



Cooperation between Schools and Local Communities in Context of Global Human Resources Development: Case Study of Malaysia

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Abstract

In multiracial Malaysia, global human resources development is under way in a multicultural and multiethnic environment in which the Malays, Chinese and Indians are a majority. This paper reports, by focusing particularly on English-medium education, on the status quo of cooperation between schools and local communities in the context of global human resources development, the challenges facing them, the education policies related to the development and the ways in which the policies are currently implemented.

1. Overview of English Education in Malaysia

Malaysia became independent from British Malaya in 1957, and the year 2017 will mark the 60th anniversary of its independence. The total population of Malaysia is around 31,250,000 (as of the end of March, 2016), and it is a multiracial country comprising the Malays and indigenous people believing in Islam called Bumiputera (meaning 'sons of the soil') (around 65%),

Chinese who are mostly Buddhists, Taoists and Christians (26%), Indians who are mainly Hindus, Muslims and Christians (7%), and other ethnic groups (1%) ⁽¹⁾. In this country, different educational methods were used according to the different ethnic groups under the divide-and-rule policy of the British colonial system until the end of World War II , and the Malays, many of whom lived in rural areas, had few opportunities for modern education in comparison with Chinese and Indians, many of whom lived in urban areas. This was a major factor that contributed to conflicting opinions amongst the different races in the post-war process of adopting a common language for education and developing common curriculum, and eventually to a series of educational reforms. Amid the progress of "Malayanization" under the so-called 'Bumiputera Policy' in the 1970s, the use of the mother tongue (Malay) in education was promoted and the reorganization of the national education system was planned. Although it has now been more than 30 years since the

reorganization started, 3 languages are the principal means of communication at primary education levels, and even today primary schools are divided into Malay, Chinese and Tamil schools.

As a response to rapid globalization from the 1990s, however, the ruling coalition, the Barisan National (BN: National Front), led by the then Prime Minister Mahathir (who resigned from the post at the end of October, 2003, after serving for 22 years) announced in July, 2002, “From the new school semester in 2003 onwards, English will be used in all science and mathematics classes for the first year students at all primary and secondary schools nationwide,” and this policy was actually introduced and implemented in the following year 2003. As a consequence, ‘science and mathematics education using English as the media of instruction’ was being provided in all grades at all schools, from primary to tertiary education (colleges, universities, preparatory schools for universities, polytechnics, etc) as of the year 2008.

The above-described policy came as a great shock to quite a few people in the Malaysian educational world, since it was considered not only as a factor that was likely to undermine the foundation of the 30-or-more-year preferential policy for Malay, which used the Malay language, or the ‘Malaysian language’ as the ‘official language’ but also as a major reform that would lead to reevaluation of the significance of the Bumiputera Policy itself in the country.

As a principle, Chinese or Tamil had been used in the classes including science and mathematics at government-aided national-type primary schools and Malay had been

used in the classes at government-owned national primary schools. Therefore, the exclusion of only science and mathematics from the principle was really a drastic change. As for the reasons why the drastic measure, which could shake the foundation of the conventional Malay language policy, was taken, Prime Minister Mahathir (then in office) was quoted as saying, “New books are published every day, and hundreds of articles are written in the English language. If we persist in the use of the ethnic languages in science and mathematics education, we will not be able to keep up with the rapid development of the latest knowledge. Therefore, our government has proposed teaching science and mathematics in the English language, because in that way we can directly acquire the knowledge (through English)”⁽²⁾. The policy of using English as a media of instruction was intended mainly to ① stop the decline in the English ability of the Malays, ② strengthen international competitiveness in the field of science technology and ③ respond to globalization based on information technologies and other innovations.

This language policy in education seemed too radical to some people, and the communities and institutions of each ethnic group responded by expressing opinions and taking action in line with their respective positions, as described below.

