

# "I Can't Practice What I Preach" – The Case of English Language Teachers

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**Abstract** In 2013, Malaysia ranked first in the English Proficiency Index (EPI)[6]. However, a shocking discovery revealed that only 27.8% teachers met the minimum standards of the Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) [7],[8]. This was reflected on the students' performance revealing a distinct failure in English language subjects in every major examination in Malaysia (UPSR= 25%, PMR= 23%, and SPM= 22%). 50% failed English 1119 and the performance of MUET revealed that 52% candidates getting only band 1 and band 2[7]. Language attrition is a phenomenon where one's proficiency in a language deteriorates due to several factors. One of the most prominent factors is the disuse of the language itself. The phenomenon can be seen as a threat to teachers or instructors of a language as the quality of their instructions can be deemed questionable should they experience the phenomenon. The research aims to investigate factors that hinder teachers' use of English in their workplace and daily lives. The study employing the qualitative method took place in the municipal of Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia. The decision to conduct the study in the municipal of Machang, Kelantan, was due to the uniqueness of the state itself for its prevalent EV[121],[13],[14]. The principal results revealed that the factors hindering the use of English language among informants were vastly related but not limited to EVT[25]. There were also factors related to policy. The study tapped into a new dimension linking language attrition, language maintenance, teaching and learning, sociolinguistics, and policy, where the results were inter-related to one another.

**Keywords** Language Attrition, Proficiency, Language Instruction

## 1. Introduction

Language attrition is a phenomenon where there is a

reduction of proficiency in a language due to less or no contact with the community using the language as well as the language itself[1]. Proficiency in a language is highly attributed to hearing/listening, speaking, and interacting with/in the target language[2]. The contact with the community using the language as well as the usage of the language highly influence the proficiency of the particular language. Bardovi-Harlig and Stringer[3] added two more points influencing language attrition being the setting is either pathological or non-pathological.

Language attrition in pathological setting is language attrition phenomenon caused by health conditions leading to the deterioration in language proficiency. Meguro et al.[4] investigated 4 senior Japanese immigrants in Brazil with Alzheimer. In this work, they examined language proficiency of bilingual adults in both languages. At the end of the research, they concluded that language deterioration could be highly influenced by the language of the environment – the dominant language of the context as opposed to the minor and the deteriorating language.

Non-pathological setting of language attrition is the condition where the subject is not having any health problems that influence their proficiency. This is illustrated by Miyaoka's claim[5] that the Yupik language, an Alaskan language, started to deteriorate due to the implementation of a bilingual education system. This system was seen to accelerate the conversion of the Yupik language to English resulting in the decline of Yupik.

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Among all the countries in Asia, Malaysia ranked first with the index of 58.99 in the English Proficiency Index (EPI) as displayed in the Education First website, [www.ef.com](http://www.ef.com). This was closely followed by Singapore (58.92) at second place with the difference of only 0.07. Malaysia has also shown an improvement of 3.45 in the comparison of the second index and the third index

published recently[6]. The improvement reflected how the English language proficiency of Malaysians has increased over the period.

The data is however faced with a shocking discovery when it was revealed that from 61,000 teachers in Malaysia, only 27.8% met the minimum standards of the Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) as they were tested[7],[8]. 5.1% were at the basic level and 4.94% were below the basic level. The majority, being the rest of the mentioned groups required uplifting[7] in which the government has launched the Pro-ELT programme to enhance teachers' proficiency. Teachers with band B2 and below for secondary school and band B1 and below for primary school have to undergo this programme with the goal of all English language teachers in Malaysia to achieve band C1[9].

The results were also reflected in the students' performance where from the data by British Council, it was revealed that the failure in English language subjects in every major examination in Malaysia was distinct. The failure rate in UPSR was 25%, PMR 23% and SPM 22%. 50% failed English 1119 and the performance of MUET was also low with 52% candidates getting only band 1 and band 2[7].

Researches on foreign language (FL) or second language (L2) attrition among teachers due to the disuse of English language for certain periods have been conducted. A quite recent study[10] reported that English Foreign Language (EFL) majors faced problems in retaining their vocabulary of the English language which is the target language after leaving university. This was not supposed to happen on them as they need this vocabulary to help them in their teaching of English. These EFL majors can be said to have faced lexical attrition.

Another research by Abbasian and Khajavi[11] also reported that Persian literature teachers who received training in English language also faced the attrition. It was found in their study that the attrition rate de-contextualized lexicon of their English language, overwhelming their contextualized English language lexicon. This happened due to the non-exposure to the target language which is the English language.

In relation to the situation in Malaysia, not all places or states in Malaysia widely use English. An example of this situation can be seen in the state of Kelantan where most of the population do not even use the national language of Bahasa Malaysia, let alone using a language considered as foreign such as the English language. Therefore, in such a situation, limited or even no contact with the English language can be found. Thus, the attrition process of the English language could happen among those who could use English language as their L2.

#### 1.1.1. Language situation in Kelantan

In Kelantan, the language choice of the people is the Kelantanese dialect in which they regard as one of the most

influential markers of identity that if a member of the community uses the standard Malay language, he or she will be labelled as "kecek lua" (speaking the outside language). They also regard those who are non-Kelantanese as "oghe lua" (outsiders) and members as "oghe kito" (our people)[12].

The Kelantanese dialect can be regarded as the lingua franca in Kelantan[12] with even the Chinese Kelantanese use the dialect in their everyday conversations and they are very proficient in it[13]. The dialect is widely accepted and widely used in the state of Kelantan that it is even used in formal settings such as in government and private institutions although not in written forms[12].

The use of the dialect is wide-spread and it sometimes becomes a hindrance for people outside of this region as the words in this dialect, although still possess quite a similarity with the standard Malay language, which is the national language in Malaysia, are quite hard to comprehend. This strong identity marker sometimes if not most, rejects other language to enter the setting[14].

