

PATTERNS OF DOMINANCE OF LANGUAGE VITALITIES AMONG MALAYSIAN STUDENTS IN PRIMARY NATIONAL-TYPE AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Multilingualism is embedded in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2015-2025) as a stated goal towards nation building. The education system provides opportunity to learn Malay which is the national language, the mother tongue (Mandarin or Tamil) and the English language as part of formal schooling. In fact, Malaysian primary schools are classified into two major divisions. Students can opt to study in national schools in which the medium of instruction is Malay with the provision for the learning of English and a mother tongue. The other option allows students to enrol in national-type schools of which the medium of instruction is either Mandarin or Tamil, with English and Malay taught as academic subjects. At secondary level, the medium of instruction in national schools is Malay and students are provided the opportunity to learn their mother tongue and English. Other than in school, other social milieus also allow the use and practice of these languages. Given this linguistic environment, there exists a myriad of language experiences within and outside formal learning which together would influence the totality of language vitality. This paper investigates language vitality featured in this multilingual environment. It focuses on the vitality of the English language among students that appears to co-exist with the learning and use of other languages as they progress through the primary and secondary levels. The vitality is measured by the following indicators: language preference, choice, dominance, use, attitude and motivation and proficiency which were used to develop a questionnaire to obtain data on strength evaluation of these languages. The methodology encompasses random and convenient sampling to obtain representative responses from students with different levels of education and language experiences. The study reveals relative vitalities of languages used and highlights values attached to languages at different points of language exposure that coincide with chronological age.

Keywords: language vitality; levels of education; primary and secondary Malaysian school students; vitality indicators

The Malaysian education system is unique in the sense that it has evolved from a system that dates back to the time when the British colonial government established schools that used English as a medium of instruction in mainstream primary and secondary schools. The education policy then also allowed for the setup of Malay schools, Chinese schools and Tamil schools at the primary level. However, all primary school students converged into the secondary school system whereby all subjects were taught in English. Students who continued to tertiary education enrolled in universities often with English as the dominant language for instruction.

When Malaysia obtained her independence, there was a gradual shift to use Malay as the medium of instruction in national schools. Mother-tongue instruction was still available as an optional subject in national schools. National-type schools encompassed Chinese and Tamil schools. At the

secondary level, the shift continued for the use of Malay as the medium of instruction and students from national-type schools converged to national schools resulting in a unified secondary school system. The feature of mother tongue instruction maintained its status quo as an option. The language policy of using Malay as medium of instruction was also extended to the tertiary level. However, a major difference is that English is more widely used at the tertiary level compared to that in primary and secondary school.

The social milieus in the nation accommodate the use of the mother tongue particularly in individual speech communities while Malay is used nationwide as a common language for communication. English remains very much a language for trade and business despite its relegation to being merely a subject learnt in school. The relegation of English from being a language of instruction to that of a subject constrained the use of

that language in schools (Burhanudeen, 2004). However, English has continued to flourish as an important language for international use.

Considering the multilingual scenery, the orientation is to consider the vitality of English in its current state of use and to compare it to the vitality of other major languages (Malay, Mandarin and Tamil). Vitality of a language, in the present study, is defined as the strength of a language in reference to the users' language experience, dominance of use in the language, the preference and desire to use the language. In juxtaposition to the application of vitality on the major languages, conventionally, the investigation of language vitality in the Malaysian context is confined to indigenous and minority languages as conducted via the studies such as those by Mohamed and Hashim (2012) to investigate Sihan language; Coluzzi, Riget and Wang (2013) focusing on Bidayuh language; Ting and Tham (2014) on Kadazandusun language, and Hassan, Ghazali and Omar (2015) on Orang Asli (indigenous people) language. As stated by UNESCO (2003), language vitality demonstrates the ability of a language to survive, and the previous studies were only operationalized to examine the maintenance of these languages in the future. In this study, the investigation of language vitality in the Malaysian setting is broadened to involve principally the English language, which is known as the second most important language in the country. In vitality studies situated in other locales, such as those by Bourhis and Sachdev (1984) in Canada, Lawson and Sachdev (2004) in London and Rasinger (2010) in East London, the vitality of English as a second language (L2) is also studied. They found the use of English to be dominant when compared to first language use in an English-dominant-environment. In the examination of the vitality of English as second most important language in Malaysia, it is also hypothesized that the language situation is different and therefore the vitality could also be different. The resilience and salience of a language is seen through daily linguistic experiences. It is believed that students would have different language experiences at different levels of education (i.e. primary, secondary, and tertiary level), or at different phases of their lives. Findings will highlight varying degrees of vitality according to levels of education and language experience, with consideration also given to language contact and other aspects of language use.

Ethnolinguistic vitality to language vitality

Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) defined ethnolinguistic vitality as a phenomenon "which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity" (p. 308) with selected status, demography, and institutional support and control as the indicators to assess ethnolinguistic vitality. Instead of having language to play the

central role, it assumes a peripheral part in the vitality assessment (Currie & Hogg, 1994; Gao, Schmidt, & Gudykunst, 1994). Progressing from ethnolinguistic vitality, Barker and Giles (2002) focused on the linguistic components. According to Boltokova (2009), Barker and Giles "leave ethnicity aside and put emphasis on the linguistic characteristics of the ethnolinguistic group" (p. 12). Thus, other than ethnolinguistic vitality, language vitality has been given a broader dimension as assumed in this study.

