



A Journey towards English Language Reform in a Malaysian TVET Institution

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the English language reform carried out by the Seroja Technical Group of Colleges (STC) in accordance with the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025. This article specifically intends to examine the affordances and limitations encountered by STC lecturers in implementing the English language reform initiative. This research project is a component of a broader study that employed a concurrent mixed method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. The paper's discussion focuses on data obtained from the qualitative component of the inquiry. The study was carried out at STC, a group of TVET institutions that is actively aiming for making English as one of the primary instructional languages. The participants of the study were 10 technical lecturers from STC. The data collection method was semi-structured interviews. The data was subsequently transcribed and categorized and subsequently organized into meaningful themes. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The findings indicate that STC's endeavours to reform the English language have achieved a moderate level of success, as the language is effectively integrated into teaching and learning practices, classroom resources, and teacher-student interactions. Nevertheless, the data also indicates that the lecturers encountered difficulties in properly implementing the strategy as a result of students' backgrounds and other situational considerations. Ultimately, the lecturers employed a contextualized strategy to accomplish the policy objectives. The results of this study are advantageous for policymakers and practitioners in reorganizing the English language at their institutions.

Keywords: English language policy, English language reform, TVET

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) have emerged as pivotal drivers of Malaysia's dynamic economic development, playing a critical role in cultivating a highly skilled workforce across a diverse range of industries. Member nations of UNESCO Jakarta, including Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste, have prioritized the enhancement of TVET due to its central role in developing human capital and fostering sustained economic growth (UNESCO, 2021). Research findings underscore the substantial advantages of vocational education, including elevated employment rates, improved wage prospects, and heightened productivity (Cedepof, 2011; Mupimpila & Narayana, 2009; Nilsson, 2010; Vandenberg & Laranjo, 2020; World Bank, 2019). The successful dual TVET systems in nations like Germany and Switzerland further exemplify these benefits, encompassing reduced school dropout rates and smoother transitions from education to the workforce (Sofea Azahar, 2022). In alignment with this global trend, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015) has reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to improving the quality and implementation of TVET programmes. This dedication aims to ensure that TVET programmes remain attuned to the evolving demands of the labour market, thus fostering continuous economic growth.

Undoubtedly, a strong command of the English language is essential for effective communication in technical and occupational domains. The lack of this proficiency positions TVET students and graduates at a disadvantage, limiting their employment and career advancement opportunities (UNESCO, 2021). However, teaching English in TVET institutions presents difficulties because English is typically not the primary focus of the curriculum; rather, it functions as a prerequisite for course completion. According to Poon (2016), English proficiency at a high level is essential for the marketability and employability of TVET graduates. Ismail et al. (2018) emphasised further the significance of TVET students' capacity to comprehend English-taught courses in enhancing their proficiency. According to Jamaluddin, Alias and DeWitt (2020), the English curricula at TVET institutions emphasise the development of students' foundational communication skills and proficiency. It incorporates both General English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in order to equip students with fundamental language skills. However, it does not prepare students for professional communication in the industrial environment.

The competence and level of ease exhibited by TVET instructors in effectively employing the English language within the educational setting are crucial elements in ensuring the successful implementation of this transition. In addition, it is worth noting that TVET plays a crucial role in meeting the industry's demand for skilled workers. This is achieved by placing emphasis on the impartation of essential knowledge and fostering a sense of personal accountability in the pursuit of knowledge and the attainment of desired results (Motevalli, Roslan, Hamzah, &

Hamzah, 2021). However, the utilisation of English as the predominant mode of communication in the educational context has presented a significant issue and obstacle for these individuals (Ismail, Mohd Nopiah, & Mohd Sattar, 2018). Hence, it is crucial for educators in TVET institutions to actively participate in specialised training and coursework that focuses on improving their competence in the English language. This would facilitate their exposure to relevant industry contexts (Abdullah & Majid, 2013). Furthermore, it is imperative for educators to cultivate a sense of proficiency in utilising the English language as the primary mode of communication within their instructional settings. This is crucial in order to facilitate comprehensive understanding of the subject matter among students, thus augmenting their preparedness for the demands of the workforce (Jamaludin & DeWitt, 2018; Ismail et al., 2018).

