ESL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR B40 PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of low-income parents and pupils in a primary school on improving the current policy management with regard to financial assistance, and other related aids to improve students’ academic performance including the English Language.

Method/design/approach: A case study qualitative study design was employed. Data was collected by a semi-structured individual interview involving 40 pupils from Sarawak, Malaysia. The data from the interview responses were triangulated using observation and document analysis. The data gathered was analysed thematically.

Results and conclusion: The findings were divided into three themes which are the Current Policy for B40 pupils in Improving ESL Learning, the challenges faced and the support that pupils require to improve ESL Learning. The findings indicate that parents face difficulties meeting the pupils’ demands at school, which go beyond fundamental necessities that include providing adequate updated resources to assist 21st-century education, mental and emotional support for today’s generation. B40 pupils are concerned with demanding resources such as devices connected to the internet, reference books in English and motivational workshops. The limitations of B40 pupils are more apparent now, due to vast technological advancements in education.

Research implications: This study could assist the relevant authority in developing a policy on managing support to B40 households for educational purposes by producing a new outline to assist B40 in the education atmosphere nowadays.

Originality/value: This study explores low-income parents and pupils’ perceptions of educational support policies in Sarawak, Malaysia, focusing on ESL learning. It provides insights into challenges faced by B40 households, offering recommendations for policy development and improved educational outcomes.

Keywords: Primary Education, English Language Learning, B40 Pupils, Education Management, Policy Plan.

AMBIENTE DE APRENDIZAGEM ESL PARA ALUNOS DO ENSINO FUNDAMENTAL B40: PROBLEMAS, DESAFIOS E ESTRATÉGIAS

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo deste estudo é explorar as percepções de pais e alunos de baixa renda em uma escola primária sobre a melhoria da atual gestão política no que diz respeito à assistência financeira, e outras ajudas relacionadas para melhorar o desempenho acadêmico dos alunos, incluindo a língua inglesa.

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Método/proyecto/abordagem: Fue empleado estudio de caso de diseño cualitativo. Los datos fueron colectados por una entrevista individual semiestruturada envolviendo 40 alumnos de Sarawak, en Malasia. Los datos de las respuestas de la entrevista fueron triangulados por medio de observación e análisis documental. Los datos colectados fueron analizados temáticamente.

Resultados e conclusión: Las conclusiones fueron divididas en tres temas que son la Política Actual para los alumnos B40 en Melhorar a Aprendizagem sobre o AEP, los desafíos enfrentados por el apoyo que los alumnos necesitan para mejorar el aprendizaje sobre el AEP. Las descobertas indican que los padres enfrentan dificultades para atender las demandas de los alumnos en la escuela, que van más allá de las necesidades fundamentales, incluyendo el fornecimiento de recursos actualizados adecuados para auxiliar a la educación del siglo XXI, apoyo mental y emocional para la generación de hoy. Los alumnos de B40 están preocupados con recursos exigentes, como dispositivos conectados a Internet, libros de referencia en inglés y oficinas motivacionales. Las limitaciones de los alumnos B40 son más evidentes ahora, debido a los vastos avances tecnológicos en la educación.

Implicaciones da investigación: Este estudo poderá ajudar a autoridade relevante no desenvolvimento de una política de gestão de apoio a familias B40 para fins educacionais, produzindo um novo esboço para ajudar B40 na atmosfera educacional actual.

Originalidade/valor: Este estudio explora as percepções de pais e alunos de baixa renda sobre as políticas de apoio educacional en Sarawak, na Malásia, com foco na aprendizagem do abandono escolar precoce. Fornece informações sobre os desafios enfrentados pelas familias B40, ofrecendo recomendaciones para o desenvolvimento de políticas e mejores resultados educacionales.


ENTORNO DE APRENDIZAJE ESL PARA ALUMNOS DE PRIMARIA B40: PROBLEMAS, DESAFÍOS Y ESTRATEGIAS

RESUMEN

Propósito: El objetivo de este estudio es explorar las percepciones de los padres y alumnos de bajos ingresos en una escuela primaria sobre la mejora de la gestión de la política actual con respecto a la asistencia financiera, y otras ayudas relacionadas para mejorar el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes, incluido el idioma inglés.

