

**THE REVERSAL OF PPSMI LANGUAGE POLICY: A  
CRITICAL STUDY OF THE MALAYS' PERSPECTIVES**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

The Malaysian implementation of language policies has always been dealt carefully as it is considered a sensitive issue in the multi-ethnic nation. The language planning process usually undergoes various levels before implementation. What happens when the language policy is abruptly implemented through language-in-education planning without much thought given to language planning? For example, the 'Teaching of Mathematics and Science in English' (EteMS) policy, better known as PPSMI (Malay acronym), was introduced to address the deteriorating English language standard among Malaysian students. Considering the quiet dissatisfaction among the Malay community about national language policy shifts in Malaysia, there is a real need to understand the reality surrounding the sudden change in the PPSMI policy. Thus, the study investigates the awareness levels and opinions of the ethnic Malays relating to PPSMI. Besides, to examine whether socio-cultural factors have any bearing on the decision of the Malays in accepting or rejecting the PPSMI policy and exploring the ideological discursive formation (IDF) in the discursive practices of the urban and the rural Malays. Finally, to determine the difference between the urban and rural Malays and whether or not PPSMI policy brings a positive impact on students. This study is very relevant, although this policy was abolished in 2009 because we do not want the same mistakes to occur in the future for any new language policy implementation in Malaysia. The researcher used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by incorporating the "Three Dimensional Framework" and discourse analysis to examine how Malays have put forward their views through language policies, primarily via PPSMI. Mixed method research was employed in this study for this purpose through the interview (240 respondents) and survey (240 respondents). The findings revealed those who have a high awareness of this policy are more than those who have low awareness of the policy. The textual analysis findings concluded that all the urban respondents and (80%) the rural respondents conveyed their support towards the PPSMI policy, and only 20% of the rural respondents rejected the policy. The findings also revealed that both urban and rural Malays did not show any difference in their opinion of PPSMI's positive impact on students and only three socio-cultural factors that influenced the decision making of the Malays from the interview session. Thus, the acceptance or rejection of the Malays of the PPSMI showed a positive relationship with their ideologies.

## خلاصة البحث

جرى التعامل مع تطبيق السياسات اللغوية في ماليزيا دائماً بعناية وحذر؛ نظراً إلى أنها تُعدُّ مسألة حساسة في الدولة متعددة الأعراق، لذا تخضع عادة مراحل إعداد السياسة اللغوية لمستويات مختلفة قبل التطبيق، ولكن يعرض السؤال: ماذا يحدث عند تنفيذ السياسة اللغوية فجأة في التعليم من دون التفكير في التخطيط اللغوي؟ فقد قُدِّمت مثلاً سياسة تدريس الرياضيات والعلوم بالإنجليزية EteMS، أو PPSMI بالملايوية؛ لمعالجة تدهور مستوى الإنجليزية بين الطلاب الملايو، ونظراً إلى الاستياء غير المعلن في المجتمع الملايوي من التغييرات في سياسات اللغة الوطنية في ماليزيا؛ ظهرت الحاجة إلى فهم الواقع المحيط بالتغيير المفاجئ فيها، وعليه؛ يهدف هذا البحث إلى التحقق من مستويات إدراك الملايو وآرائهم فيما يتعلق بسياسة PPSMI، ودراسة ما إذا كان للعوامل الاجتماعية الثقافية أي تأثير على قرار الملايو قبول تلك السياسة أو رفضها، وأيضاً؛ اكتشاف أيديولوجية الخطاب التشكيلي IDF في الأحاديث الجانبية للملايو في المدن والأرياف، وأخيراً؛ تبيين الفرق بينهم فيما يتعلق بسياسة PPSMI، وإن كان لها تأثير إيجابي أم سلبي على الطلاب، وقد استخدمت الباحثة تحليل الخطاب النقدي CDA من خلال مزج إطار العمل ثلاثي الأبعاد، وتحليل الخطاب؛ لفحص كيفية تقديم الملايو وجهات نظرهم في السياسات اللغوية، ولا سيما سياسة PPSMI، واعتمدت منهج البحث المختلط، فأجرت مقابلات مع 240 من المشاركين، ووزعت استبانة، وقد بيّنت النتائج أن من لديهم إدراك عالٍ لهذه السياسة أكثر ممن غيرهم، في حين خلصت نتائج التحليل النصي إلى أن جميع المشاركين في المدن و80% من المشاركين في الأرياف؛ قبلوا سياسة PPSMI، في حين رفضها 20% فقط من المشاركين في الأرياف، واتفق الملايو في المدن والأرياف على أن لسياسة PPSMI تأثيراً إيجابياً على الطلبة، وأن ثلاثة عوامل اجتماعية ثقافية فقط؛ أثرت في عملية اتخاذ الملايو قرارهم في أثناء المقابلات، ومن ثم؛ أظهر قبولهم تلك السياسة أو رفضها؛ علاقة إيجابية مع أيديولوجياتهم، وختاماً؛ تُقدِّم هذه النتائج تمهيداً لدراسات مستقبلية أكثر شمولاً وأهمية للنجاح في تخطيط السياسات اللغوية.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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## DECLARATION