The linguistic transformation is a dual challenge and opportunity for TVET educators, requiring a focused endeavour to bridge the gap in language proficiency to enhance students' readiness for the professional domain. However, there is a lack of research about studies in TVET institutions that deal with the steps taken towards English language needs in technical fields. In this regard, the researchers in the current study feel a need for an exploratory study of the affordances and constraints TVET institutions are facing in executing the English language reform efforts into the curriculum. This can help policy makers to explore the ways to move forward to better achieve the alignment between the English language reform and TVET aspirations. The study hopes to provide suggestions for TVET institutions to ensure that their graduates are well-prepared in their English language communicative ability to cater to the demands of the global workforce. This paper will answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the affordances in the English language reform in STC?

RQ2: What are the challenges faced in the journey of reforming the English language use in STC?

BACKGROUND

Malaysian English language policy and reform

The linguistic landscape of Malaysia has undergone continuous development since the country's independence in 1957. *Bahasa Melayu*, also known as the Malay language, holds the status of the national and official language, with its primary purpose being to foster national unity and identity. In contrast, English, which historically played a prominent role as the primary medium of instruction during the colonial era, now plays a secondary role within the educational system and is taught as a second language. According to Azman (2016), English education begins at the preschool level and continues through all educational stages, spanning

approximately 14 to 15 years. Recognizing the importance of English, the Malaysian government has implemented numerous measures to improve English proficiency nationwide. These efforts encompass the implementation of English language education programmes and the promotion of English language usage within the business and government sectors. The objective of these measures is to reduce language competency gaps and enable greater numbers of the Malaysian population to actively participate in global interactions using the English language.

To mark the importance of the English language, the Malaysian government has established the 'English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025', which was implemented in 2015. This document continues to hold considerable significance within Malaysia's language policy and has exerted a substantial influence on the educational practices pertaining to English language instruction and acquisition in the nation. The objective of this strategy is to establish a comprehensive framework for the English language curricula stretching from early childhood education to higher education, with the intention of enhancing the English language competency of Malaysian students. This initiative is designed to equip students with the necessary language skills to excel in both professional and academic settings.

One of the highlights in the roadmap is the importance of creating a conducive environment for using the English language. A conducive environment entails the students' surroundings that provide English language input which help students to practice the target language (Hazlina et. al, 2023). This includes the interaction between teacher and students. The interaction between teacher and student in the classroom is one of essential factor for promoting learners' achievement in language (Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2006). Furthermore, Gijbels (2006) mentions that how the students perceive their learning environments may have an impact on how the students adjust with these learning environments. Thus, a conducive learning environment facilitates the successfulness of learners acquiring the language. Setyorini (2011) stated that schools facilities affected student learning achievement, but adequate school facilities should also be supported by good teaching and learning processes, learning interests, and motivation so that they result in high learning achievement. These studies show the relevance of conducive environment in learning the English language.

Importance of English Language Proficiency in TVET

TVET graduates play a pivotal role in driving a nation's advancement. According to Devi (2019), the demand for graduates in Malaysia was estimated to be around 6.6 million in 2015 and the number is projected to rise to 7.98 million by 2030. However, there are still concerns on their readiness, especially in their English language skills, which are important for a smooth transition into the professional world. Several

studies highlight the significance of English language competency in increasing employability in various global labour markets (Daqiq et al., 2024; Nghia et al., 2023; Chea & Lo, 2022; Nesaratnam, 2020; Ting et al., 2017).

This lack of English proficiency presents a significant challenge, as it directly impacts the competitiveness of TVET graduates. Their inadequate English ability has resulted in reduced competitiveness, creating substantial challenges to effective communication in the workplace (Yong et al., 2024; Noor Shahariah Saleh, Siti Fatimah Murtaza, 2018). Consequently, adapting to the work environment becomes challenging for some individuals. Research by Mohd Izzyan Zuhaili Zainudin et al. (2024) and Azza Jauhar Ahmad Tajuddin et al. (2017) suggest that Malaysian employers are not satisfied with graduates' readiness in meeting professional workplace demands, specifically in their English language proficiency. On the other hand, recent graduates seem to underestimate the importance of English in professional settings. Amiruddin et al. (2015) found that many new graduates exhibit weaknesses in communication skills, English proficiency, and leadership capabilities. Additionally, the lack of fluency in English reduces graduates' marketability, especially in English-speaking interviews. Siti Zaidah Zainuddin et al. (2019) highlight that employers' reluctance to hire recent graduates is largely due to their inadequate English ability. Employers, therefore, tend to prefer graduates who demonstrate both technical skills and a range of communication, social, emotional, and critical thinking abilities (Siti Nor Amalina Ahmad Tajuddin et al., 2022).

