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# AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FULBRIGHT ENGLISH TEACHING ASSISTANT PROGRAM IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

CHAN SIANG JACK

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE)
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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program in Malaysian secondary schools. The evaluation of the program is crucial to investigate the effectiveness of the implemented ETA Program in motivating and enhancing the students' interest to use English language (EL). This study employed both quantitative methods and qualitative methods in data collection, which involved a total of nine rural secondary schools in seven states around Malaysia. This study involved a total of 59 EL teachers and 399 students. Based on the findings gathered, there were discrepancies in the actual implementation as compared to the intended objectives of the ETA Program. A few of the intended objectives of the ETA Program were not achieved due to improper execution of the program in the schools. The written and oral test results showed discrepancies between students from the co-teaching classes and the students from the non-co-teaching classes. However, the differences between the total mean scores of both tests between the students from both classes were not significantly different from one another. Despite the flaws in the implementation of the ETA Program, most of the EL teachers and students mentioned that the program had a positive impact on the schools, particularly towards the students' confidence. As a conclusion, the findings of this study showed that the implementation of ETA Program has had a positive impact on the students' overall motivation and interest in English language but the impact was found to be minimal and did not have a profound effect on the students' overall English language proficiency, given the fact that the ETA Program had been implemented for at least two years in all of the schools involved in this study.

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# PENILAIAN PELAKSANAAN PROGRAM *FULBRIGHT ENGLISH TEACHING ASSISTANT* SEKOLAH MENENGAH DI MALAYSIA

## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menilai pelaksanaan Program Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) di sekolah menengah di Malaysia. Kajian ini penting bagi melihat keberkesanan pelaksanaan Program ETA dalam meningkatkan motivasi dan minat murid dalam Bahasa Inggeris (BI). Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Sebanyak sembilan buah sekolah menengah luar bandar melibatkan tujuh buah negeri di seluruh Malaysia yang terlibat dalam kajian ini. Seramai 59 orang guru bahasa Inggeris dan 399 orang murid yang terlibat dalam kajian ini. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat percanggahan antara pelaksanaan sebenar Program ETA dengan objektif program tersebut, serta aspek-aspek seperti co-teach, orientasi, dan pemantauan Program ETA. Selain itu, dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan prestasi ujian lisan dan bertulis antara murid yang terlibat dalam kelas co-teach dengan murid yang tidak terlibat dalam kelas co-teach. Namun begitu, min skor ujian lisan dan bertulis bagi murid yang mendapat bimbingan daripada ETA masih rendah dan perbezaan tersebut tidak menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan jika dibandingkan dengan murid yang tidak mendapat bimbingan daripada ETA. Dalam sesi temubual, majoriti guru Bahasa Inggeris menyatakan bahawa Program ETA membantu dalam meningkatkan motivasi dan minat murid untuk belajar dan menggunakan BI. Temubual bersama murid juga menunjukkan bahawa Program ETA membantu mereka dalam meningkatkan motivasi mereka. Namun begitu, dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa sesetengah guru BI tidak berpuas hati dengan sesetengah aspek pelaksanaan Program ETA. Kesimpulannya, Program ETA mempunyai impak yang positif terutamanya dalam meningkatkan motivasi dan minat murid dalam BI, namun impaknya masih rendah dan program tersebut tidak mempunyai impak yang besar dalam penguasaan BI murid, walaupun program tersebut telah dilaksanakan sekurang-kurangnya dua tahun bagi setiap sekolah yang terlibat dalam kajian ini.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS


**Pages**

**DECLARATION** ii

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** iii

**ABSTRACT** iv

**ABSTRAK** v

**TABLE OF CONTENTS** vi

**LIST OF TABLES** xii

**LIST OF FIGURES** xvi

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS** xvii

**LIST OF APPENDIXES** xviii

**CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Introduction 19

1.2 Problem Statement 21

1.3 Research Objectives 24

1.4 Research Questions 24

1.5 Significance of Research 25


05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

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1.6 Operational Definitions 25