Models of language vitality

In language vitality studies, various models that demonstrate the involvement of various indicators can be used. Fishman's (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) (1991) is the pioneering model to account for language vitality. Its assessment encompasses language use and transmission from individual language user to that in the wider community associated with language maintenance and revitalization. The indicators of UNESCO (2003) and National Indigenous Language Survey (NILS) (McConvell, Marmion, & McNicol, 2005) were used in other studies to investigate the level of language endangerment in terms of how safe or endangered a language is. Additionally, Van Der Avoird, Broeder, and Extra (2001) and Plüddemann, Braam, Broeder, Extra, and October (2004) shed light on the linguistic experiences of the language users as shown in the vitality's indicators. Different vitality models are forwarded in studies situated in different socio-cultural settings, leading to the conclusion no one model can fit all. Some proposed indicators may not be appropriate for a particular context and thus there is a need to tailor a model to suit the context. In this study, a model was selected and modified to suit the Malaysian context.

METHOD

Subjects

Of prior importance in the research design would be to identify the subjects from different levels of schooling to represent the different language experiences. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the Malaysian Ministry of Education to carry out the study in the schools. Once permission was obtained at the Ministry level, the researchers had to establish contact at the school level. The subjects of the study were also sourced via random sampling as well as convenience stratified sampling. National-type schools in the Klang Valley in the state of Selangor were identified as this was a convenient location for the researchers in terms of having to travel to collect data. Two hundred subjects from primary schools were selected, of which, 100 were from the national-type-Chinese and another 100 were from national-type

Tamil schools. For the primary level, the subjects were sourced from the population of primary five students. This decision was based on the rationale that primary five students were considered mature enough to answer structured questionnaires. The primary five students were the next best option over the primary six students who could be considered as the ideal population to represent primary level students at the exit point of primary schooling. However, they were inaccessible as it is the Malaysian ministry's policy that examination year students (they need to sit for the national primary six exit test) were not allowed to participate in research such as the study undertaken.

The secondary school subjects were represented by 100 secondary two students who were 14-year-olds studying in secondary form two and they had previously attended national-type primary schools. Thus, their linguistic repertoire included English, Malay and their mother tongue. Subjects from secondary form two were selected based on the belief that students who had experienced about two years in the transition from primary to secondary education level, would have increased language contact considerably in a different linguistic environment which could influence the level of language vitality. Again, the ideal population would be the exit point lower secondary three students but they remained inaccessible for the same reason that they had to sit for a national examination at the end of year. It is important to note that the subjects who were sourced from both primary to secondary levels took into account the continuum of language contact and exposure as they experienced the education shift that could affect language vitality.

Instrument

Various vitality determinants have been designed and used for investigating vitality. One of which is the framework proposed by UNESCO (2003) which suggests the following nine vitality indicators:

- 1) Intergenerational Language Transmission
- 2) Absolute Number of Speakers
- 3) Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population
- 4) Trends in Existing Language Domains
- 5) Response to New Domains and Media
- 6) Materials for Language Education and Literacy
- 7) Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, including Official Status and Use
- 8) Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language
- 9) Amount and Quality of Documentation

These vitality indicators were used in the Malaysian context by Mohamed and Hashim (2012) and by Hassan, Ghazali and Omar (2015) to

investigate vitality of indigenous languages, such as Sihan and the indigenous Orang Asli language. Slanting from the vitality focus on the indigenous languages, Van Der Avoird, Broeder and Extra (2001) and Extra, Yagmur, and Van Der Avoird (2004) brought attention to the vitality of immigrants' minority languages. The former study stated language monopoly, language proficiency, language choice, language dominance and language preference as components of language vitality; whereas, the latter study included language proficiency, language choice, language dominance and language preference into the construction of the language vitality index. In view of different language contexts, varied vitality indicators have to be produced to accommodate certain settings to capture the findings that would be more representative of vitality.

Taking into consideration the appropriateness and practicality in applying the indicators proposed by UNESCO in the vitality assessment of the major languages, the indicators in the present study were designed with reference to the framework proposed by Van Der Avoird et al. (2001) and Extra et al. (2004). Thus, the indicators outlined in this study are as below:

1. Language preference: Students' preference towards the language
2. Language dominance: Language which students have dominance in
3. Language use: Language that students use in home, school, entertainment and community domains
4. Language choice: Students' desire and wish to use the language in the present and in the future
5. Language attitude and motivation: Attitude and motivation shown by the students in the use of the language
6. Language proficiency: Language of which students are proficient in

Each indicator formed constructs that are relevant to reflect the language vitality of the primary and secondary school respondents. Where necessary, some modifications to the constructs of the indicators were made to elicit relevant responses constrained by education experience. For instance, the items such as finding jobs and maintenance of identity were deemed unsuitable to be evaluated at the primary and secondary level; items such as studying in the future was evaluated at the secondary level only (See Appendix 1). In accordance with the 5 point Likert scale in the questionnaire, scales of language vitality were designated as follows: Very Strong (5), Strong (4), Moderate (3), Weak (2), and Very Weak (1).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 21). Descriptive statistics was used to find the mean score of each component indicator. The overall language vitality index would be the average mean score of the six indices measured. Initial results from the SPSS revealed a Cronbach Alpha of 0.945 which indicates good internal consistency attesting to the questionnaire's reliability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results obtained from the study are presented according to primary and secondary school levels. At the primary level, the focus of discussion is divided into students from national-type Chinese schools and students from national-type Tamil

schools. However, this division does not apply to the secondary level.

