English as a Foreign Language in Malaysia:

Voices from Malaysian English Teachers

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Abstract

Is English a second language or is it a foreign language in Malaysia? It all depends on the geographical dynamics or the family background where one is from. In rural areas in Malaysia, and in the words of one participating teacher who is teaching in such a school, “English is a foreign, a very foreign language to my students.” In this study, I hope to provide you a window into the world of five Malaysian English teachers who have chosen to teach in public schools in Malaysia because they want to make a difference in the lives of the students. Their frustrations and their joys are heard as they share their journey of teaching in schools that are divergently different from them. The findings suggest that English teachers need to be trained, not just in pedagogical knowledge but also in linguistic knowledge if they are to be successful and to make an impact in students’ outcomes. Teachers in this study voiced their needs in wanting professional development that is contextually appropriate. Teachers in this study need administrative support in order for them to flourish as professionals.

Keywords: Malaysia, public secondary schools, English teachers, English as a Foreign Language, voices, effective, professional development, support


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English as a Foreign Language in Malaysia

A common headline in the local newspapers in Malaysia usually centers on the depreciating standards of English in the land. Headlines like “Bring back English, firms tell Putrajaya (equivalent to D.C. in America)”, “Education Ministry supports call to master English”, “When English language teachers don’t know English”, “Why are our English teaching standards so low? (Aliman, 2015; The Malaysian Insider, 2015) are among many similar ones. It was once a nation where people took great pride in their British English, commonly known as the Queen’s English or Standard English. Growing up in Malaysia, I remember conversing in English with the bread seller at the market or with the ophthalmologist who was attending to my eye condition in her private practice. English used to be a “common” spoken language among the many different races in Malaysia, a language that is oblivious to the different ethnic cultures. It was a language, whether spoken perfectly or not, was welcomed by people from all lifestyles.

After Malaysia became independent from the British rule in 1957, the Malays who made up the majority ruling party or the more conservative group thought otherwise. Instead, English was seen as a language that was imposed on Malaysians when the British colonized the country until the sixties (Stephen, 2013). Therefore, English was forced into the background and consequently, this action has brought forth detrimental results to the schools and the nation as a whole.

Purpose of the Study

As a Malaysian, I identify with this discontentment as an educator, as a parent, and as a student. Having lived in the United States for more than ten years now, I am saddened with the level of English among my relatives and the younger generations in Malaysia whenever I travel to visit them. I grew up attending Malaysian public schools and encountered English teachers
(and education policies) that either encouraged or discouraged me as a student. I am a product of both English and *Bahasa Malaysia* mediums of instruction and worked hard to be a proficient English language speaker. I know the challenges and the joy of learning the language. The cyclic nature of English in Malaysia has piqued my interest to do a study on English teachers in Malaysia and therefore, the birth of this study. In addition, I hope to return there to train English teachers one day.
Review of Literature

History of English in Malaysia

Malaysia is a multicultural country with a population of about 30 million people; three major races are the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Sixty-eight percent of the population is the Malays, twenty-five percent are the Chinese, and seven percent are the Indians and others. With these different races come the different native languages that are spoken, predominantly Malay, and English. The national language of Malaysia is the Malay language, known as Bahasa Malaysia.

According to the Malaysia Ministry of Education (2014), one of the six key attributes of a globally competitive student is to be bilingually proficient, meaning that students should speak English in addition to another language. In public schools in Malaysia, all subjects are taught in Malay and English is a second/foreign language subject that is incorporated into the curriculum. Although English is the official second language in Malaysia, it is only second to Bahasa Malaysia, (Mustafa, 2009) but not in terms of how often the language is being used outside of classrooms. Students that come from families that speak English and from urban areas might view English as a second and even a first language. On the contrary, if students are from families that do not speak English and from the rural areas of Malaysia, English becomes a foreign language. Therefore, it is not “entirely wrong to say that English has fast become a foreign language here in Malaysia” (Mustafa, 2009, p.3).

Malaysia has had a long history with the English language. Malaysia was once colonized by the British, from 1874 – 1957 (“Malaysia-Western Colonialism,” n.d.) and was influenced by the British education system, where English was the medium of instruction in public schools. Malaysians living in the urban areas, mostly the Chinese and Indians during that era were
educated in English and many were native speakers of the language. After Malaysia gained her independence from the British in 1957, the Malay conservatives changed the medium of instruction to the Malay language, having viewed English as a dividing factor between the haves and have-nots. At that time, and any hint of British colonization discouraged, and that included the English language. Malay became the “national language and the medium of instruction and was implemented through the National Language Act in 1967” (Stephen, 2013, p. 3). The idea was that using the language would promote national unity across varying ethnic groups.

English in Malaysia is still seen as a threat to national unity and therefore, the education policies on English as a medium of instruction have seen the following changes: in 2003, English became the medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science and in 2009, English was again removed as the medium for these two subjects after the Malays in the rural schools suffered negative outcomes (Stephen, 2013). Subsequently, in 2012, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced a new English as a second/foreign language curriculum to all Malaysian schools (Hardman & A-Rahman, 2014; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013) with the aim of improving English proficiency and spearheading Malaysia into a globally competitive nation (Mustafa, 2009).

Are Malaysian English teachers able to successfully teach this new curriculum? Are they confident enough? Do they have the support of the MOE and the school administrators? Recently, the MOE announced that a compulsory pass in English in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), a national examination that was proposed in 2013 has now being retracted; citing reasons like “more time is needed for various parties to get prepared”, the policy is “unfair to students in the rural areas…and the country still lacked a sufficient number of English teachers” (Hamid, 2015).
With the fluctuating implementation of the English language policies, there is no strong foundation for the mastery of the language. There is a great need to improve students’ achievement in the English language in public schools in Malaysia (Hardman & A-Rahman, 2014). English language teachers in Malaysia are expected to possess the skills and pedagogical knowledge that will result in student achievement. However, English teachers often experience sparse or inadequate preparation that is in stark contrast to the expectations. Kabilan and Veratharaju (2013) pointed out this problem in their study that Malaysian English teachers “urge and demand far more effective PD programmes/activities that are tailored to their needs” (p.332). These uncertainties face Malaysian English teachers today and have created discontentment among various stakeholders in the nation.

**Perspectives from the Teachers**

**Motivation for Teaching.** Teachers choose the teaching profession for varied reasons. Teachers that are motivated by altruistic reasons want to make an impact on their students’ lives and see themselves as agents of change for the betterment of the society. Amy White (2015), an elementary school teacher who is in her fifth year of teaching, echoed the altruistic reason shared by many teachers on how she knew she wanted to be a teacher since she was a kindergartner.

I was told that teaching was a thankless and exhausting job; I didn’t realize how true that was until I experienced it. Even still, I cannot imagine doing anything else with my life. I want to stir up a love of learning in the hearts and minds of my students…I want to give them hope. The best part is that I get to do these things every day. ..That’s why I teach. (p. 32)

Some are motivated by intrinsic reasons; teachers enjoy teaching and possess the subject knowledge. Yet, some choose to be teachers because of extrinsic reasons; benefits that come
with the profession. Thomson, Turner and Nietfeld comment that “Intrinsic reasons and altruistic reasons seem to be the more influential factors for becoming a teacher in western cultures, but other reasons, such as extrinsic reasons, seem to be the most influential in other countries such as Brunei, Cyprus, and Latvia (as cited in Thomson & Turner, 2015, p. 579). Azman (2013) cited two studies done in Malaysia on teachers’ motivation in entering the teaching force, which yielded findings, which supported the notion that teachers in the non-western countries are more motivated by the long holidays and benefits package. Regardless of the reasons, most teachers work hard at their professions and want to be regarded as effective professionals (Azman, 2013; Barr & Carolyn, 2012; Thomson & Turner 2015). What do teachers need then in order for them to be effective in their personal and professional lives?

The Need to Understand Oneself. The need to know who we are is a complex process. Who are we on the inside, our convictions, beliefs, and what guides us as to how we conduct ourselves on the outside need to be addressed. The outward performance of teachers is sometimes seen as more important than who they are on the inside and the motivation that drives them. Who the teachers are can have significant impact on their profession, their students, other teachers, families, and the community that they serve. That is why it is important that teachers engage in self-reflection (Carr, Fauske, & Rushton, 2007) to gain a better understanding of who they are. Reflection can be used as an instrument for change (Avalos, 2011) as teachers begin to reflect on their inner selves and their beliefs.

Incecay and Kesli Dollar define a belief as a “mental state that is believed to be true by the person holding it, although the individual may know that alternative beliefs may be held by others “(as cited in Incecay, 2011, p.29). Research on the topic of teachers’ beliefs have emerged
in recent years highlighting the way teachers perceive themselves and having an impact on their profession. In the words of Johnson,

Research on teachers’ beliefs shares three basic assumptions. First, teachers’ beliefs influence both perception and judgment, which, in turn, affects what teachers say and do in classrooms. Second, teachers’ beliefs play a critical role in how teachers learn to teach that is, how they interpret new information about learning and teaching and how that information is translated into classroom practices. Third, understanding teachers’ beliefs is essential to improving teaching practices and professional teacher preparation programs. (as cited in Inci, 2011, p. 30).

Lived experience informs beliefs. What forms these beliefs? Teachers’ prior experience as a student or an adult; having had teachers who were positive role models in their lives or otherwise and prior career or lived experience might influence teachers’ current teaching or learning. “We teach and lead based largely on how we have experienced teaching and leadership in our own lives as students” (Carr et al., 2007, p. 2). In a study by Sturtevan and Linek (2003) on what constitutes a “good teacher”, the researchers cited personal perceptions [or beliefs] based on past and current experiences as one of the constructs that affected the teachers’ teaching. One of their participants, Gail shared her own thoughts,

I do not think I would have been an especially good middle school teacher before I had my own children…I think when you watch your own children you see how at one stage in their life they make a tremendous leap forward and then they sort of plateau for a while…. I don't think I had a sense of that…until I had my own family. (p.83)

In relation to pedagogic beliefs of language teaching or learning, how one has acquired an additional language and prior experience play an important role in what is implemented in the
classroom or openness of teachers toward new ideas or approaches. What kind of image do most people have of their language teachers in schools or universities? According to Snow (2007),

> When most people think of a language teacher, perhaps the first image that occurs to them is of a tidily dressed woman or man standing in front of an attentive class, explaining a grammar point or a new word. Then the teacher checks whether or not students understand the point by asking each one a question or two, patiently correcting any mistakes they make. (p. 26)

This stoic image of the language teacher and his/her way of teaching can have an effect on current language teachers. Graduate TESOL students cited their “foreign language experience in high school with instructors’ overemphasis on rote memorization and drills” (He, 2013, p. 63) as one of the influencing factors that contributed to their own prior way of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to their English Language Learners (ELLs).

