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Research paper

Reengineering the English Teacher Education Reform: Pro-ELT

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Abstract

The explosion of in-service professional development programmes for English teachers is inevitable in the 21st century. Nevertheless, many English teachers across the globe are found linguistically deficient, thus jeopardizing the quality of English teaching as a whole. In spite of in-service professional development programme being the ubiquitous measure to leapfrog the quality of teachers, there is still no guarantee that it would combat the English teachers' declining language proficiency. Thereby, this paper intends to survey the English teachers' perceptions and the effectiveness of the Pro-ELT programme using the Kirkpatrick's evaluation model. The findings indicated that Pro-ELT, on average, was effective in enhancing the English teachers' language proficiency, $Z=8.065$, $p< 0.05$ with a very large size effect ($r=0.77$) but suffered from some criticisms. Most importantly, this study indicated that mandatory in-service programme, which often yielded negative results, was reacted favourably albeit its shortcomings. This therefore accentuates the significance of in-service English teachers' professional development programme to remedy the language attrition, especially in a limited English-speaking milieu.

Keywords: *Continuous professional development; English teachers' language proficiency; In-service teacher training; Pro-ELT; Quality of Malaysian English teachers.*

1. Introduction

Indisputably, there is a pervasive need to acquire competency in the English language as reflected in many language policies or reforms all over the world [1]. The Government of Malaysia has long accorded great importance to the English language in the education system. It can be traced to a long list of language-based initiatives undertaken to empower the command of English amongst Malaysians as evidenced in the roadmap for English language education reform in Malaysia 2015-2025. There is no doubt that the mastery of English is very much sought to keep the country competitive in a global arena and thereby, strengthening the economic and political influence in the long term. However, much to the dismay of the stakeholders, the quality of English has been on the decline even tough numerous attempts have been made to remedy it [2-3] In fact, the [4] implies that the Malaysians' English proficiency is in a chronic state and it is thus an area of critical need [5-6]. Moreover, it is saddening to grapple with the fact that many Malaysian university students are lacking in communicative competence which have often rendered them unemployed [7]. This linguistic deficiency in which students are unable to fluently express their views in the English language is commonplace in most English classrooms as observed by Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin Tuanku Mukhriz, the founding president of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs [8]. This matter of overriding concern must be addressed in no time for the country to remain insusceptible in these overwhelmingly tough and challenging geopolitical times.

As a matter of fact, the erosion in English has not only affected Malaysia but it is a global problem. For instance, Indonesia [9], Thailand [10], Turkey [11] have suffered the same fate despite numerous ways being employed to address such pressing issue. This has surprisingly affected some of the developed countries such as Hong Kong [12] and Japan [13]. Honda, a prominent Japanese car manufacturer, for example, has intended to make English the language of business which was once considered stupid by its former Honda Motor Co. Chief Executive Officer, Takanobu Ito [14]. This move has indirectly augmented the superiority of English as the global language of commerce and therefore should be seen as a clarion call for non-English speaking nations to equip their people with sound English proficiency. In fact, English-speaking countries such as England and the United States of America have been committed to keeping the quality of English at its optimal level [15]. Thus, there is no doubt that the decline in English proficiency is a matter of great concern affecting the stability and ultimately, the survival of the country in this rapidly changing world. To ameliorate the language malaise, this points to teachers of English who are the bedrock of English education system.

It is unquestionable that English teachers play an instrumental role in moulding students into good language learners. To this end, they must arm themselves with good English which is the basis of quality English teaching in addition to other requisite pedagogical skills. Because of that, language proficiency matters very greatly and in some countries, English teachers are required to recertify their English proficiency within a stipulated period of time. Unfortunately, 70,000 Malaysian English teachers were found to be ill-proficient based on their performance in the Cambridge Placement Test [15]. This indirectly reflects the severity of declining proficiency afflicting English teachers, one of the most important agents of change at school who are entrusted to teach English the right way and fulfil students' language needs. This could probably be among the factors accountable for students' poor English proficiency as the English teachers are the only language models accessible to the majority of the students [16]. Yet, it is seemingly unfair to put all the blame on the English teachers exclusively without bringing their voices to the forefront.

