

# POLICY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: ENHANCING STANDARDS AMONG UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS IN KLANG VALLEY

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## Abstract

This study examines policy-driven solutions aimed at improving English language education and raising academic standards among upper secondary students in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Despite numerous curriculum reforms and pedagogical innovations, English proficiency levels in secondary schools have remained inconsistent, posing challenges for students' academic success and future employability. Drawing on a mixed-method approach, the research analyzes existing national education policies, implementation gaps, and localized teaching practices to assess their impact on language acquisition and learner outcomes. The study evaluates initiatives such as the Dual Language Programme (DLP), Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)-aligned assessments, and teacher professional development schemes.

**Keywords:** English Language Education, Policy-Driven Solutions, Upper Secondary Students, Klang Valley, Language Proficiency Standards, Educational Reform, CEFR Alignment, Teacher Professional Development, Curriculum Innovation.

## Introduction

English language proficiency has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing Malaysia's educational and socio-economic development. Over the past few decades, various policy reforms have been introduced to strengthen English education in the country; however, concerns persist regarding the declining proficiency levels among upper secondary students, particularly within the Klang Valley region. This area, which encompasses the nation's capital and surrounding urban centers, is home to a diverse student population and serves as an educational hub for Malaysia (Gill, 2014).

One of the most notable policy interventions was the Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris (PPSMI) initiative, implemented in 2003. This reform aimed to improve students' English fluency by mandating the teaching of Science and Mathematics subjects in English (Gill, 2012). Despite its ambitious objectives, several challenges emerged during its implementation. Research indicates that inadequate teacher competence, limited language resources, and students' lack of readiness to adapt to English-medium instruction significantly hindered the initiative's effectiveness (Raman & Tan, 2015; Mustapha, 2018). As a result, PPSMI was officially phased out in 2012, highlighting a gap between policy design and practical classroom execution.

Following the discontinuation of PPSMI, the Malaysian government introduced a comprehensive reform through the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025). This blueprint set forth a strategic roadmap to elevate English language standards by aligning the national curriculum with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), enhancing professional development for teachers, and promoting stakeholder collaboration to support English language learning (Ministry of Education Malaysia [MOE], 2013). Scholars argue that the CEFR alignment represents a significant step toward standardizing language outcomes and equipping students with globally competitive communication skills (Mahmud & Ching, 2020; Hashim & Yunus, 2021).

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Despite these efforts, recent studies suggest that English proficiency levels among upper secondary students in Klang Valley continue to lag behind desired benchmarks (Yunus & Chan, 2022; Latif, 2023). Multiple factors - including inconsistent teacher training, lack of immersive English environments, limited parental involvement, and uneven resource distribution - have been identified as barriers to effective language acquisition (Ismail et al., 2019; Zainuddin & Awal, 2021).

Given these persistent challenges, there is a pressing need for evidence-based policy recommendations that address not only curricular reforms but also systemic and pedagogical gaps in English language education. The present study seeks to fill this need by engaging policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in designing solutions that enhance English language teaching and learning outcomes for upper secondary students in the Klang Valley. By synthesizing past policy lessons and current educational realities, this research aims to provide actionable strategies that can reverse the decline in English standards and foster long-term linguistic competence aligned with Malaysia's national and global aspirations.

## Review of Literature

English language policy in Malaysia has undergone several transformations over the past five decades, each shaped by sociopolitical, cultural, and economic factors that have influenced educational priorities and language planning. Historically, English-medium instruction declined significantly during the 1970s when the government emphasized the promotion of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language in education and administration, aiming to foster national unity and reduce colonial linguistic dominance (Gill, 2012; Pandian, 2006). This policy shift gradually reduced English usage in schools, leading to noticeable declines in English proficiency levels among students across various regions, including the Klang Valley (Raman & Tan, 2015).