This utilization of prior language learning experience is exemplified in Incecay’s study (2011) of two pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. Both of the participants exhibited teaching practices that were parallel to their prior classroom experience when they were language learners themselves. One of these pre-service teachers who graduated from a public high school with large classrooms were more concerned with having a disciplined authoritative environment as compared to the other participant who was comfortable with a more student-centered environment; having graduated from a private school with smaller classrooms. Therefore, it is evident in the study that teachers’ beliefs were “affected by their studentship period” (p. 34).
Vibuphol stressed, “The developmental process of pre-service teachers’ beliefs about language learning starts from the period when they were language learners themselves and goes till the time when they were in teacher education programs.” (as cited in İnceçay, 2011, p. 30). Wu (2011) in his research on English teaching to Mongolian students elaborates that teachers’ beliefs about language learning will determine how they choose their instructional materials, how they perceive their students’ ability, and how they employ their own teaching methods.

That prior knowledge or experience will function as a filter is evident in this recent study by Assalahi (2013) on Arab teachers who continued to use grammar translation method in teaching grammar instead of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology in which they were trained. CLT has been in practice in the West and not so in other parts of the world (Wyatt, 2015). The Arab teachers conducted teacher-centered instead of student-centered lessons, form-focused rather than meaning-focused instruction, explaining lessons in their mother tongue, and insisting on the error-free approach in their grammar instruction despite being trained otherwise. This research demonstrates that teachers’ lived experience as language learners has been an influential factor in how they conduct their classroom practices. Research about language teachers and their beliefs about teaching and learning indicates, according to Karavas-Doukas, “there is evidence that the two [stated beliefs and classroom practices] do not always coincide” and Almarza and Pickering stated that these beliefs “can be deep-rooted and resistant to change” (as cited in Phipps & Borg, 2009, p. 380). Yet again, in Wu’s (2011) study, the author contends that beliefs are “dynamic and can be changed by their [teachers’] frequent reflections on their own teaching behaviors in particular social, political, and teaching contexts” (p. 95).
Similarly, He (2013) affirmed that uncovering a positive past experience with learning a foreign language or a positive role model can contribute to a teacher’s current beliefs about his/her ELLs as well. In the words of a high school English teacher, Linda who conveyed her experience about a college history professor who made them write test questions in class, “We could not just recite facts; we had to show that we could [explain] an idea…Linda recalled that she "felt powerful" in the class” (Sturtevan & Linek, 2003, p. 84). Such prior experiences can either constrict or motivate changes in the way that teachers conduct their professional lives (Avalos, 2011; Carr et al., 2007; Mansfield & Volet, 2010; Wu, 2011). Prior experience can sometimes also cause teachers to take an approach that is opposite to one that they experienced. Carr et al., (2007) state:

> Often our view is shaped by the examples we see, but sometimes we create structures for how we teach and lead based on how different we wish to be from those who educated us. For example, we might avoid emulating a teacher for whom we completed countless “busy work” worksheets or who required us to memorize passages from textbooks. We might intentionally develop skills to avoid treating others badly to avoid the ways others have treated us in the past (p.2).

**Beliefs influence results.** Findings from these studies indicate that teachers’ beliefs contribute to self-efficacy, effectiveness, behaviors, motivation, students’ learning and outcomes, and classroom practices (Assalahi, 2013; Avalos, 2011; Farrell & Ives, 2015; Mansfield & Woods- McConney, 2012; Wu, 2011). Teachers’ “self-efficacy level or confidence to teach” (Thomson & Turner, 2015) and/or the belief in their own capacities affect their receptivity toward new classroom implementations, attitude change, teachers’ classroom practices, students’
achievements, their educational responsibilities (Guskey, 1988; Thomson & Turner, 2015), and the degree of teacher engagement with content-related issues (Andrews, 2001).

Bandura (1993) explains self-efficacy in this way:

People make causal contributions to their own functioning through mechanics of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives. Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave. (p. 118)

In correspondence with Bandura’s theory, efficacy beliefs can influence how teachers behave as professionals and therefore, determine classroom practices. Gibson and Dembo (1984) explained that one can assume “teachers with a sense of high-efficacy persist longer, provide a greater academic focus in the classroom, and exhibit different types of feedback than teachers who have lower expectations concerning their ability to influence students’ learning” (p.570).

Therefore, teachers’ instructional efficacy, teacher’s confidence to teach or teacher’s effectiveness could be related to teacher’s knowledge of the subject matter. Mansfield and Woods-McConney (2012) said that teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs are contextually related. Teachers who have overall high self-efficacy as teachers might possess low-self efficacy in teaching subject matters that they are not competent in. In a study done on Malaysian pre-service teachers in teaching Mathematics, there was a strong correlation between knowledge of the content and confidence in teaching Mathematics. Teachers with lower grades in Mathematics were reported as not confident to teach students in higher grades, and the lowest confidence level was in teaching Mathematics in English (Yunus, Hamzah, Ismail, Husain, & Ismail, 2006). This outcome could be the cause and effect of the fluctuation of the English Language policy in
Malaysia. In 2003, Malaysia reintroduced English as the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics after decades of teaching these subjects in Malay, citing reasons like “declining proficiency in English among Malaysians…and the need to keep abreast with the scientific and technological advancement of the domestic and international trade” (Then & Ting, 2011, p. 303).

It is not difficult to imagine that the teaching of English in Malaysia suffers from the same lack of self-efficacy as the teaching of math in English. We know that there is a shortage of English teachers (Darus, 2009; Then & Teing, 2011). How does Malaysia resolve this issue of lack of English-proficient teachers? Gaudart (1999) attested to the fact that Malaysia has resorted to placing teachers in English classes who are not trained to teach English and therefore, do not possess the skills nor the knowledge to effectively teach the language, solely on the premise that they speak “English fairly fluently” (p. 289).

*Training enhances positive results.* Is English proficiency alone enough basis for teachers to be teaching the language? In her book, Dormer (2011) talks about the educational harm that teachers can impose on students when they do not possess the necessary requirements for language teaching. She explained, “When English proficiency is considered the only requirement for teaching English, as it is in many places, teachers (including native English speakers) may have little understanding about what needs to take place in the classroom to promote language learning.” (p. 17). Teachers need to be trained in order for them to be effective in their classrooms. Teachers who receive training or professional development in content knowledge are better able to impact students’ outcomes. Cowen, Barrett, Toma and Troske (2015) confirm that “targeted and intensive training” (p. 14) result in prolonged positive effects on students’ learning. Without training, teachers are not able to provide effective feedback (among other teaching strategies) that will influence learning but instead as Tan described, these teachers “focus on
correcting disruptive behavior” (as cited in Hall, Larson, Heinemann & Brusseau, 2015, para.11). The authors in their study on physical education paraprofessionals versus licensed teachers found that trained teachers are better at providing constructive feedback as opposed to paraprofessionals. Raval, McKenney and Pieters (2010) in their review on para-educators cited various issues when teachers are not trained and some of them are lack of classroom management, lack of content knowledge, and lack of effective teaching strategies.

In a yearlong study involving twenty-two universities in eight countries, Gibbs and Coffey (2004) reported significant findings comparing teachers who were in a training group to those in a control group. To summarize:

- The training group adopted a more student-focused rather than a teacher-focused approach by the end of the training.
- In terms of teaching skills, the training group improved significantly in:
  - Enthusiasm: The teacher was enthusiastic about teaching the course.
  - Organisation: The teacher’s explanations were clear.
  - Group interaction: Students were invited to share their ideas and knowledge.
  - Rapport: The teacher had a genuine interest in individual students.
  - Breadth: The teacher contrasted the implications of various theories. (p. 90)

Training can change teachers and that in turn can affect teachers’ efficacy levels and students’ learning outcomes. Lyne (2013) described the English teaching situation in Malaysia, where training programs were implemented in an attempt to equip teachers with the pedagogical language skills to teach the new curriculum.

In 2011, the MOE initiated a new child-centered standard curriculum and teaching methodology called Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR)...and Teaching English
Language and Literacy programme (TELL) in which experienced native English language teachers were brought over to mentor the Malaysian teachers. (p.2)

Lynne’s study (2013) focused on measuring Malaysian English teachers’ self-efficacy and achievement scores after a mentoring program. The findings indicated that there was an overall improvement in achievement. Teachers were able to adapt and implement some of the new methodologies that came with the new curriculum after attending workshops with follow-up mentorship. However, there was an ethnic difference among the Chinese and Malay mentees in their self-efficacy scores. The researcher attributes the development to his feelings that the “English ability of the Chinese mentees is lower than the Malay mentees which is probably one of the root causes of the difference in self-efficacy” (p. 13).