1) Response by Malay Institutions

Firstly, in Hearing of Opinions from Malay Institutions and Organizations on Government’s Proposal of Teaching Science and Mathematics in English at Primary and

Secondary Schools held on August 23, 2002, in which the National Association of Linguistics, the Malay Students Association, the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia), the National Writers Association and other organizations participated, the Malay institutions pointed out mainly that more time would be necessary for clarification of potential problems, that the students in rural areas would be adversely affected, that the number of English-speaking science and mathematics teachers was insufficient and that it was premature to introduce the system in the next year. Furthermore, although the importance of English was recognized, some members of the institutions objected to the government's proposal out of the concern that the status of Malay as an education language might be affected.

2) Response by Indian Institutions

Secondly, the Indian institutions decided to accept the teaching of science and mathematics in English on July 23, 2002, because the Indian ruling party MIC (the Malaysian Indian Congress) had already announced approval of the English-medium education at Tamil primary schools. Amid the criticism that Tamil schools did not make much effort to use their native language as a medium of instruction, the ruling MIC approved the government's proposal mainly for the reasons that very few Indians opposed the proposal, that English-medium instruction of science and mathematics would raise the social status of the Indian community, that the number of dropouts at secondary schools would be reduced as a result of English-

medium education at primary schools, and above all that the adoption of English-medium education would make Tamil schools even more attractive to Indian students. Furthermore, IPF (the Indian Progressive Front) also supported the government's proposal, and since Indians frequently used English for practical purposes, a majority of Indian organizations and institutions decided to approve the proposal without major objections.

3) Response by Chinese Institutions

On the other hand, the Chinese education circles and the Chinese-based political parties strongly opposed the government's proposal of the introduction of English-medium instruction in primary schools, and therefore the Chinese institutions and organizations were very slow in making the decision. As they insisted consistently that science and mathematics should be taught in their language, the ruling coalition BN gave a one-week grace period to the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and other parties on October 22, 2002 so that they could submit the proposal of the English-medium education at Chinese primary schools. On October 31, the Chinese ruling party MCA and the other parties concerned finally accepted the adjustment plan on English-medium education made by the Supreme Council of the ruling coalition BN and decided to introduce English-medium instruction of science and mathematics in primary schools by overcoming objections from the opposition parties and the education circles. Specifically, they decided to introduce 'bilingual instruction' in primary schools by providing 6-hour

Chinese classes and 4-hour English classes for mathematics and 3-hour Chinese classes and 3-hour English classes for science ⁽³⁾.

At this time, an executive of the ruling coalition criticized UCSCAM (the United Chinese School Committee's Association of Malaysia), which was the most influential teachers' association in the Chinese community, of their strong opposition to the decision to introduce English-medium instruction of science and mathematics in primary schools. Then, the Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah (then in office) committed to monitoring the moves of UCSCAM, stating, "We will carefully watch the words and actions of the Chinese educational institution UCSCAM in order to prevent the issue of English-medium science and mathematics education at Chinese primary schools from turning into a political problem. Our government is very concerned because this institution tends to cause political problems for us ⁽⁴⁾." However, the opposition party PAS (the Islamic Party of Malaysia), which objected to the reform, began supporting the opinions of UCSCAM, and conflicts continued even after the introduction of the system.

In September, before the government's proposal was accepted, the Prime Minister Mahathir (who also held the post of the Minister of Economics at that time) presented the budget bill, which included 'RM 5,000,000,000 (around ¥150,000,000,000 Yen) to be allocated to the expenses of science and mathematics instruction at primary and secondary schools from 2002 to 2008 ⁽⁵⁾.

Furthermore, it was decided to extend the teachers' retirement age from 55 to 57 upon the introduction of English-medium science

and mathematics education in 2003, and the retirement of the teachers who were supposed to retire in 2003 was automatically extended (the teachers' retirement age is 60 as of 2016). This privilege was given to science, mathematics and English teachers as a measure to secure the sufficient number of the teachers of the subjects ⁽⁶⁾. It was also decided to give incentives to teachers to press ahead with the educational policy. Under the incentive arrangement, teachers of English, mathematics, science and other relevant subjects (including pure science, technical arts and information technology) were paid bonuses as well as the base salary, and teachers of other subjects who improved their English ability were also granted a pay raise. As a result, around 50,000 teachers teaching mathematics, science and English to the first graders of primary schools and the first and 6th graders of secondary schools were eligible to receive incentives. The percentage of incentives to base salary was 10% for non-college graduate teachers compared to 5% for college graduate teachers. In July, 2003, all the English teachers, in addition to the teachers of the said 3 grades, were allowed to receive incentives.