1.6.1 Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program 25

1.6.2 English Teaching Assistant (ETA) 26

1.6.3 Mentors 26

1.6.4 Co-Teach 27

1.6.5 Teaching and Learning (TaL) 27

1.6.6 English Language Proficiency 28

1.6.7 Program Evaluation 28

1.7 Organisation of Thesis 29

1.8 Summary 30

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

**CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1 Introduction 31

2.2 Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia, Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI) Policy 32

2.3 Teaching Assistant (TA) 35

2.4 Fulbright English Teaching Assistant 36

2.5 The Use of English Language Native Speaker in the Development of English as Second Language 40

2.6 Program Evaluation 41

2.6.1 The Purpose of Program Evaluation 44

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi


2.6.2 Summative and Formative Evaluation 46

2.7 Evaluation Models 49

2.8 Stufflebeam's Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) Evaluation Model 49

2.8.1 Context Evaluation 51

2.8.2 Input Evaluation 51

2.8.3 Process Evaluation 52

2.8.4 Product Evaluation 53

2.9 Evaluation Studies Conducted using Stufflebeam's CIPP Model 55

2.10 Summary 59

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

**CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

3.1 Introduction 61

3.2 Research Design 62

3.2.1 Phase 1 64

3.2.2 Phase 2 65

3.3 Research Sample 67

3.4 Research Instruments 72

3.4.1 Questionnaire 74

3.4.2 Test 82

3.4.3 Written Test 84

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi


3.4.4 Oral Test 91

3.4.5 Teaching and Learning Observational Checklist 97

3.4.6 Interview Protocol 100

3.5 Pilot Study 105

3.6 Data Analysis 106

3.7 Summary 108

**CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

4.1 Introduction 110

4.2 Profile of Research Respondents 111

4.3 Actual Implementation as Compared to the Intended Implementation 115

4.3.1 Comparison between the Objectives of the ETA Program and the Actual Implementation of the ETA Program 116

4.3.2 The Implementation of ETA Program in the Aspects of Co-teach, Orientation, and Monitoring 133

4.4 Students' English Language Proficiency 146

4.4.1 English Language Proficiency of Form 2 Students 148

4.4.2 English Language Proficiency of Form 4 Students 154

4.5 Perceptions on the ETA Program 158

4.5.1 Perception of English Language Teachers on the ETA Program 159

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi


4.5.2 Interview Analysis on the Perception of Heads of English Language Panel and English Language Teachers on the ETA Program 162

4.5.3 Interviews Analysis on the Perception of Students on the ETA Program 172

4.6 Summary 176

**CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

5.1 Introduction 177

5.2 Overview of Thesis 178

5.3 Summarization of Findings 180

5.3.1 Research Question 1: Are there any discrepancies between the actual implementation of the ETA Program in Malaysian schools and the objectives, as well as the major aspects from ETA Program Guidelines? 180

5.3.2 Research Question 2: Are there any discrepancies in the language proficiency of the students guided by ETAs and students who are not guided the ETAs? 186

5.3.3 Research Question 3: What is the perception of EL teachers and students on ETAs and the ETA Program? 188

5.4 Discussion 191

5.5 Summary 206

5.6 Limitation of Study 208

5.7 Recommendations 210

5.8 Suggestions for Future Research 211

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi


5.9 Conclusion 212

REFERENCES 214

APPENDIX 224

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi


# LIST OF TABLES


| No. of Table | | Pages |
|---|---|---|
| 2.1 | The Distribution of ETAs in Malaysia | 39 |
| 2.2 | Differences between Formative and Summative Evaluation | 48 |
| 3.1 | Number of Schools and Samples According to Zones | 69 |
| 3.2 | Number of Schools and Samples According to Zones | 70 |
| 3.3 | Pseudo Names used in Indicating Schools, Teachers, Students and ETAs | 72 |
| 3.4 | ETA Program Evaluation Instruments | 72 |
| 3.5 | Distribution of Constructs in the Questionnaire (QT) | 76 |
| 3.6 | The Aims of Constructs in Questionnaire (QT) | 76 |
| 3.7 | Comparison of Constructs in the Questionnaires for Both Studies | 77 |
| 3.8 | Samples of Items in the Input Constructs of QT | 79 |
| 3.9 | Scales and Indicator used in the Questionnaire | 81 |
| 3.10 | Distribution of Students based on their Forms | 84 |
| 3.11 | Comparison of Themes and Topics in Forms 2 and 4 Textbooks | 85 |
| 3.12 | Written Test Marking Rubric for Category 1 Students (Form 2) | 88 |