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In response to the deteriorating level of teachers' language proficiency, the Education Ministry of Malaysia initiated the Professional Up-Skilling of English teacher programme or popularly known as Pro-ELT in 2013 with the aim of improving English teachers' language proficiency [15] particularly in four language skills such as reading, writing , speaking and listening. In spite of that, Pro-ELT has caused much disappointment and dissatisfaction amongst English teachers claiming that the Ministry of Education Malaysia is insensitive to their incessant plight and onerous struggles of teaching English [17]. The irk brought about by Pro-ELT is worth pondered upon as language-based policies in Malaysia show much reverence for one-size- fits- all model and its centralized bureaucracy [18- 19- 20]. What is worse is there is a slippage in the management of Pro-ELT from selecting the programme participants to monitoring its effectiveness ([21]. Even though it has been implemented for four years, very few studies have looked into it. At the same time, the chairman of Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia, Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim in [3] urged the Education Ministry to provide transparent evidence on the upskilling of English teachers. Such concern should be treated very seriously as it concomitantly evokes the Government's decision to postpone making English a compulsory subject at the SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education) level even though it was supposed to be implemented in 2016 [22], claiming that both teachers and students are not linguistically prepared for such move. With the present study undertaken, it intends to uncover the effectiveness of the Pro-ELT programme through the lens of English teachers whose views and roles have been often sidelined in many in-service training or foreign language teacher education programmes [23-24-25] especially in Asian contexts [26]. More noticeably, there is a dearth of evidence of how teachers perceive their language improvement training and professional development [27-28-29]. This study has its own merit as it deals with the first ever nationwide in-service language programme focusing on the language enhancement of the English teachers in mostly rural districts of Marang and Hulu Terengganu where 58% of Malaysian English teachers teaching in rural and remote areas failed to meet the necessitated level of language proficiency [30]. Moreover, the students' English performance in Terengganu has not been constantly promising, hence failing to achieve at the very least 95% passing percentage since 2012 [31]. With the participation of the English teachers in the specified areas, it could possibly shed light on Pro-ELT from a different angle which is in tandem with the second wave (2016-2020) of the Malaysian Education Blueprint Initiative aimed to keep the quality of the Pro-ELT Programme in check. As such, the study intended to investigate the English teachers' perceptions of the Pro-ELT Programme and to find out to what extent there was a difference in the English teachers' level of language proficiency before and after joining the Pro-ELT Programme.

1.1 Research Question

The following questions are formulated with this end in view.

1) What are the English teachers' perceptions of the Pro-ELT Programme?

2) To what extent is there a difference in the language proficiency level of English teachers before and after the Pro-ELT Programme?

1.2 Research Hypothesis

Below is the null hypothesis which attempts to answer the second research question.

Ho: There is no significant difference in the language proficiency level of English teachers before and after the Pro-ELT Programme.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Underpinning Evaluation Model

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the Pro-ELT programme, the study hinged upon the Kirkpatrick's evaluation model. This model is widely used in evaluating programme or training because it provides a clear direction and easy to be conducted. Basically, it is comprised of 4 levels which are reaction (level 1), learning (level 2), behavior (level 3) and results (level 4). In the process of examining the state of the programme, it is recommended to go through all the levels in an ascending order beginning with reaction and concluded with results. Following are the figure on the Kirkpatrick's evaluation model and its detailed description.



Fig. 1: Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model

In detail, reaction level measures the participants' satisfaction and perceptions and it is typically conducted through questionnaires distributed at the end of the programme. Learning level, on the other hand, is focused on the acquisition of skills which can be identified through pre- and –post tests. Different from the first two levels which are straightforward and easy to quantify as well as interpret [32], behavior level entails frequent observation and interview in determining to what extent the participants have demonstrated changes and integrated the skills acquired into their work routine. As the level increases, so does its degree of difficulty. The last level seeks to show how much the programme has affected the whole system not only the targeted participants. This is the most challenging level as it is also involved with some unidentified factors [33] which lead to the unfair judgement of the programme performance on the whole and there is no framework ever reported in English as a second language (ESL) literature in assessing the comprehensive impact of the [34] Because of that, the present study was guided by the first two levels, namely, reaction and learning. Not only are they practical and convenient, but they also suit the primary objective of the Pro-ELT Programme which is driven to enhance English teachers' language proficiency. In other words, as the main focus of Pro-ELT is neither the students nor the administrators, the selection of the first two levels are justified. Besides, there are some measures that have been taken to provide conclusive evidence and reliable findings. Instead of getting the participants to respond to the questionnaire usually conducted at the end of the programme, for example, the researcher opted for retrospective survey questionnaires. This would allow them to recollect and reflect on their past experiences dealing with the programme. Having done that, this gives the recognition of time as it permits them to critically evaluate how much their proficiency has improved over the years due to the Pro-ELT programme.