Método/diseño/enfoque: Se empleó un estudio de caso de diseño cualitativo. Los datos se recopilaron mediante una entrevista individual semiestruturada en la que participaron 40 alumnos de Sarawak (Malasia). Los datos de las respuestas a la entrevista se triangularon mediante observación y análisis documental. Los datos recopilados se analizaron temáticamente.

Resultados y conclusión: Los resultados se dividieron en tres temas que son la política actual para los alumnos de B40 en la mejora del aprendizaje ESL, los desafíos enfrentados y el apoyo que los alumnos requieren para mejorar el aprendizaje ESL. Los resultados indican que los padres enfrentan dificultades para satisfacer las demandas de los alumnos en la escuela, que van más allá de las necesidades fundamentales que incluyen proporcionar recursos actualizados adecuados para ayudar a la educación del siglo XXI, apoyo mental y emocional para la generación de hoy. Los alumnos de B40 se preocupan por los recursos exigentes, como los dispositivos conectados a Internet, los libros de referencia en inglés y los talleres de motivación. Las limitaciones de los alumnos de B40 son más evidentes ahora, debido a los grandes avances tecnológicos en la educación.

Implicaciones de la investigación: Este estudio podría ayudar a la autoridad pertinente a desarrollar una política sobre la gestión del apoyo a los hogares B40 con fines educativos al producir un nuevo esquema para ayudar a B40 en la atmósfera educativa actual.

Originalidad/valor: Este estudio explora las percepciones de los padres y alumnos de bajos ingresos sobre las políticas de apoyo educativo en Sarawak, Malasia, centrándose en el aprendizaje ESL. Proporciona información sobre los desafíos que enfrentan los hogares B40, ofreciendo recomendaciones para el desarrollo de políticas y mejores resultados educativos.

Palabras clave: Educación Primaria, Aprendizaje del Idioma Inglés, B40 Alumnos, Gestión de la Educación, Plan de Políticas.
1 INTRODUCTION

Education is a highly important resource as it has the potential to significantly impact individuals' economic status, particularly those who are low-income or less privileged (Allang, 2019). The significance of acquiring English as a second language in Malaysia cannot be understated, given its growing importance in several fields such as medicine, engineering, and education (Nishanthi, 2018). English is commonly employed as a second language and as a medium of instruction in both academic and informal contexts. English is used extensively in all courses, journals, and publications, even at the tertiary level of study.

In the context of Malaysia, individuals are classified into three distinct income brackets, namely the top 20% (T20), the middle 40% (M40), and the bottom 40% (B40). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), the B40 group refers to the lowest-earning group. This group is further divided into four levels: B1, with a median income of RM1929; B2, with RM2786; B3, with RM3556; and B4, with RM4387. According to e-kasih (2014), the poverty threshold for low-income households in West Malaysia was established at RM910, while in East Malaysia it was set at RM710. Poverty is defined as the absence of necessary material resources, which can directly affect a student's overall growth and progress. (Andrabi & Jabeen, 2018).

Many factors contribute to the effectiveness of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Alves & Oliveira, 2014; Kalati, 2016). The significance of the pupils' location and environment has been acknowledged (Castello, 2015). Several studies conducted in Malaysia have consistently shown that pupils with little proficiency in English tend to reside in suburban and rural regions. Schools provide as a platform for English language learners (ESL) to acquire the language, in addition to their households. The acquisition of a language is primarily driven by the development of fluency in spoken language. The acquisition of a language encompasses more than mere comprehension of its notion or structure (Dong & Ren, 2013). While certain individuals possess fluency in English and excel in essay writing, they encounter difficulties in effectively communicating through language (Ghezlou & Biria, 2017; Khan & Khan, 2016). Educational institutions exert a substantial influence on students' exposure to the importance of the English language and their acquisition of language skills (Ahmed, 2015; Nguyen & Terry,
Hence, in order to enhance the educational capabilities of B40 pupils, particularly in the domain of English proficiency, it is imperative to address their fundamental requirements. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct a thorough examination of the government's policy aimed at supporting students in suburban and rural schools in Malaysia. Based on the outcomes of this study, it is possible to make revisions to the aid offered by both governmental and corporate entities in a more comprehensive and systematic fashion. An examination of the administration of such support (including financial subsidies, types of assistance, and workshops) is necessary. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to enhance the existing government policy regarding the provision and administration of aid to school students.