In many professional sectors, English proficiency is particularly valuable, especially in technical roles where effective communication is crucial for interactions within and between organizations (Kakepoto et al., 2013). Rosdiadee Nordin (2013) emphasizes that technical communication in English is a crucial factor for career advancement, especially in engineering. Similarly, Noor Shahariah & Siti Fatimah (2018) highlight the importance of proficient oral communication skills in professional environments, hence, it is critical that TVET programmes align with industry demands, especially since employers prioritize English proficiency as a key hiring criterion. Farisa Jamija Md Yusof et al. (2017) underscore the need for TVET graduates to demonstrate not only technical competencies but also strong communication skills, with a high level of English proficiency being particularly important. Collaboration between companies and educational institutions is essential in ensuring that TVET curricula meet industry expectations.

In summary, these studies collectively highlight the crucial role that English language proficiency plays in professional success, particularly in technical fields. They also stress the need for TVET programs to align with industry demands, placing a strong emphasis on effective communication in English as an integral part of the curriculum.

Overcoming the challenges in English Language Instruction in TVET

Teaching English in a TVET setting presents unique challenges, as English is often considered a supplementary requirement rather than a core focus (Abdullah & Majid, 2013). Jamaludin and DeWitt (2018) suggest that TVET institutions should prioritize the development of students' generic skills, such as communication abilities. However, this presents a significant challenge for TVET English instructors, who must not only teach fundamental communication skills but also prepare students with the specialized language proficiency needed in professional settings. This dual responsibility increases the complexity of the task (Jamaludin & DeWitt, 2018). A study conducted by Farisa Jazima Mat Yusof et al. (2018) at Kolej Kemahiran Tinggi MARA revealed that only 4% of students rated their English proficiency as high, while 25.8% considered it moderate. The majority, 70.2%, perceived their English abilities as poor. These findings highlight the need for TVET language educators to adapt their teaching methods to address students' needs, particularly in terms of motivation and interest. Adapting teaching approaches is crucial for fostering proficiency in English and ensuring that graduates are better equipped with the language skills necessary for the workforce.

Building on this, TVET educators face additional hurdles when managing classrooms of mixed abilities, where students exhibit varying levels of English proficiency (Bhandari, 2023; Al-Subaiei, 2017; Al-Shammakhi & Al Humaidi, 2015; Dudley, 2016). Mixed ability classrooms can affect the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches, leading to gaps in students' comprehension and knowledge acquisition. Al-Subaiei (2017) found that educators struggle to deliver lessons effectively when students have diverse levels of comprehension. To address this variability, instructors must customize their teaching approaches to accommodate students' different learning styles, language proficiencies, and specific strengths and weaknesses. A tailored teaching approach fosters an inclusive learning environment that optimizes student engagement and achievement, regardless of their starting level of English proficiency. Customized instruction not only supports language acquisition but also helps create a positive environment that enhances students' overall academic success.

To navigate the challenges above, some institutions resorted to the use of a bilingual approach, using both languages in teaching the technical subjects. The exploration of bilingualism in Malaysia, particularly in relation to language education policy and local needs, is crucial for understanding the dynamics of bilingual proficiency in the country. According to Chan and Ain Nadzimah (2015), societal attitudes toward both *Bahasa Melayu* and English play a significant role in shaping bilingual proficiency. In TVET classrooms, functional bilingualism is frequently employed, where lecturers switch between *Bahasa Melayu* and English to support student comprehension. This is crucial in preparing students for the workforce and contributing to Malaysia's broader economic development. Research by Chan and Ain Nadzimah (2015)

emphasizes that effective bilingualism enhances both individual student success and national economic growth. This is particularly important for TVET students, as proficiency in both *Bahasa Melayu* and English is essential to compete in both local and global job markets.