Primary level

National-type Chinese schools

Table 1 shows the language vitality among primary school students in national-type Chinese schools. As expected, the highest vitality value (4.39) is for Mandarin. In these schools, the English language has a higher vitality value (2.93) compared to Malay (2.64). Malay takes a back seat compared to Mandarin and English in national-type schools. In comparing the vitalities of English and Malay, it was found that the mean scores for the individual subdomains of Malay were lower than those for English. This would mean that English was more consistently used than Malay in these schools.

Table 1: Language vitality at primary level: National-type Chinese schools

National-type Chinese school students	Language preference	Language Dominance	Language use	Language choice	Language attitude & motivation	Language proficiency	Vitality
English	2.83	2.71	2.21	2.96	3.64	3.21	2.93
Malay	2.51	2.67	1.73	2.59	3.41	2.95	2.64
Mandarin	4.43	4.23	4.41	4.64	4.34	4.30	4.39

While English ranked second in vitality subsequent to Mandarin, most of the vitality for English sub scores fell below an average of 3.0. Attitude and motivation, and proficiency had the highest means of 3.64 and 3.21 respectively. In other words, it could be said that students were quite keen to use English and they saw themselves as having a slightly above average ability in the language. The students in the national-type Chinese schools gave high value to effort to use both Malay (3.77) and English (3.89) with parental encouragement scoring for Malay at 3.90 and English at 4.26 (See Appendix 2: Language attitude and motivation). These scores ranked the highest among scores of the sub-domains for language attitude and motivation. This would mean that parents saw both languages as important for their children to acquire with English having a slight edge over Malay. For language use, it was found that English was used more than Malay for media purposes such as for entertainment, social interactions and general reading (See Appendix 2: Language use). For language choice between English and Malay, it was apparent that the mean values for the sub-domains (family, school communication, homework language, subject language, exam language, and outside language)

were higher for English (See Appendix 2: Language choice). Language preference also demonstrated higher mean scores for English compared to Malay.

Another indicator investigated was language proficiency. Again, Mandarin scored the highest with a mean value of 4.30. This was followed by English (3.21) and Malay (2.96). Among the sub-indicators, reading and speaking were ranked the highest for Mandarin, while understanding and reading were highest for English as well as for Malay (See Appendix 2: Language proficiency). For both English and Malay, speaking and writing achieved the lowest and second lowest mean scores respectively (See Appendix 2: Language proficiency). This implies that the students have mastered language production skills in Mandarin but have only reached comprehension level for English and Malay.

National-type Tamil schools

Table 2 presents the overall mean scores for the vitalities of the three languages under investigation in national-type Tamil schools. Tamil language has a vitality of 4.15 which is lower than that of Mandarin in the national-type Chinese schools. English remains second in terms of overall vitality (3.75).

Table 2: Language vitality at primary level: National-type Tamil schools

National-type Chinese school students	Language preference	Language Dominance	Language use	Language choice	Language attitude & motivation	Language proficiency	Vitality
English	4.04	4.02	2.98	3.64	3.85	3.94	3.75
Malay	3.61	3.94	2.67	3.23	3.78	3.89	3.52
Mandarin	4.15	4.49	3.90	4.13	3.96	4.28	4.15

The following discussion focuses on the sub-domains that build up the overall vitality indicators (as seen in Table 2). Language preference was scored in terms of the language students preferred the most; preference at home, preference in school and preference in other places. Consistently, English scored higher at 4.04 compared to Malay (3.61). For language dominance, the students claimed that they speak and understand English (3.85, 3.99) better than they do in Malay (3.62, 3.75) (See Appendix 3: Language dominance). However, Tamil school students read and write better in Malay than in English, though the mean score difference is not significantly large.

As for language use, Tamil achieved a higher mean score than English and Malay. As one of the sub-components, what stood out for home language use was the sub-domain of using the language with friends. For this sub-domain, English (3.49) was preferred over Malay (2.60) (See Appendix 3: Language use-home language). However, the lowest score for the use of English in this domain was aligned to speaking with grandparents (2.55) (See Appendix 3: Language use-home language). This indicated that they used English the least with grandparents at home. This pattern was also similar for the use of Malay. The score of 4.31 for Tamil was the highest for home language used to communicate with grandparents (See Appendix 3: Language use-home language). It could be inferred that the use of the ethnic language is strong when communicating with the older generation. Referring to Appendix 3 (Language use), in the school domain, speaking to teachers and classmates in English in class ranked highest (3.09, 3.33). The language was used much less in speaking outside of class (2.86, 2.74) with teachers and classmates. Malay was used more than English in the school domain with reference to speaking with the headmaster (2.52) and the administrative office staff (2.91). Tamil was used least with office staff (3.53). The figure is also quite similar when speaking to classmates outside the classroom (3.97). In the sub-domain of community language use, shopping stood out as having the highest score for Malay (3.17) and English (2.98). When speaking with neighbours, more Malay (2.89) was used compared to English (2.73). In the entertainment domain, English was used more than Malay for almost in all sub-domains except for reading newspapers where Malay had a slight edge over English. It should also be noted that Tamil achieved low means for the sub-domains of sending short message service or SMS (2.60) and social networking (2.46). This may imply that Tamil is an unpopular language for use in the new media.