Low-income individuals in Malaysia, namely those belonging to the B40 category, encounter several obstacles pertaining to their suboptimal mental, physical, and nutritional welfare. According to Shahtar et al. (2019), the acquisition of English as a second language is a complex process that requires more effort. In order to assist struggling students in improving their English language abilities, families with higher incomes have implemented supplementary measures. Conversely, families with low wealth would need to do additional effort to redirect their attention onto alternatives such as covering tuition expenses, acquiring English references, and attending classes to enhance their academic achievements. Therefore, it is imperative to establish a policy that assists economically disadvantaged students in attaining academic excellence. To tackle this problem, a comprehensive and enduring intervention strategy is necessary. The reduction of socioeconomic disparities in education necessitates the implementation of policy modifications targeting the several facets of socioeconomic status, including income, education, and employment, as well as the mechanisms by which they impact educational outcomes. (Allang, 2019).

1.1 MALAYSIA EDUCATION POLICY

The reform agenda for an exceptional education in Malaysia, as outlined in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2015-2025, places significant emphasis on student academic achievement. The primary objective of the Malaysian Education Blueprint is to ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all Malaysians, hence preventing any kind of exclusion. This encompasses pupils who are economically challenged, specifically those belonging to the B40 community. The B40 demographic was selected as the focal group in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 (RMK11). According to Bakar et al. (2020), the government employed education as a strategy to enhance the income of B40 households and
address the socioeconomic disparity. The B40, due to their comparatively lower income levels, experience limited access and capacity to adequately address the requirements of their families.

The ability of students to attain Malaysia The National Educational Philosophy is shaped by a multitude of factors, with the objective of cultivating individuals who possess a well-rounded and harmonious development in intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical, and psychological dimensions. The academic accomplishment level of pupils pertains to their aptitude and proficiency in assimilating and mastering the knowledge and skills acquired within the educational setting. (Norzahida, 2013).

The initial step in the teaching of B40 pupils should involve efforts to meet their needs, namely by attending to their physiological needs, love, safety, appreciation, and self-actualization, as outlined in Maslow's theory of needs. The guiding principle of the B40 Pupils Education Policy Plan is rooted in the slogan "Maslow first, then Bloom." This plan aims to contribute to the cultivation of a thriving human capital within society, thereby fostering a sustainable Malaysian economy. It aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which prioritise the eradication of poverty and the provision of high-quality education. (Malaysia Economic Planning Unit, 2021).

There are five aspirations for the Malaysian Education System (refer to Figure 1). One of the aspirations under the policy of education in Malaysia is equity. The government of Malaysia put much effort into reducing achievement gaps among students.

**Figure 1**

*Five aspirations for the Malaysian Education system*

![Figure 1: Five aspirations for the Malaysian Education system](image)

Source: (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2015)

The management of education for B40 kids frequently involves addressing concerns related to dropout rates, absenteeism, and subpar academic performance (Juliana & Mohd Izham, 2020). According to a recent study conducted by Muhammad Nur Asyraf et al. (2020) in the Eastern Zone of Kelantan, it was observed that the academic performance of B40 kids
remains subpar. Additionally, the research revealed that the level of interest and attitude exhibited by B40 students towards the process of teaching and learning was not very positive. This corroborates the conclusions drawn in Ngrambang’s (2012) research, which indicates that the majority of students that have low academic performance are Malay students classified as B40. Prior research has also demonstrated a disparity in academic performance between B40 students residing in rural regions and their counterparts in urban areas. One of the factors leading to this diminished academic achievement is the relatively low attendance rate of B40 students in educational institutions. (Malaysia Education Policy Planning and Research Division, 2017).

Furthermore, the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) on all school children as a preventive measure against the transmission of the Covid-19 pandemic has introduced novel obstacles for B40 students in terms of coordinating efficient educational sessions (Magasvaran, et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic necessitates a shift from in-person to online instruction, which poses further difficulties when parents and teachers are ill-equipped (Dong & Bouey, 2020). Consequently, in order to enhance the appeal and applicability of English language instruction, educators utilise a diverse range of strategies. In contrast, students experience a decrease in motivation when they encounter difficulties comprehending the content and tasks presented in the context of English instruction. (Yacob & Yunus, 2019).