2.2 Overview of Pro-ELT

Prior to joining the Pro-ELT Programme, all primary and secondary school English teachers have to sit for the Cambridge Placement Test as shown in Figure 2 below. Their proficiency is meas-

ured against the Council European Framework of Reference for Languages ranging from A1 (Breakthrough), A2(Wastage), B1(threshold), B2(Vantage), C1 (Effective) to C2 (Mastery). The Education Ministry of Malaysia has set C1 as the minimum level of language proficiency to be achieved by the English teachers. In detail, C1 achievers are recognized as proficient users who "can understand a wide range of demanding, longer clauses and recognize implicit meaning, express ideas fluently without much obvious searching for expressions, use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes and produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices" [35]. If they fail to attain the required level, they are necessitated to take the Aptis Test, acting as a second filter, to confirm their proficiency level based on the four language skills. Those who do not meet the desired level of language proficiency are to attend the Pro-ELT Programme.

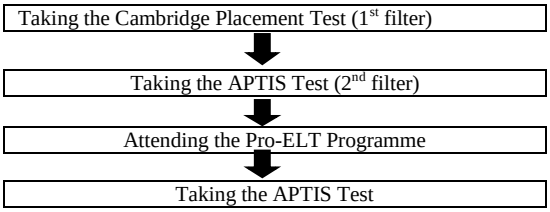


Fig 2: Overview of the Pro-ELT Programme

Additionally, this programme is run in a blended mode which consists of 240 hours of face-to-face and another 240 hours of online learning sessions. Trainers of the British Council Malaysia are assigned to tutor and facilitate the learning process during the programme. By the end of the programme, they are instructed to take the APTIS test again which informs the stakeholders of their English competency upon undergoing the one-year Pro-ELT programme.

2.3 Perceptions of in-Service Educational Courses and Language-Based Programmes in International Context.

Often times, language –based initiatives or training implemented have not come into fruition, leaving neither significant change nor desired impact on teacher practice and student learning [36- 37]. But the inclination towards such measure in an endeavor to enhance the language competency of both students and teachers is evident in many parts of the world [38]. Given the fact that there are always two sides of a coin, empirical evidence in various studies have signified that the degree and quality of in-service educational courses and language-based programmes are affected by the integration of the language skills, participants' needs, workload, duration of the programme and the freedom of participation.

To begin with, it is imperative for language planners or policy makers to integrate all the four dominant language skills into language initiatives. In other words, achieving the equilibrium of the said skills must be at the heart of any language reforms instead of merely focusing on one particular skill. [39-40-41] reaffirmed the fact that programmes directed at English teachers should strive for comprehensive integration of linguistic skills in order for them to function effectively in language classroom. As a matter of fact, skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are integrative and interdependent of one another [42]. Improvement on the above skills especially speaking would lead to an increased level of self-confidence especially for non-native English teachers. This has thus accounted for Japanese and Thailand English teachers' strong preference in English conversation practices in developing their communicative competence [43] in [44] and [45]. Another thing to note is the commitment to harnessing the proficiency of English teachers should be pursued even after the programme has concluded. In this vein, it should not be conceived as a mere event but rather a continued process [46- 47]. Particularly, in the limited English-speaking environment characterised by the unavailability of natural contexts of learning [47], the need is increasingly felt to maximise the impact of the programme. In so doing, the expected changes can be achieved with ease and the success of the programme can be sustained in the years to come.

Secondly, an effective language programme is quintessentially responsive to the language needs of its participants. For example, [48] studies revealed that pronounciation appeared as among the most dominant new knowledge gained from 60-hour courses offered for in-service English teacher training in Greece. Further, it was ranked highly in terms of its applicability and usefulness as the English lessons are highly oriented towards the skill acquisition. On the contrary, despite claiming the improvement in the command of English, language–based programme initiated in non-English speaking countries such as Kuwait [49], Iran [50] and Indonesia [9] did not help much in the acquisition of speaking and listening skills. In other words, skills that are crucially needed are neither given much emphasis nor attention to produce well-versed language teachers-cum-learners. Moreover, it has always been a never-ending struggle for the people in these countries to practise their communication skills in the English language which is very much considered foreign within their own polities even in the epoch of scientific and technological outbursts. These could partly explain why a slew of non-native English-speaking teachers display poor English proficiency measured at the beginners' levels of A1 and A2 under the European framework [51].