*Reflecting on beliefs.* If beliefs are a strong driving force in the lives of teachers, then, teachers need to reflect on what these beliefs are and what impact they have on classroom practices and their professional lives. Studies show differing views on the relationships between beliefs and classroom practices, with Kuzborska (2011) stating a strong correlation while Farell and Lim (2005) reporting a more limited correspondence. Moreover, Kagan (1992) stated that “unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught” must be brought to the level of conscious awareness. (as cited in Farrell & Ives, 2015, p.595). In their case study on the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices, classroom observations, interviews, and journal writings were done with one L2 (second language) reading teacher. The findings indicated, “the teacher’s beliefs provided a strong basis for his classroom actions” (p. 608) and by reflecting on his teaching practices, he adds,
In addition to gaining insight into the relationship between past experiences and current beliefs and practices, the reflective practice process can bring to your attention practices that you do intentionally or unintentionally. If it is a positive practice, you may want to do it more often. If it is a negative practice, you may make attempts to stop it. (pp. 607-608)

Reflective journaling is reinforced by Carr et al., (2007) as a “professional development tool” where teachers can record their perceptions of the classroom and discover more about their teaching practices. It can help develop congruity between what we espouse to do and what we actually do in practice. …The creative process of reflective writing can draw us to a deeper level of self-awareness as well as help unfold the complexities of our professional lives. (p. 51).

Carr et al., believed this process can “help teachers and leaders better understand their motives, practices, and teaching skills and can lead to making real changes.” (Glenn, 2004; Wellington & Austin, 1996 as cited in Carr et al., 2007, p. 52). Some of the real changes that teachers need to be cognizant of are the attitudes or beliefs that teachers have toward their students, creating either a positive or a negative teacher-student relationship. Teaching is a profession that involves people. Teachers can either act as “well-oiled machines” (Farrell, 2015, p. 27) or begin to build valuable interpersonal relationships. Farrell (2015) states that research has also indicated that different teachers will have differing conceptions of such relationships and many may not be consciously aware of how they build, negotiate, and maintain them. Nevertheless, the nature of these relationships affects interactions between teachers and students both inside and outside the classroom (p. 26).
Developing a caring relationship can be both rewarding and draining at the same time because it takes commitment. Sakiz, Pape, and Hoy (2012) pointed out, “Teacher support is one of the strongest correlates with youth adjustment, social and motivational development, and achievement” (p. 235). Teachers need to see the importance of their roles in the lives of young people. Negative relationships that exist between teachers and students can bring about disruptive behaviors especially “among the lower socio-economic group” (p. 235).

In order for teachers to have a good teacher-student relationship, teachers need to be culturally competent. To even a greater degree, it is relevant in a multicultural country like Malaysia; with its three distinct ethnic groups, certainly culture influences the teachers. Abd Razak, Darmawan, and Keeves (2010) stress that “This is particularly important in the field of education, where there are teachers working in schools that have different cultural orientation” (p. 188).

The Need to Continue Learning

Whether it involves pedagogy or students’ different personalities or cultures, teachers should be constantly learning. One reason why this is so important is because our experiences limit our understanding. “Teachers and leaders each have a schema for what teaching and leading look like in schools, and this schema is shaped by a relatively narrow range of experiences” (Carr et al., 2007, p. 3). Teachers need to be engaged in continuing learning in order to widen the experiences, or, as Woolfolk termed it, their “response set” (as cited in Carr et al., 2007, p.3) and to be made aware that what has worked in the past perhaps should not be applied in a different circumstance (Carr et al., 2007).

Professional Development. Avalos (2011) stressed that the core of professional development (PD) is about:
teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students’ growth. Teacher professional learning is a complex process…it requires cognitive and emotional involvement…willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs…for improvement of change. (p.10)

PD is integral in bringing about changes whether with the curriculum, the policy, or teachers and students’ behaviors. Professional growth is essential for improving teaching quality and teachers should be involved in PD activities that are intentional, effective, content-focused, supported with follow-ups, and opportunities for active learning (Guskey, 2009; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013; Lauer, Christopher, Firpo-Triplett & Buchting, 2014). PD activities may include “individual development, continuing education, and in-service education, as well as curriculum writing, peer collaboration, study groups, and peer coaching or mentoring” (Goh & Loh, 2013, p. 203).

In order to be developing in their knowledge and skills, teachers need to be active learners and be involved in “professional learning” as the classroom is constantly evolving. Argued Easton (2013):

It is clearer today than ever that educators need to learn, and that’s why professional learning has replaced professional development. Developing is not enough. Educators must be knowledgeable and wise. They must know enough in order to change. They must change in order to get different results. They must become learners, and they must be self-developing. (p. 756).

In a literature review study on short-term PD, Lauer et al., (2014) identified that “reported gains in teacher outcomes” were not attributed to the duration of PD activities but
more on “opportunities for content-focused active learning…or what is done during that time.” (p. 208). The authors went on to elaborate some features of active learning that are common in effective PD activities: feedback, reflective writing, analysis of current teaching practices, group discussions, opportunities to practice new skills, follow-up support, and relevant information are some of the factors that were highlighted.

Pop, Dixon and Grove alluded

One way teachers can increase their knowledge is through professional development. Providing teachers with high-quality professional development may help teachers with increasing their content and pedagogical knowledge and help them learn more effective teaching practices for their classrooms, thus encouraging them to stay in teaching. (as cited in Thomson and Turner, 2015, p.580)

Teachers need to seek out continuing education to stay motivated, to stay informed about teaching approaches, to stay intellectually stimulated, to stay enthusiastic and confident about teaching, to stay attuned to research- based findings, and to stay connected with other educators (Chisholm & McPherson, 2014; Lyne, 2013; Wyatt, 2011).

When teachers “expand their response sets related to schools and schooling through reading and research and interactions with colleagues from other schools and districts [in today’s technology, even from other countries], we much more readily think outside the limiting school “lunch box”. …we still can learn from carefully considering and reflecting on our experiences. (Carr et al., pp 3-4)

Sturtevan and Linek (2003) in their narrative research with nine middle and high school teachers, observe that the mitigating factor in driving teachers toward professional growth is their own personal beliefs . For example, Kelly, a high school biology teacher said, "To me, to be a
teacher is to constantly accept learning, and I want to learn to be the best teacher I can be for my students” (p. 83). On a similar note, Beth, a sixth grade social studies teacher, shares her love for learning in this manner; “I’ve always enjoyed learning myself, and so I want to try to relate that enthusiasm to the kids. I teach them above all else that learning is a lifelong process;… it goes on forever whether you're in school or not” (p. 83). Linda, a high school English teacher connects her current attitude of on-going learning to her childhood experience in a few lines:

I learned to read at an early age and I love to read. I think that informs everything else that I do. So I see books and literature as being essential. If they [the students] are going to become thinking members of society, they have to expose themselves to as many ideas as possible and as many different ways of expressing things as possible…Learning is a reward in itself. I'd like them to come out of my class knowing that. That’s what I'm shooting for. (p. 83).

Teachers are to see themselves as learners; teachers need to learn well to teach well. “Being a learner similarly requires that we admit to not having all the answers ourselves” (Carr et al., 2007, p. 8). Continuous learning should not be just about acquiring new information or knowledge, or just fulfilling required PD hours or “as part of ongoing licensure procedures” (Cowan et al., 2015, p. 14). It should be about “engaging learning experiences that facilitate teachers to gain new understandings of current situations and contexts, and enhance their awareness of professional strengths and weaknesses that will lead them to examine their own practices and philosophies as teachers.” (Kabilan, Adlina, & Embi, 2011, pp. 94-95).

In the quest for continued learning, teachers can connect informally and have personal connections with like-minded professionals. Teachers can connect with other educators to share ideas for teaching and learning. Michael, an ESL teacher noted
Now that I have the Master's degree, what I do now is just continue professional development. I present at conferences. I am a member of TESOL International. I'm a member of WATESOL. I'm a member of Virginia TESOL. I'm on a couple of list serves that are all directed to bilingual education and ESL. Every day I'm reading articles and research. (Sturtevan & Linek, 2003, p.85)

Attending conferences is indeed another form of PD. Malupa-Kim relates “the feeling of belonging to a group that shares your passion, the knowledge we get from presentations, and interacting with our peers, and experts in the field (as cited in Borg, 2015, p. 36).

Teachers can be engaged in formal and informal professional development activities organized by their schools or the MOE in the case of Malaysia (Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013) and resources over the internet. Kabilan (2003) emphasized that Malaysia in her pursuit of transforming the country from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy, embracing the information technology and multimedia in the midst of all these policy changes, is a country in which teachers, especially English teachers, are caught in the middle. The expectations are high since the computer language is in English and teachers are now expected to use this technology “as one of the tools to support and enhance the teaching-learning cycle” (p. 368) in all schools by the year 2020. The author calls for Malaysian teachers to be part of continued learning and be known as “practicing teachers…who hold the key to the transformation of Malaysian schools, training and preparing its learners to face challenges, and improving the learners’ performances.” (Kabilan, 2003, p. 369).

Fast forward to the year 2013, Kabilan & Veratharaju (2013) continued to monitor the PD situation among teachers in Malaysia and in this one study on PD needs of primary school
English-language teachers in Malaysia, the researchers noted that in light of the new English-language curriculum introduced in 2012 to all Malaysian schools, they commented

    However, this introduction will have its weaknesses if teachers’ professional needs are not identified and determined. The new curriculum should take into consideration, among other factors: what teachers are able to do (and not able to do); strengths and weaknesses of teachers in terms of teaching methods, orientations and perspectives/philosophy; and the new knowledge and skills (including readiness and adaptability) that are required of teachers to successfully implement the curriculum. (p. 332)

    Contextualized Professional Development. What may apply in one school culture might not apply in another. Even within the same school, not all training will be relevant to every classroom situation. Guskey (2009) states that

    No professional development practice, strategy, approach, method, or activity works well under all conditions. Effective school leaders must begin all professional development endeavors by focusing on learning and learners; recognize the vital importance of core elements such as time, collaboration, a school-based orientation, and leadership; and then work to find the most appropriate adaptation for those core elements to specific contexts. (p. 231)

In short, “teacher learning experiences cannot be too far removed from the daily context of teachers’ work” (Raval et al., 2010, p. 220).

    The Need to Have a Supportive Environment

    Each of us has our own reasons for becoming a teacher or school leader. For some, the purpose relates to economic concerns, with little regard for the “fit” between the self and the job. For others, the journey to the new credential is in and of itself, an exploration of
personal, collegial, and professional self. Often, the choice of education as a career is based on a genuine desire to serve, to make a difference in the lives of children. This genuine commitment to serve is at the heart of professional authenticity, and it flourishes best in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. (Carr et al., 2007, p. 7).