The fall in academic achievement among students, particularly those classified as B40, can be attributed to the adverse effects of online learning. This phenomenon has been recognised as a hindrance for economically disadvantaged students, mostly due to their restricted access to resources like as electronic devices and internet connectivity (Zainol et al., 2021). The students have demonstrated an average level of proficiency in the English language in class, reaching Band 3 according to the School Based Assessment (2018). Although COVID-19 has sparked extensive research, there remains a dearth of studies examining the achievements of B40 pupils in the present educational environment.

This study was conducted with the recognition that support is necessary to attain high-quality education for B40 children. The inspiration for this study is from the existing ambiguity within the current education policy plan concerning the elements that influence the efficacy of English as a Second Language (ESL) learning for low-income populations residing in metropolitan areas. An investigation of these elements is vital to enhance a favourable disposition towards education, particularly the English language, and thus tackle the problem of absenteeism and subpar academic performance. The objective of this study is to investigate...
the perspectives of economically disadvantaged parents and students in a primary school on the enhancement of English Language Learning (ELL). This study aims to investigate the perspectives of parents and pupils regarding the education management policy for B40 pupils and its impact on enhancing their ESL learning.

1.2 SOCIOECONOMIC AND EDUCATION RELATIONSHIP

The topic of socioeconomic status (SES) has garnered significant interest within the field of education. The term "SES" denotes the social position or class of an individual or a collective entity. The three existing socioeconomic status (SES) indicators are education, income, and occupation. These metrics commonly prioritise the domains of health, education, and human welfare. (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; White, 1982).

According to Willingham (2012), parents who possess greater financial resources have the ability to offer their children superior learning environments and increased opportunities. The majority of families, particularly those classified as B40 households, lack the financial means to purchase the essential devices or internet subscriptions required for their children's online education. According to Lee (2020), there exists a viewpoint among certain individuals that the allocation of funds towards the acquisition of a computer and the subsequent rise in internet expenses lacks value in relation to academic achievement. In addition, socioeconomically deprived family groups, such as the B40 group, faced difficulties due to a lack of adequate technological devices for their children to participate in educational activities (Zainol, 2021). The majority of families, particularly those classified as B40 households, lack the financial means to purchase the essential devices or internet subscriptions required for their children's online education. Moreover, certain individuals tend to presume that allocating resources towards acquiring a computer and augmenting internet expenses yields minimal advantages in terms of performance-to-price ratio. (Lafraxo et al., 2018)

The educational attainment of students is significantly influenced by socioeconomic variables. According to Green et al. (2016), families with a higher economic level are more likely to have students who are naturally motivated to accomplish. Motivation is a crucial factor in the process of acquiring a second language. Motivation is the inclination to acquire new knowledge or skills. Teaching a second language in a classroom setting becomes exceedingly challenging when a student lacks the motivation to acquire a language. According to the theoretical framework proposed by Abraham Maslow, individuals are driven by five fundamental wants, namely physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (see...
Figure 2). Satisfying an individual's fundamental wants might facilitate their advancement till they achieve self-actualization. The phrase 'Maslow first before Bloom' is commonly employed in educational circles (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Prioritising the satisfaction of students' basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, security, love, and praise is essential before expecting them to thrive academically. Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1913-1999) establishes a framework of verb levels that classify cognitive abilities into higher and lower levels for the purpose of learning.

Maslow's two lowest rung physiological and safety needs encompass our basic necessities, including sustenance, hydration, and housing, as well as our social and financial security. The manner in which an individual advances throughout Maslow's hierarchy significantly impacts their capacity and focus for learning, encompassing both academic and social domains. According to Mutch (2021), Bloom's taxonomy encompasses three distinct categories of learning that encompass all facets of human learning across all contexts. Focusing on the cognitive aspects of learning becomes challenging until the pupils' basic human needs have been met.

**Figure 2**

*A Theory of Human Motivation*

![Source: A. H. Maslow (1943)](image)

1.3 LOW-INCOME PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS AND ESL LEARNING

English as a Second Language (ESL) refers to the utilisation or examination of English by individuals who speak languages other than their original tongue. English is employed as a secondary language in the educational system of Malaysia. Typically, the English language is
not the primary language of the students, thus necessitating additional support in the form of supplementary classes, supplementary classes, courses, and reference materials. (Renandya et al., 2018).