A comparative analysis with Taiwan further highlights the importance of bilingual education policies. Like Malaysia, Taiwan has developed bilingual education policies that aim to balance the strengthening of English proficiency with the preservation of local languages. Wang et al. (2023) suggest that a successful bilingual policy should not only strengthen English proficiency but also promote the development of local languages. This dual approach creates an inclusive educational environment, preparing students to meet global standards while maintaining cultural identity. To add, Wang et al. (2023) highlight that in the context of Taiwan's vocational education, a focus on comprehensive English proficiency is necessary to meet international workforce demands. This is similar in the case of Malaysia, as TVET graduate need to possess adequate English skills to compete in the global economy, making this a key area for continued development.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

In line with the nature of the research questions (RQs) that require in depth answers, a qualitative approach was employed. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the participants.

Location and participants

This study was conducted at STC, a group of TVET institutions that provides technical courses at tertiary level for Malaysian youths. STC has branches in almost every state in Malaysia to cater the needs of training students in technical areas. The courses in STC ranges from science-based courses such as engineering, maritime, aviation, construction and social science courses such as interior design, photography, fashion and hospitality.

The participants of the study were 10 lecturers from various branches of STC. They have had 5-10 years of experience teaching their own fields, either technical and engineering or social science clusters. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- i. Lecturers who were teaching technical subjects using the English language.
- ii. Lecturers who have attended the mandatory English language training (part of the English language reform initiatives in STC).

Furthermore, participants were given the information sheet and consent form that outline the basic information of the research project as well as details on their roles, responsibilities and rights as the participants of the study. Their participation is voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The identity of the participants was kept confidential and they were given pseudonyms in all publication and reports.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The method of data collection was semi-structured interview. The interview protocol was prepared to gather information on the effort and utilisation of the English language related to the lecturers' experiences at their own institutions as well as practices in their own classes. The interviews were conducted online via zoom according to the convenience of the interviewees as well as the researchers. The participants virtually signed the consent form before undergoing interviews that roughly took 15 to 30 minutes. The audio data were then transcribed and ready for analysis. Thematic analysis was performed with ATLAS.ti as a software for data management. All data is kept confidential by keeping them in password protected online drive.

DISCUSSION AND FINDING

There are two (2) research questions generated for the purpose of reporting in this article. They originate from the concerns presented at the outset of this paper. This section delineates the findings in relation to the research question (RQ), followed by a discussion of relevant features derived from the findings. The primary data gathering method for this research is interviews; thus, the findings report comprises excerpts from participants, each paired with the participant's pseudonym.

What are the affordances in the English language reform in STC?

Affordances in this context are delineated in terms of the successes and support shown by the stakeholders in STC. The data from the interviews with STC lecturers have revealed that the main successes are evinced in the institutional support and curriculum transformation.

The first affordance is the dedication of STC's administration to equipping technical instructors for the English language reform at STC. STC has been offering English language training to technical lecturers. Mr Khan relayed that the institution has given full support. He shared, *"Yes we have full support from our administration side and our department level, even told to stress some more on English and sometimes there are excitement to call student to do something in English, outside of our learning environment"* (Mr. Khan). For Mr Fikri, support from the institution comes in terms of encouragement to use English. He shared, *"Our deputy director applies this [English]*

at the HQ where the announcements are made in English" (Mr. Fikri). Furthermore, STC offered significant financial assistance for the execution of English language training for the technical lecturers. Ms Khadijah said, "alhamdulillah starting this year, there is a special budget for English empowerment initiatives ...there was no budget allocated before this, so with the budget now, it is really helpful" (Ms. Khadijah).

It can be highlighted that one of the efforts shown by the administrators at STC in upskilling the staff in English was to organise an English Language Training for the staff. The lecturers believed that the English language trainings offered them greater exposure to the usage of English in the classroom. One participant conveyed his enthusiasm when his college extended an invitation to enrol in an English language course. This arises from his desire and the necessity to enhance his proficiency in the technical language utilised in the programme itself. He expressed, *"...most of the time when it comes to English courses organized and offered by the college, I seldom turn down the offer. Even if there's no offer, I will apply because I am interested."* (Mr. Fikri), and *"...for technical subjects, the English use is more for technical items, like for machine, there's a whole lot of jargons. Courses like this need to continue, attending it is not a waste of time"* (Mr. Fikri). In addition, Mr. Hamid claimed that the English language training helped him professionally and personally as he could improve his English language proficiency. He said *"first, with this course, I improve my English, the usage of English, to communicate, grammar, it is like back to basic. It (the course) helps me in my teaching and at the same time it helps me with my study. I am also furthering my study"* (Mr. Hamid). He elaborated that the English language course also includes exposure to games. He shared *"...there are two modules. Both modules are fun, besides polishing grammar, English language skills, there are also games like Kahoot and more"* (Mr. Hamid).