As for language choice, the vitality figures were more dominant for English in all the sub-domains. Between English and Malay, it was rather surprising to note that English was more dominant for doing homework, as a subject and as an

examination language. Students were shown to have a balanced desire to use the language in the family and school platforms and outside of these immediate environments. It was also reported that students had a strong desire to use Tamil in various settings where most of the sub-domains achieved mean scores of more than 4.00, except outside of the classroom (3.99) though the margin of difference is small in comparison to that of the other sub-domains. The figure is shown in the Appendix 3 (Language choice).

In terms of attitude and motivation (See Appendix 3), students claimed that greater effort was made to use Malay and parental encouragement was also higher for learning the national language than English (4.01, 4.25 respectively). However, motivation to learn was higher for English (4.08) than for Malay (3.86) and there was a greater preference for speaking in English (4.20) than in Malay (3.55). It would appear that parents and learners are discerning about the functional purposes of the different languages. Parents are pragmatic about Malay as an important school language for obtaining certification, thus the high encouragement given to students to be proficient in the national language. On the other hand, motivation to learn English is higher than Malay as it appears to enjoy a higher prestige in the social world. The prestige factor is viewed as having a positive outcome subsequent to learning English and this is manifested through the mean scores marked in the salience indicator (3.54) and its sub-components: a tool to earn money (4.18) and wanting to be seen as educated (4.11). The students marked most of the sub-components as being 'very important' and 'important' thus indicating the high values embedded in the use of the language. Hence, being able to speak the language well becomes a motivating factor.

Secondary level

At an early age such as at primary level, children's linguistic experiences may provide glimpses of how a multilingual community shares and uses many languages particularly in relation to mother tongue use. It is in fact not surprising that the mother tongue has been given such high vitality values as young children are highly influenced by the home environment. However, as students enter secondary level schooling, their language experience could broaden in a way that the vitalities of the languages are modified. As they enter secondary education, more language values are cultivated to the extent that vitality could increase significantly (or otherwise) depending on perceived language roles and usefulness. From Table 3 (which presents the overall mean scores for the vitalities of the four languages under investigation in secondary schools), Mandarin stands out as having the highest vitality index of 4.02, followed by Malay (3.69),

Tamil (3.58) and lastly, English (3.56). This could be due to the fact that the secondary schools under investigation were located near predominantly Chinese neighbourhoods and also because they were feeder schools for the nearby national-type schools.

Despite the secondary unified school system having Malay as medium of instruction, the vitality of Mandarin remains strong. Similarly, Tamil is also comparatively strong vis-à-vis the other languages. Under the sub-domain of language preference as shown in the Appendix 4, for the three languages, English, Malay and Tamil, the highest mean score was for English as the language they liked the most. English was also high as the preferred language in school and also for use in other places. On the other hand, the choice to use mother tongue as home language was high. In terms of language dominance (See Appendix 4), speaking (Mandarin - 4.18, Tamil -4.43) and understanding the language best (Mandarin-4.21, Tamil-4.27) were aligned to the mother tongue. Reading had the highest score in Mandarin (4.00) followed by Malay (3.98). English had the lowest dominance rating for reading (3.49) and writing (3.18).

As a home language (See Appendix 4), English was the most lowly rated language (ranging from 2.71-3.29) in all sub-domains while, as was expected, the mother tongues were most used. In the case of Malay, it was least used with grandparents (2.71) but was highly used with friends (3.41). The use of the mother tongue as a school language registered lowly, though the figures picked up when used with classmates outside school (Mandarin – 3.29, Tamil –2.93). However, Malay scored 4.00 for the same sub-domain. English ranked third in this

list (2.99). It would appear that Malay has been firmly established as a language for inter-ethnic communication. In school, the use of Malay ranked high in all sub-domains. As for entertainment domains, the comparison between Mandarin and Tamil showed some interesting findings. Watching television in the ethnic languages ranked highest as the language of media. Interestingly, the use of Mandarin was also high for most of the sub-domains, ranging from 3.93 to 4.32. However, for Tamil, the most highly ranked sub-domain was listening to (4.47) and singing songs (4.47), followed by watching movies (4.30). Tamil was least used for social networking (1.90) followed closely by SMS usage (1.93). The reasons for low usage of Tamil for social networking and SMS at the secondary school level seemed to be the same as for primary school. This indicates that the language has played a lesser role in digital media among the students. In general, English (3.38) was ranked higher than Malay (2.88). The students watched movies in English (3.75) much more than in Malay (2.84). For social networking and SMS, English was also preferred. However, the students slightly preferred Malay more when it came to reading newspapers (English-2.88, Malay -3.01) and comics (English-2.91, Malay-3.01). As community languages, the use of Mandarin was again the highest in all sub-domains especially for making friends (4.04) and for shopping (4.00). Tamil was also used quite highly for making friends (3.97) compared to Malay (3.42) and English (2.87). In fact, Malay (3.28) was preferred to English (2.73) as a community language.