The examination of the family's financial and educational background is a topic that merits consideration. Parents with little financial resources may be unable to afford tuition lessons and additional learning materials for their children, in contrast to parents who do not belong to the B40 socioeconomic category. In addition, the limited educational level of parents hinders their ability to provide adequate support for their children's remote learning (Lamb, 2008). Hence, it has been demonstrated that individuals residing below the poverty threshold face a dearth of educational resources inside their households (Pettigrew, 2009). Parents with lower socioeconomic status are compelled to work extended hours, resulting in limited opportunities for active engagement in their children's educational endeavours. (Gratz, 2006).

According to Jackson (2010), parents exert a more significant impact on their children in comparison to educational institutions. During primary education, families exert the most significant influence on their children's academic progress, as this is the period when they require the most familial assistance. While factors such as a family's economic condition and educational background are indeed significant, the level of involvement exhibited by the family in their children's studies remains paramount. Parental participation is crucial for children's learning, attitudes towards school, and aspirations, as previously stated. (Dauber & Eipstein, 1993).

According to Lie (2017), numerous research have demonstrated that technology can facilitate the enhancement of language abilities and competencies among teachers and students across all educational levels. In addition, it is recommended that learners get instruction using a pedagogical approach that aligns with the demands of the 21st century (Pamela et al., 2016). Furthermore, the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) as an educational tool has been suggested by Yunus et al. (2013). Therefore, it is imperative to ensure the provision of fundamental resources for digital learning in the year 2022, as highlighted by Graham et al. (2019). Zainol et al. (2021) have found that online learning has had a detrimental effect on students' academic performance, particularly for economically disadvantaged students who face limited access to resources like gadgets and the internet. A significant proportion of households, especially those belonging to the B40 socioeconomic group, lack the financial means to procure the necessary equipment or internet subscriptions for their children's online education.
2 METHOD

The present study utilises a qualitative research methodology known as case study, wherein a face-to-face interview was conducted. From April to September 2022, the interview was conducted at a primary school located in Kuching, Sarawak. The data was triangulated by conducting a thorough examination of existing material and making observations. The purpose of this study was to collect data from primary school students and parents belonging to the B40 demographic regarding their perspectives on the education policy plan aimed at enhancing the English Language Learning environment for B40 kids. This was achieved via the use of semi-structured interview questions. Furthermore, the objective of the study was to examine the current education management policy plan and solicit public input for areas that require enhancement for B40 pupils within the educational setting.

2.1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This study employed purposive sampling. The selection criteria consist of primary school pupils and parents who are part of the mainstream population. In order to be eligible for an interview, individuals must be members of the B40 group. The study comprises four 12-year-old mainstream primary school students from a B40 home, as well as four B40 parents. The participants in this study originate from Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. The study aims to enhance theoretical and empirical understanding of the dynamics of enhancing English Language Learners (ELL) through a targeted development education programme for the low-income community, despite the small sample size.

2.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The interview questions were derived from Bity Salwana's research on the development of the foundational plan for managing student education at the B40 level. The interview was conducted in the Malay language due to its status as the national language of Malaysia. This choice was made to accommodate parents and kids who face challenges in effectively communicating in English, as it is not their primary language. The interview was conducted using a predetermined set of questions derived from the study questions, comprising 16 questions directed towards parents and 6 questions directed towards kids. The interviews were conducted in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, spanning from April to September 2022. To
ascertain the credibility of the instruments, two specialists in the domains of education administration and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) conducted a thorough evaluation of the initial iterations of the questionnaire and interview protocol. The interviews were performed and documented with the explicit consent of the participants, who were provided with anonymity. The data is further triangulated by examining related documents, such as government circulars and letters, that pertain to special help for B40 pupils in the primary school environment. Observations were employed as a research tool to examine any gaps that may arise.

2.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The Faculty of Education, University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) prepared a consent letter for the researcher to conduct the interview. The interview was carried out in person, with each subject being met at a distinct time and date.