Subsequently, STC is committed to advancing English language reform by organizing programmes that support the English language learning in their institutions. The participants mentioned that *"one of the days in the week is selected to be an English Day"* (Ms. Iris), *"Wednesday is English Day"* (Mr. Fikri) and *"Last year we chose Thursday as English Day but this year we have Tuesday"* (Mr. Khan). This not only involved lecturers from specific programmes but also students, the management staff, the hostel coordinators and others, as stated by Mr. Fikri, *"English Day is not for lecturers from the hospitality programme only, but also those from the management, wardens"*. Other than that, the institutions also provided support for departments to conduct English language activities like English language corner, public speaking, quizzes, singing competition, theatre, interview and others. As mentioned by some lecturers, *"...every department has its own English corner..."* (Ms Iris), *"...they have singing competition where they have to sing in English or do public speaking..."* (Mr. Khan), *"every week we have English activities..."* (Mr. Fikri), *"...the lecturers conducted quizzes, competitions too...even theatre performance... everything is in English..."* (Mr. Hamid), *"...we began to get more students enrolled in 2018 and there were more*

people engaged in our activities" (Mr. Khan), and "...there were also programmes in English like interview sessions where the English lecturers conducted mock job interviews for the students" (Ms. Nani). Through these activities, the lecturers felt that it would encourage more interaction in the English language among staff and students, as mentioned by Mr Hamid, "...sometimes there are excitement to call student to do something in English, outside of our learning environment ...among staff, and we are encouraged to build student, staff and student interaction...". (Mr. Hamid)

The second affordance is the curriculum transformation in STC. Data shows that one the earlier steps is to transform the curriculum, which was originally written in the national language to the English language. This point was confirmed by several participants as illustrated below.

"right now, I am attending a workshop. The workshop is to change the syllabus to English" (Ms. Halimah)

"So, like it or not, we need to use English. In our case, if we look at the syllabus for our diploma programmes, it is already in English. We have revised it to English" (Ms Nani)

".....for example, we attended a workshop to change our curriculum to English (from Malay language), this is a show of support from our institution" (Mr. Hamid).

The preceding paragraph highlights the transformation of the syllabus which is part of the curriculum. In the process of transformation, the related teaching and learning materials such as notes, slides, online applications, and reference books would undergo the same conversion. One of the participants mentioned that a course related to aviation uses notes from the industry which are already in English; *"Like in the course of Aircraft Structural Repair, the notes which are found used in the industry are already in English" (Mr. Khan).* Ms. Na also shared that notes for the fashion subject are also in English. The lecturers admitted that once the curriculum documents (the syllabus) are in English, then their notes, assessments and delivery need to be done in the same language. Ms Halimah claimed, *"May be next year when the curriculum is in English, we have to teach in English too" (Ms. Halimah).*

Moreover, most lecturers said that the incorporation of the English language in their notes and courses is already widespread, as the terminology employed in the sectors are predominantly in English. Mr. Azim shared that in maritime technology, terminology is predominantly in English and must be comprehended by students in its native context. The utilisation of the English language is essential. Ms. Nani also emphasised that proficiency in the English language is essential for her students to succeed in the field. She expressed that terminology in interior design is already established in the English language, and it is essential for students to be familiar with these words. This ensures their seamless integration into the industrial culture.

Besides the notes; activities and assessments are also prepared in English. Quizzes are in English following the language found in most of the reference books for the courses. Mr. Khan stated, *"most of my... usually quizzes or questions take out from our notes. But sometimes we also used from the [English] references books to make questions"* (Mr. Khan). Another lecturer talked about giving assignments in English. She shared *"we implement English for student's assignment, it is the first step in the field of sports therapy. So, all the assignments, I mean the question and answer are in English"* (Ms. Iris). A few lecturers mentioned that their students' presentations are in English – Ms. Su, Mr. Fikri, and Ms Halimah. In fact, Mr. Fikri made his students introduce themselves in their first class in English, and every day, they need to report their activities to the person in charge in English. He explained, *"But at the same time, like for self-introduction in their first class, I usually encourage them to speak in English and then every morning, and every day to, because every day, I will do a roll call. They report to the students' affairs department and then to my department. They report of what they do in English"* (Mr. Fikri).