## 1.2. Problem Statement

Language attrition could happen in a community with high Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV). The language facing the threat of attrition here is not the language of the community but other languages which used to be spoken by member(s) of the community. In conjunction with the study, the state of Kelantan can be considered as a high EV community. The attitude of the speaker itself is shaped through experience and in Kelantan, where the dialect is widely used even in formal settings[12], the perception of the people would be that it is only the dialect which possesses the most importance leading to them to project a negative attitude and not motivated to learn and use other languages (in this case, the English language). Following the activation and inhibition theory, the informants of the present study, the Kelantanese English language teacher, would face English language attrition due to the severance of contact with, and less activation of the English language.

Given the language situation in Kelantan, it is clear that the dominant language in use is the Kelantanese dialect. The Kelantanese dialect, as mentioned by Zuraidah[12], is even used in the formal settings in which the classroom setting is considered one of them. It is clear that the contact with the English language as a whole, and especially in classroom setting, is severed. Not even the national language, the Malay language, could be widely used in this unique state. This could pose problems in English language teaching and learning as a language can undergo the attrition process and this can be due to another language being the dominant at the scene[4]. When teachers themselves are faced with English language attrition, they would not be able to fully carry out their duty as an English language teacher as Wilkerson[2] mentioned that "classroom should afford students as many opportunities as

possible for input, output, interaction and negotiation of meaning in the target language.” Language attrition could hinder the teachers to provide their students with the opportunities for possible input, output, interaction, and negotiation of meaning in English language due to, they, the teachers, themselves are no longer at their best level of competency in English language. Hence, the study of language attrition could provide an insight on the English language attrition phenomenon among English language teachers in this state which implicates on the foreign language teaching and learning[15] in Kelantan.

### 1.3. Literature Review

#### 1.3.1. The Activation Threshold Hypothesis

The Activation Threshold Hypothesis (ATH) explains that frequently used items are better retained and easily reactivated when needed. Less used items however face gradual loss and replaced by items with frequent use[17].

Activation Threshold Hypothesis (ATH) was proposed by Paradis[18]. In this theory, motivation is also said to have an impact on the activation threshold as it could raise and lower the activation threshold[17]. The Attitude Theory is derived from the work of Gardner and Lambert[19]. The theory explains the relationship between attitude, motivation and use of language. Attitude is formed through perception[20] of an individual towards an entity (e.g. a group of people using a different language as opposed to the one perceiving). Different attitudes and perceptions develop different motivation towards doing or taking part in an event (learning, using, and maintaining a language) related to the particular group or language spoken. This happens as a result of the perception and attitude one has on the member of the group and also due to other reasons one has for example reason to learn the particular language as well as reason of migration into the group that uses the language[19],[20].

Attitude and perception are developed and can be changed with experiences and direct contact with the reality. Positive perception leading towards positive attitude could be achieved from a positive or good experience with member(s) of the group while negative perception causing negative attitude towards a language or the community speaking the language is formed from negative personal encounters with the group[20].

Brown[20] added that the positive attitude benefits language learning and use as learners and users of the language are motivated in learning, using, and maintaining the language. Negative attitude however, hinders positive linguistic choice in which the learners or the users would not be motivated to use and maintain the language thus leading to a possibility of the particular language facing attrition. A positive emotion towards a particular language lower the activation threshold as the user tend to use the language while a negative emotion towards a particular language lead to infrequent use of the language illustrating

the raise in the activation threshold[17].

From the previous paragraph, it can be said that items (linguistic items such as lexical or grammatical items) with high activation require less stimuli for them to be reactivated at times as the activation threshold of these frequently used items are lowered[18]. The theory is highly associated with the frequency of use and reinforcement of an item or a language[16].

While attitude influence language learning and acquisition, it could also lead to language attrition when looked at in the opposing way it works on language learning and acquisition[16]. In relation to language attrition, de Bot[21] mentioned that insufficient activation of linguistic items could be one of the factors leading to attrition. This is illustrated by Andersen[22] mentioning that language which is seldom used or activated tend to face attrition. The studies by Ammerlaan[23] and Hulsen[24] validated this claim where in their research findings, it was found that at least, certain lexical items in a language require more stimuli for them to be retrieved and reactivated.

#### 1.3.2. The Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) proposed by Giles et al.[25] describes group's action performed collectively which displays distinctive features that separate them with other groups. This action represents identity marker.

The vitality of ethnolinguistic group is influenced by three class factors namely status, demography, and institutional support factors[26]. The status factors refer to wealth, social status, and social-historic prestige while demography factors are the number of members and the distribution of this number in territories. The institutional support factors refer to the privilege of using the language in a variety of spaces and or institutions such as at home, school, formal and informal situations. Bourhis et al.[26] later mentioned that more vitality is possessed when there is more of privilege towards each of the factors.

Under this theory, Yağmur and Ehala[27] mentioned that the level of Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) determines the vulnerability of a language belonging to a group to attrition. They mentioned that high EV group maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings.

Low EV group language however, as opposed to the high level EV group language, is prone to face language attrition. This is due to the influence that EV has on language use as mentioned by Bourhis et al.[26]. When there is another group with higher EV, the language of the group with a lower EV faces threats as their use are impeded by certain factors as mentioned in the above paragraph as they do not have the privilege to be used in certain places. This leads to the language with the low EV to attrite or being replaced by the mainstream language as minimal maintenance of language use is practiced by the

group members.

### 1.3.3. Identity, Attitude and Attrition

People always hold incorrect conception which is the choice of language stands for their identity and preference of culture. According to Fei et al.[28], young Malaysians who speak good English are more often labeled as “others” such as ‘bukan Melayu’ (non-Malay) who are excluded from the same ethnic community. For some Malaysians speaking English too often means rejecting their own origins and culture.

This might be one of the vital reasons why Malaysians, especially suburban local people, evade speaking English and instead use their dialects to show solidarity and affability of same race. The perspective that language is tightly linked with personal identity might influence the motivation and attitude of both teachers and students implementing English with their colleagues or fellow friends in daily lives. The teachers may intend to pursue identity and sense of belonging in their working place.