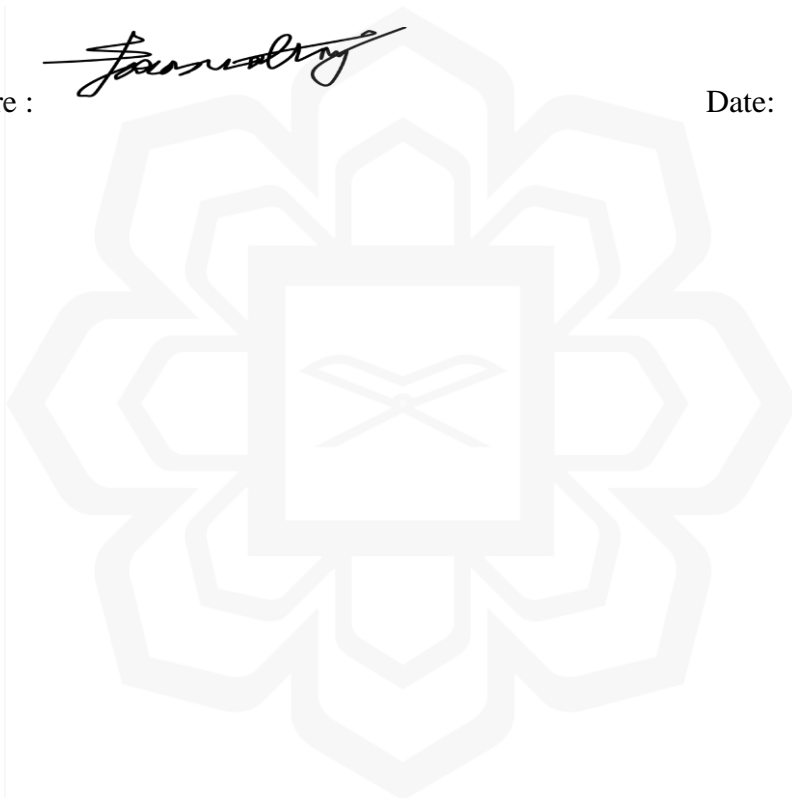
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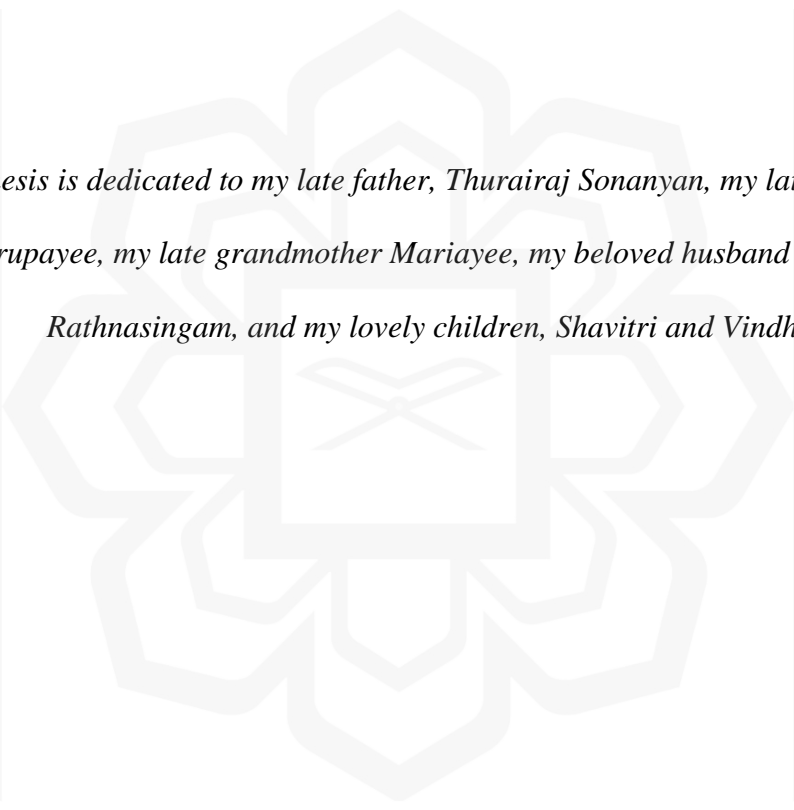
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*This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Thuraiaraj Sonanyan, my late mother Sittu Karupayee, my late grandmother Mariayee, my beloved husband Sivakumar Rathnasingam, and my lovely children, Shavitri and Vindhiya.*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DAP	Democratic Action Party
DBP	Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
DD	Direct Discourse
DD[S]	Direct Discourse Slipping
DLP	Dual Language Programme
DHA	Discourse Historical Approach
DP	Discursive Practice
DRA	Dialectical Reasoning Approach
ELTC	English Language Teaching Centre
EteMS	Teaching of Mathematics and Science in English
GAPENA	Gabungan Persatuan Penulis Nasional
GMP	Gerakan Mansuhkan PPSMI
IA	Intertextual Analysis
ID	Indirect Discourse
IDF	Ideological Discursive Formation
IUKL	Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur
MaSTT	Mathematics and Science Trainer Training
MBMMBI.	Dasar Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCKK	Malay College Kuala Kangsar
MELTA	Malaysian English Language Teaching Association
MIC	Gerakan, Malaysian Indian Congress
MOE	Ministry of Education
MSC	Multimedia Super Corridor
MST	Mathematics and Science teachers
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
NEP	New Economic Policy
NST	New Straits Times
NG	Non-government organisations
PAGE	Persatuan Parent Action Group for Education
PEMBINA	Pemuafakatan Badab Ilmiah Nasional
PEMANDU	Performance Management and Delivery Unit
PHEI	Private tertiary educational institutions
PPSMI	Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris
RM	Rural Malay
SFL	Systematic Functional Linguistics
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
UCSCAM	United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UM	Urban Malay
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation

UNSIG  
UPSI

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, a linguistically divided society, language constitutes both a cultural boundary and a marker of social stratification. The implementation of language policy in Malaysia is always dealt with carefully as it is considered a sensitive issue in the multi-ethnic facet of the nation. The language planning process undergoes typically various levels of discussions before it is implemented. However, there were situations when such a strict code of conduct is bypassed. An instance is the hastily drawn policy regarding mathematics and science teaching in English' (EteMS) or better known as PPSMI (Malay acronym). It was introduced mainly to address the deteriorating standard of the acquisition of the English Language among Malaysian students. Further, English is deemed necessary due to its status as the language of science and technology. Implemented in 2003, the policy was scrapped and the two subjects - Mathematics and Science – were taught again using the Malay medium from 2012. The abrupt change did not allow Malaysians to gauge the impact of PPSMI policy. On an emotional scale, the sudden shift in policy left Malaysians bewildered. Many of them, particularly the affected stakeholders - parents and the students - began to question the rationale behind this move. Even the Malays, who were deemed to be beneficiaries of the change in the policy, were divided in their views. How big a group was rooting for this change and what were their views, from both the urban and rural communities, on the scrapping of PPSMI were issues that need to be assessed so that populist solutions can be weighed against the peoples' desire.

The National Language Act of 1963/67 set the stage for the development of

BM. The Act also emphasizes the official language to be used for government administrative purposes, in line with Article 152(1) of the Constitution of Malaysia. The most significant features of the National Language Act include: (1) BM is to be utilized as the medium of instruction in all national schools and a compulsory subject to pass the PMR (lower secondary assessment) and SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education/O level), (2) BM as the primary language of instruction in public institutions of higher learning, (3) BM as a mandatory subject in non-national schools (schools not using BM as the primary language of instruction), and (4) English as a mandatory subject in all schools (Hassan, 2002).