Aside from that, there is an appeal for the authority to recognize teachers' voices pertaining to their nature of work in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Teaching English which necessitates them to give undivided focus on preparing lessons, selecting materials, monitoring students' progress, giving feedback is indeed a rigorous teaching orchestration. With the influx of language policies imposed on them, there is a likelihood for their concentration and dedication to be perturbed and thus mars the quality of in-service training. To illustrate, [52] and [53] reasoned that excessive workload could negate the effectiveness of professional development programmes. This happened when teachers had to take up two roles, juggling between their daily teaching routines and attending training programme. In reference to [54], this is termed as the intensification of teachers' work which would cause adverse effects not only on the programme itself but more acutely on their psychological health. On the same wavelength, [55] also cautioned that teachers' workload is one of the barriers for the smooth execution of in-service training (INSET). Thus, it is of paramount importance to take cognizance of their responsibilities at school which might potentially moderate or worse ruin the objective of the training or programmes attended. To do so, it is fundamentally vital to involve them from the very first phase of designing the programmes which both parties might create a diplomatic negotiation and eventually arrive at a win-win decision making situation and outcome [56]. In this way, teachers' voices are empowered for being treated as the subjects than the outsiders of the programme. As a result, this increases a sense of ownership towards fulfilling national standards for the increased professionalization of quality teachers [57], thus translating into lasting educational change [58].

The other contributory factor to the success of the programme or in-service training is time. As much as there is affinity for a short-period training, there are others who advocate a more intensive one. In a study by [9] who investigated the effectiveness of Indonesian English teachers programme, there is a need for increasing the allocation hours and number of days so as to hone the skills required for effective English teaching. Similarly, respondents in [59] study, expressed the same concern in which the programme should be extended for a longer time. In addition, it is very unlikely for the changes to happen overnight when they still need more time to internalize and experiment on ideas or methods that work best for them and their students. Conversely, consideration should also be given to their numerous school responsibilities so that they would not experience burnout in the midst of the programme.

Aside from that, the status of participation in the programme does play a role in determining to what extent productive changes have been demonstrated by the parties concerned. It was revealed by [60] that the reactions to INSET have often stirred ambivalent feelings amongst teachers in Singapore as they are not obliged to attend to. They were of the view that their involvement in INSET might leave their students unattended even though it had not been conclusively proven. In comparison to that, [61] on the effectiveness of the writing course voluntarily attended by the English teachers reported that it was well-received due to two factors; the acknowledgement of teachers' needs and the significance of the course in their professional development. Above all, [62] maintained their stance that teachers' engagement with any form of professional development activities would witness the resultant increase in language proficiency. With that, they would become more confident to teach and facilitate their students' learning. Not only that, they would feel compelled to take the helm of change and later positively influence their surroundings at large and the landscape of teacher education in particular. These dispositions could be seen in individuals who are concerned about their professional development and capabilities [63]. Ideally, for any programme to be impactful, the clients' needs, skills interests and experiences [64-65-66] have to be taken into consideration, deeply understood and openly embraced.

2.4 The Local Scene

Producing students who are not only proficient in the Malay language but also the English language is one of the aspirations articulated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025). In an effort to materialize it, English teachers must attain good language competence which represents the crux and core of the Standards for English Language Teaching [67] and the Malaysian Teacher Standards for Quality Professional Educators Competency Based Standard [68]. In reality, disappointingly, a massive number of Malaysian English teachers are found linguistically incompetent [69]. Furthermore, there has always been an acute shortage of teachers professionally trained to teach English and thus recourse to recruiting non-optionist English teachers [70]. This points to the vicious cycle perpetuated in the English education system which significantly impairs both the teachers and students [71-72]. Coupled with that, there is a lack of exposure to English in some parts of Malaysia and the only access to English to most students is, sadly, during English classes [73- 74- 75] as well as the inadequacy of meaningful language experience [76]. Hence, it is not surprising when Malaysians, irrespective of educational levels, are found to be incapable of achieving the international standard of English proficiency [77]. The study of [78] reported that the least improved soft skill in the Finishing School Programme was English proficiency despite receiving years of English education at school and university levels. In a way, this again beckons the weakness of education system and the futility of English teachers' roles in supporting the development of quality human capital. Aware of such repercussion, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia introduced Pro-ELT to combat the English teachers' language attrition. In spite of that, there is a scarcity of research conducted on the Pro-ELT Program.