Sometimes, teachers use the dialects in the classroom as a result of the needs of students rather than their limited command of the target language. According to Azman et al.[29], from other studies they found out that English teachers intended to use Bahasa Malaysia instead of English to teach English, this was because using students’ first language can help students understand English language better, especially among low proficiency learners. And students even required instructors to translate text from English to their native language so that would be easy for them to solve difficulties and acquire knowledge.

This is corroborated by the finding of Hayes[30] that teachers even used dialects to aid students in understanding English grammar rules. English language syllabus of Malaysian secondary school consisting of most frequent English words cannot be used to prepare students to fulfill the tertiary level in which college students are expected to comprehend academic text in English and to accommodate to lecturers teaching fully in English[31]. This might be one of the reasons that instructors’ use of English is fading away. Conversely, the amount of first language has been increasing to facilitate students.

The review on the language teaching and learning in Malaysia can be related to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory by Giles et al.[25] as well as the relationship between attitude, motivation and use of language proposed by Gardner and Lambert[19]. The study by Fei et al.[28] can be related to the EVT which is related to identity. The influence of EVT on the use of the English language later has an impact on the motivation of the language use itself that it could interfere with the use and maintenance of the English language thus contributing to the language attrition.

The study by Azman et al.[29] and Hayes[30] stated that the use of L1 in teaching English as a second or foreign language is as an aid for students’ comprehension.

However, this situation depicts the hindrance of using the English language itself. What is more is that teachers teaching via this method themselves failed to provide as much exposure of the English language[2], thus impeding potential acquisition of the language by the students, at the same time, limiting their own use of the English language. This could lead to the attrition process to occur in the teachers’ English language. This can be related to Gardner and Lambert’s[19] proposed relationship between attitude, motivation and use of language as the disuse of the English language itself could have a high possibility of causing language attrition.

Having mentioned about language attrition and the poor proficiency of English language among the instructors in the instruction, this seems to be a serious case that could hinder the language learning and teaching process and its effectiveness. This is due to not being able to fulfill one of the roles of language instructor which is to provide as much opportunities for output, input, interaction and negotiation of meaning in target language[2], in this case, English.

### 1.3.4. Factors of Attrition

Quoting Andersen[22] “language attrition is a special case of variation in the acquisition and use of a language or languages can best be studied, described, explained, and understood within a framework that includes all other phenomena of language acquisition and use”, Schmid et al.[32] discusses the Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) framework. In relation to the framework, the authors listed factors contributing to attrition as found in previous works of others. These factors found are personal background factors, input and use factors, and personal attitudes and experience factors.

Of all these factors, it was found that the first two factors did not have linear connections to language attrition and seemed to be complex to explain but, the last one, being the attitude and experience factors, seemed to have an observable connection to attrition process of a language. Having that being mentioned, due to the dynamic interaction between these factors, the external factor of age onset of migration did provide an effect leading to language attrition. From the discussion, it was mentioned that L1 language maintenance and attrition differ for speakers with full exposure of L1 at post puberty and pre-puberty.

The difference in L1 language maintenance and attrition for speakers with full exposure of L1 at post puberty and pre puberty was discussed using findings from two previous studies which are the work of Schmitt[33] and Schmid[34]. In Schmitt’s[33], it was found that the subjects’ instrumentative case was affected by attrition as from the whole test, it was only accurately used in more or less one third of the obligatory contexts.

The study also explained that the tasks used in measuring attrition can also be erroneous as they can contribute to cognitive load. This cognitive load increased

with time taken for the tests as well as the increasing complexity of the test items themselves. From the discussion, it was mentioned that even monolingual native speakers' performance could fall to the same level of the L2 learners' performance. Therefore, the authors concluded that "...the best and most natural way of ensuring that a participant applies her cognitive resources to all aspect of the message is to simply make her do what human beings normally do with all language: speak." [32].

Schmid et al.'s [32] work has contributed to the realization that one of the factors of attrition in singular would not always have a direct effect on a language leading to attrition as attrition is a non-linear process. However, being one of the strings entangled together, these factors altogether could pose effects on languages leading to the attrition process of languages. Another revelation is that although test can be an instrument to measure attrition, it also however, has another negative impact in where the test itself contributed to cognitive burden that the use of language in study was not in its natural form of use.

Schmid [35] studied first language attrition among migrants in L2 setting. In her study, she distinguishes two types of L1 attriters which are those whose migration took place after puberty or those who have total acquisition of the L1 and attriters whose migration took place before puberty or those whose acquisition of L1 is yet to complete. For the first category, it was found that the level of attrition in L1 was lower compared to the latter category. This was due to their competency in the L1 itself before the migration to L2 setting that the L1 knowledge was frequently rehearsed to a point it does not need more stimuli for reactivation for later use. However, although attriters with total acquisition glitches in communication in L1 could still be found, this was not due to their L1 has become lost or forgotten but due to intervention from L2.

Another finding in Schmid's [35] study revealed that the disuse of a particular language did not completely prevent attrition. It was found that the disuse in informal L1 communication did not lead to attrition in L1. However, the disuse in formal L1 communication has an impact on L1 attrition. This was because in informal settings, most participants were bilinguals. Hence the intervention of L2 was minimal as participants kept on switching between codes. However, in a formal setting, it was inappropriate to code switch. Therefore, should the formal setting was in L2, then there would not exist space for L1 to be used hence leading to language attrition in the L1. The author concluded her study to shift a further study on attrition from focusing on L1 and L2 to focusing on dominant language and non-dominant language.

This study contributed to the revelation of the connection between acquisition of a language with language attrition. Total L1 acquisition of a language before migration or immersion in another language setting hindering the frequency of use somehow helped in L1 language maintenance that even though the duration of the disuse of the language was long, due to the total acquisition,

the L1 was still retained and not much of stimuli or effort were needed for activation when needed.

Another contribution to the study is that the role played by L1 and the situation of the use of L1 influence L1 maintenance and retention from attrition. The use of a language, or in this case the L1, in formal activities minimized the competition from another language at hand thus better retained the L1. This happened due to the inappropriateness of code switching in formal exchanges or communication in where only one language was used at all times in this situation.

Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer [3] in their work "Variables in Second Language Attrition" defined attrition as loss of language as a result of contact with the language of the community or the majority or the loss of language in individuals in either pathological – an example would be the condition studied by Meguro's team [4], or non-pathological settings.