2. Challenges of English-Medium Science and Mathematics Instruction

After the above-described process, the system of English-medium science and mathematics instruction was introduced for the first graders of all the national and national-type primary and secondary schools across Malaysia in the new school semester in January, 2003. As described above, however,

this educational reform was expected to mark a major turning point from the conventional preferential policy for the Malay language, but the impression was created that the system was established and introduced too abruptly.

As mentioned above, this reform was intended mainly to ① stop the decline in the English ability of the Malays, ② strengthen international competitiveness in the field of science technology and ③ respond to globalization based on information technologies and other innovations. In relation to ① the Malays' English ability level, for instance, when an investigation was made to confirm the fact that the English level of the students in Brunei receiving bilingual education was higher than those in Sarawak, South Malaysia, it was found out that science, mathematics and English were taught in English at primary schools and history and geography were taught in English at junior and senior high schools in Brunei. On the contrary, Lim Kit Siang, the leader of DAP (the Democratic Action Party) stated "In the Sixth Malaysian Plan from 1991 to 1995, the government announced that English is very important as a second language and that it is crucial to raise the English level above the standards. It must be explained why no results have been seen in the past 10 years⁽⁸⁾." The decline in the English ability in Malaysia had sparked criticism of the government's policy again and again. Considering the fact that the system of English-medium instruction was introduced within less than one year from Siang's remarks, the results of the factual investigation of bilingual education in the neighboring country, Brunei, had a

favourable influence on those promoting the introduction of 'English-medium instruction of all the subjects'.

Regarding ② strengthening of international competitiveness and ③ response to globalization based on IT, these policies were proposed in the late 1990s, and from the viewpoint of introduction of foreign capital, industrial development and future human resources development in these fields, the enhancement of English proficiency was a major concern in the national policies. As a matter of fact, bilingual education is currently provided at most of the private colleges and universities established in 1997 and thereafter. Judging from the attitude of the Mahathir administration at that time, it can be imagined that the government was taking great pains to promote the use of English nationwide, which is now the de facto language of international communication, while trying to iron out the differences with the Bumiputera Policy.

However, since the reform was introduced abruptly without sufficient preparation, there still remain various problems that need to be fixed immediately, as described below.

1) Necessity for Solution of Discrepancies that Occurred in Process of Introduction

The logic advocated by the former Prime Minister Mahathir and his government was as follows: 'Technological development is the top priority in the country.' → 'Science and mathematics are the subjects that form the foundation for national development.' → 'English is the common language in the world and facilitates the development of science and technology.' → 'Therefore, it is crucial to the

prosperity of Malaysia for children to learn science and mathematics in English.’ Unfortunately, however, this logic was not based on any academic grounds.

As the ‘Fenn Wu Report’ once proposed, “Children should be educated in their mother tongue, it is true that, in the system that requires children, particularly primary school students to study a second language before mastering their first language, (in this case, they are compelled to study subjects using the second language), there is a high risk that they will learn neither of the languages completely. Therefore, the effectiveness of the system is questionable. For example, in the Philippines, which is also a multiethnic and multilingual country, English-medium science and mathematics education is provided, but their level of science and mathematics is not so high by international standards. In fact, an overhaul of the system was considered in the country. Furthermore, some people opposing the system stated that in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Germany, France and other non-English speaking countries, although science and mathematics are not taught in English at primary or secondary schools, their technologies are at the top of the world. However, this statement was ignored, and the system was arbitrarily introduced. This also needs to be clearly explained after the results are seen.