To the best knowledge of the researchers, to date, there have been 3 studies on the matter concerned. One of which is [79 study investigating the needs of Pro-ELT participants. Even though the programme was said to fulfil the Pro-ELT participants' needs with language proficiency being the top priority, it was appalling to note that the last intensive English exposure received was predominantly at secondary level. The main criticism for the study is it did not give regard for the time-lag when assessing the programme [80]. Supposedly, they have to be given the luxury of time so that they would be able to try out the new knowledge gained from the programme and assess its practicality. The other study was conducted by [81] with the aim of disclosing the participants' perceptions of Pro-ELT. Contrary to the findings gleaned from [82] study, it was found that Pro-ELT was lambasted for being too exam-oriented and repeating what they had previously learned in their tertiary studies and thus, unsuccessful in actualizing their needs and expectations. However, the findings of the study could be argued as it engaged a limited number of respondents and similar to Estherhadi, there was no attempt to statistically show how Pro-ELT enhanced their language proficiency.

Recently, [83] studied the English teachers' perceptions of Pro-ELT in urban schools which represented the first two earliest cohorts of Pro-ELT taking place in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Clearly, the said programme was reacted positively in spite of being too time consuming and disregarding their nature of occupation. This is in concordance with [84] study suggesting that teachers' heavy workload coupled with the skyrocketing pressure and escalating demands might defeat the purpose of the language course. In more detail, Malaysian teachers, averagely, spent 5.7 hours on administrative work in stark contrast to the average of 2.9 hours by other teachers from the other countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [5], implying an overload of administrative work concurrent to the study of [85]. As the study of [84] was done on a mini scale and involved respondents predominantly stationed in urban areas, generalisation of findings cannot be made. In view of that, the undertaking study intends to fill the gaps found in [84] which underscores the perspectives of Pro-ELT participants in rural vicinity where English-speaking environment is claimed to be unsupportive [86] and 16% of its schools are at a discouraging rate of English literacy [87] and to investigate the effectiveness of the Pro-ELT programme with empirical evidence which was not explored in the previous studies.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a survey to investigate the perceptions and effectiveness of the Pro-ELT Programme. As the study dealt with many respondents, survey is deemed appropriate to gather the information crucial for the study very quickly, conveniently and economically [88]. In addition to being compatible for reaction and learning levels as articulated in Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, survey is considered efficacious in representing the respondents' voices and thus offers a better understanding of the issue research.

3.2. Research Respondents

The samples selected for this study was of purposive sampling based on the predetermined criteria. The most important criterion is they attended the programme either in 2013 or 2014, thus representing the earliest batches of Pro-ELT who were professionally trained by the British Council Malaysia trainers. The following table presents information on the profiles of respondents.

Table 1: Profiles of respondents

Category					
Gender	Male	Female			
	19 (17.1%)	92 (82.9%)			
Age	22-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	
	7 (6.3%)	45 (40.5%)	46 (41.4%)	13 (11.7%)	
Sector	Primary	Secondary			
	71 (64%)	40 (36%)			
Locality	Rural	Semi urban			
	61 (55%)	50 (45%)			
Option	English	Non-			

		English			
	103 (92.8%)	8 (7.2%)			
Qualification	Certificate	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	
	20 (18%)	27 (24.3%)	58 (52.3%)	6 (5.4%)	
Teaching experience	1-3 2 (1.8%)	4-6 11 (9.9%)	7-18 62 (55.9%)	19-30 34 (30.6%)	31-40 2 (1.8%)

Altogether, there were 111 respondents comprised of 19 males (17.1%) and 92 females (82.9%). The preponderance of females in this study is expected as they represent a dominant population in teaching profession with a female-male ratio of 70: 30 in the Malaysian teaching force [5]. 71 (64%) are identified as primary school teachers and the rest (36%) are secondary school teachers. Nearly all of them (92.8%) are English-optioned teachers whose highest academic qualification is (52.3%) Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Their age was considerably varied ranging from 29 to 60 years of age and majority of them (41.4 %) were at the age of 41 to 50. Likewise, their experience in English teaching differed with 2 years being the minimum and 37 years the maximum number of English teaching experience. With respect to the school locality, the majority of the respondents (55%) were stationed at rural schools.