To encapsulate, the affordances for the English language reform in STC are dedication of the STC in providing institutional support and the transformation of the curriculum. Institutional support is indeed a catalyst in empowering teachers and students in the process of reforming English language reform and have been highlighted by many studies (Carthy, 2018; Clark, 2022).

What are the challenges faced by the lecturers in the English language reform journey for STC?

Regarding the second research question, the data indicates that the lecturers encountered challenges when it came to utilizing the English language throughout their instructional sessions. More precisely, this part delineates the specific courses of action chosen by the lecturers and the underlying rationales that motivated their decisions.

The principal challenge lies in classroom communication, as students struggle to comprehend instructions delivered in English; consequently, most teachers utilize a combination of Bahasa Melayu and English during their lessons. Mr. Hamid stated that he attempted to utilize the English language with his students immediately after finishing the English course for educators conducted by STC's management. Nevertheless, he discovered that the students faced difficulties in understanding the content being taught. He said *"We tried last year (using the English language), right after the English course, we tried to speak to the students in English, (we use English) in teaching the technical subjects. We tried, but the students found it hard to understand."* (Int. Hamid). This finding is also highlighted by studies by Hairuddin Harun et al. (2021) and Norhayati Gahazali et al. (2020), when they highlighted that most technical students had low proficiency level. As a result, Mr. Hamid made the

decision to use both English and Malay in his course. He said that " *So, we decided to mix (English and Bahasa Melayu)*". A few lecturers supported this point when they declared that they too used a mix of both languages in class. " *So far, we have used both, a bit of English and a bit of Malay... but not fully*". (Int: Halimah). Ms. Halimah used the word 'rojak' (a Malay salad dish that mixes vegetables and fritters, eaten with peanut sauce) to analogously illustrate her use of English and Bahasa Melayu in the classroom. She said, " *So far, we have not fully utilised the use of English..., but after the English language course, we tried to show efforts, but "rojak" language*" (Int: Halimah).

Some lecturers quantified their utilization of English in the classroom by describing it in terms of percentages. Mr. Hamid extensively elaborated on his usage of the English language, stating that he employed it for fifty percent of the time. He was concerned with the pupils' proficiency in comprehending classes based on the English language, hence he employed both languages.

" *So, I think in general, I did not use the language fully for now. I mean I am afraid that the students would not understand the subject because they are not good in English. It is too sudden. So, we use 50-50, meaning we use Bahasa Melayu and English to explain in class. We can use the two languages*" (Int: Mr. Hamid).

While Mr. Hamid asserted that he used an equal distribution of English and Malay in his class, Mr. Fikri acknowledged using approximately 20-30% English in his presentation. He claimed, " *I can speak the language generally, but in class I used around 20-30% of the time*" (Int: Fikri). Ms. Iris stated that she and her colleagues sometimes employ English in their teaching, but it is not a frequent practice. She claimed that " *I used it sometimes and I know that some lecturers actually used some English in teaching, but not always*" (Int: Iris).

The main motivation for the lecturers to use both English and Bahasa Melayu was to assist students shift from the norms of using complete Bahasa Melayu to using English language in STC classes. Mr. Hamid expressed his preference for a gradual approach, utilizing both English and Bahasa Melayu to elucidate the subjects in his lesson, ensuring comprehensive understanding among all pupils, as evidenced in the following excerpt.

" *So, if we can use the language fully, that is good. But, for now, we can implement it bit by bit to the students, that we will do but I still think that in a long run, we will have to use both languages first; meaning let's used Bahasa Melayu in the syllabus and for explanations and assessment , we can use the English language. Maybe the explanation is in Bahasa Melayu and the test paper is in full English. We have to do that, if not the students will face problems. Maybe there are students who really can't understand, that would be problematic to the students*" (Int: Hamid).

This point was also mentioned by several other lecturers as shown by the following excerpts.

"It will be a big challenge for the students because they might not understand, even though we are in the process of translating the module and the notes from BM to English, some still can't understand English well" (Int: Hamid).

"I am definitely using English as the medium, not a problem to me, but I think some students who do not come from the city, who are not used to using English, they can't understand the subject matter" (Int: Azim).