2.4 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The findings were analysed using thematic analysis. The interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis technique. This technique involved several steps: (1) becoming acquainted with the data set, (2) generating initial codes, (3) developing a coding framework by refining codes and comparing them with coding extracts and the larger dataset, and (4) defining and clarifying significant themes. Ultimately, through the examination of each cohort of participants: parents and pupils, the interview extracts were slightly altered to enhance their legibility. In order to conduct a more comprehensive examination of the deficiencies in
the current policy plan for B40 pupils, the replies were subjected to triangulation through the utilisation of document analysis and field notes.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the B40 parents’ and pupils’ perceptions of the Education Management Policy Plan for B40 pupils in Improving ESL learning. The followings are the results and discussions of the findings. The research instruments were individual interviews and document analysis. The parents were invited to the school. They contacted the researchers and informed their consent and convenient time to be interviewed. Generally, the interview session was conducted for an hour or 60 minutes. The individual interviews were conducted as it is difficult for the researchers to find a common time for focus group interviews.

3.1 CURRENT POLICY FOR B40 PUPILS IN IMPROVING ESL LEARNING

Since English is typically not the students' native language, more assistance is needed in the form of extra lessons, classes, courses, and resources (Renandya et al., 2018). However, in Malaysia there are policies that exist to assist B40 pupils in their education, specifically primary education. Assistance provided by the government is largely in terms of food and beverages, financial support, shelter and information and communication technology (ICT) assistance. The findings below explain how efficient these supports are to primary school pupils in improving their English as a Second Language learning.

Parent 1 indicated that “the government has been providing assistance to the pupils under the Rancangan Makanan Tambahan (RMT) which is to provide supplementary food to primary school pupils, from low-income groups to improve their health, physical condition and nutrition.”

Based on the observation, document analysis and interview, the government has made much effort in helping B40 pupils to meet their basic needs, however, a problem arises for the next party that was given the responsibility to produce quality healthy food for the pupils. The headmaster plays an important role to ensure the food quality is met. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1979), suggests that the belief that a person’s interactions with their environment have an impact on their own growth and development.
Furthermore, financial supports are also available from the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) which is the financial fund named Poor Student Trust Fund Assistance (KWAPM) which is given to pupils by crediting it directly to the pupil's account or in cash or non-cash based on the Malaysia Ministry of Education 2021 circular.

According to the Milk Program Circular, 2022, this program is implemented for pupils in order to get a balanced diet while in school.

Pupil 1 said that “We receive food and drinks too at school which sometimes helps our parents to not prepare food for us when at school.”

The basic needs of an individual are met for the B40 students. The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs by Abraham Maslow (1943) states that current support is concentrated on meeting basic needs including breathing, eating, drinking, sheltering, and clothing.

In conclusion, the assistance provided to a certain extent did assist these B40 students in using it to enhance their ESL learning, particularly while they are at home. However, the assistance provided by the numerous sources is mostly focused on providing the B40 students with food, lodging, and money support; it does not include mental, emotional, or spiritual help to increase their enthusiasm to learn English and to thrive in their studies as a whole.

3.2 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE EXISTING EDUCATION POLICY

There are very limited guidelines for managing B40 students in schools since Malaysia education management is mainly concerned with students' level of achievement, according to Bity Salwana and Muhammad Nur Asyraf (2020). On the other hand, in order for them to be on par with other students, they need additional attention.

Parent 5 indicated that “Not all of the B40 groups were given extra support, it is for families with extremely low income.”

The B40 category in Malaysia has a household income that is between RM4237 and less. The B1 group in the B40 group, which is the lowest of the lowest, is the group for whom help is offered, not the B40 students. They are the crucial groups with extremely low incomes who require greater financial support than others.
Parent 1 said that “Other households which have a higher a bit income are still in need of these supports since the expenses these days has increased.”

From the observation done during the individual interview, it could be concluded that the parents are unsatisfied with the poverty line stated by the government and the eligibility for all these supports. Figure 4 is a screenshot from Financial Circular Letter 20, 2020 indicating the range of income that is qualified for the stated support provided by the government.

**Figure 4**
*Financial Circular Letter 20, 2020 indicating the range of income that is qualified for the stated support provided by the government*

In general, several studies show that people with low socioeconomic status are more likely to be exposed to hazards including carelessness, abuse, and fewer educational chances (Pace et al., 2017). Compared to students from high SES, students from such backgrounds typically have a larger tendency to do poorly in the English language.

According to existing research, kids from underprivileged homes typically have poor reading abilities because they lack access to literacy resources and have parents with low levels of education (Frechette, 2013). Furthermore, in order to support the Sustainable Development Goals, (SDG 4) also calls for the eradication of all forms of discrimination in education, particularly those that disadvantage the underprivileged or members of the B40 group, by the year 2030. This implies that everyone, regardless of background, should have access to high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable and offers the chance for lifelong learning.
Parent 1 indicated that “The form needed to fill and update always also a troublesome for us. We need to seek a higher officer to certify some documents.”