2) Concern over Increase in Burden on New First Graders of Chinese Primary Schools

In most of national-type Chinese primary schools nationwide, classroom time is divided into 2 sessions: the morning session and the afternoon session. The morning session

usually started at between 7:30 and 7:45 and ended around 12:20. The first graders were required to take 9 classes (1 class was 30 minutes long) a day. However, they were compelled to take 10 classes a day starting with the new school semester in January, 2003 (the morning session ended around 12:50, and the afternoon session started at 1:00 and ended 6:20). On a weekly basis, the number of classes increased by 5, and the time was extended by 2 hours and 30 minutes (increase of 1 class and 30 minutes per day), and the hours of English classes, English-medium mathematics classes and English-medium science classes increased by 2, 4 and 3 respectively. Of all the 43 classes excluding practical training classes such as art, music and physical education, the numbers of English-medium, Malay-medium and Chinese-medium classes were 9, 9 and 25 respectively, and virtually ‘trilingual education’ was underway. Studying in 3 languages was a big burden on the 6-year-old new first graders of Chinese primary schools, and parents and teachers also had to shoulder the burdens of, for example, the employment and training of Chinese teachers who could teach science and mathematics in English. Furthermore, appropriate measures had to be taken to prevent possible adverse effects of the system of 6-hour Chinese-medium and 4-hour English-medium instruction of mathematics and 3-hour Chinese-medium and 3-hour English-medium instruction of science.

The biggest reason why UCSCAM was opposed to the system was that they were discouraged by the decrease in the hours of Chinese-medium classes from conventional 15 to 12 in 2003. They insisted as their basic

policy, “It is irrational for primary school students to spend more time on the study of two technical subjects than on the study of the language itself at the early stage of learning⁽⁹⁾”, which meant that they “approve of the goal of improvement of English ability, but disapprove of the system of English-medium classes”. In fact, they strongly objected to the introduction of English-medium science and mathematics classes based on the results of UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test) showing that the students of Chinese primary schools were better than the students of other ethnic primary schools.

3) Widening Gap amongst Teachers

As described above, the Malaysian Education Ministry decided to give incentives to teachers to proceed with the system. Under the incentive arrangement, teachers of English, mathematics and science were paid bonuses that were 5% of the base salary, and teachers of other subjects who improved their English ability were also granted a pay raise. This was a preferential system in which extra salaries were paid based on the ‘subjects that could be taught by some teachers’, and there was a high risk that, as a result of favouring of some elite teachers over others, demoralization of teachers who could not teach in English and conflicts amongst teachers, confusion would occur in school operations, teachers training and workshops, etc.

4) Significance of Existence of Malay and Fall in its Status

Malay had been recognized as ‘the official Malaysian language’ after the Bumiputera

Policy, but the significance of its existence was reduced and its status was lowered upon the decision to introduce English-medium education.

The idea spread that science and mathematics are the most important subjects for advancement of technology and changes in industrial structure, and that these subjects “should be studied in ‘English’ to keep direct contact with the latest developments of science”. This means, however, the former Prime Minister Mahathir admitted, “that cannot be done well in Malay”, it had never been possible in the past and it would never be in the future. The idea posed serious challenges that might lead to reconsideration of the very meaning of the Bumiputera Policy itself over the medium and long term.

5) Promotion of Elitism

Since English has been used as a second language for a long period of time in Malaysia, it is often pointed out that the translation culture is generally absent particularly in the academic fields, and many theses, academic works and other books written in English are published without being translated into Malay. Furthermore, at many private colleges and universities established in 1997 and thereafter, English has been increasingly used in their classes in a bid to develop human resources for international business expansion or to accept many foreign students. Of course, English is being frequently used in everyday life in Malaysia in comparison with Japan and other countries. However, as a result of the policy of English-based education a smaller number of academic books will be translated into Malay, and eventually it is likely to be

difficult to promote education amongst the general public.

In Malaysia, English is used mainly in urban areas. In rural areas, where relatively many Malays live, children, students and adults have little opportunity to use English and only a few speak English very well. In a medium and long term perspective, therefore, the type of educational reform being discussed in this paper will very likely result in widening of regional and ethnic differences in education and promotion of elitism, in which only people who can read and understand academic books and other scholarly literature written in English will be preferentially treated in the future, instead of attaining the goal of raising the English literacy level of all the people.