In this study, they mentioned about two variables affecting attrition. These are linguistic and extralinguistic variables. Linguistic variables are lexical and morpho-syntactic influence of dominant language, frequency of input, loss of morphological complexity, and a reduction in registers of use. Extralinguistic variables include age, length time without input and language maintenance motivation.

From previous studies on language attrition, some recurring variables and areas in language proficiency affected by language attrition can be observed. The most recurring variable is the frequency of input and output in where the use and exposure to the dominant language are greater as opposed to the non-dominant language. The recurrence of language proficiency area affected is on lexicon rather than grammar in where speakers tend to forget words rather than how to construct the sentence structure.

## 2. Objective

The aim of the study was to investigate the factors leading to English language attrition among the English language teachers in Kelantan. Focus were given on the factors hindering the practice of the language.

### 2.1. Research Question

To fulfill the aim of the study, a research question was formulated.

- What are the factors that hinder the teachers' use of English in their workplace and daily lives?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Qualitative Approach

Researches employing quantitative method tend to

overgeneralize phenomena to a wider scenario. It is “weak in understanding the context or setting... that participants’ personal bias and interpretations are seldomly discussed”[36],[37].

Crotty[38] mentioned that the construction of meanings is based on the person’s engagement with the world he or she is interpreting. This engagement is based on the history or the society; culture, and to come to an in-depth-understanding of a phenomenon related to human, an approach which is inductive in manner is deemed necessary and such approach can be found in the qualitative process. Since the study examines factors contributing to a human phenomenon; the English Language Attrition, the qualitative method is seen as the most suitable to implement.

Furthermore, the qualitative approach also provides detailed explanation on the research problem through exploration with fewer subjects[39].

### 3.2. Instrument

#### 3.2.1. Interview Questions

The interview questions revolved around the factors leading to the deprivation of the use of English in daily and workplace lives. These questions were triggered using the factors (linguistics and extralinguistics) of language attrition as outlined by Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer[3] and the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) proposed by Giles et al.[25].

### 3.3. Sampling Method and Informants

#### 3.3.1. Sampling Method

The study employed stratified purposive sampling method[40] which enabled the research to find similarities or irregularities across the subgroups of the participants. Although the participants were derived from the same group (English language teachers in Kelantan), they were divided into 3 subgroups as discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### 3.3.2. Informants

The participants for the study were teachers teaching in one area of Kelantan which is the district of Machang. 9 teachers were selected for group interview sessions. 3 teachers representing each of the three school types were selected to undergo a semi structured interview session pertaining to the factors causing the hindrance of English language use in Kelantan leading to English language attrition. The criteria of the selection were teachers who have been teaching English language for between 3 and 20 years and have been teaching in various areas. These criteria were posed as Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer[3] mentioned in their research design, citing others[41],[42],[43],[44],[45],[46],[47],[48] that attrition could happen in durations as short as 3 months up to 50

years of severance of contact with the language facing attrition.

### 3.4. Data Collection

The data collection involved the informants being interviewed in three separate semi structured interviews in small focus group interview sessions. This was due to the stratified purposive sampling method[40]. The interview sessions were based on the classification of schools as the followings:

- School A = School with High Achievement
- School B = School with Moderate Achievement
- School C = School with Poor Achievement

Each of these focus group interviews consisted of only 3 teachers.

Another reason for conducting the interviews in smaller group was that it would provide the researcher with rich insights from the teachers. Due to more time available for the teachers to react and respond to the interview questions, they could provide better insight on the topic discussed[49].

### 3.5. Research Procedure

The interview questions were semi structured. They revolved around the factors leading to the deprivation of the use of English in their daily and workplace lives. These questions were triggered using the factors (linguistics and extralinguistics) of language attrition as outlined by Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer[3] and the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) proposed by Giles et al.[25].

The interviews were conducted as focus group interviews with teachers being grouped into 3 focus groups according to their strata; teachers from high achieving, moderate, and poor achieving schools. The moderator acts with minimal involvement as to provide teachers with more speaking opportunity as to contribute and react to the issue discussed.

“...if the goal is to learn something new from the teachers, then it is best to let them speak for themselves.”[49]

The data gathered from the interview were used to explore other factors and to gain more insight on the English attrition phenomenon taking place among the English language teachers in the state of Kelantan.

The responses of the interview were recorded using recorder software found in normal Samsung Android smartphones. These recordings were cleaned using Audacity[50].

The recordings were then transcribed into 3 different documents representing each session. Then, from the transcription, adapting the method by Krueger & Casey[51], responses were grouped into the questions but still separated within the population strata. Then, each response was tagged for their relevance towards the

question.

From these responses, factors leading to English language attrition among Kelantanese English Language Teachers were determined.

**3.6. Data Analysis**

The analysis on the structured interview was done by grouping the responses into within the population strata. Then, each response was tagged for their relevance towards the question. From these responses, factors leading to English language attrition among Kelantanese English Language Teachers were determined.

**4. Results**

Table 1 displays themes found in teachers’ responses to the interview questions

From Table 1, certain themes appear more than once in the responses as they kept on being repeated when different factor was asked. The theme of “acceptance” appears in IQ1, IQ2, and IQ4. The theme “proficiency” appears in IQ1 and 2 while the theme “environment” appears in IQ1 and IQ4. Other themes are seen exclusive to each factor.

Due to the recurring themes, the total 20 listed themes were reduced to 15 different themes. From the 15 themes found, several themes are not related to Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory. These themes are listed below:

- Aiding comprehension
- Education board
- School policy
- English not a passing subject
- Seniority complex
- proficiency
- Difficulty to explain words
- Teaching more than 1 subject

**Table 1.** Themes and Responses

Themes		Responses			
		Interview Question 1 (IQ1) (Teachers’ Factors)	Interview Question 2 (IQ2) (Student’s Issues)	Interview Question 3 (IQ3) (Policy Issues)	Interview Question 4 (IQ4) (Social Issues)
Related to EVT	Acceptance	5	3		4
	Bias thinking				1
	Tendency to revert to L1				1
	No opportunity/contact				1
	Environment	4			3
	Comfort	3			
	Interest		1		
	Attitude		2		
Not Related to EVT	Aiding comprehension		2		
	English not a passing subject			2	
	Difficulty to explain words	2			
	Seniority complex	1			
	Teaching more than 1 subject	1			
	Education board			1	
	Proficiency	2	2		
	School policy			4	

17 responses were found not to be related to Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory. This is so as they were not caused by the society and the surrounding but derived from factors such as law and policies, the nature of work, as well as the “self” such as teachers’ and students’ own proficiency.