Parent 2 stated that “The documentation is sometimes redundant from one aid to another.”

Conclusively, it is found that the current policy does give support in terms of finances, food and beverages and shelter for the B40 pupils. However, drawbacks exist in terms of the low poverty line in order to be eligible for the aid and the hassle to complete the documentation needed to request the aid.

3.3 SUPPORT B40 PUPILS’ NEED TO IMPROVE ESL LEARNING

Despite the ongoing assistance provided, there are improvements needed in assisting the B40 pupils. Online interactions are now available as a result of continual advancements in digital technology, hence, there is an increase in internet usage recently due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic as mentioned by Fernandes et al. (2020).

Pupil 2 also mentioned that “tab and internet connection is important for my English studies since my family does not speak English at home”

Parent 4 indicated in the individual interview that, “…the types of assistance the B40 would need nowadays is the ICT assistance in terms of gadgets and internet connectivity.”

Based on the interview responses, the usage of ICT should be a norm for all pupils, especially in learning the English language. Technology also aids language teaching strategies and helps pupils enhance their writing skills (Syafrudin et al., 2021).

According to Hwang et al. (2016), technology could help students improve their speaking and listening skills. With digital tools and programs that were able to provide feedback on their speaking production as well as analyze their listening comprehension, students were able to self-regulate their learning.

Pupil 1 also mentioned that “The best way to learn English is through listening to it every day, I find out that the more I listen to it the easier for me to say the words correctly.”
Parent 1 also highlighted that, “My children enjoy listening to English language songs and educational games on the internet, however, we can’t really afford enough tabs and internet data for all our children at home.”

Parent 4 mentioned that “When I asked my children they say they don’t really use the computer and internet at school since the room does not cater enough for all pupils in the class.”

Based on the interview excerpts above, it is clear that pupils need and want the ICT assistance which is internet connectivity and devices to be used to learn the English language. From the observations, when the pupils explain their experience learning English using the internet their facial expression shows much joy and however when they indicated that they could not afford to have it frequently their expressions show disappointment and frustration.

Parent 1 mentioned that “We appreciate the food and beverages aids however in order to cater to our children’s study development, food and beverages do not help much. We need assistance to help our children to be ICT literate in order for them to not be left behind.”

Parent 2 informed that “I would not want my child to be left out especially nowadays where information and classes are available on YouTube and on the websites. Unfortunately, I really can’t afford those devices for each of my children and the internet connection.”

Pupil 5 expressed that, “It is sometimes sad that I could not always use the computer at school, unless our teacher brings us in.”

According to the conducted individual interviews, technology is a popular topic to discuss. Although both parents and pupils are aware of the numerous advantages the internet offers for the study of the English language by pupils, it is difficult for the B40 families to succeed in helping their children learn since they lack the funds to purchase devices and internet connections. The findings are in line with Quang and Duc’s (2023) study that prioritizing technology enhancement is able to develop a country’s socioeconomic strengths. Therefore, Malaysia Ministry of Education should increase resources or assistance to help these B40 families and schools in equipping themselves with internet and technological devices.

Furthermore, as supported by Ahmadi (2018) the use of modern technologies in English language teaching and learning represents a substantial advancement in current English language teaching methods. Indeed, Ahmadi (2018) also mentioned that electronic teaching programmes have become the preferred choice of instructors since they are thought to increase
positive student connection with instructors and encourage overall English language development. In addition to ICT help, B40 students require greater moral support in their everyday lives.

Pupil 3 indicated that “Besides the RM100, I miss having motivational camps and attending motivational talks.”

Pupil 4 informed that “sometimes it is demotivating to study hard since there is no UPSR and there are no interesting camps to join.”

The students themselves have expressed their interest to obtain assistance in boosting their morale and providing support for the current learning environment. Based on the document analysis, there are few motivational camps available for pupils to join and the camps are usually online based on the researchers’ observations. From the interview responses, the findings show that pupils were not happy to join online motivational talks or camps.

Parent 4 claimed that "B40 students need morale support and further encouragement in addition to financial and material help in order to have a healthy mentality."