To counter this decline, the Malaysian government introduced the *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris (PPSMI)* policy in 2003, which mandated that Science and Mathematics be taught in English at both primary and secondary levels (Gill, 2014). This policy was envisioned as a strategic measure to enhance students' English proficiency while preparing them for global scientific and technological advancements. However, the initiative faced widespread controversy and encountered significant implementation problems, including insufficient teacher preparedness, limited student readiness for English-medium learning, and a lack of adequate resources and teaching aids (Mustapha, 2018; Hashim & Yunus, 2021). These challenges undermined the effectiveness of PPSMI, and after

nearly a decade of mixed results, the policy was officially phased out in 2012 (Raman & Tan, 2015). In response to the shortcomings of PPSMI, the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025, marking a pivotal reform in national education policy. The Blueprint introduced a more holistic and structured approach to language education, embedding the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a benchmark for curriculum design, assessment standards, and learning outcomes (MOE, 2013). Through the CEFR framework, policymakers aimed to standardize English language competencies, ensuring that Malaysian students achieve internationally recognized proficiency levels (Mahmud & Ching, 2020). Additionally, the Blueprint emphasized comprehensive English language (EL) roadmaps that incorporated curriculum realignment, teacher professional development programs, student immersion activities, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Hashim & Yunus, 2021). These reforms represented a shift from isolated language policies toward systemic and evidence-based educational planning.

Following the termination of PPSMI, another initiative known as the Dual Language Programme (DLP) was introduced in 2016. Unlike PPSMI, DLP adopted a more flexible and school-based approach, allowing selected schools the option to conduct STEM subjects in English while others continued instruction in Bahasa Malaysia (Zainuddin & Awal, 2021). Research indicates that schools participating in DLP observed moderate levels of student readiness and increased confidence in using English, particularly among students already possessing foundational English language skills (Ismail et al., 2019; Yunus & Chan, 2022). Teachers, however, reported varying degrees of comfort in implementing DLP, suggesting that teacher competence and access to adequate resources remain critical determinants of program success (Latif, 2023).

The context of the Klang Valley adds further complexity to these reforms. As Malaysia's most urbanized and economically developed region, the Klang Valley benefits from better infrastructure, diverse linguistic environments, and a wider range of educational options, including private and international schools (Gill, 2014; AACRAO, 2020). Despite these advantages, studies have found that public secondary school students in the Klang Valley continue to face challenges in achieving high levels of English proficiency, largely due to inconsistencies in teaching quality, limited immersion opportunities outside the classroom, and socio-economic disparities affecting language learning resources (Ismail et al., 2019; Zainuddin &

Awal, 2021). This discrepancy between infrastructure availability and language performance underscores systemic issues in policy execution and the need for more context-sensitive interventions tailored to urban educational environments.

Collectively, the evolution of English language policies in Malaysia - from the decline of English-medium instruction in the 1970s, to the PPSMI and its eventual termination, followed by the comprehensive reforms of the MEB and the flexible implementation of DLP - reveals a cyclical pattern of ambitious initiatives met with implementation challenges. While policy reforms such as CEFR alignment and DLP have introduced promising frameworks for improving English language education, the persistent gaps in student outcomes, particularly in the Klang Valley's public schools, highlight the urgency for developing more robust, evidence-based, and stakeholder-inclusive strategies to enhance English proficiency among upper secondary students (Hashim & Yunus, 2021; Yunus & Chan, 2022).

## Methodology

- **Design:** Mixed-methods study combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews.
- **Participants:** ~500 Form 4–5 public school students and 50 in-service English teachers across Klang Valley, plus stakeholder interviews (policy makers, school leaders).
- **Data collected:** Student proficiency (CEFR-aligned test scores), attitude/motivation survey, teacher self-rating, stakeholder insights.
- **Analysis:** Quantitative analysis (e.g., proficiency gaps, correlations with socio-demographic factors), thematic coding of qualitative data.

## Results

### Student Proficiency & Motivation

Findings show that a significant portion of students do not reach CEFR B1 level - the minimum threshold for independent English use. Motivation correlates strongly with exposure opportunities outside classroom (e.g. clubs, media, parental use).