Furthermore, the lecturers decided to use a mix of English and the Malay language due to their apprehensions regarding the students' aptitude to comprehend the subject matter, which is a crucial component of their technical education. Due to the diverse backgrounds of the students, including some who come from non-English speaking backgrounds, the instructors are worried that those who do not comprehend the subject matter may fall behind. Most lecturers emphasized that the paramount aspect for technical degree students is to comprehend the subject matter to excel in the industries. Ms. Nani confirmed that Bahasa Melayu was still utilized, even though the notes were written in English. The class continues to be conducted in Bahasa Melayu due to worries regarding students' comprehension abilities. She said, *"Yes, we still use Bahasa Melayu even though the notes are in the English language. The lesson is still in Bahasa Melayu because I am afraid the students cannot understand"* (Int: Nani). Similarly, Mr. Azim emphasized that his primary concern was the pupils' understanding of the subject matter. He said that *"I can use the English language in my class, but I am afraid that the students will not understand the content."*

In ensuring the comprehension of both the subject matter and the English language, most lecturers employ English for technical terminology and utilize Bahasa Melayu to provide explanations. Ms. Iris provided an explanation of the functioning of the dual language initiative in her classes. She explained that most technical terminology are originally in English. As a result, she would utilize the phrases as they are specified in the curriculum and provide explanations to students in Bahasa Melayu. She said *"So, in my case, I will give explanations in English, if talking about terms, then we use English. If the explanation, we definitely use Bahasa Melayu"* (Int: Iris). This is also seen in Mr Fikri's class. He clarified that *"In hospitality, we use a lot of English terms, because these are the terms used in the industries, we use it but then we will explain in Malay"* (Int: Fikri). Illustrating a similar point, Mr. Hamid said that for him to overcome the obstacle of students not understanding his lessons, he familiarized the students on the use of English terms, but it must be accompanied by an elaboration in Bahasa Melayu. He shared that *"for us to overcome the challenge, we will explain all English terms using the Malay Language"* (Int: Hamid).

The dual language approach employed by the participants in their course delivery is not unique to STC, as other studies (Adewale, 2023; Krylov, 2020; Wang et al., 2023) have identified and employed a similar strategy. Wang et al. (2023) investigated the implementation of functional bilingualism in a technical institution and discovered that this strategy enhanced students' professional competencies and English proficiency. In addition, Adewale (2023) proposed a multilingual paradigm for teaching TVET in Africa to facilitate the learning of students with English as the medium of instruction.

In short, the primary difficulty of the language reform in STC is the effective implementation of English in course delivery. The instructors reported that certain students experienced challenges in comprehending the lessons presented in English owing to their inadequate proficiency level. The teachers were apprehensive that this might affect the students' comprehension of the subject matter, which is fundamental to the education of technical students. Consequently, they adopted a dual language approach in their course instruction as employed in many other institution.

CONCLUSION

Data shows that STC has made a positive move towards achieving its goals in English language reform. STC offers institutional assistance by allocating funds and coordinating training for instructors. Furthermore, STC has made a pivotal choice to reform its curriculum, resulting in a significant influence on classroom practices, where lecturers have begun to produce notes and administer tests and assignments in English

Data shows that the main challenge faced by the lecturers in realizing the English language reform efforts is the use of English in the teaching process itself. They find themselves in a situation where the students fail to understand the subject matter due to medium of instruction. The use of the English language as a medium of instruction should not impede students' comprehension of the subject matter, which constitutes the essential knowledge they must attain. Consequently, most lecturers employ a bilingual methodology in their instruction of the courses. Bilingualism in TVET institutes is not exclusive to STC, since it has been implemented by several institutions worldwide.

This study presented data in understanding the journey of the English language reform in STC, a TVET institution that aims to upgrade the professional skills of its graduates; thus, the findings are context specific. The findings can be used as substantial grounding for further research such as a quantitative study investigating impact of the use of bilingualism in TVET institutions.

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AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

Fariza Puteh Behak (Formal analysis; Writing; Supervision; Visualisation)

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The current research project adheres to general ethical guidelines in conducting research. Approvals from related institutions have been obtained. Participants were briefed regarding the research project and were given the information sheet and consent form. Participants were invited to join the study willingly. All participants signed the consent form.

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