Table 3: Language vitality at secondary level

National-type Chinese school students	Language preference	Language Dominance	Language use	Language choice	Language attitude & motivation	Language proficiency	Vitality
English	3.62	3.38	2.89	3.71	3.93	3.80	3.56
Malay	3.34	3.85	3.32	3.74	3.90	3.97	3.69
Mandarin	4.16	4.06	3.67	4.32	3.81	4.15	4.03
Tamil	3.58	3.98	3.18	3.53	3.39	3.82	3.58

Making reference to the Appendix 4, language choice with the family was skewed towards the use of the mother tongue though English (3.41) and Malay (3.46) were moderately used. The use of Mandarin again ranked highly for all the sub-domains while the use of Tamil was much lower for school communication, homework, as a subject, exam language and outside school language. These trends were generally also reflected in the use of Malay and English. Malay achieved the highest mean scores in choice as school communication (3.93), whereas English as subject language had the highest mean scores (3.95) among all sub-components. The findings reflect the students' wishes to sustain the use of Malay as the medium of

communication and English as the medium of instruction for important school subjects.

For language attitude and motivation (See Appendix 4), the interest in learning a language was ranked the highest for Mandarin (4.14), followed closely by English (4.05), Malay (3.83) and Tamil (3.67). The effort put in to learn a particular language was highest for English (4.01) followed by Malay (3.98), Mandarin (3.89) and lastly Tamil (3.17). As for parental encouragement, the scores indicated the following: English (4.08), Malay (4.07) and Mandarin (4.04). Tamil took a back seat with 3.30. The students possibly had attended fewer programs that encouraged the usage and learning of their mother tongue compared to English (3.72) and Malay (3.67). Attitudes however, remained positive

for all languages with Malay scoring the highest (3.99). The secondary school students' preference towards English language speakers was second highest (3.97) after preference towards Mandarin speakers (4.18). Motivation was highest for the learning of English (4.09) followed by Malay (3.97), Mandarin (3.89) and Tamil (3.20) respectively. When asked to rank the importance of the individual languages for communicating with people, the students ranked Mandarin (4.25) the highest, followed by English (4.10) having a slight edge over Malay (3.97) and Tamil (3.83). As a tool to earn money, the result was the same with the highest being Mandarin, followed by English and Malay. English and Mandarin were ranked highest when the students' were asked which language they perceived as making someone seen as educated. In the importance of a language for study, English was ranked the highest (4.25), followed by Malay (4.12), Mandarin (4.07) and Tamil (3.57). Students were least anxious in using Malay (3.80) followed by Mandarin (3.75), English (3.72) and Tamil (3.50). At this stage of their education, the students saw themselves as being very proficient in Mandarin in terms of understanding, speaking, reading and writing, but the use of Tamil was not as high. Malay compared to English was ranked higher in terms of speaking, reading and writing. It was noted that the rankings did not fall below the score of 3.70 which is above the average mean score. In other words, the students appear rather confident of their language ability which contributes to the generally high vitalities of the languages being investigated.

CONCLUSION

The vitality of the languages used in Malaysia as investigated in the study shows that the mother tongue exerts a significant influence in the students' language experiences. In particular, the study reveals that the unique setup in the Malaysian primary level educational system has led to the entrenchment of mother tongue language vitalities. This, in fact, is expected and the phenomenon has been criticized as contributing to a divisive system which does not promote a high vitality for the use of the national language (How, Chan, & Abdullah, 2015; Raman & Tan, 2010; Selvadurai, Ong, Radzi, Ong, Ong, & Saibeh, 2015). Seen as a community language, these languages are viewed as vital for the preservation of mother tongues and the associated users' identities (i.e. ethnic identity). What is interesting to note is the continuation of the vitalities of the mother tongue from the primary to secondary school level. The data shows that Mandarin, especially, is highly used at the secondary level even when these students had gone on to a unified school system. In comparison, Tamil does not have as strong a vitality as Mandarin. The phenomenon of Mandarin becoming entrenched as a language with

high vitality has led to developments which further promote its use in terms of the need for more national-type schools. Today, enrolment in these schools has increased and in fact they are also even attracting non-ethnic Chinese students. The current state of vitality for Mandarin is also likely attributed to global issues, such as the tremendous strides made by China as an economic and political giant. Similarly, English is also valued especially when it is a legacy language from the west due to the British colonization of Malaya (pre-independent Malaysia) and has resulted in a relatively high vitality at secondary level when compared to the primary level. At the secondary level, there could be greater awareness of the importance of English as an international language. From the data, at the primary level in national-type Chinese schools, the vitality of English is concentrated in the domains of language use for media, in attitude and motivation and also in proficiency; while the national-type Tamil schools showed vitality of English in most of the indicators, except language use.