Parent 1 asserted that "...a self-management campaign, a psychological awareness campaign, and a motivation camp are all successful strategies to enhance one's quality characteristics. Schools need to be calm places where students may learn in both academic and non-academic ways."

Based on the interview excerpts above, it is clear that the need of motivational support is needed by pupils at the primary level to enhance their learning experience, especially in a second language which needs more guidance and effort. The fact that the pupils and parents are aware that in order to excel in the English language is not solely dependent on finance and the basic education which is in class education sheds light on the importance of moral support in children’s everyday life. They need to be able to share their anxiety in learning English with their parents as well as teachers as proposed by Samah (2023). According to Shahla et al. (2021), motivation is an internal force that propels pupils ahead in their English study with zeal and readiness, in addition to an intense desire to learn and understand the language.

Furthermore, the interviews conducted have shown that the next aspect that is emphasized is the pupils’ need for English reference books.
Pupil 1 mentioned that “I need more English reference books because it has colourful illustration and I can learn English faster.”

Pupil 2 indicated that “books from the outside bookstore are fun but I can’t buy a lot of it because I don’t have money.”

Pupil 3 expressed that “picture dictionary book helps me to understand some words easier. I feel it helps me a lot to learn English.”

Parent 3 stated that “my children usually would go to bookstores and look at the books there but sometimes I can’t buy them the books they want.”

Parent 4 informed that “reference books are important as additional supporting materials children need to have.”

Based on the interview excerpts above, pupils and parents agreed that pupils need reference books to advance their English language learning experience. According to Marudut and Irma (2020), the advantage of using books from other sources is that it could spark readers' interest in reading. Publishing books in full color enhance student reading enthusiasm, which motivates students to participate in literacy programs. These books can also be used as students’ references when they do their homework. Success in reading is heavily dependent on how well-versed the students are in the English language.

Thus, alternatives should be thought out in order to get more English reference books. Reading helps students apply English in their daily interactions. Reading might be very beneficial for learning, according to Hashim et al. (2018). Based on the interview excerpts with the pupils, they indicated that they used the financial aid (BAP) given to them, however, the aid does not help much due to the rising prices for almost all goods in Malaysia.

Teacher 3 told that “NGOs should take part in proving picture books to primary school students.”

Based on the interview too, parents were aware that reference books help their students to improve their ESL learning. In language learning, family members have the most influence on their children’s education at the elementary level.
5 CONCLUSION

Conclusively, English language is regarded as the second language in Malaysia, hence learning of the language needs extra effort, especially for a low-income community or the B40 community. This research has successfully conducted and produced significant outcomes: B40 pupils in primary schools are still in need of aid and assistance to improve their ESL learning.

Based on the individual interview conducted with pupils and parents, also by document analysis and observations, the findings have indicated that there are loopholes in the present support systems in place for B40 students. The perspectives of the stakeholders have illuminated ideas about improvements that are necessary as well as the present advantages of the support that is being provided.

According to the findings of this study, the current assistance present for B40 primary school pupils is food, beverages and financial aid. However, the extent to which this assistance made an impact on the B40 pupils at the primary school to improve their ESL learning is still questionable. The effectiveness of the assistance provided could be improved and this study has shed light on this aspect.

The results of this study indicated that B40 children in primary schools required assistance with ICT, where functioning devices are necessary, as well as Internet connectivity, where a fast connection is beneficial for students to increase the resources they use to learn English. Additionally, as Covid 19 has increased the need for moral support to study in the setting of today's demanding educational environment, the policy should not only focus on food, beverages, and funds but also on moral support such as motivational workshops and tuition. These measures are to encourage students always have the will and inspiration to thrive in their studies, especially while studying a second language such as English in the educational environment, moral support in the form of motivational talks and camps is crucial nowadays.

Future research studies could study in-depth each category of education stakeholders’ perspectives such as teachers, pupils, parents, administrative school officers and educational officers. Besides, future studies using a mixed method approach could focus on a larger scale of participants in order to make the empirical data on this study richer.

The limitation of this study is that it only includes one community which is a primary school from Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. As a result, it was unable to draw any generalizations about the issue, but it does contribute to the growth of theoretical and empirical knowledge in this area, which could help in the preparation of a better educational policy for B40 students.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is funded by Dana Pecutan, Education Faculty, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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