The Malaysian government continued to ensure the progress of BM to replace English strategically. However, globalisation, language dominance, and cultural powers proved the need for more excellent prowess in the English language. On the domestic front, too, English was deemed as necessary, especially in the corporate world. In view of these demands, the Malaysian government had to re-examine the reduced importance given to English.

This reassessment of English ushered in a new language policy known as The Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English or better known by its BM acronym PPSMI (Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris). It was announced that from January 2003 onwards, English would be used as the medium of instruction for the teaching of Mathematics and Science in Standard One, Form One and Lower Form, Six in all government-aided schools and it, was duly implemented in all government-aided schools in Malaysia. By 2009, the first cohort of students under the PPSMI policy sat for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) public examinations for Science and Mathematics in English.

It was not an easy path for implementing the policy despite the government's

push for it. The period before PPSMI, according to Alis Puteh (2006), the Malaysian government had made many efforts to establish a national identity and achieve unity through its language medium policies in the 1970s. Most Malay nationalists felt that these past efforts made by the government to maintain Malay rights and the status of BM through the New Economic Policy (NEP) 1971 had not been given due consideration in the implementation of the PPSMI. This is because the Malay nationalists felt that if the medium of instruction is changed to English, many Malaysian children from less literate home background will be at a disadvantage. The NEP period saw tremendous effort was made to increase the number of Malays at the tertiary level (Alis Puteh, 2006). Quotas that favoured the Malays (74.9% of the 1977 public university intake) were put in place for entrance to the universities; government scholarships were also prearranged for the Malays (Ministry of Education, 2002). It was felt that the conscious efforts to gradually implement Malay as the medium of instruction at all levels of education over 26 years were discoloured totally by the PPSMI policy. Thus, the PPSMI was criticised by various groups. Still, at the same time, the government was trying to gain collective agreement from Malaysians through publishing positive news of its implementation in mainstream media such as the *Berita Harian*, *Utusan Malaysia*, *The Star*, *The New Straits Times*, etc.

The exercise of media freedom via online portals allowed various opinions of Malaysians to be published in *Malaysiakini*, the now dysfunctional *Malaysian Insider* and *Malaysia Today*. Many ideas were brought forth by the public through this media discourse. According to Selamat et al. (2011), public opinions regarding PPSMI were formed based on the language used by them in their daily routines. The study states that most people who opposed PPSMI read Malay newspapers every day and who are likely to speak in Malay; those who favoured the implementation of PPSMI are those

who usually read English newspapers and most likely speak English daily (Selamat et al., 2011). Opinion sharing and media discourse have allowed, and invited, an investigation into the discursive construction of the policy (Tharmalingam, 2011). Nor Hashimah (2011) states that in a democratic country like Malaysia, people are allowed to air their opinions and concerns; however, she feels that these views should be supported with actual concrete data and facts based on academic judgment and reasoning. Thus, this study proposes investigating the opinions of the ethnic Malays regarding the PPSMI debate and examining whether socio-cultural factors have any relevance to the Malays' decision to accept or reject the PPSMI policy that was already abolished. It was felt that it would be salient to scrutinise the opinions of the ethnic Malays rather than the other ethnic groups regarding the PPSMI for several reasons. One, they are the largest ethnic group in Malaysia, comprising 50.2% of the population in 2010. Besides, Malays hold top-ranking positions in the country with decision-making responsibilities. It is undeniable that even among the Malays; they are divided into the urban and rural segments governed by different ideologies. According to Kessler (1980:6), in the post-1969 period, the old Malays split based on the dichotomy between rural Malays of "humble origins and inspired by middle-Eastern Islamic modernism", and Malays of the "well-born, English educated highly anglicised" administrative and aristocratic class with an entirely different set of ideologies; the rural Malays, on the other hand, are labelled as "devout Muslims who have found and understood the totality of Islam as a way of life" (Zainah, 1987:90). The urban Malays are described as "secular Westernised Malays whose priorities lie with modernisation and development" (Zainah, 1987:90). In other words, rural and urban Malays have different mindsets. Therefore, it is significant to explore the