At the secondary level, Mandarin remained as a language with the highest vitality. Malay, Tamil and English also had reasonably high vitality values. It seems that education in the mother tongue has helped to entrench the vitality of the language which is carried over to the secondary level. Each language, however, establishes vitality significance in its own domains and functions giving generally high vitality indices for all the languages. This is supported by the statement made by Abdullah (2008) who emphasized that these languages are not in conflict at all. Each language has vitality of its own as well as separate roles and functions, and these co-existing languages should not be seen as languages in a state of conflict, but as languages that exist to complement each other (Crystal, 2000).

This study captured information that reflects the current state of English language vitality, particularly language use among Malaysian students at primary and secondary level. It should be dawned upon teachers that there is a need to expand the communication and practice space within the classroom setting for vitality elevation. The findings of this study could also serve as a reference to the Malaysian education policy makers to know the current status of the languages and to improve from the current state.

The conclusions arrived at in this study must be accompanied by some limitations. Firstly, the sampling is not significantly large to give a firm representation of vitality at the national level. The second limitation has to do with localities of the schools and the students. The secondary schools were located near Chinese communities and this factor could have exerted an influence on the make-up of the school population. It is believed that vitalities of a language is much connected to the communities that use the language. It would appear

that this study on vitality that covered national-type schools and secondary schools could have been indirectly influenced by the environment. It is suggested that studies of a wider nature covering more schools and environments be carried out to get a more complete representation of vitality of languages used in Malaysia. Nonetheless, findings from this study can provide a snapshot of linguistic vitalities located in a segment of society which does reflect a dominant development pattern of language use. The snapshot is seen as a significant contribution to the understanding of a 'linguistic vitality' landscape that is unique to multilingual Malaysia, in particular to the reference of the use of English as a significant world language.

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Appendix 1: Construct of language vitality indicator

Indicator	Primary	Secondary
Language Preference		
1. Like the language the most	✓	✓
2. Prefer to use the language at home	✓	✓
3. Prefer to use the language at school	✓	✓
4. Prefer to use the language in other places, outside home and school	✓	✓
Language Dominance		
1. Speak the language the best	✓	✓
2. Read the language the best	✓	✓
3. Write the language the best	✓	✓
4. Listen and understand the language the best	✓	✓
Language Choice		
1. Use the language with family members if given a choice	✓	✓
2. Use the language in school if given a choice	✓	✓
3. Use the language to do your homework if given a choice	✓	✓
4. Learn the content subjects in the language if given a choice	✓	✓
5. Answer the exams in the language if given a choice	✓	✓
6. Use the language outside home and school if given a choice	✓	✓
Language attitude and motivation		
1. Interest in learning	✓	✓
2. Effort in learning	✓	✓
3. Teacher's preference	✓	✓
4. Encouragement	✓	✓
5. Tuition or enrichment programmes	✓	✓
6. Attitudes in learning	✓	✓
7. Preference towards speakers	✓	✓
8. Motivation to learn the language	✓	✓
9. Salience of using and learning the language		
• Communication with people	✓	✓
• Communication with relatives	✓	✓
• A tool to earn money	✓	✓
• Want to be seen as educated	✓	✓
• Acceptance as a friend	✓	✓
• Acceptance by neighbourhood	✓	✓
• Studying in the future	✗	✓
• Finding a job	✗	✗
• Religion	✓	✓
• Maintenance of identity	✗	✗
10. No anxiety	✓	✓
Language Use		
1. Media		
• Watch TV	✓	✓
• Surf Internet	✓	✓
• Send SMS	✓	✓
• Listen to songs	✓	✓
• Sing songs	✓	✓
• Watch movies	✓	✓
• Do social networking	✓	✓
• Read newspapers	✓	✓
• Read novels/ story books	✓	✓
• Read comic books	✓	✓
• Read magazines	✓	✓
2. Home		
• Mother	✓	✓
• Father	✓	✓

• Siblings	✓	✓
• Grandparents	✓	✓
• Best friend	✓	✓
3. School		
• Principal	✓	✓
• School office staff	✓	✓
• Teachers in the class	✓	✓
• Classmates in the class	✓	✓
• Teachers outside the class	✓	✓
• Classmates outside the class	✓	✓
4. Community		
• To meet friends outside	✓	✓
• When go shopping	✓	✓
• To participate in religious activities	✓	✓
• When talk to neighbours	✓	✓
• When talk to strangers	✓	✓
Language Proficiency		
1. Ability to listen and understand the language	✓	✓
2. Ability to speak the language	✓	✓
3. Ability to read in the language	✓	✓
4. Ability to write in the language	✓	✓