Themes related to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory by Giles et al.[25] are listed in the followings:

- Acceptance
- No opportunity/ contact
- Comfort
- Attitude
- Bias thinking
- Tendency to revert to L1
- Environment
- Interest

28 responses were found on these themes to be related to Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory. This is due to their relation to “society”. The proceeding analyses discuss the responses found in each theme. The analyses are structured according to the 4 main factors which are teachers’ factor, students’ factors, policy factors as well as social factors.

#### 4.1. Teachers' Factors

“Is there any issue regarding to teachers that hinders the use of English language in your workplace and your daily life interactions?”

##### 4.1.1. Acceptance

The theme acceptance appeared in all three interviews in where respondents mentioned that they wanted to be accepted by other teachers. For this reason, instead of practicing English, they use the Malay language or the dialect. Responses are presented below:

The responses stated that it is hard in reality to use English as illustrated in the first example below:

P1 ... in order to be accepted, I have to use our mother tongue at times in order to be accepted... I want to be accepted among friends and I'm not talking about students I'm talking about you know teachers in ...

(School A, 26-31)

P3 ...if you cannot beat them, just join them...

(School B, 46-62)

The use of English could lead to them being labelled as showing off. Therefore, the respondents, although aware of the fact that it is detrimental to their English language proficiency, have to abandon the English language. This is explained below:

P1 ...I think we are worried that other people might look at us and think we are showing off or something.

(School B, 46-62)

Another reason for not using English as mentioned in the following examples is that respondents do not wish to be

outcasts.

P3 ...if you are in my shoes, being a single male teacher teaching in morning session, and I have to have friends, last time...

(School B, 86-94)

P2 ...we don't want to be the outcast

(School C, 90-99)

##### 4.1.2. Comfort

Another emerging theme is the comfort of using the English language. The interview with the teachers in school with high achievement reveals that even though no negative perception towards them are felt when they are using English in public, they just do not feel comfortable of using the English language. This is illustrated below:

P1 ... They they will surely accept us as the way we are. We teach English. But then, we are not comfortable at times

(School A, 48-58)

Another reason leading towards the uncomfortable feeling is that they do not feel “natural” when using English in public as they always get replies in Malay.

P1 ... we want to speak English...it doesn't feel natural...especially in Kelantan...they respond to us ...aaa in in BM ...

(School B, 27-31)

The hustle in providing a lot of explanation as it is stated that sometimes it is hard for people to understand them is also another factor leading to the teachers not feeling comfortable using English in public.

P1 ...it feels unnatural to speak English in Kelantan...when you speak English, you have to explain because people cannot follow you. I'm not just talking about speaking English in classroom...

(School B, 40-48)

##### 4.1.3. Environment

Environment also plays crucial roles in the use of English at school. Teachers from all three interviews shared their own experience teaching in other schools, mostly outside Kelantan, mentioned that the environment in their previous schools encourage the use of English. However, the present schools they are teaching in do not provide the opportunity for them to practice the use of English.

The example from a respondent in the School A stated that it is even uncommon for interactions between students and teachers to be in the Malay language in her previous school. The transcription can be seen below:

P2 ...I did my practicum in a convent school...they were very comfortable using English and also even the teachers...they teach Kemahiran Hidup, when the students came to see her, she will switch into English ...

(School A, 67-86)

Another response from another teacher in School A stated that even Kelantanese teachers who meet another Kelantanese would use English among each other when she was teaching outside Kelantan.

P1 ... So I remember like Cikgu XXX from Kelantan, so he taught aaaa Geography, but whenever he saw me, he would speak English...

(School A, 96-109)

Responses from teachers from School B and School C reveals that mostly everyone in the school, the teachers who are talking other subjects, the administrators, and even the janitors use English in schools which they had taught previously.

P2 ... I had nine years of experience there in Kuantan...everybody is actually speaking English...even the cleaners, yes, they are speaking English...

(School B, 68-74)

P2 ... I was in Johor previously... most of the teachers there, they spoke English...But when I came here ... the situation in Machang, they prefer, they are comfortable using their own dialect instead of using English.

(School C, 50-65)

#### 4.1.4. Seniority Complex

Under this theme, responses by a participant from School A revealed that she was feeling inferior to speak in front of senior teachers. However, when she became a senior herself, she somehow felt the need to lead thus improving her confidence.

P3 ... when I was first teaching... there were senior teachers so I was quite the junior so, everytime I have to speak especially in the assembly, I would, ... prepare myself... I was very worried and ... frightened ... to be speaking in front of everybody...

(School A, 118-147)

#### 4.1.5. Difficulty in Explaining Words

Teachers from high achieving and School C s confirmed that they sometimes forget certain English words thus leading them to revert to Malay

P1...when we use English when teaching literature... when you go into the meaning, it's very difficult to explain and ... a word of BM came in your mind which is easier to explain...

(School A, 159-171)

P3 ...sometimes when I was teaching in the classroom, sometimes I cannot remember the words. Usually the ones that we use daily right? Sometimes it's lost because of the influence of Kelantanese dialect

(School C, 161-163)

#### 4.1.6. Teachers' Proficiency in English

Another theme which is only discussed by teachers in School B is teachers' proficiency. Due to not being English optionist teachers, some teachers are stated to not have fluency in English.

P1 ...I think one of the factors regarding teachers' issue is that they are not fluent themselves... some of them, they are not optionists...

(School B, 17-25)

P2 ... English teachers also mispronounce the words but I dare not to say anything also especially the grammar usage right? Because they are not optionists...