3. Abolition of English-Medium Science and Mathematics Education and New Development in Field of English Education

As a result of introduction of English-medium science and mathematics instruction, many children and students, who could have fully understand the content of science and mathematics if they had been taught in their own language, were not able to understand it very well due to their poor English. Some students had poor grades and lost their motivation to continue because they could not fully express ideas in English. In this way, a number of cases were reported in which the students' ability of science and mathematics was adversely affected by their ability of English.

Given these circumstances, in July 2009, the Education Ministry announced the policy of reversing the system of teaching science

and mathematics in English and reintroducing the previous system of instructing them in Malay and other ethnic languages in stages. The ministry decided to restore the pre-2003 system of instruction of science and mathematics in Malay at national primary schools, only in Chinese at national-type Chinese primary schools and in Tamil at national-type Tamil primary schools in the new school semester in 2012. Specifically, the schedule was set to abolish the system of English-medium education in the 1st and 4th grades of primary and secondary schools in 2012. As an exception, however, the first graders of primary schools at the time of the initial introduction of English-medium education were required to take English-medium science and mathematics classes until 2014 when they completed the course of the 6th grade of secondary schools.

While taking this approach of 'returning to the basics', the Malaysian Education Ministry, considering that the system for improvement of English proficiency of children and students would be absolutely necessary under current globalization from 2012 onward, decided to:

- ① employ additional 14,000 new teachers including employment of 1,000 foreign teachers and reemployment of 600 retired teachers;
- ② increase the time of English classes by 90 minutes to 330 minutes (11 classes) a week for the 1st to 3rd graders of national primary schools and extend the time to 300 minutes (10 classes) for the 4th to 6th graders;
- ③ increase the time of English classes by 60 minutes to 120 minutes a week for the 1st to 3rd graders of national-type Chinese and

Tamil primary schools and extend the time by 30 minutes to 120 minutes a week for the 4th to 6th graders;

- ④ increase the time of English classes by 80 minutes to 280 minutes a week for the 1st to 6th graders of secondary schools;
- ⑤ extend the time to 400 minutes a week for students of Form 6 (the college entrance course affiliated with senior high schools);
- ⑥ increase the time from 3 to 6 hours a week for the students of the matriculation program (the pre-university education program); and
- ⑦ strengthen the study of English grammar.

As listed in ① - ③ below, Malaysia's English education curricula are intended to teach not only 4 basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing but also correct grammar, the English phonetic system and how to build a vocabulary for communication, thinking skills, information communication technology (ICT) and the value of citizenship education.

- ① Content of curricula: mastery of skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing
- ② Instruction of linguistic features: phonetic system, grammar and vocabulary
- ③ Other educationally essential skills: thinking skills, learning how to learn skills, acquisition and application of ICT skills, value and citizenship, multiple intelligence, knowledge acquisition and preparation for real world.

Not only textbooks and workbooks but also education software produced and distributed as teaching media by the Curriculum Development Centre) are mostly used as teaching materials. Schools in some districts introduce the systems of providing

English classes, English medium mathematics and science classes, Malay (official language) grammar classes and question-and-answer exercises to support reading comprehension and other skills through the intranet. Many commercially available worksheets and workbooks are also used for the purposes not only of summary, review and homework but also of giving grades to students.

Basically, English education in Malaysia is intended principally for acquisition and application of 4 skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). However, since the status of the English language in the country is not a 'foreign language' but a 'second language', the textbooks are designed for students to correctly learn vocabulary, expressions, grammar, sentence patterns, word order, phonetics and other aspects.

Regarding learning assessment, the 4 skills of the students at each stage of the curriculum are as a rule rated directly in the classes or by monthly tests and other means. However, there is a strong tendency that the assessment is focused on the reading and writing ability in order to prepare students for the final examinations at most schools.