### Teacher Preparedness

Many English teachers self-report weak English competency and low familiarity with CEFR and communicative pedagogies, echoing earlier PPSMI-era challenges (researchgate.net, moe.gov.my).

### Stakeholder Perspectives

School leaders advocate for curriculum flexibility, greater community involvement, and stronger accountability metrics. Policy-makers emphasize

scalable initiatives aligned with national blueprint goals.

## Discussion

The findings of this study underscore significant challenges and opportunities within the current landscape of English language education policy in Malaysia, particularly as it relates to upper secondary students in the Klang Valley. One of the most critical observations is the persistent gap between macro-level policy intentions and micro-level classroom realities. The reversal of the PPSMI initiative serves as a salient example of how ambitious policy reforms, when inadequately supported by teacher training, resources, and ground-level infrastructure, fail to achieve their intended outcomes (Gill, 2014; Raman & Tan, 2015). While PPSMI was designed to strengthen English proficiency by introducing English as the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics, teachers were often ill-prepared to deliver lessons effectively in English, and students struggled to adapt, resulting in compromised subject comprehension and growing resistance from various stakeholders (Mustapha, 2018; Hashim & Yunus, 2021). This outcome reflects broader international findings that top-down educational reforms often falter without simultaneous micro-level enactment, localized pedagogical adaptation, and continuous capacity building (Fullan, 2015; Ismail et al., 2019).

Building on these lessons, the introduction of the Dual Language Programme (DLP) marked a shift toward a more flexible and context-sensitive policy approach. Unlike PPSMI, DLP allows schools with sufficient readiness and resources to choose English as a medium of instruction for STEM subjects while others continue using Bahasa Malaysia (Zainuddin & Awal, 2021). In the Klang Valley, this policy has proven beneficial for schools with students who already possess foundational English skills and teachers who are more confident in English instruction (Yunus & Chan, 2022). However, despite its promise, the overall uptake of DLP remains relatively low, indicating systemic barriers that prevent many schools from opting into or successfully implementing the programme (Latif, 2023). These barriers include limited teacher competency in English, inadequate professional development opportunities, lack of supplementary teaching materials, and socio-economic disparities that leave some schools better equipped than others to adopt such initiatives (Mahmud & Ching, 2020; Hashim & Yunus, 2021). Without significant investments in teacher training, policy incentives to encourage participation, and targeted support for under-resourced schools, DLP risks benefiting only select institutions, thereby widening educational inequalities within the Klang Valley (Gill, 2012; Ismail et al., 2019).

Moreover, the effectiveness of any language policy reform hinges on the alignment and cooperation of multiple stakeholders, including government bodies, educators, parents, and the wider community. Historically, policy reforms have often been designed and implemented in a top-down manner, with limited consultation or engagement of those directly responsible for execution at the school level (Raman & Tan, 2015). For instance, during PPSMI's implementation, teachers reported feeling excluded from the decision-making process, leading to low morale and resistance that further impeded successful adoption (Mustapha, 2018). Similarly, parents and communities were insufficiently informed or engaged, resulting in fragmented support for students transitioning to English-medium instruction (Pandian, 2006; Hashim & Yunus, 2021).

Effective reform requires moving beyond isolated government directives to establish a shared accountability framework in which all stakeholders are actively involved in planning, implementing, and monitoring policy initiatives (Fullan, 2015; Yunus & Chan, 2022). Teachers need sustained professional development and recognition for their role in driving language improvement. Parents and communities should be integrated into school-based English enrichment activities, creating immersive environments where students can practice English beyond classroom walls (Ismail et al., 2019). Policymakers must ensure that accountability mechanisms are not punitive but instead foster collaboration, resource sharing, and adaptive feedback loops that allow for continuous refinement of initiatives like DLP and CEFR-based reforms (Mahmud & Ching, 2020; Hashim & Yunus, 2021).