(School B, 199-202)

#### 4.1.7. Teaching More Than One Subject

The emergence of this theme is only found in the interview with teachers in School B. Due to having to teach more than one subject, teachers have to juggle between English and Malay as certain subjects are taught in Malay. Hence impeding their use of English at times.

P3 ... Ok some teachers, they are burdened by the fact that they have to teach more than one subject... they have to juggle between these two subjects...it brings out a lot of confusion...they just cannot cope up with all these hurdles...

(School B, 32-37)

## 4.2. Students' Issues

"Is there any students' issue that hinders the use of English language in your workplace and your daily life interactions?"

#### 4.2.1. Aiding Comprehension

One of the students' issue leading towards teachers using L1 instead of English is in aiding students' comprehension. A response by a teacher in School A revealed this reason and later on added that certain complex text left them with no choice but to use L1 in order not to further confuse their students.

P1 ...I would say aaa I, this is umm one of the major reasons aaa I would use BM with them because of their ummm aiding their comprehension, helping them to understand.

(School A, 190-192)

P1 ... when it comes to the point where complex structures are used and students are asking question...you can't help it sometimes. You have to explain all words, phrases, sometimes in BM, yeah, that will be more helpful at times.

(School A, 348-352)

#### 4.2.2. Attitude

Students are found to have the tendency to not use English even in crucial situations. A response from a teacher in School A stated that the students do not even want to use English to ask permission just to go to the toilet and are willing to hold their urges. The teacher further elaborated that those who try to use English often receive demotivating reactions from friends.

P2 ...some of the students, they even, they hold

themselves not to go to the toilet because they don't want to speak in English. They, they are just afraid, just aaa very, really afraid to say that "teacher, may I please go out"...

(School A, 220-232)

The response from a teacher in School B mentioned that there are students who will go as far as to mock teachers who are using English.

P2 ... I could actually hear he was shouting, "oh, kecek oghe puteh napok teh!" (oh, looks like someone wants to speak English) he told me that, and then, the other students were actually, "woooo, cikgu baghu kecek oeghe puteh, cikgu baghu kecek oghe puteh" (wooo, the new teacher is speaking English)

(School B, 73-80)

#### 4.2.3. Interest

Another theme emerging from the interview is "interest". This theme is found in the interview with teachers from School B as the teacher mentioned that trying to find topic related to English in entertainment is hard as most students do not watch English entertainment. Instead, they only watch Malay entertainment.

P1 ... when I talk to my students, when I talk about some tv programmes I watched, many of them don't watch those programmes. They watch Malay dramas so they don't have that much exposure to English...

(School B, 104-110)

#### 4.2.4. Acceptance

From the interview, the theme "acceptance" emerged in all interviews. It is being discussed extensively by teachers in School B and also in School C. Another emergence is in the interview with teachers from School A. These responses are however contrary to responses in moderate and School C. The following exchanges are from the interview with teachers in School B:

P1 ...I find, when you try to be an English teacher, students are scared of us. We want to be popular with our students and also we want them to like us...to be friendly, we cannot strictly use English because they no longer see us as a person, they see us as English, English, scary, run away...

(School B, 163-190)

From the discussion, it is found that students tend to isolate themselves from English language teachers when teachers are using the English language. They view the teachers not as human and English not as a language but an alien entity. This also happen even the teachers are trying to be friendly with the students. Being aware that the students face moments of embarrassment while they struggle to find words in English, the teachers themselves switch to Malay to save the students from these moments of embarrassment. This happens even though teachers themselves know that what they are doing would defeat their purpose of teaching English.

The responses found in the interview with School C is

also quite similar to the ones in School B. One respondent stated that students suddenly become friendlier when the Malay language is used. The response is illustrated below:

P3 ...hence the gap between us and the students, when you speak English, the gap is far... but when we speak Malay, they become friendlier,

(School C, 216-217)

The interview with teachers from School A however reveals interesting responses regarding this theme. The following exchanges illustrate the situation in the School A.

P3 ...Because this is quite a good school...all the selected students are here...So it's different from the daily school outside there so our students, I should say that I our students are one level higher in that sense

(School A, 353-361)

Students acceptance towards the teachers are seen to be unwavering even when the teachers are using English as it is state that the students are aware of the teachers' profession of teaching English. Therefore, their acceptance towards the teacher is neutral.

#### 4.2.5. Students' Proficiency

Another emerging theme when asked about students' issue that impedes teachers' use of English is "students' proficiency". Students' proficiency influences teachers' use of English as sometimes, students get confused with the explanation due to their insufficient understanding on what is explained. This is illustrated in the following response:

P2 ... we explain to them, in English, they would be confused. They'll say "teacher, BM la teacher". That's when we have to switch to BM

(School A, 341-344)

Another issue pertaining students' proficiency is that when they struggle to find words in English when using English with the teachers, they tend to feel embarrassed. The teachers, being aware of this fact, in order to save the students from the moments of embarrassment, switch to the Malay language. This is illustrated by the response below:

P3 ...one of the students greeted me in English...I saw him was struggling just now...I switch to Bahasa Melayu. But I know that he was trying...but ...the duration, moments of embarrassment maybe, that he would encounter by trying, struggling to find the right word to speak, so I just switch code to BM...

(School B, 181-186)

### 4.3. Policy Issues

"Is there any issue regarding to policy that hinders the use of English language in your workplace and your daily life interactions?"

#### 4.3.1. Education Board

Responses by teachers from School A stated that the

state education board do not have much activities encouraging the use of English language.

P1 ...not much for English, again even for PPD level, even for JPN  
(School A, 560)

The lack of activities encouraging the use of English language leads to the hindrance of the use of English language this factor is made worst by the policy of the school itself. This illustrated by responses in the proceeding theme “school policy”.