✓ indicates construct presence in the questionnaire

✗ indicates non-inclusion of the construct

Appendix 2: National-type Chinese school students at primary level

	English	Malay	Mandarin
Language preference	2.83	2.51	4.43
Like the most	3.34	2.95	4.50
Preference at home	2.53	2.21	4.40
Preference in school	2.71	2.41	4.37
Preference in other places	2.73	2.45	4.45
Language dominance	2.71	2.67	4.23
Speak the best	2.68	2.60	4.35
Read the best	2.58	2.49	4.18
Write the best	2.62	2.76	4.01
Understand the best	2.97	2.82	4.37
Language use	2.21	1.73	4.41
<i>Home language</i>	1.95	1.53	4.60
Mother	2.12	1.64	4.56
Father	1.84	1.53	4.60
Siblings	2.20	1.55	4.61
Grandparents	1.45	1.40	4.47
Friends	2.13	1.54	4.74
<i>School language</i>	1.93	2.02	4.43
Headmaster	1.66	1.60	4.47
Office staff	1.84	2.32	3.41
Teacher (in the class)	2.26	2.51	4.67
Classmates (in the class)	2.07	1.91	4.70
Teacher (outside the class)	1.83	1.99	4.59
Classmates (outside the class)	1.93	1.81	4.73
<i>Media language</i>	3.05	1.73	4.18
Watch TV	3.22	1.90	4.46
Internet	3.21	1.69	4.05
SMS	3.03	1.64	4.01
Social Network	3.29	1.67	3.96
Listen to songs	3.76	1.72	4.22
Sing songs	4.04	1.62	4.08
Newspapers	2.35	1.74	4.28
Novels/ Story books	3.01	1.88	4.52
Comic books	2.99	2.00	4.51
Magazines	2.24	1.64	3.67
Movies	2.41	1.50	4.16
<i>Community language</i>	1.89	1.64	4.42
Neighbours	1.74	1.78	4.13
Meet friends	1.88	1.56	4.40
Participate in religious activities	1.79	1.57	3.75
Shopping	2.05	1.62	4.26
Strangers	1.97	1.69	5.54
Language choice	2.96	2.59	4.64
Family	2.80	2.38	4.72
School communication	2.74	2.37	4.69
Homework language	3.06	2.66	4.53
Subject language	3.20	2.83	4.62
Exam language	3.01	2.67	4.59
Outside language	2.97	2.63	4.69
Language attitude and motivation	3.64	3.41	4.34
Interest	3.74	3.41	4.71
Effort	3.89	3.77	4.51
Preference (teacher)	3.74	3.76	4.49

Parental encouragement	4.26	3.90	4.37
Tuition/programmes	3.71	3.65	3.88
Attitude	3.54	3.35	4.31
Preference (speaker)	3.47	3.08	4.68
Motivation	3.80	3.54	4.38
Saliency	3.18	2.65	4.15
• Communication with people	3.73	3.18	4.50
• Communication with relatives	2.92	2.60	4.46
• A tool to earn money	3.78	3.04	4.1
• Want to be seen as educated	3.61	2.83	4.07
• Acceptance as a friend	2.74	2.42	4.23
• Acceptance by neighbourhood	2.68	2.43	3.83
• Religion	2.81	2.02	3.84
No anxiety	3.08	3.02	3.95
Language proficiency	3.21	2.95	4.30
Understanding	3.22	2.96	4.25
Speaking	3.18	2.89	4.47
Reading	3.39	2.99	4.48
Writing	3.03	2.94	4.01

Appendix 3: National-type Tamil school students at primary level

	English	Malay	Tamil
Language preference	4.04	3.61	4.15
Like the most	4.23	4.08	4.34
Preference at home	4.17	3.39	4.08
Preference in school	3.87	3.45	4.16
Preference in other places	3.90	3.51	4.01
Language dominance	4.02	3.94	4.49
Speak the best	3.85	3.62	4.57
Read the best	4.23	4.32	4.42
Write the best	4.01	4.08	4.31
Understand the best	3.99	3.75	4.64
Language use	2.98	2.67	3.90
<i>Home language</i>	3.05	2.54	4.19
Mother	3.16	2.71	4.07
Father	3.00	2.63	4.19
Siblings	3.06	2.66	4.19
Grandparents	2.55	2.12	4.31
Friends	3.49	2.60	4.19
<i>School language</i>	2.79	2.64	4.09
Headmaster	2.13	2.52	4.32
Office staff	2.58	2.91	3.53
Teacher (in the class)	3.09	2.96	4.31
Classmates (in the class)	3.33	2.46	4.32
Teacher (outside the class)	2.86	2.57	4.08
Classmates (outside the class)	2.74	2.39	3.97
<i>Media language</i>	3.31	2.82	3.55
Watch TV	3.19	2.89	3.60
Internet	3.81	2.66	3.02
SMS	3.39	2.79	2.60
Social Network	3.14	2.62	2.46
Listen to songs	3.50	2.80	3.85
Sing songs	2.98	2.61	3.90
Newspapers	3.07	3.16	3.99
Novels/ Story books	3.79	3.18	4.03
Comic books	3.54	3.01	3.84
Magazines	3.20	2.91	3.74
Movies	2.76	2.33	4.05
<i>Community language</i>	2.78	2.66	3.75
Neighbours	2.73	2.89	3.57
Meet friends	2.62	2.40	4.12
Participate in religious activities	2.82	2.36	4.08
Shopping	2.98	3.17	3.49
Strangers	2.74	2.45	3.47
Language choice	3.64	3.23	4.13
Family	3.46	2.96	4.20
School communication	3.49	3.09	4.09
Homework language	3.61	3.33	4.17
Subject language	3.79	3.58	4.10
Exam language	3.85	3.31	4.20
Outside language	3.62	3.08	3.99
Language attitude and motivation	3.85	3.78	3.96
Interest	4.05	3.82	4.10
Effort	3.92	4.01	3.99
Preference (teacher)	4.13	4.15	4.37

