficiency development outside of the classroom.

The HIP allows a highly immersive language-rich atmosphere to be developed for the pupils. HIP also aims to motivate and empower school principals, teachers, students, parents, and communities to emulate codified best practices to

improve English proficiency and expand and scale those practices through sharing, learning, and support. The outcomes targeted by the HIP for all schools and pupils include increased self-evaluated levels of English immersion in schools, favourable acceptance towards the importance of learning and mastering English and increased overall proficiency of the English Language.

HIP programme is implemented with the aim to expose the pupils with English environment in accordance to increase the English usage in the school and out of school compound. [14] postulated that educators need to initiate possibilities for pupils to use English in meaningful, realistic and relevant circumstances. Puzzles, cartoons, games, brain-storming exercises, riddles, role play activities, information gap tasks, jokes, songs, and other low budget and easily available teaching materials become useful. Students enjoy playing with the language, experimenting with it and gradually become confident and comfortable with the language. Once they have excluded the language phobia, they will be able to use English resourcefully. In sum, teachers should be helpful to build up the pupils' confidence to eliminate fear of making mistakes in order to make the pupils feel comfortable with their language usage.

C. Factors Contributing to the Success of Highly Immersive Programme in primary schools

Since the HIP is based on the whole school approach, it aims to engage and empower principals, teachers, students as well as parents and the adjoining community to create a highly immersive English environment in Malaysia's both primary and secondary schools. The success of HIP is highly dependent on a combination of four critical factors.

School Heads

School heads are the captains that steer the ship of learning in the huge ocean of education. They are the managing supervisors of their schools too. They provide vision and guidance to all stakeholders in the school and create a safe and peaceful environment to fulfill the mission of learning and education. They manage daily school life and supervise all school activities. They are the responsible decision makers and are accountable for their efforts to upgrade the school to the best level of learning achievements for the students, best teaching skills for the teachers and best work environment for support staff.

According to [15] and [16], research points out that successful school heads have important roles in directing the school improvements. Thus, implementation and participation of the HIP successfully in schools starts with the initiative of the school heads in where they set an example for others to follow in the school environments. Monday morning assemblies conducted in English is an impressive attempt among the many others in national schools to foster and encourage the usage of English Language in schools.

Teachers

According to [7],[8],[9], teachers must be ready to incorporate the language teaching into the teaching of the various practices and norms. The top proficient programmes focusing on educational language guidance are instilled into

professional learning networks and are well footed via school and district leadership. They can assist to upgrade improvements in student achievement [10],[11],[12]. Teachers engage the students in various activities to encourage them to be comfortable using English Language.

"A learner of a language is less motivated, low in self-esteem, or anxious if the affective filter is so high up that it prevents input from getting through" proposed [17] in his "affective filter" hypothesis. To tackle this situation, educators need to be flexible in creating a tranquilized and enjoyable learning atmosphere. For example, some teachers choose to start their lessons with warming up tasks such as vocabulary games and brain teasers to cultivate students' interest and stimulate their eagerness for learning and stirring their motivation and boosting their certainty in mastering the English language. While in class, teachers give importance to interactive and communicative methods of teaching to arouse students' interest. By using various teaching activities such as presentation and pair or group discussion, students will excitedly be involved into their learning development. This blended teaching is applied in the HIP to help students to feel comfortable in using English Language. It will be their steppingstone to engage themselves in an English-rich environment.

In another recent study, [18] claim that Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition is possibly applied inside the classrooms and outside the classrooms which will be directed in the approach of the HIP in Malaysia. Teachers need to motivate learners to use versatile outside sources like watching videos or movies, cartoons, newspapers in the target language for acquiring the language. Developing reading habits through teachers too encourages learners to explore external reading materials such as novels, stories or poems under their guidance. Teachers motivation will ensure the learners acquisition of the target language.

Students

In the HIP implementation, students play a key role towards the success of the programme. The created English environment in schools are to encourage the students to blend and use the language comfortably. Students here apply the Bandura's theory of social learning. They learn new behaviour patterns in the social learning environment by direct experience or by looking at other student's behaviour. Students are exposed in the basic form of learning, ingrained in direct experiences. They want to be rewarded for their positive actions. Eventually, the positive actions are picked from exploratory behaviours through the differential reinforcement. The unsuccessful behaviours are disposed on their own. The HIP creates a rich English-speaking atmosphere for the students to learn via observation, imitation and modelling.

In the year 2016, an outreach carnival entitled Entrepreneurship in the ELT Classroom where students learn how to analyse, make decisions and persuade others through entrepreneurial language activities was held. It is an addendum in the KSSR Curriculum. One of the highlights of the event was the Entrepreneurship in the ELT Classroom where teachers showcased their innovative pedagogical practices

involving elements of entrepreneurship skills. The students that participated in the carnival managed to have hands-on experience in the activities held there. Thus, they managed to gain knowledge through examples set in the carnival through observation and imitation.

Parents and community

[19] mentioned that social environment such as family, school and community that influenced children's development process in education has lately obtained its significance. Therefore, the role as the first teacher that children's parents or their caretakers have is important although their children pursue their education. Moreover, parents should team up with teachers for their children to excel in school. [20] states that an effective learning environment could only be created if parents and teachers be united.

The involvement of parents in educating their children helps schools to understand student's necessity and gives the school a chance to guide parents in influencing their child's growth and development in every grade [20]. Two-way communication is important among the teachers and parents to help students in their development in education. However, the school should establish a way to communicate with parents who can't speak in English language. Moreover, volunteering activities encourage parents and community to come forward to share their time and various contributions to help schools, teachers, and students. Parents and community often contribute their time, knowledge and energy by lending their helping hands during school activities and in developing school premises for the betterment of the students.

In the HIP, parents and community experts will unite into a highly immersive, language-rich social surrounding that inspires the use of English Language among the students comfortably and freely. These 'experts' are democratising the process of language learning through unconventional but highly engaging out-of-class activities such as cooking competitions, climate action for peace challenge, and performing arts in order to increase students' confidence and produce an ecology that supports a more organic language acquisition. A pilot project was initiated by the Ministry of Education in June 2019 to encourage and persuade the society to assist the school in enhancing students' language proficiency. HIP mentors were ex-teachers and lecturers who have volunteered themselves to offer their skills and knowledge in enhancing students' English language. The mentors were sent to schools to help the school management and teachers in creating an English-speaking environment. Partnership between some organization and institutions such as Blubricks, British Council and MYReaders came forward to offer their help to schools for the success of the HIP.

III. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper only provides a literature review on the factors contributing to the success of the HIP in primary schools. There are four fundamentals factors that join forces to create an English-rich environment in schools. All these factors do not work in isolation. Thus, it is extremely important for the HIP to be conducted steps by step, involving all the fundamental factors. The factors discussed here also presented some of appropriate approaches to enhance the programme indirectly even though the study on focuses on the factors of success.

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