4. Trends and Challenges of English Education in Local Communities

The above overview of Malaysia's English education policy indicates that in order to respond to globalization the country is considering the possibility of acquisition of English proficiency for application of scientific and technological expertise in future business settings on the basis of daily communication skills. With the effects of this policy in mind,

the trends of English education in local communities of the country are discussed below.

The Malaysian communities are divided roughly into the urban areas where various ethnic groups coexist and the rural areas where relatively only a few territorially related ethnic groups live. There are differences in ethnic compositions between the urban and rural areas, but the tendency in which people of the same ethnic groups congregate and support each other remains strong in both communities. It is often pointed out that although the regional disparity is a long time issue in Malaysia the gap between the urban and rural areas is widening these days as a consequence of not only the disparity among ethnic groups but also the differences in changes of industrial structure and in infrastructure maintenance and management.

It can be said, however, that the issue of regional differences in English education has resulted from differences in frequency of use between the urban areas where English is regularly used and the rural areas where the language is hardly ever used rather than from differences in the courses and teaching materials available at schools. That is to say, what matters is how to maintain, develop and efficiently utilize English skills learned at school, and this is a problem directly associated with 'the significance of studying English (foreign languages) in Japan and other foreign countries where it is not a native or official language.

As described above, in Malaysia, the assessment is focused more on the knowledge and skills of reading and writing English accurately than on the skills of listening and

speaking in order to prepare students for the final examinations at each stage of school education. Therefore, it is quite common in every local community that many students receive private English lessons at cram schools or from tutors to brush up their English skills.

Regarding preschool education, there are more advantages in urban area, where Chinese, English and Malay 'trilingual education' is possible, than in other local communities, and private kindergartens are dominant in comparison with other preschool educational institutions. Therefore, the wealthy population and a small number of elites may have better education opportunities, and there is concern that the educational gap amongst the same ethnic groups will widen.

The authors have visited several kindergartens there before to carry out a field study on preschool education, and each of them provided excellent education on not only English but also science and mathematics.

In Malaysia, there are many NGOs and NPOs addressing environmental issues and providing educational support in cooperation with schools and local institutions. Other forms of assistance are also available, and for instance 'supplementary schools' are run mainly by Muslim mosques, Buddhist and Hindu temples and other bodies in each ethnic community, where volunteers provide supplementary English lessons or teach English conversation to students of the families that cannot afford to pay tuitions for cram schools or tutors free of charge after school or on holidays.

In most cases, the English instruction provided by cram schools, tutors and above-

described supplementary schools is intended principally to improve students' school performance, mainly their examination scores, by teaching grammar, vocabulary and how to better read and write in order to prepare them for the next stage of education or employment. This situation is commonly observed in English education in Japan, too, where too much emphasis is placed on so-called 'examination English'. In Malaysia, however, since English is frequently used as a second language in everyday life, it is considered important for students to acquire the basic skills of 'reading and writing' at primary and secondary education levels and then the skills of 'listening and speaking' through conversation at higher education levels. The general idea is that the students may then, with sufficient academic ability, further improve conversation and other communication skills and enhance their comprehensive ability of application of the language.

Supplementary Note)

This thesis summarizes part of the joint research of the Shonan Institute of General Research of Bunkyo University in 2015, based on 'Cooperation between Schools and Local Communities in Context of Global Human Resources Development: From the Comparative Study of the Cases of Malaysia and Japan (representative of research: Masahiro Teshima and person in charge: Koichi Imada) issued by the institute.

Notes)

(1) http://www.statistics.gov.my/english/frameset_keystats.php October 21, 2016.

(2) *Utusan Malaysia*, October 15, 2002.

(3) *Ibid.*, November 1, 2002.

(4) *New Strait Times*, November 14, 2002.

(5) *Ibid.* (2), September 20, 2002.

(6) *Ibid.* (4), January 1, 2003.

(7) *Ibid.*, July 14, 2003.

(8) *Nichima Press News.com*, June 11, 2001
<http://www.nichimapress.com/news4/news20010611.html>

(9) *Sin Chew Daily*, November 3, 2002.