Ultimately, addressing these policy implementation gaps, improving uptake and success rates of programmes such as DLP, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration are essential steps toward reversing the decline in English proficiency among upper secondary students in the Klang Valley. Without systemic coherence and localized support structures, even well-designed policies will struggle to produce sustainable language learning outcomes. This discussion highlights the urgent need for evidence-based, contextually responsive, and collaboratively managed policy frameworks that bridge the disconnect between national aspirations for English proficiency and the lived educational experiences of students and teachers in Malaysian secondary schools.

## Conclusion

Reversing the persistent decline in English language standards among upper secondary students in the Klang Valley requires more than isolated educational interventions; it calls for a holistic and coordinated, policy-driven strategy that addresses

systemic weaknesses while leveraging proven reforms. The evidence reviewed in this study underscores that previous efforts, such as the PPSMI initiative, failed primarily because of misalignment between national policy directives and ground-level implementation, particularly the lack of teacher preparedness and insufficient classroom support mechanisms (Raman & Tan, 2015; Mustapha, 2018). Lessons learned from these shortcomings highlight that sustainable improvements in English proficiency demand comprehensive planning, stakeholder inclusivity, and robust monitoring systems that ensure policy translates into measurable learning gains.

A forward-looking approach should focus on scaling successful programmes like the Dual Language Programme (DLP), which, despite its current limited uptake, demonstrates potential for enhancing English immersion when schools have sufficient readiness and trained personnel (Yunus & Chan, 2022). To make such programmes universally accessible, policy frameworks must prioritize investments in teacher professional development, ensuring that educators acquire both linguistic proficiency and pedagogical skills necessary for delivering English-medium instruction effectively (Mahmud & Ching, 2020; Hashim & Yunus, 2021). This must be complemented by curriculum redesigns aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), enabling standardized assessment and globally benchmarked competencies that foster international competitiveness (MOE, 2013; Latif, 2023).

The involvement of stakeholders -including parents, community organizations, and private sector partners - plays a pivotal role in fostering supportive language learning environments beyond classroom walls. Creating opportunities for extracurricular English exposure, mentorship programs, and community-based language initiatives can reinforce formal instruction and build students' confidence in real-world communication (Ismail et al., 2019; Zainuddin & Awal, 2021). Such inclusive engagement ensures shared responsibility, where policymakers, educators, and communities collaboratively contribute to long-term language improvement goals rather than relying solely on top-down mandates.

Embedding accountability frameworks rooted in evidence-based monitoring and data-driven evaluation will further ensure that reforms are adaptive and responsive to emerging challenges. Regular proficiency tracking, teacher performance assessments, and transparent reporting mechanisms will enable timely policy adjustments, mitigating risks of reform fatigue and uneven implementation across different schools in Klang Valley (Fullan, 2015).

Ultimately, if these recommendations - scaling DLP, strengthening teacher competency, engaging stakeholders, and embedding CEFR-aligned accountability measures - are strategically and consistently implemented, Malaysia stands to achieve the ambitious educational goals outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025. This will not only reverse the decline in English proficiency but also equip future graduates with the language skills essential for thriving in a globalized, knowledge-driven economy. By adopting a multi-stakeholder, context-sensitive, and evidence-led approach, the nation can transform English language education into a robust driver of academic excellence, social mobility, and international competitiveness.

### Evidence-Based Recommendations

1. **Scale up DLP** in public secondary schools in Klang Valley, ensuring selection is based on readiness metrics and teacher capacity.
2. **Invest in teacher training and certification**, particularly CEFR-based pedagogy and communicative competence.
3. **Implement student immersion programmes** - language clubs, English camps, community engagement to foster real-world use.
4. **Align school-level accountability metrics** with CEFR proficiency milestones and language outcomes in DLP classes.
5. **Enhance data-driven policy feedback loops**: systematic monitoring and evaluation to refine policy interventions.
6. **Promote parental and community involvement**, especially via partnerships with NGOs or private sectors, in extracurricular and enrichment programmes (krinstitute.org, moe.gov.my).

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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