The opportunity for teachers to grow should ideally be found in particular educational policy environments or school cultures, some of which are more appropriate and conducive to learning than others.

When the support system is non-conducive, the education system might experience attrition among teachers. In a study on what motivates certified teachers to leave the profession, Struyven and Vantournout (2014) remarked that “Based on 66 possible reasons for attrition, our analyses identified five overarching motives for exit attrition: ‘job satisfaction and relations with students’, ‘school management and support’, ‘workload’, ‘future prospect’ and ‘relations with parents’” (p. 44). Here teachers experienced a “mismatch” (p. 38) between their expectations and a supportive school management. To affirm that teachers’ attrition in the profession is related to management, Khawary and Ali (2015) explained,

The rate of teachers’ turnover increases when the organization’s management and leadership focusses only on the teachers’ teaching in the class without focusing on the teachers’ job satisfaction, motivation, and willingness to continue with their teaching profession. Although without job satisfaction and motivation, the teachers may continue to teach, but the passion to teach the students from the heart and mind may be missing. (p. 21)

Teachers leave their professions or feel discouraged for myriad reasons: lack of communication between administrators and teachers, empathy, support, meaningful PD, positive school culture,
and a good salary, among others (Bickmore, 2013; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013; Khawary & Ali, 2015). Lack of support from the administrator or co-workers can lead to disheartening effects. How should teachers be encouraged in their profession? Teaching is a relational profession, just as teachers need to build positive and encouraging relationships with their students; teachers too need to have mentoring relationships with their peers and administrators.

In an interesting study on novice teachers in Japan, Ahn (2014) explains the concept of shokuin shitsu (teachers’ room): a place that is often off limits to students but a place where sustained learning goes on between teachers. Ahn talks about novice teachers being “molded and guided by more experienced educators” (p. 50); lesson planning, discussions on students’ results, classroom behaviors, and strategies, collaboration, curriculum issues, and also a haven where teachers can relax and enjoy some down time with other teachers. It is a room where continual nurturing is happening. “This support system may explain the high retention rate of beginning teachers in Japan” (p. 49) as compared to the statistics from the United States (p. 50).

**Literature Review Conclusion**

To be an effective teacher is a tall order. One needs to be knowledgeable, attuned to latest pedagogy research, collaborating with co-teachers, abiding by the administrators’ expectations, working alongside with families, responsible for students’ learning, culturally intelligent, and yet remain committed, flexible, enthusiastic, and passionate about the job. Given the challenging circumstances of being a teacher, this present study attempts to give a platform to Malaysian English teachers who are expected to possess all the above characteristics in the waves of the ever-changing policy of teaching English in Malaysian public schools.
Methodology

Research Design

In order to hear the voices of these Malaysian English teachers regarding their professional and personal lives, I employed a qualitative research methodology to investigate and to understand the thoughts of these teachers. According to Creswell (2015), “Qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore. The literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study, and you need to learn more from participants through exploration” (p. 16). Since this study involves Malaysian English teachers from different schools, this research is what Stake classifies as a “collective case study” (as cited in Creswell, 2015, p. 469), and Creswell (2015) adds, “multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue (p. 469). Case studies are useful in providing answers to “How?” and “Why” questions, and in this role can be used for exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory research (Rowley, n.d., p.16).

Participants

The five participants in this research study were selected using convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Malaysian English teachers who were currently teaching English in Malaysian secondary public schools. I chose the convenience sampling method because the participants were “willing and available to be studied” (Creswell, 2015, p. 144). Due to time and distance, I did not have much time to build relationships with other possible participants. One of the participants was included through the snowball sampling method as I had asked “participants to identify others to become members of the sample” (Creswell, 2015, p. 144).

In the initial recruitment phase, I established contact with an educational non-profit organization (NGO) in Malaysia that is in partnership with the Malaysian Ministry of Education.
The recruitment officer at this NGO linked me with one of their English teachers who was teaching in a nearby state where I was staying during my vacation to Malaysia last summer. I started our introductions through two emails and I was able to meet up with the teacher and established a relationship with her. This first teacher introduced two other English teachers to me while I was in Malaysia. They were informed of the possibility of being involved in my study and email addresses were collected. Through the snowballing method, I was able to secure five possible participants.

In the second recruitment phase, after the approval by the Institutionalized Review Board, I emailed invitational letters with attached informed consent forms (see Appendix A) to the five interested participants. Only four participants agreed to be part of the study. The fifth potential participant cited medical reasons for opting out. However, I managed to replace the fifth participant by emailing an alumnus of my undergraduate school in Canada on the NGO’s website. That teacher was interested in my study and agreed to be the fifth participant. Four of the participants were teachers from rural schools while one participant was a teacher in an urban school. All the teachers taught English from grades 7 to 11.

Four of the teachers (T1, T2, T4, and T5) were Malaysian Chinese with the exception of one teacher (T3) who was Malaysian Indian. These teachers represented two ethnic groups, possessed different educational qualifications, taught in two geographical areas (i.e., rural and urban), taught varying grade levels, and taught different ethnic groups of students in their classes. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

On the receipt of the approved consent forms, I emailed a set of questionnaires (see Appendix B) to collect data on the teachers’ background. The questionnaire consisted of two sections with open and close-ended questions— one section with ten items pertaining to the
teachers’ English language background and the other section with ten items on teachers’ current teaching context. After the completed questionnaires were emailed back to me, I established interview dates with the teachers.

**Interviews**

Forty -to fifty -minute interviews were conducted over Skype at the convenience of the participants since there was a twelve- hour time difference between Malaysian and the United

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Educational Qualification</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>School Area</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Ethnicity of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>M.Sc Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7,8,9</td>
<td>Malays/Indians/Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>BA Psych/Minor Educ. Counseling/Currently Dip. Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mixed - Ethnic Indigenous People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>B.Sc Biochemistry/ Masters Medical Science Post Grad. Dip. Educ.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>8,9</td>
<td>Malays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>B.Sc Biotechnology Post Grad. Dip. Educ.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>8,9,10</td>
<td>Malays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Master Chemistry Post Grad. Dip. Educ.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>10,11</td>
<td>Malays</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
States. T1 and T2 had one-on-one interviews and the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of data. T3, T4, and T5 also answered open-ended interview questions (see Appendix C) over the emails. T3, T4, and T5 were busy with their final year examinations as Malaysia’s academic year is from January to November and we were not able to set an appropriate interview time. These three teachers were teaching the exam-classes and therefore, were more time constrained. They were involved in preparing the students for their local and national examinations. Moreover, these teachers were in rural areas where the internet connectivity over Skye was poor. This challenge was overcome by additional emails. Overall, all participants collaborated in exchanging of emails when clarifications or elaborations of data were sought by me.

**Procedures in Data Collection and Data Analysis**

After audio-recording my interviews, I began to transcribe the data by hand. Creswell (2015) explains transcription as a “process of converting audiotape recordings or field notes into text data” (p. 238). I did the transcription right after each interview in order to record an accurate account of the interview. I stopped and reviewed the recording numerous times in order to ensure accuracy. I transcribed all words, background noises, and pauses as they “may provide useful information about times when interviewees cannot or will not respond to a question” (Creswell, 2015, p. 238). In such instances, I went back to the participants for clarifications through email exchanges. I transcribed other emotions like laughter, sighs, etc. since the Skype interviews were done with no video, so that I could capture the nonverbal cues of the participants. I wanted to be as detailed as I could in these interviews as they could provide important information for the study.
One of the first steps I did in analyzing the data was to read these transcriptions a few times. At times, it was too much reading and I would step away and do something else but at the same time, my mind was mulling the data repeatedly to get an idea of what the participants were trying to convey among all those words. As a beginning researcher, I was astonished as to how much data there was to transcribe and read through.

I used the method suggested by Creswell (2015) and wrote in the left margin (Codes) and the right margin (Themes/Ideas). Every time, I got the gist of what the participant was saying, I would segment the text, gave it a code or label, and wrote it in the left margin. As I continued to read the text data and “discover a common idea”, I would write the theme down in the right margin. I found it extremely helpful when I wrote the research questions down and wrote the codes under each research question. This enabled me to visualize my ideas on the spreadsheet that I had created.

Then, I took a step back and did the following: looked through the codes, identified frequency, or redundancy, and sought out the common themes. I “cycled back and forth between data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2015, p. 237). Eventually, I wrote down the themes or categories for the data collected.

Limitations of the Study

Data collection in this study was limited to Skype interviews, a questionnaire, and email exchanges between the researcher and the participants. In order to get a more in-depth understanding of this issue, it is recommended that more types of data be collected, for example classroom observations, documents, and/or reflective journals. (Creswell, 2015). I was able to conduct one-on-one interviews with only two participants and the rest of the participants responded to the interview questions through emails. One of the disadvantages of conducting
these interviews over Skype (with no video) and through the emails was not having the ability to gain access to extra information through their body language. Moreover, with email interviews, the participants had a longer time to deliberate on their answers and therefore, spontaneous responses were not obtainable (Opdenakker, 2006).

In the future, if research is to be done with overseas participants, we need to take into consideration the time difference, internet availability in rural areas, and the school calendar of the education system in the participants’ home countries. The ability to schedule appropriate interview times can be challenging if one is not aware of the school academic calendar where teachers might not be available. A larger sample of participants is proposed, as Strauss and Corbin stress that it would “offer us maximum opportunities for comparable analysis” (as cited in Creswell, 2015, p. 44). Since this is a small sample size, it is difficult to generalize the findings. However, it is still beneficial to learn from these Malaysian English teachers and I hope that their narratives will raise awareness and create a supportive environment for these teachers, not just to survive but also to thrive in their professional lives and in turn, better able to affect students’ outcomes.
Findings

What did these teachers have to say with regard to their roles as teachers? In this section, I present their perspectives based on the three research questions. I hope to give an insight into their world of teaching English in Malaysia.