3.3. Research Instruments

This study utilised the survey questionnaire adapted from [89], [90] and [71]). It was made up of two sections: Section 1 elicited information on teachers' demographic profiles such as gender, age, workplace, teaching option, academic qualification related to the teaching of English, language used in different contexts and Aptis Test results before and after the Pro-ELT programme; Section 2 ,which gathered information the teachers' perceptions of Pro-ELT, had two parts. The first part contained 6 items with a reliability coefficient of 0.956 and the 4-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree (SD), 2:disagree (D), 3:agree (A) and 4: strongly agree (SA) was exploited which would eliminate neutral response (Enkin, 2015). The second part, which is recommended in evaluation studies, had 2 open-ended questions. They were included to gain more insights into the teachers' improvement in language proficiency as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the programme which further supported and explained their standpoints in the Likert-scale items.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was administered after getting the approval from the Educational Planning and Research Unit and Terengganu State Education Department as well as school principals concerned. Since the study researched on the Pro-ELT programme taking place in 2013 and 2014, the English teachers involved were given seven days to respond to the questionnaire. All of the questionnaires which were distributed to 111 English teachers were successfully returned to the researchers within the scheduled time. However, the rate of response for the first open-ended question was slightly higher at 83.78% than the second one at 82.89%. The data obtained were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. In great detail, the statistical procedures such as descriptive analysis and frequency counts were deployed to answer the first research question. Meanwhile, the Wilcoxon-Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test was performed in response to the second research question. Before applying it, the researchers had ensured that the data used in the study fulfilled two assumptions required for such non-parametric test; assumption 1: the dependent variable was measured at the ordinal level either A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 or C2 as depicted in the CEFR and assumption 2: the independent variable consisted of matched pairs whereby the same individuals were tested before and after the Pro-ELT programme.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The mean value in Table 2 below was interpreted based on the study of [42] which was previously used in the study by [73]. To further explain, the mean score of 0-1.25 is interpreted as a very negative response, 1.26-2.50 (negative response), 2.51-3.25 (positive response) and 3.26-4.00 (very positive response).

Table 2: Perceptions of the Pro-ELT Programme

Item	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	$\bar{x}$
Pro-ELT improved my reading skills.	1 (0.9)	8 (7.2)	85 (76.6)	17 (15.3)	3.06
Pro-ELT improved my writing skills.	1 (0.9)	8 (7.2)	82 (73.9)	20 (18.0)	3.09
Pro-ELT improved my speaking skills.	1 (0.9)	8 (7.2)	69 (62.2)	33 (29.7)	3.21
Pro-ELT improved my listening skills.	1 (0.9)	16 (14.4)	68 (61.3)	26 (23.4)	3.07
Pro-ELT improved my command of English as a whole.	1 (0.9)	8 (7.2)	79 (71.2)	23 (20.7)	3.12
I am satisfied with the programme as a whole.	1 (0.9)	14 (12.6)	75 (67.6)	21 (18.9)	3.05

However, it was of grave concern that the mean value for their overall satisfaction with the programme, despite being responded positively, was the lowest.

In reference to Table 3 below, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test indicated that teachers' performance in the second Aptis test that they took after undergoing the Pro-ELT programme was statistically significant higher than their first Aptis test taken prior to the programme, $Z=8.065$, $p< 0.05$ with a very large size effect ($r=0.77$).

Table 3: Results of the Wilcoxon Signed -Rank Test for the pre-post survey analysis of the effectiveness of the Pro-ELT Programme

			Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Wilcoxon (Z)	P
Aptis two-Aptis one	Negative ranks	0	.00	.00	-8.065	.000
	Positive ranks	70	35.50	2485.00		
	Ties	41				
	Total	111				

Thus, this study rejected the null hypothesis as there was a significant difference observed. Even though there were no negative ranks found, the fact that 37 % (41) of the English teachers demonstrated unchanged level of language proficiency was uncalled for. This discovery was apparently in congruence with the lowest mean value for satisfaction exhibited in Table 2.

First and foremost, the Pro-ELT Programme was reacted positively in terms of the improvement in all four language skills as displayed in Table 2. This indirectly indicated that the Pro-ELT Programme did not favour one skill over another, therefore denoting comprehensive skills integrated in English teachers' language programmes espoused by [24], [65] and [76]. Majority of them claimed that "the contents of the programme included all the language skills" (R110), "Pro-ELT is the most comprehensive language Programme I have attended" (R39) and "the comprehensive contents of the course improved my command of English as a whole" (R101). Therefore, there is no doubt that Pro-ELT has left them a good impression, even after a period of 3 to4 years since they last joined it, due to its nature in developing all the skills equally and integratively. Moreover, an ideal English teacher must have a wide repertoire of linguistic skills to realise the aspiration of the integrated English curriculum and on par with the international standard of English proficiency [86].