Parental encouragement	3.94	4.25	3.80
Tuition/programmes	3.74	3.83	3.80
Attitude	3.93	3.73	4.16
Preference (speaker)	4.20	3.55	4.20
Motivation	4.08	3.86	4.23
Saliency	3.54	3.45	3.86
• Communication with people	4.07	3.95	4.05
• Communication with relatives	3.33	3.25	4.02
• A tool to earn money	4.18	3.91	3.50
• Want to be seen as educated	4.11	3.84	3.81
• Acceptance as a friend	3.23	3.33	4.02
• Acceptance by neighbourhood	3.17	3.49	3.83
• Religion	2.69	2.39	3.79
No anxiety	2.93	3.17	3.07
Language proficiency	3.94	3.89	4.28
Understanding	3.99	3.74	4.29
Speaking	3.90	3.75	4.31
Reading	3.97	4.06	4.21
Writing	3.91	4.00	4.29

Appendix 4: Secondary level

	English	Malay	Mandarin	Tamil
Language preference	3.62	3.34	4.16	3.58
Like the most	3.88	3.65	4.43	3.83
Preference at home	3.31	3.00	4.32	3.73
Preference in school	3.44	3.38	3.82	3.07
Preference in other places	3.84	3.31	4.07	3.67
Language dominance	3.38	3.85	4.06	3.98
Speak the best	3.25	3.81	4.18	4.43
Read the best	3.49	3.98	4.00	3.63
Write the best	3.18	3.72	3.86	3.60
Understand the best	3.61	3.90	4.21	4.27
Language use	2.89	3.32	3.67	3.18
<i>Home language</i>	2.74	3.07	4.38	4.39
Mother	2.71	3.07	4.36	4.50
Father	2.73	2.98	4.32	4.43
Siblings	2.94	3.16	4.54	4.27
Grandparents	2.04	2.71	4.18	4.40
Friends	3.29	3.41	4.50	4.33
<i>School language</i>	2.71	4.04	2.26	1.93
Headmaster	2.22	3.99	1.32	1.20
Office staff	2.26	4.01	1.29	1.20
Teacher (in the class)	3.04	4.11	2.14	1.87
Classmates (in the class)	3.06	4.10	3.36	2.83
Teacher (outside the class)	2.69	4.03	2.18	1.53
Classmates (outside the class)	2.99	4.00	3.29	2.93
<i>Media language</i>	3.38	2.88	4.15	3.20
Watch TV	3.47	3.08	4.39	4.37
Internet	3.67	2.63	3.93	2.10
SMS	3.18	3.02	3.89	1.93
Social Network	3.51	2.73	3.93	1.90
Listen to songs	4.02	2.63	4.32	4.47
Sing songs	3.81	2.87	4.29	4.47
Newspapers	2.88	3.01	4.07	3.33
Novels/ Story books	3.08	3.07	4.18	2.83
Comic books	2.91	3.01	4.25	2.73
Magazines	2.85	2.77	4.07	2.80
Movies	3.75	2.84	4.32	4.30
<i>Community language</i>	2.73	3.28	3.89	3.20
Neighbours	2.64	3.28	3.82	3.07
Meet friends	2.87	3.42	4.04	3.97
Participate in religious activities	2.59	3.29	3.89	3.20
Shopping	2.91	3.25	4.00	2.77
Strangers	2.62	3.15	3.71	3.00
Language choice	3.71	3.74	4.32	3.53
Family	3.41	3.46	4.50	4.30
School communication	3.62	3.93	4.32	3.37

Homework language	3.67	3.79	4.07	3.00
Subject language	3.95	3.72	4.39	3.50
Exam language	3.81	3.91	4.25	3.30
Outside language	3.77	3.65	4.36	3.73
Language attitude and motivation	3.93	3.90	3.81	3.39
Interest	4.05	3.83	4.14	3.67
Effort	4.01	3.98	3.89	3.17
Preference (teacher)	3.84	3.93	3.07	3.37
Parental encouragement	4.08	4.07	4.04	3.30
Tuition/programmes	3.72	3.67	3.11	3.00
Attitude	3.92	3.99	3.93	3.47
Preference (speaker)	3.97	3.89	4.18	3.57
Motivation	4.09	3.97	3.89	3.20
Saliency	3.85	3.83	4.09	3.66
• Communication with people	4.10	3.97	4.25	3.83
• Communication with relatives	3.66	3.77	4.18	3.90
• A tool to earn money	3.93	3.81	4.07	3.33
• Want to be seen as educated	4.00	3.86	4.00	3.47
• Acceptance as a friend	3.87	3.88	4.25	3.70
• Acceptance by neighbourhood	3.60	3.79	3.93	3.67
• Studying	4.25	4.12	4.07	3.57
• Religion	3.35	3.46	3.96	3.77
No anxiety	3.72	3.80	3.75	3.50
Language proficiency	3.80	3.97	4.15	3.82
Understanding	3.80	3.98	4.29	4.07
Speaking	3.70	3.84	4.18	3.97
Reading	3.91	4.07	4.07	3.70
Writing	3.79	4.00	4.04	3.53

ⁱ Corresponding author