Participants Demographics

All of the participants were Malaysian English teachers, in their early twenties, who obtained tertiary education from Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and North America. The teachers had at least a year of English teaching experience in Malaysian public schools.

Teacher 1 (T1). T1 was a Malaysian Chinese who grew up in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. T1 held a Masters in Engineering from a college in North America. She described herself as a native English speaker in this way, “Because I use English in many settings – at home, talking to friends, learning in university, and interacting with strangers. It was also the only language that I learned before the age of 7.” She communicated in English in all facets of her life except for conversations at school where most of her colleagues were Malays who spoke only Bahasa Malaysia. Besides English, T1 spoke Mandarin and Bahasa Malaysia, languages that she learned in school. T1 was an untrained English teacher who taught about 5.5 hours of grades 7 and 8 English per week, with an average of 20 students of varying English levels per class. She explained, “Most of my students barely know English…a wide gap between students.”

Teacher 2 (T2). T2 was a Malaysian of the Chinese ethnicity who grew up in a city. She possessed a Bachelors of Arts from a university in North America. She was in the process of pursuing her Diploma in Education with a History track at a local university. T2 was
proficient in Mandarin and spoke two other languages, *Bahasa Malaysia* and English. She learned some English in preschool and went on to complete her schooling in Chinese schools where the medium of instruction was Mandarin. In terms of being an English speaker, she depicted herself in this manner, “I would say I am a nonnative English speaker because this is my third language. I am using it more frequently and getting more familiar with it just because I have been using it intensively since Pre-U to university.” T2 was an untrained English teacher. She taught 10 hours of English per week to four classes of 8th graders at the beginners’ level. She explained that some of her students were of “primary (elementary) school level.”

**Teacher 3 (T3).** T3 was a teacher who spoke English, *Bahasa Malaysia*, and Tamil. She was a Malaysian Indian and Tamil was the language of communication with her parents. Both of her Science degrees were obtained locally and she had just completed her Diploma in Education in teaching high school Math. She saw herself as a native English speaker when she said, “A native speaker by definition would mean that the individual has acquired the said language growing up (early childhood). If I’m to follow this definition, then yes, I am a native English speaker.” She taught 6.5 hours of English per week to 8th graders whom she pointed out, “have little or almost no experience with the English language.”

**Teacher 4 (T4).** T4, a Malaysian Chinese, grew up in a metropolitan city. She held a science degree and was studying for her Diploma in Education with a concentration in English as a Second Language (ESL). T4 spoke three languages and they were English, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and *Bahasa Malaysia*. She considered herself a nonnative English speaker with this reasoning, “Though the first language I learned was English, I stopped speaking English at home at the age of about 4-5 years old after I
learned Cantonese.” T4 taught four beginners to intermediate classes, grades 7 to 9, and spent about 13 hours a week teaching English.

**Teacher 5 (T5).** T5, a trilingual Malaysian Chinese, characterized herself as a native English speaker, explaining, “…it is the first language I learned and preferred language for communicating.” T5 possessed a Masters from the United Kingdom and had always been in private schools (where English was the medium of instruction) for her earlier education. With science as a background and pursuing a postgraduate Diploma in Education with an ESL track, T5 taught 14 hours a week of beginning and intermediate English, to 10 and 11 graders. She categorized her classes as “the best and the worst classes”, and described them, “In Form 3 (Grade 10), I teach the second best and worst (4th) ranked classes while in Form 4 (Grade 11), I teach the best and worst (5th) ranked classes.”

With such a diverse background in upbringing and no formal teacher or limited English training, these English teachers chose to work for an NGO that had a vision of ending education inequity in Malaysia. Teachers were therefore, assigned to schools where they were most needed. In this study, I sought their viewpoints with regard to the three research questions:

**RQ1** - How do Malaysian English teachers feel about their professional lives?

**RQ2** - What issues do Malaysian English teachers see as having significant impact on their work?

**RQ 3** - What kinds of resources or development do Malaysian English teachers feel would support their teaching and professional lives?
Altruistic and Intrinsic Reasons for Teaching

After experiencing some peer teaching in her college in North America, T1 chose to teach after returning to Malaysia. She expressed some desire to help students as she experienced how they struggled in college from lack of a strong academic foundation in pre-college education. She went on to explain her journey into teaching

I did peer tutoring in school and I realized a lot of times, students struggle in college because of their lack of basics in schools. So, I thought I like to do something that is lower level and that is why I picked secondary school. So, part of the discovery of my career and future. I did engineering and I am interested in engineering too but I thought education, would be interesting as well. So, I decided to try teaching, and I wouldn’t know if I like teaching before I teach. I guess there are some desires to help the kids but I think it is both.

T1’s choice to teach was for altruistic reasons; “seeing teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job, combined with having a desire to help and a desire to improve society…” (Thomson & Turner, 2015, p. 579). T2 had a similar yearning to see an improvement in the Malaysian education system after been educated overseas. She commented, “I started to wonder if I can bring some changes into Malaysia education system.” T5 wanted to see how she could contribute toward improving the education system as well, as she shared these thoughts,

I came in wanting to make a difference and also to understand how education was like for Malaysians who weren’t as financially well-off as I am, and to be able to better understand why it is that education inequity exists. My family thinks what I am doing is
noble. My mum still calls it voluntary work sometimes even though I am paid. My colleagues and administrators think it is quite strange to have someone who studied abroad at X University decide to become a teacher in school, and they think I have better work options in terms of salary in the job market.

T3 summarized her desire to teach in a few lines,

I have had the privilege of an education. I can continue to study if I want to. Some of my students do not have that opportunity. I wanted to be able to provide them with enough access for them to see that they can achieve their dreams.

As for T4, she chose to be a teacher because of intrinsic reasons, which “address the aspects of the job activity itself, such as love for teaching…” (Thomson & Turner, 2015, p.579).

I enjoy hanging out/ hanging around kids. I always wanted to teach kindergarten or primary school kids, but God always leads me to teenagers! I acknowledge that I might not reap what I sow now, I might not even get to see the fruits of my labor, BUT, I acknowledge the fact that this role has been entrusted to me by God’s grace and I will give my best.

These teachers chose teaching either for altruistic or intrinsic reasons. The findings appeared to be ambivalent to some studies that state that teachers in non-western countries were more motivated by extrinsic reasons (Azman, 2013; Thomson & Turner, 2015).

Feelings about Teaching and Oneself

Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy. Incecay (2011) reports that teachers’ beliefs influenced their behaviors and in turn, might affect their instructional beliefs. What kinds of beliefs did the
Malaysian English teachers hold about themselves? In terms of effectiveness, T1 shared that “effectiveness is still bit low. I am struggling to see what I should teach first and what I should teach second.” T1 had never been trained to teach English and claimed “English is not my forte.” She compensated that lack with “At least I speak English, so I don’t struggle that much with knowing what is right or wrong. I just don’t know how to transfer that to the skills.” When asked to elaborate on her response with regard to “knowing what was right and wrong,” T1 was skeptical and mentioned that, “maybe, maybe. I wouldn’t’ say all the time.”

Mansfield and Woods-McConney (2012) state “a teacher’s sense of efficacy may be influenced by the particular curriculum or subject matter they are required to teach.” (p. 37). Some have a higher efficacy to teach one subject over the others. Not all the teachers, with the exception of T5, chose to teach English but instead were assigned to do so, and they had the following comments:

1. T1 wanted to teach Math. She verbalized her situation,

   I am not a language person, like I did not expect to teach language. There is a lack of skills that are available to both parties. Like the kids can’t understand much English. So, it is really hard to conduct the class in full English, they don’t understand and they tune out right away. On my side, it is the lack of what should be taught first and what should be taught second. I don’t know the sequence. That is my main struggle.

2. T2 signed up to teach History and remarked her role as an English teacher as such, “…I think my English is really not that good. The reason, I lack of experience. Sometimes, it makes me feel that I am not good enough for the students. I’m not teaching correctly.”
3. T3 chose Math and Science but was posted to teach English for two years. She shared her thoughts, “I use a fair bit of Bahasa Malaysia to help comprehension. I do wish I was better equipped to teach them. I am not sure that I’m doing it right but I do try and I can only hope it’s enough.”

4. T4 requested to teach Math or Science instead of English. T4 expressed, “I think of my ineffectiveness as being “naked” in terms of feeling unequipped and unprepared, without a proper certification to teach English. I feel guilty and inadequate in my role as an English teacher.”

5. T5 was the exception. She opted to teach English. She saw herself as an “OK teacher because English is my first language.”

**Prior Experience.** What did these teachers resort to when they were expected to teach English, with no training, and yet make a difference because they were proficient in the language? T3 did not feel comfortable in teaching English as shown by these statements I feel like I do not have adequate training to teach English. All the teaching I do is based on prior experiences I had with my family, teachers, and friends. I teach grammar and tenses based on what I know is right and not based on rules of grammar. I can’t say with certainty that I know the rules of grammar because I don’t.

Since there was a lack of training in English language teaching pedagogy, T1 lamented,

Everyone just try. Some people are doing okay but I don’t think our methods are very research-based. You know…it is trial and error and which works best for you. I remember how I learned Bahasa Malaysia. The teacher made me find all the words in the
dictionary. Now, my students are getting good at it. I try to remember how I learned another language.

T1’s teaching experience was based on how she was taught another language and her structure was shaped by her earlier learning experience. On the other hand, one can deviate from an ineffective experience to do the exact opposite (Carr et al., 2007). T2 did just that. She had the opportunity to be exposed to a different style of learning and teaching from her earlier education in Malaysia, while pursuing her undergraduate degree in North America:

In 2010, I had a chance to further my study in North America. During my study, I took some education courses and realized that there is a difference between North America and Malaysia education system. And apparently, North America education system is being recognized as one of the best education system in the world. In the same time, I personally, also like the learning and teaching style over there. I wanted something different for the students in my class.