Of all the skills, intriguingly, speaking emerged as the most valued skill with the mean score 3.21 in contrast to [78], [65] and [55]. Their propensity for speaking skills is predominantly discernible in open-ended questions, indicating that that Pro-ELT "improved speaking skills tremendously and became confident to deliver lessons in English" (R28), "enhanced overall proficiency in English especially in communication skills" (R40) and "changed the belief that they could speak English to everybody anywhere and anytime" (R08). These pinpoint that Pro-ELT cultivated confidence and bravery in speaking English, given the fact that the use of English is limited within their surroundings. Moreover, having confidence in communicative competence is fundamental to non-native English teachers [44-36] so that they could act as good language models, given the fact that the students' exposure to English is limited to English classes [22-45-76]. In opposition to [5] and [58] whose respondents were deprived of opportunities to practise speaking skills, the Pro-ELT Programme was found conducive to hone the speaking skills of the respondents. This was made possible as "we are given ample opportunities to speak in English" (R80). Aside from that, they are drawn to interact in English as "it is an obligation to use English all the time during Pro-ELT" (R76), and what is more to be trained by "native speakers of English who do not know anything about the Malay language" (R07). Hence, the environment they were situated in somewhat galvanised them into speaking in English; they had no other choice than English to survive the one-year long programme. It is also evident that they were socially and psychologically open to the target language as they "received much support from the other participants and trainer to converse in English" (R63). Due to the warm learning atmosphere engendered in Pro-ELT, the fear "to speak English either in public or with other fluent English teachers" (R50) was finally conquered and they no longer had to "isolate themselves from the English-speaking communities" (R06) and "resort to using the Malay language all the time" (R10). So, alongside the available .platform to support their speaking competence, it is of imperative importance to establish a nurturing and optimal learning environment where they feel supported and valued as well as a way of compensating for the unavailability of natural learning contexts [12].

It is believed that their favourable reactions to the Pro-ELT Programme, as evidenced by consistently positive mean score in all items beginning from 3.06 to 3.21, is attributable to the beliefs they hold about professional accountability which is in sync with [33]. Contrary to [65], they regarded the programme forced upon them very highly as "Pro-ELT is of great relevance to the 21st century teaching and learning wherein English teachers have to be progressive and responsive to the demands of the global market" (R32) and brought them "a new lease of hope to continually strive for excellence in the teaching and learning of English" (R24). Clearly, these portray their heightened awareness of professional commitments and responsibilities in becoming the paragon of excellence for the students and nation. In the same vein, the openness to their proficiency being measured against the international standard regularly surfaced in the open-ended questions, mentioning that "to remain globally competitive and productive, there is no reason why we must disallow ourselves from being subjected to international assessments" (R02). Following that, one respondent warned a teacher not to be "like a frog waiting for the beauty out of nowhere to kiss and turn you into a prince charming who can speak fluent English effortlessly" (R48), thus giving the impression that English teachers must be responsible and proactive to ace English. This matches what lifelong learning has been referred to in teachers' professional development. Further, several expressed that Pro-ELT was keyed to the needs of most English teachers in Terengganu and one of them elaborated that "Having taught English in Terengganu, where English is of limited use, has eroded my English skills over the years. Now, with better English I acquired through Pro-ELT, I could support my students' learning in a more meaningful manner" (R62). This has foregrounded the significance of in-service training in catering to their needs which are concurrent with [67-45-87-41], thus leading to the increased professionalization of quality teachers [88]

Despite all the items in Table 2 were interpreted approvingly, the fact that the mean score for respondents' satisfaction was the lowest revealed that Pro-ELT did suffer from some shortcomings. It is also worth pointing out that 37% represented by 41 respondents as delineated in Table 2 did not show any improvement in their level of language proficiency before and after joining Pro-ELT. Having scrutinized responses on the open-ended questions, there are two major criticisms frequently raised by the respondents even though there was uniformity concerning the benefits of the programme. Parallel to the findings of [99-7-63-91-12], the Pro-ELT Programme was insensitive to teachers' burgeoning workload which caused them to be "physically strained, emotionally burdened and mentally challenged" (R51). In reality, they emphasized the fact that they "are not robots that could dedicate time, attention and energy to school work and Pro-ELT simultaneously." They also made pleas for the policy makers and the Ministry of Education to "pay them a visit and observe how stressed they are at school, having no time for their families and even for themselves" (R44). Another factor contributing to their dissatisfaction with the programme was time. In juxtaposition to [5] and [12], they claimed that Pro- ELT was "time-consuming" (R29) and "overwhelmingly exhausting" (R72) to the extent that it might "kill the teachers' enthusiasm and motivation" (R99). Instead of attending it once a week, they opined that "it would be better if Pro-ELT was made a full-time programme" (R99) and they were "totally excluded from any school workload while undergoing Pro-ELT" (R85). Even though such suggestions seem implausible taking into account the acute shortage of professionally trained English teachers [87], all the impediments raised should be given due consideration and attention to leverage the effectiveness of the Pro-ELT programme in the foreseeable future.