implicit ideologies in the discursive practices of the urban Malays and the rural Malays concerning language education policy.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The demographics of Malaysia are represented by the multi-ethnic groups that exist in this country. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2017), Malaysia's population in 2016 was 31.7 million people. Among Malaysian citizens, ethnic Bumiputera recorded the highest percentage with 68.6 percent, followed by Chinese at 23.4 percent, Indians at 7.0 percent and others at 1 percent. In 2013, the percentage distribution by ethnic groups showed that ethnic Malays comprise 50.4 percent, Chinese 23.7 percent, Indian 7.1 percent, other Bumiputera 11 percent, and others 7.8 percent. The Chinese and Indian immigrants were brought mainly to Malaysia by the British during the colonial era. There are 137 living languages in Malaysia, and among them are BM, English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainanese, Fuzhou, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Punjabi, and others (Saw, 2015). Although many languages are spoken in Malaysia, Malay and English are the primary languages for intra and intergroup communications (Gill, 2002). The Malay language is the mother tongue of the ethnic Malays. According to Winstedt (1956), the term "Malay" refers to the civilised Malays of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, including the Malay Archipelago, Formosa, Philippines, and some of the tribes of Indo-China. Ethnic Malays are noticeable because it is the largest group in Malaysia. By constitutional definition, Malays are Muslims who practise Malay customs and culture and have been the decision-makers in Malaysia during pre-independence, independence, and post-independence eras.

During the pre-independence era, the leaders of the major ethnic communities

decided to make Malay the national language. During that period, they envisioned BM as a symbol of national unity, bringing the country's multi-ethnic groups together. According to Asmah (1997:15), BM was chosen because of its role as a "lingua franca, its position as a primary language, its possession of high literature, and the fact that it had once been an important language of administration and diplomacy in the Malay Archipelago".

During the post-independence period, BM was given the stature of the national language of Malaysia under Article 152 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. The politicians of that era wanted to maintain this mandate; thus, when the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1971 took place, the act prohibited "the questioning of any provision in Article 152 of the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya (which safeguards the special privileges of the Malays i.e., Islam as the state religion and BM as the national language) and makes it seditious, punishable under the Sedition Act, 1948, for anyone who questions the Article 152..." (Nik Abdul Rashid, 1981:296). Gradually BM became the prominent language in the country, replacing the English language. By 1976, all English-medium primary schools were converted to National Schools in Peninsular Malaysia (Solomon, 1988), and by 1985 the change of the medium of instruction from English to Malay throughout the entire school system was completed. This included Sabah and Sarawak. During this period, the use of the English language started declining. One of the education policies is to make the national language the medium of instruction in the national curriculum and standard examination (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Besides the First Malaysia Economic Plan 1966-1970, one of its objectives is to consolidate the educational system further to promote social, cultural, and political unity; to improve the quality of education, and spread educational opportunity evenly

throughout the country. This is done to correct the imbalance between urban and rural areas and diversify educational and training facilities by increasing such services in vital fields, especially agriculture and industrial science and technology. Through the use of BM, all these objectives, as stated in the First Malaysia Economic Plan, were to be materialised.

The importance of BM was also emphasized in the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975; the main objectives were; the consolidation of the educational system to promote national integration and unity. Besides, the implementation in stages of BM as the medium of instruction in schools; the closing of the gap in educational opportunities in the region and among the races; and eventually integrating the education system of East Malaysia with the national system. The struggle to bring BM to a superior level also continued, as the Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980 contained objectives to strengthen the educational system for promoting national integration and unity through the ongoing implementation, in stages of BM as the primary medium of instruction at all levels. According to Chitravellu (1985), this indicates that BM was to become the common language of all ethnic groups in Malaysia. It is an undeniable fact that the education policy was used as one of the primary tools to support and accelerate the social and economic mobility of the Malays. The education policy was used to create a national identity and level the playing field for the Malay community (David and Govindasamy, 2005) so that the Malays could have equal rights when seeking opportunities, especially in securing a job.

Malaysia, being multiracial and multilingual, was not an easy place to implement the objectives; not all the ethnic groups could accept BM right away. This is mainly due to fear that other languages and cultures would be exterminated with Malay as the only official language. This is clear because a major opposition political