Reflection. One of the ways that teachers can learn from their prior experience is through reflection (Farrell & Ives, 2015). T4, a teacher who was into her second year of teaching, did just that and commented,

The one big difference of my classes this year compared to last year is I speak MORE English – 90% instructional time is in English. Upon reflection after teaching for one year, I realized my stumbling block was my instructional language. I was too worry about students not understanding me that I used so much of their native language during English classes. Though I use mostly English now, I noticed that students still struggle,
but after repeating a few times with varying speed, students seem to be able to grasp my instructions.

T4 had reflected on her experience and had made some conscientious effort to improve her classroom teaching the following year. Here, T4 was demonstrating what Dormer (2011) terms as “appropriate teacher talk” (p.93); where the speed and the level of language used in the classroom is important to facilitate learning. However, in order to engage in reflective practice, teachers need to “collect data about classroom practices” because “ultimately, any changes in practices a teacher makes will be the result of concrete evidence rather than based on impulses or routine” (Farell & Ives, 2015, p. 595).

**Feelings about School Setting**

The participants in this study spent most of their lives living in urban areas and cities in Malaysia and other Western countries. All of them were currently teaching in an environment that was drastically different from where they were accustomed to. Getting adjusted to students, administrators, and other teachers who were ethnically divergent from them had been a challenge.

**Students.** Teachers in this study have varying comments about their students:

- T1 – “The good thing is that I see kids wanting to learn. Most of them are very enthusiastic”
- T2 – “I have seen students’ attitudes changed. I see their engagement in the class”
- T3- “There are students who are excited to learn but there are also those who’d rather be elsewhere. There are also students I’d rather avoid (out of school), as mean as it may sound but I am only human. My heart can only take so much’’

- T4- “My students have the potential but they don’t have the right mind set and learning attitudes. They take things for granted. They are complacent with life and do not see beyond where they are.”

- T5 had this to say:

  I have a soft spot for the weak students who try hard but I struggle to understand boys in my weak classes who are rude and show no interest in learning. I dread having to teach those classes at times although this is a mindset; I am trying to shift, with varying success. I understand but struggle to internalize that students who react rudely towards me have both emotional and mental poverty that usually stems from their backgrounds.

Teachers’ expectations, lack of classroom management, lack of culturally sensitivity, and lack of training or preparatory courses can lead teachers to perceive their students as disinterested, difficult, or weak (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014; Olvera, 2015). T5 seemed to have issues with the boys in her class, and Freiberg and Driscoll state, “Classes that are not managed well will generally lead to student discipline problems, and this can inhibit effective instructional approaches from occurring (as cited in Goh & Wong, 2014, p. 73). When probed to elaborate on the situation with the students in her class, T5 shared,

  Classroom management is something that I have always struggled with especially as a female teacher. In teaching older students, I teach 15 and 16. So, I teach the oldest kids. I think it is just a general, like…but they just respond much better to patriarchy, in terms of
wanting discipline. Because I am very young, I think my students see me as very
different because I am one of two Chinese teachers in the school and I am in the
minority group. I suppose they want attention but they don’t want to really care what kind
of attention it is. And that is why they act out. And, I am still trying how to better control
it.

However, merely controlling the classroom for management purposes is not pedagogically sound
by itself. Teachers need to look beyond “basic competent classroom practices…using the correct
pedagogical methods to engage students in their learning, cater to differing abilities of students
and to make the lesson interesting.” (Goh & Wong, 2014, p.74).

**Colleagues.** In Malaysia, teachers sit next to one another in the staff room or *bilik guru,*
where discussions about lessons and students are often heard; it is also a place where teachers
“take a break” and discuss their weekend activities. T2 and T3 seemed to have good social
relationships with their colleagues. T4 and T5 shared both social and professional relationships
with one another as they were in the same school, and T4 detailed their experience:

We lend a listening ear to each other. We encourage one another. We exchange ideas and
strategies on how to handle certain students or situations. We do cross-class brain breaks
for an 80-minute class. We combine classes where one teaches, one assists. We divide
students according to their levels and organize workshops for each group. We take turns
organizing weekly English intervention program.

T4 had a collaborative relationship by team teaching with other English teachers in her school
and Dormer (2011) calls it, “shared competence; where we want both to be successful…and the
key is working together and learning from one another” (p. 243). On the other hand, T1
experienced the opposite and related her working relationship as being “run pretty independently, to be honest. If you ask, definitely there will be (support) but if you don’t ask, you are on your own.” Here, T1 was a beginning, untrained English teacher with no support and no curriculum. She mentioned that the English teachers in her school were quite dedicated except that

they are also afraid to not teach the syllabus. It is hard to get a syllabus from them. They tell me to follow the scheme of work. They follow it really strictly and if not, and if I am not mistaken, and if we are caught, it won’t be good. The English teachers get together to discuss events, like the English club, and extracurricular activities instead of discussing pedagogy.

Throughout the interview, T1 shared her frustrations of not having a curriculum and when asked about support, she said, “There is a Photostat machine and you do your own thing. Not much.” T1 was a typical teacher who experienced the opposite of shared competence; isolated frustration where “teachers in such schools did not have adequate opportunities to get to know-let alone learn alongside or teach with- the other group of teachers on staff.” (Dormer, 2011, p. 242).

**Issues Significantly Affecting Teachers’ Work**

**Lack of Training**

These untrained English teachers were given 8-week training before they were assigned to the different schools across the country. During the training, teachers were introduced to “21st century teaching” which incorporated student-centered classrooms, collaborative learning, and classroom management skills. T1 recounted, “they (schools/organizations) basically taught us a little bit on how to teach reading and writing in a very…, like in an overview sense. So, the very
basic idea of applying all these skills, in reading and writing.” What these teachers could have used would be more comprehensive trainings in English teaching skills.

T1 expressed, “Sometimes it is frustrating knowing that there are solutions out there but I just don’t know where to go. I will be more effective if there were some guidance.” T1 would have benefitted from being trained in language teaching skills. Dormer (2011) suggested one of the skills is “methodological competence”, where the teacher has “the ability to choose classroom activities and techniques which will result in language learning” (p. 4). Many assume that native English speakers would have no struggles in teaching the language, after all, as the famous adage goes, “If you can speak English, you can teach it.” T5, a native speaker, contradicted this saying by sharing her struggles with linguistic knowledge in teaching grammar,

I think I do ok with grammar though it is difficult because for me, English is like a first language. So, grammar rules I had to learn so that I could teach because I did not know the grammar rules. They were like…I learnt it all inductively.

This self-realization of T5 corresponded with Lasagabaster and Sierra who describe that it is arduous to explain one’s own native language (as cited in Wong, 2009), and how much more, to teach it. Untrained ESL teachers “generally have a hard time explaining the language to the students.” (Wong, 2009, p. 136).

Studies (Lauer et al., 2014; Thomson & Turner, 2015) have indicated that teachers’ self-efficacy; how teachers are able to affect how students learn (Lyne, 2013), are related to professional development or trainings as suggested in this present study. T3 explained her lack of training candidly, “I have not attended any professional development or training with regards to English. I just look at what the other English teachers are doing and see how I can incorporate
that into my lessons.” She summed it up, “I do wish that I was better equipped to teach them. I would feel a whole lot more comfortable (teaching English) if I was taught the technicalities and nuances of the language.”

**Diverse Students**

One of the prominent features of the issue of EFL teaching environment in these Malaysian public schools was the varying proficiency levels of students in the classroom. T1 had students from one end of the spectrum to the other. “My students who are 13 years old have an English proficiency level of a kindergarten student. English is a foreign, a very foreign language to them”. During the in-house training, T1 clarified

teachers were told to give students the responsibility (to learn) but in my mind, I am thinking how are they gonna do it if they (students) do not know anything. We are supposed to follow the syllabus strictly but I would like to change it. The main reason is that the kids are not in the level they are supposed to be. The syllabus is not bad. It is pretty well planned for kids who are 13 years old but their English levels are like Standard 1, 2 or even kindergarten.

Here, we see T1 with disparate groups; it is not easy to teach gifted children or struggling children and at times, teachers need to adjust the curriculum or lessons to meet the needs of these students (Dixon et al., 2014). T2 concurred with this concern, “I feel kinda shocked when I see students that can barely read, barely can write, or barely can speak. It is out of my expectations.” Some of the students in her class are unmotivated and expressed themselves in this manner, “This is not my thing”, “I have no talent in it”, I don’t want to try”, among others. Faced with a situation like this, T1 remarked
It is difficult to apply the learning skills. The kids can’t seem to reach that level. Maybe, I don’t know how to apply it for really low level texts. As with disinterested or lower-level students, I just leave them there. Sometimes, I don’t know what to do. I just let them copy from their friends.

In order for teachers to respond to individual needs, teachers need to apply modifications to their instructions and it could be challenging for teachers, especially new teachers. Dixon et al., (2014) explain

Teachers are the ones who take charge of these modifications, and their skills in understanding the characteristics of student learning and then using this knowledge in adapting lessons is paramount to success in this complex process. Teachers who do not recognize ways to differentiate or who do not feel capable of instructing different groups at the same time struggle with differentiating instruction (p. 113).

With all these challenges posed against these teachers, what kind of assistance do they need, not only to sustain their teaching vocation, but also to be able to be effective in their professional lives?

**Lack of a School Curriculum**

T1 did not have a curriculum to teach. She expressed in this manner

I don’t know what structure, what curriculum to use. The textbook is really hard to follow. Like they (the students) don’t know basic English and they (teachers) teach high level. I know there should be a curriculum somewhere that we could just use. Sometimes it is frustrating knowing that there are solutions out there but I don’t know how to get it.
T1 tried teaching her students by employing the *trial and error* method, and looking at the exam papers to figure out what the students needed to know and she would teach to the test.

**Need for Training**

Guskey refers to professional development (PD) in the education field as “program and strategies designed to change the beliefs and practices of teachers in order to improve the achievement of their students (as cited in Lauer et al., 2014, p. 207). Therefore, in an attempt to grow teachers in the profession in Malaysia, various bodies are involved in providing professional development: the Malaysian MOE, in-school trainings, and the NGO. T1 explained, “Experts in their area from outside sources who train us conduct the in-house trainings that were implemented by the MOE. These trainings are not engaging (laughs) and they are usually about higher thinking skills and government policies.” T2 seemed to experience similar types of PD. She shared,

“*Guru cemerlang* or expert teachers from the surrounding school districts usually conduct these in-house trainings. I find that some of the speakers especially when they are talking about 21st century learning are just talking. They make me question, “Are you really doing this in your class?” They are less effective than the courses that we had outside, like from the NGOs.