#### 4.3.2. School Policy

In continuity of the previous theme, teachers from School A also mentioned another interesting factor regarding the theme “school policy”. This factor is however, exclusive to the particular school as this school is not like other schools as this school is of a national religious school type. The school treated English differently as mentioned below:

P1 ...in our school... English language is treated differently...the way our superiors looking at the subject... So the way our superiors treat English is different here...  
(School A, 533-547)

From the responses, it is evident that the school emphasizes more on other subjects because of the school type. Even for activities, the school put more efforts in the religious subjects as compared to English language activities.

Another issue regarding the theme of the “school policy” is that the schools do not have their own policy of English use in ceremonies. A respondent from the School A compared her present school to her previous school stating that:

P2 ...and then, I guess aaa the the environment of the school where aaa they conduct every assembly or any announcement, everything is in English. Sometimes the prayer are conducted in English  
(School A, 88-90)

In her response, she mentioned that her previous school practice the use of English in assemblies, announcements, and even when prayers are recited. Another response supporting this claim is the response from a respondent from a School C in where she stated that:

P2 ...when I was in Johor, our meeting I think, once a month is conducted in English... they, we use the same words “good morning”, and that to the PK 1, the administrators, eventually they use it in their speech...  
(School C, 120-124)

From the response, it is stated that teachers’ use of English helps encourage and improve students’ use of English.

Another interesting response found in policy issue regarding the “school policy” is that the school policy imposes on the proficient teachers to teach upper secondary

level while those who are regarded as “not proficient” to teach the lower secondary. The teachers mentioned that they received “damaged goods” and whatever they do is “beyond repair” as at this level, these students have lost their interest towards the English language hence, the interaction between students and teachers in English as well as the teachers’ use of the English language itself is impeded. The following illustrate the responses regarding this issue:

P3 ... teachers, who are proficient, not teaching the lower secondary... these form 1 form 2 students, they should be equipped, they should be prepared, groomed to be at least ... I think that would be where the period of our students, candidates, lose their interest  
(School B, 137-151)

#### 4.3.3. English Not a Passing Subject

Regarding to the present policy, English is not one of the passing subjects for students in order to receive their SPM certificate. This somehow leads to students not paying much attention towards the subject hence the language itself. The policy is however, to be replaced by a new policy stating that for students to receive their SPM certificate, English is one of the compulsory subjects to pass.

P1 ...yeah...this relates to the policy as well, English is going to be made compulsory as a subject to pass starting next year...  
(School A, 415-423)

P3 ...because all of this time, they thought that they can get away because English is not made compulsory for the lower exam level but when it comes to STPM, yes,  
(School B, 132-133)

### 4.4. Social Issues

“Is there any issue regarding to social that hinders the use of English language in your workplace and your daily life interactions?”

#### 4.4.1. No Opportunity/ Contact

The first theme appeared regarding to the social issue is “no opportunity or contact” with the language as well as the native speakers can really be found in the society in which the present study is conducted. The response from a respondent from a low achieving school illustrate the “theme”:

P1 ...all of them, they use the same language, the dialect, their mother tongue. They don’t meet any foreigners here. Seldom ah. No foreigners coming in, the English people...Tourists also very seldom unless sometimes at kota, KB... you can see a few  
(School C, 27-30)

#### 4.4.2. Acceptance

Another theme emerging from the issue of social is the theme of “acceptance”. It is stated that in this unique state,

the acceptance towards the English language is somehow towards the negative side. The responses from the interview are as the followings:

P1 ...Hinder? The environment lah...seldom heard here people speak in English here in Kelantan. Not the same to west coast. You want to speak in English, they can't understand and there won't be a respond

(School C, 11-15)

The response above mentioned that when English is used, due to the insufficient repertoire in the English language, there would not be any response from the other part you are talking to. Therefore, it can be said that the society do not accept the English language and the speaker.

The issue mentioned above is in relation to how the society studied treat the English language. Even though the English language is supposedly considered the second language of Malaysians, in this unique state, English is treated as a foreign language. This is illustrated below:

P1 ...it goes back to their environment. You know, in Kelantan, English is not even the second language, it's a foreign language

(School B, 104-106)

Another issue befalling into this theme is how the society treats the English language users that discourages them from using English. The response below illustrate the society through the example of what has happened in a class.

P2 ...yeah, whenever she tried to talk to me in English, I could see that some of the friends at the back giving her that kind of look.

(School A, 288-292)

In order to be accepted by the society itself, even though they are proficient in English, they always found themselves to revert to Malay when it comes to communicating in Kelantan.

P1 ...attending courses, we can just switch and use English easily like...But when you return to your state, it's always special and I'll use the cue or the word to be accepted

(School A, 43-47)

#### 4.4.3. Environment

The theme "environment" explains the previous theme in which the "acceptance" also depends on the environment. This term is also closely related to the society's repertoire preference and repertoire. These has influence on one another and they are going in cycle as repertoire or "proficiency" here is influenced by "use" and "use" is influenced by "preference" while "preference" itself is influenced by "acceptance". Going back when it all started, "acceptance" itself is influenced by "proficiency".

The following response illustrates the language preference of the people or the society in the district:

P2 ... the situation in Machang, they prefer, they are comfortable using their own dialect instead of using English...

(School C, 50-65)

The following response records the confession by a Kelantan born teacher confirming the language preference in speaking:

P3 ...I was born in Kelantan, and what I can see that we Kelantanese... speaking wise is a bit...we didn't use much English in Kelantan but maybe in term of writing, we can write well because maybe Kelantanese people is, tend to read more books than speak the language...

(School C, 76-79)

From the response, it is found that English is not used in daily interactions with others when it comes to speaking but in terms of writing and reading the respondent mentioned that they can write and read well.

Another issue falling into the "environment" them under social issues is recorded to be the hustle to provide more explanation when using English as the surrounding people just cannot understand what is said. This illustrates the society's proficiency in English and due to this, the respondent reported that she is feeling discouraged to use English in the society. The response is illustrated below:

P1 ... it's tiring to speak English because you know, when you speak English, you have to explain because people cannot follow you. I'm not just talking about speaking English in classroom, I'm talking about speaking English...

(School B, 40-44)

#### 4.4.4. Tendency to Revert to L1

Another theme that emerged when asked about social issues is the "tendency to revert to L1". The response below illustrated how a bank personnel used the English language in treating customers.