5. Conclusion

There are three implications that can be drawn from this study. One of them is the increasing need to create an English-speaking environment. As explained in the preceding discussions, to keep the language intact requires the setting that immerse its users in it. The implementation of the Pro-ELT programme might contribute to their improvement on speaking skills but still it cannot withstand the test of time. In other words, nothing beats than providing the atmosphere that supports the use of English beyond the programme venue. This is of supreme importance in the area where English is of little use, hence aggravating the deterioration in English among English teachers and students. As a result, this requires much support, care and attention from the whole school particularly and the public generally to together advocate the use of English at the very least within the school compound. Without it, the communicative competence is impossible to achieve and it is a discrimination against English teachers who ceaselessly strive for better English for themselves and their students. Consequently, the struggle ensues, victimizing the English teachers as much as it does to the students, the future workforce of the country. It suffices to say that no matter how much effort, energy, time and money have been channeled into the programme, it would be meaningless with the deprivation of English-speaking ambience.

Next, evaluation is integral in determining to what extent the designed programme has achieved what it is supposed to achieve. Unfortunately, this practice has occasionally been done despite its immense potential. If the evaluation is conducted, it is merely done for the sake of fulfilling formal requirement at the end of the course without considering the time lag. With the present study, it gave them the privilege of time to reexamine their perceptions of the effectiveness of the programme. By means of evaluating and revisiting the programme after a span of 3 to 4 years, the evidence becomes more conclusive and refined because they know what suits or works for them best and thus, heightening its degree of

transparency especially when researched by parties fully detached from the programme. However, it is best to keep in mind the purpose of evaluation is not to condemn nor find faults of the programme but to be critical of its usability, practicality and efficacy before revamping it for more favourable end results [65-32-67]. Via the evaluation of the programme, this propagates the ideas of bringing the participants of the programme, in this case, the English teachers' viewpoints to the fore. By so doing, it brings back democracy in top-down educational policies which allows them to voice their pleasure and displeasure. After all, they are the ones who experience reform dictated upon them and by right, they are in a position to judge and critique it [76].

Last but not least, recertification of English teachers' language proficiency within a stipulated period of time would be an effective means of optimizing the quality of English language teaching. This is another form of follow-up strategy that could be taken besides the evaluation of the programme. Realising other external factors that might hamper the teachers' language proficiency such as the absence of English-speaking environment, students' low motivation and attitudes towards the English language, amongst others, there is of course a necessity to safeguard standards of proficiency crucial for the teachers to teach more effectively and confidently. However, this measure must be done with extra caution so that it will not be misinterpreted as diminishing faith in teachers' capability. Rather, the recourse to the proposed means is done with their best interest in mind. Furthermore, with its objective to harness the English teachers' language proficiency, it would elevate the image of teaching profession and enhance the public trust in the English education system in the country. Looking at the severe consequences of the issue studied, it might be the right time for the Government of Malaysia to consider recertifying the language competency of English teachers which is in parallel with its aspiration to take the quality of teacher to greater heights.

In conclusion, this study has enriched the existing body of literature in the sense that it underscores the English teachers' perceptions and the effectiveness of the first nationwide in-service language enhancement programme in the history of Malaysian English teacher education. In essence, it illustrated that the success of mandatory programmes should not be underestimated provided that the clientele's needs, skills and experience are well catered for. Additionally, it is pivotal for future studies to look into the English teachers' perceived effectiveness of Pro-ELT in terms of its content, trainer and online learning session in valorizing their language proficiency as the present study has yet to uncover them. Having pursued and revisited the Pro-ELT programme, this study is seen as a manifestation of the follow-up strategy, serving as points of checks and balances in an effort to capitalize potentialities of the programme and materialize the aspiration of the country to produce world-class English teachers.

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