Kabilan and Veratharaju (2013) concluded

Although the Ministry of Education (MOE) propagates that the PD are now school based, the truth is that the operationalization of PD programmes is still very much a cascade type of programmes (top-down). This is because the MOE still dictates and organizes PD courses, and hence teachers are still dependent on the MOE for their PD (p. 335).
What would constitute a more effective PD for these teachers? What works for one school district might not work for the other. What works in one classroom might not work in the other? PD will have a more powerful influence if they possessed these qualities: contextualized activities (Guskey, 2009; Raval et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 2014), content-focused, provided opportunities for participant practice, group discussions, a participant-centered setting and follow-up support (Lauer et al., 2014, p. 218).

Effective Training. T4 felt that learning happened for her during these times:

Although there were lectures that I needed to attend in my postgraduate diploma in education, I strongly felt that my learning happened during the many discussions with my course mates. On top of that, I learned from my course mates’ presentations.

T1 expressed her desire for trainings that were contextualized and that provided active learning:

I think training in the sense of seeing different people teach at different levels, like incorporating the same skills. That will really make me understand all these concepts better. It can show me how it is done with different levels, so that I can see how it works out in our own classroom.

T5 voiced her own needs for PD and trainings that she had attended by the MOE as being “lacking in terms of execution”. Instead, T5 had found courses online that were helpful to her own professional growth and justified these courses as “very applicable because the case studies given and the methods suggested were easily applied in the classroom.” T5 had found that her learning was transferable to her individual students in her classroom. “Good teachers teach classes but great teachers teach individual students”, according to Dormer (2011, p. 53).
Supportive Administrator

While talking to these teachers, many of them shared the role of their administrators and its influence on them as teachers. Some have administrators that esteemed their teaching, like T2. She described her administrators:

I think I am very lucky as my school principle gives me the full support, like everything he can give me. He even praise (me) in front of other teachers and would say, “Ms. T2’s class is very fun and interactive. You should go and see her class. I kinda noticed that he didn’t give me much responsibilities outside of teaching so that I can focus on my class and just my teaching. It is the same with the vice-principal; she always uses my class as an example. In terms of support, this is the best support I can get from the school.

T4 had characterized her administrators as “very supportive” and went on to explain that the English teachers had the freedom to organize any workshops that they deemed were necessary for the students. However, T5 shared her experience in this manner:

If there were one thing I would change, it would be the principal. I have come to see that having an understanding leader who knows how to show empathy in order to inspire and motivate those under him/her is very important to me. My current principal has fallen very short of this, to the point that one third of the teachers have applied to transfer schools because they are so antagonized by her leadership style. The principals and administrators at my school don’t make time to check in on new teachers to help in settling in, and I think that would have gone a long way in making me feel more included in the school community (since I am a racial minority here).
The support system is important in the retention rate of teachers, especially beginning teachers (Ahn, 2014; Struyven & Vanhournout, 2014); we hear T5’s comments, and she concluded with “I don’t want to teach anymore.” T1 expressed that she had no desire to continue teaching in the public schools “as there is a lack of PD and career progression, which I think I am looking for at this age.” Do you hear these voices sounding from Malaysia?
Implications

Due to the increasing demands from the Malaysian Ministry of Education, employers, higher education establishments, families, and students, Malaysian English teachers have never been under such tremendous pressure to improve the English standards among Malaysian students. In this study, we hear their “voices” of ambivalence, and yet, a spirit of determination among these young professionals. The findings from this study provided a glimpse into the lives of five untrained, tertiary educated Malaysian English teachers and the various struggles that affected their performance in the classrooms and consequently, may have created a negative attitude among their students toward the English language. Among some of the more prevalent issues were a lack of training and a lack of support from the educational entities. T1 acknowledged that her main struggle was her lack of skills and her students tuning out right away when the class was a challenge. As for T5, she expressed her frustrations working with a leader who showed no understanding or empathy during her two-year contract that ended with her leaving the profession. As a result of these findings, I provide the following suggestions to increase the effectiveness of English teachers in Malaysia (see figure 1).
Figure 1- The essentialities in a journey of a novice teacher to an effective teacher.
A Need for Training in ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages)

The teachers in this study possessed college degrees and were proficient in English but they encountered classroom circumstances that were beyond their own competencies. Some of these teachers were native speakers of the English language; T1, T3, and T5 grew up speaking the language and English was used in all facets of their lives. Generally, it is harder to explain or teach one’s native language (Wong, 2009) if one does not possess the “teaching skills for effective language teaching” (Dormer, 2011, p. 4). These findings suggest that not merely teacher education courses, but also linguistic knowledge and training in ESL or EFL are necessary for English teachers to be competent in their professions and to build their self-efficacy. Teachers’ beliefs about their self-efficacy are correlated to how competent they are in the subject matter and consequently, influence their behaviors in the classrooms (Bandura, 1993; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Mansfield & Woods-McConney, 2012; Yunus et al., 2006) that can affect students’ outcomes.

A Need for Contextually Related Professional Development (PD)

In order for teachers to stay relevant in the teaching profession and to meet the needs of their students, PD “remains key to educators’ progress and professional growth” (Guskey, 2009, p. 226). T3 lamented, “I have not attended any professional development/training with regards to English” and T4 added, “I don’t mean to criticize the structure of the course but I strongly felt that my learning happened during the many discussions with my course mates.” T4 and T2 shared that guru cemerlang or exemplary teachers from their districts are assigned by the Ministry of Education to conduct trainings in schools. However these trainings were not engaging as the trainers were “just talking” or lecturing and non-interactive. The findings in this
study suggest that it is NOT just any PD but PD activities that are focused on specific instructional practices, provide opportunities for teachers’ participation, and are contextually relevant (Guskey, 2009: Lauer et al., 2014) will facilitate learning on the part of participants. Goh and Wong (2014) add, “Any professional development programmes to improve teaching quality also need to be relevant to the real problems of classroom practices” (p. 78). Teachers need to have input in creating programs that can enhance students’ learning and therefore, increase teachers’ efficacy. It also appears that PD that includes both content and participative activities for these teachers would be helpful. Teachers in the study were looking for strategies and methodologies that would develop language skills like student-centered methodologies, effective corrective feedback, group work, formative assessments, incorporating activities and games in the classrooms that will enhance language learning. Like in the words of T3, “I do wish I was better equipped to teach them. I always want to make it fun but in doing so, I am not sure if all they’re getting is fun and no actual knowledge.”

A Need for Educational Entities to Understand the Lack of Effective Working Conditions and Its Consequences

Due to the shortage of English teachers in Malaysia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and other NGOs have employed teachers based on their English proficiency, without requiring teaching qualifications in language teaching (Darus, 2009; Gaudart ,1999; Then & Teing, 2011) . And yet, they do not provide ESOL training, according to this study. It is no surprise that these English teachers felt ineffective in their roles and T3 commented that she “felt guilty” without the proper certification to teach English. It is imperative that the MOE and well-meaning NGOs begin to understand the negative consequences of placing untrained teachers in public schools. Hiring English teachers based solely on English proficiency might not be a sound decision in
improving the English standards in schools. In fact, this decision might demoralize teachers and might result in difficulty in retaining beginning teachers.

I concur with Kabilan (2003) and Kabilan and Veratharaju (2013) that English teachers are caught in the middle of the MOE’s ever-changing policies and instead of positive outcomes for both teachers and students, the findings in this study suggest that teachers are frustrated and feel ineffective. The findings in this study suggest that the Ministry of Education and the NGOs need to provide English teachers with training in both pedagogy and linguistic knowledge. Therefore, policy makers should revisit their teacher education programs to ensure that English teachers receive comprehensive training in teaching English.

**A need for culturally competent school leaders.** The findings from this study seem to indicate that there is a lack of support from school administrators, especially the school principals, in providing sufficient encouragement and direction to enhance integration for these beginning teachers, who are culturally and ethnically different from the general populace of the school. T5 termed herself as a “racial minority here (school and community)” and she expressed her disappointment when the principal and other administrators did not try to include her in the school environment. She felt that she did not belong and found “the language of interaction to be a barrier because I am not so fluent in *Bahasa Ngori* (the local dialect of *Bahasa Malaysia*) and the environment is very different from what I am used to”. As a result, T5 decided to leave the teaching profession.

The ability to retain teachers in the profession requires a supportive administration and school leaders who are willing to mentor and nurture teachers, especially beginning teachers (Ahn, 2014; Khawary & Ali, 2015). One way that this may be accomplished is by providing
cultural sensitivity courses and workshops among the teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. These beginning teachers may benefit from a semester of field experience in prospective schools that are culturally different, prior to being formally placed. If things were done differently, teachers of such caliber in this study might have discovered their calling to teach and indeed, make a difference in the lives of these students. English could have been presented as a learnable language, instead of just a foreign, a very foreign language.

Further Research

My recommendation for further research would be to enlist a bigger sample of English teachers in urban and rural schools so that it may represent the broader population of Malaysian English teachers. Additional studies on voices of English teachers who are ethnically similar to their students and the school environment might provide an insight into the social cultural perspectives on English teaching in Malaysia. In that case, questions such as teachers’ perception of acceptance and self-efficacy, relations between students’ ethnic similarities and language learning, and others can be further explored.