P2 ...I called one of the banks here in Kelantan...that person was trying to speak in English...he said, "Hello, may I help you?"...when I answered, "can I speak to the particular person?"... "kejap,"(wait,) he switched back to Malay...

(School A, 475- 481)

From the response, it is stated that even though the bank personnel started the conversation in English, he then suddenly reverted back to Malay when the respondent responded in English.

#### 4.4.5. Bias Thinking

"Bias thinking" towards the west is one of the themes emerging from the interview which is related to the social issue. One of the respondents mentioned that in relation to religion and what is happening around the globe, the society somehow have a negative perception and treated the English language negatively.

P1 ...see, today la it's also something with religion, contradict with religion lah, you see, outside there always got conflict outside eh, the west and the east, with the

middle east, then, this language, and then it must be their belief or ...

(School C,111-114)

From the analysis, it is revealed that most of the factors hindering the use of English language in teachers' workplace and daily lives are related to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory proposed by Giles et al.[25]. As can be seen from the 15 themes emerging from the interviews with teachers from the three types of school, 8 themes are related to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory by Giles et al.[25]. Other remaining 7 themes are found to be not related to the theory. However, from the responses given by the teachers, it is revealed that 28 responses are from the themes related to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory by Giles et al.[25] while 17 responses are found to be unrelated to this theory. From the number of the responses, it can be concluded that most of the factors hindering the use of English language in teachers; workplace and daily lives are stemmed from factors related to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory by Giles et al.[25].

The analysis done in answering the research question provides 15 themes or factors that hinder the teachers' English language use in workplace and daily lives. These factors emerge from four contributing causes which are teachers themselves, students, policy, and social. Some factors are interrelated to each other and responses are mostly found in themes related to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory proposed by Giles et al.[25].

## 5. Discussion

From the analysis, it is revealed that 28 responses are from the themes related to Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory while 17 responses are found to be unrelated to this theory. From the number of the responses, it can be concluded that most of the factors hindering the use of English language in teachers' workplace and daily lives are stemmed from factors related to the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory by Giles et al.[25].

Most of the themes found in teachers' and students' issue and social issue are closely related to the theory of Ethnolinguistic Vitality in which it describes group's action performed collectively which displays distinctive features that separate them with other groups. This action represents identity marker. Under this theory, Yağmur and Ehala[27] mentioned that the level of Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) determines the vulnerability of a language belonging to a group to attrition. They mentioned that high EV group maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings. Low EV group language however, as opposed to the high level EV group language, is prone to face language attrition or being replaced by the mainstream language as minimal maintenance of language use is practiced by the group member.

### 5.1. Implications

The discussed factors should be taken into consideration as they contribute to the hindrance of the use of the English language hence leading to the English language attrition. The study found that the society itself and the policy have their part in contributing to the English language attrition as they are both found to impede the use of the English language. From the findings of the present study, there are implications in the formulation of the education and social policy for teachers and the society with regards to the use of the English language.

#### 5.1.1. Policy Maker and School Administrator

The need to address the use of English language is crucial as the ranking of the 1st place in the proficiency index of English language published does not meet the reality in which not even 30% of the 61,000 English teachers in Malaysia met the minimum standard of the Cambridge Placement Test as they were tested[7],[8]. The findings of the study revealed that instead of factors caused by social, which is not in ones' control, policy also plays an important role in encouraging the use of English language in schools and not too surprisingly, in the society as well.

It is crucial that policy makers formulate a policy that encourages and emphasize more on the English language as it is found that the English teachers themselves are facing a hard time practicing the English language and due to this, attrition could happen hence affecting teachers' own proficiency in English. This could be a virus in the field of English language teaching and learning as it is against one of the teachers' role of "providing students as many opportunities as possible for input, output, interaction and negotiation of meaning in the target language." [2].

The findings from the interview also stated that by having the administrators and teachers using English, the improvement in students' proficiency is also observable that it helps in certain ways. Therefore, it is crucial for the school administrators to have a policy in which English is to be used in certain school ceremonies. Most of the respondents kept on comparing their previous school to the present stating that the later does not provide such opportunities to them. This is positive to the improvement in English language proficiency as it creates the "English" environment which is not available for the Kelantanese, or to be precise the society dwelling in the district of Machang itself as stated in the interview responses.

#### 5.1.2. English Language Teachers

To ensure the maintenance of the English language, teachers have to take their own initiative in maintaining their English language use as the study reveals most of the factors contributing to the impeding of the English language use is out of their control. The study found out even the attitude of the teachers towards the English

language is positive, however, due to several factors such as factors related to the society as illustrated in the EVT by Giles et al.[25], their use of English is limited thus impeding their English language maintenance. Teachers have to be aware of these factors and take proper measurement as to increase their own use of the English language among themselves and create as much opportunity for the use of English language.

## 6. Conclusions

The research studies factors leading to the English language attrition among English language teachers in the state of Kelantan, Malaysia. One of the most prominent factors is the disuse of the language itself (the English language). The phenomenon can be seen as a threat to teachers or instructors of the language as the quality of their instructions can be deemed questionable should they experience the phenomenon as they should provide as much opportunities to their students to be in contact with the language taught[2]. Due to the uniqueness of the state of Kelantan for its prevalent EV[121],[13],[14], the research was conducted as it was discussed earlier that high EV groups maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings. This is considered a threat to the minority language, in this case, the English language (as it is not widely used in this setting).

The findings discuss the factors impeding the use of English language in the teachers' workplace and daily lives. Several factors were presented in which they are related to self-competency (attitude, proficiency, and interest), social (acceptance, environment, and contact), and policy (school and education board policies). These factors however, can only be overcome through the implementation of the right policy (a policy that encourages the use of the English language at workplace e.g. in ceremonies, meetings, or even better, in the whole instruction for selected subjects) as well as initiatives by the teachers themselves. Teachers should be more aware of and create more opportunities among themselves and with students to use the English language. This describes that crucial measures are to be taken in overcoming the discouraging use of the English language hence preventing the English language attrition.

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