Conclusion

As a Malaysian, I myself have experienced English teachers who could hardly speak English but taught the subject nevertheless. However, this research was done with proficient English-speaking teachers hired right out of college who found themselves facing challenges teaching the language. This research gave them a voice that would otherwise go unheard. Part of what has been heard is that language proficiency without training in language teaching is not effective in an English classroom setting. It not only demotivates students but demoralizes the
teachers as well. I hear these voices; they now linger in my heart, and I pray that the Lord will open the door for me to train and encourage Malaysian English teachers.
References


Appendix A

**Teacher Invitational Email:** Readability Index: 7.5 – (Flesch-Kincaid)
(Personal Email)
Subject: Participation in a TESOL Research Project

Dear Teachers,

As you may know, I am working toward finishing my Master of Education in TESOL. I am studying the perspectives of English Language teachers working with English Language Learners in public schools in Malaysia. I would like to hear your views about teaching English in Malaysia.

If you choose to participate and you are at least 18 years old, you will answer a questionnaire that takes about 15 minutes. I will set up an interview time over Skype that is convenient to you. You will be part of a 30 to 45 minute interview, which will be audio recorded. You might have to participate in 3 to 5 emails for clarifications to your responses. Your responses will be confidential and voluntary. You can choose not to answer questions if you do not want to. You are not required by the school to participate in this study.

See the attached consent form that describes what you will do if you wish to participate. Your participation will be from 28th September to 13th November, 2015.

If you agree to be part of this study, please reply to this email with the signed consent form.

Thank you so much.

Yours sincerely,

Lilian Schultz
Title: A Narrative Study on Malaysian English Language Teachers

Researcher: Lilian Schultz

9884 Otterbein Church Rd, Newburg, PA 17240

+1 717 423-6376

Skype Name: felicia4my

lschultz@messiah.edu

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of English Language teachers working with English Language Learners in public schools in Malaysia.

Procedures

In the first week of October, if you wish to participate, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that will take about 15 minutes. This questionnaire will be emailed to you. You will scan and email the completed questionnaire to me. You might be asked for clarification through email correspondence.

In the second week of October, I will set up an interview time over Skype that is convenient for you through email. You will participate in a 30 to 45 minute interview with me, which will be audio recorded. You can choose not to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. You can choose to stop
anytime you like during the interview. You are not required by the school to be part of this study. After the interview, you might be asked for clarification through email correspondence.

The interview and possible email correspondence will occur from mid-October until the end of November, 2015.

Will you allow audio recording for the interview? Please check one:

- YES
- NO

**Discomforts and Risks**

There are no risks involved beyond those in everyday life. During the interview, you might feel some discomfort when you are talking about your experiences.

**Benefits**

There are no benefits.

**Duration/Time**

Oct 4 – A questionnaire will be emailed to you. You will take 15 minutes to answer this questionnaire. You will scan and email the questionnaire back to me.

Oct 6 – An interview date over Skype will be set up at your convenience through email.

Oct 8 to Nov 13 – You will participate in a 30 to 45 minute interview over Skype. You might be involved in 3 to 5 email correspondence for clarification, if needed.

**Statement of Confidentiality**

The data will be stored in a password-protected file on my password-protected personal computer. Only the Institutional Review Board (IRB), my advisor, and I will have access to the data. All data including your names, recording, and information will be kept confidential. No one at your school will know that you have participated in this study.
Your name and the name of your school will not be used on the thesis document or any other publications resulting from this study. You will be identified as “Teacher A” from “A public school in Malaysia.”

**Right to Ask Questions**

If you are hurt by this study, please contact me at +1 717-650-4860. If you cannot reach me, you can contact my advisor, Dr. Jan Dormer at +1 717-796-1800, ext. 7053 or at jdormer@messiah.edu. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Messiah College’s Office of the Provost at (717-766-2511 x5375).

**Voluntary Participation**

You are a volunteer in this research. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You are not required by the school to participate. Your school will not know whether you have chosen to participate or not.

If you withdraw from this study, none of your data will be used.

You must be at least 18 years old to take part in this research. If you agree to take part in this study, please scan and email this signed consent form to me.

___________________  ____________________
Signature            Date

___________________
Printed Name
Appendix B

Questionnaire for English Language Teachers

(Readability Index: 6.4 –Flesch-Kincaid)

Name: ______________________________ Date: _________________________

Background

1. How long have you been teaching English?

☐ Less than 1 year
☐ 1-2 years
☐ 2-3 years
☐ 3-4 years
☐ More than 5 years (Please specify the number of years) __________

2. What training/education do you have in teaching English?

☐ Occasional seminars, workshops, etc.: Number of hours: __________
☐ Certificate course: Number of hours: __________
☐ Associate degree (1-2 years post-secondary)
☐ Bachelor’s degree (3-4 years post-secondary)
☐ Master’s degree (beyond a 3-4 year Bachelor’s degree)
☐ No specific education/training in teaching English
☐ Other: __________________________________________________________
3. What training/education do you have in **other types of teaching**? Please explain the type of teaching (e.g. elementary education, art education):

__________________________

- Occasional seminars, workshops, etc.: Number of hours: __________
- Certificate course: Number of hours: __________
- Associate degree (1-2 years post-secondary)
- Bachelor’s degree (3-4 years post-secondary)
- Master’s degree (beyond a 3-4 year Bachelor’s degree)
- No specific education/training in teaching.
- Other: __________________________________________________________

4. If you do not have training/education in teaching, what kind of qualifications do you possess (e.g. Bachelors of Science in Biology)?

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

5. What languages/dialects were spoken in your home when you were growing up?

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

6. What languages/dialects do you now speak in your home?

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________
7. What language did you learn:
   First: ___________________
   Second: ___________________
   Third: ___________________
   Other: ____________________________

8. What is your strongest language in:
   Speaking: ___________________
   Listening: ___________________
   Reading: ___________________
   Writing: ___________________
   Grammar knowledge: ________________
   Vocabulary: ________________

9. What language do you use the most for:
   Conversations with family: ___________________
   Conversations with friends: ___________________
   Conversations at work: ___________________
   Listening to music: ___________________
   Watching television: ___________________
   Reading for enjoyment: ___________________
   Reading for work: ___________________
   Personal writing (diaries, journals): ___________________
   Informal writing (letters, notes): ___________________
Formal writing (business letters): ________________________________

Professional writing: ________________________________

10. If you did not grow up speaking English, describe:

   **When** you learned English: ________________________________
   ________________________________

   **Where** you learned English: ________________________________
   ________________________________

   **How** you learned English: ________________________________
   ________________________________

11. Would you describe yourself as a nonnative English speaker or a native English speaker? Why?

   ____________________________________

   ____________________________________

   ____________________________________

**Current Teaching Context**

12. How many classes do you teach? What are their forms (grades)?

   ____________________________________

13. What is the average number of students in your class?
14. How many hours per week do you teach English?

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________

15. With regard to your English lessons, what kinds of resources are available? (Check all that apply)

☐ National Curriculum
☐ Teacher’s text supplied from textbook companies
☐ Own ideas and experiences
☐ Resources over the Internet
☐ Others: __________________________________________________________

16. How comfortable are you teaching English?

___ Very comfortable    ___ Somewhat comfortable    ___ Not at all comfortable

Can you explain why? ________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________
17. About how many non-teaching hours per week are you at school for:
   a. preparation (include at home too) ____________________
   b. meetings ______________________
   c. extracurricular activities ________________________
   d. social events ______________________
   e. others (please specify) ________________________

18. How much English is used during the English lessons? Circle the answer that best describes your classroom.
   a. Only English is used in my English classes.
   b. English is used most of the time in my English classes, but I use the local language for classroom management.
   c. I use the local language for classroom management and explanations, but everything else is in English.
   d. I use a lot of the local language in my English classes because ____________________________________________
   e. Not very much English is used in my English classes because ____________________________________________

19. What percentage most accurately reflects the language use in your class:
   a. 100 % in English
   b. 80% in English
   c. 50% in English
   d. 30% in English
   e. less than 30% in English

20. Which of these statements best describes the English usage in your class:
a. I, the teacher, almost always speak English in class and many students also do or try to speak English in class.
b. I, the teacher, almost always speak English in class but fewer than half of the students speak very much English in class.
c. I, the teacher, only use English about half of the time in class because I need to use the local language for______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
d. Both I, the teacher and the students use a lot of the local language in class because________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Other:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

21. How much English is used with your students outside of the classroom? Circle the answer that best describes your situation.

a. I, the teacher almost always speak English outside of the classroom and many students speak or try to speak in English too.

b. I, the teacher sometimes speak English outside of the classroom and some of the students speak or try to speak in English too.

c. I, the teacher seldom speak English outside of the classroom because
______________________________________________________________________________

d. I, the teacher hardly ever speak English outside of the classroom because
______________________________________________________________________________

22. I use the following classroom strategies during my English lessons. You may circle the one(s) that you use and how often you use them.

a. Collaborative group work. __________________ per week.

b. Action-based activities (e.g. games, songs, role-plays, etc.) __________________ per week
c. Open-ended questions: ____________________________ per week.

d. Others: __________________________

________________________ per week.

23. Provide some information regarding your English classes. An example is given in *italics*. If you want to list more, you may use the back of this page.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>English level</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form 1, Class 1</td>
<td>Beginners</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>all skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

**Interview Questions for Teachers A, B, C, D, and E: Readability Index: 7.1 – (Flesch-Kincaid)**

1. Please tell me about your students and their levels.
2. Can you tell me about your lesson plans? What are the different skills that are taught in your lessons?
3. Please tell me about resources that are available for your lesson preparation?
4. Please share some of the activities that you use in the class.
5. Can you share your thoughts about professional development or trainings that you have attended?
6. Can you tell me about the kinds of support that you receive from the administrators?
7. Can you share your experiences as an English teacher? Can you tell me about a funny moment in a class?
8. Can you tell me about something that was challenging for you during an English class?
9. Can you share a moment of success in your classroom?
10. Can you share your level of interactions with students in and out of class? How about out of school?
11. Please share some of your interactions with families of students.
12. Can you give me an idea of your interactions with the community?
13. Can you share about your experiences or collaboration with the other English teachers in this school?
14. Please tell me about social interactions with other teachers.
15. How do you view yourself as an English teacher?
16. How do you think the students see you as an English teacher?
17. Can you share your colleagues, administrators, or families ‘perception about you?
18. What are your goals and aspirations? Can you tell me about them?