05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3.13 | Written Test Marking Rubric for Category 2 Students (Form 4) | 89 |
| 3.14 | Oral Test Marking Rubric for Category 1 Students | 92 |
| 3.15 | Oral Test Marking Rubric for Category 2 Students | 93 |
| 3.16 | Sample of TaL Observation Checklist | 98 |
| 3.17 | Topics and Questions for Interview Session | 101 |
| 3.18 | Code System for Interview Session | 102 |
| 3.19 | Sample of Transcription of Interview Data | 103 |
| 3.20 | Sample of Transcription Form | 104 |
| 3.21 | Reliability Coefficients of Instruments | 105 |
| 3.22 | Summary of the Data Collection | 107 |
| 4.1 | English Language Teachers' Years of Experience with ETA Program | 113 |
| 4.2 | Years of Implementation of ETA Program in Schools | 113 |
| 4.3 | Comparison between the First Objective of ETA Program and the Actual Implementation | 117 |
| 4.4 | Comparison between the Second Objective of ETA Program and the Actual Implementation | 118 |
| 4.5 | Comparison between the Third Objective of ETA Program and the Actual Implementation | 121 |
| 4.6 | Comparison between the Fourth Objective of ETA Program and the Actual Implementation | 123 |


05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4.7 | Tabulation of Interview Data According to Objectives of the ETA Program | 125 |
| 4.8 | Actual Implementation of the ETA Program in the Aspect of Co-teach | 134 |
| 4.9 | Actual Implementation of the ETA Program in the Aspect of ETA Program Orientation | 136 |
| 4.10 | Actual Implementation of the ETA Program in the Aspect of ETA Program Monitoring | 138 |
| 4.11 | Tabulation of Interview Data According to Co-Teaching, Orientation and Monitoring | 140 |
| 4.12 | Pearson Correlation between the Oral and Written Test Scores | 147 |
| 4.13 | Form 2 Students' Written Test Scores between Co-teach and Non-co-teach classes | 149 |
| 4.14 | T-Test Analysis on Form 2 Students' Written Test Scores between Co-teach and Non-co-teach Classes | 150 |
| 4.15 | Form 2 Students' Oral Test Scores between Co-teach and Non-co-teach classes | 151 |
| 4.16 | T-Test Analysis on Form 2 Students' Oral Test Scores between Co-teach and Non-co-teach Classes | 152 |
| 4.17 | Form 4 Students' Writing Test Scores between Co-teach and Non-co-teach Classes | 154 |
| 4.18 | T-Test Analysis on Form 4 Students' Written Test Scores between Co-teach and Non-co-teach Classes | 155 |
| 4.19 | Form 4 Students' Oral Test Scores between Co-teach and Non-co-teach classes | 156 |


05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi
05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4.20 | T-Test Analysis on Form 4 Students' Oral Test Scores between Co-teach and Non-co-teach Classes | 157 |
| 4.21 | Perception of English Language Teachers on the Activities Conducted in the ETA Program | 159 |
| 4.22 | Perception of English Language Teachers on the ETA Program | 160 |
| 4.23 | Benefits of ETA Program towards the English Language Teachers | 161 |


05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

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# LIST OF FIGURES


| No. of Figure | | Pages |
|---|---|---|
| 2.1. | Strategies on MBMMBI Key Action Plans | 34 |
| 2.2. | Number of Fulbright ETAs Placed Per Country | 38 |
| 2.3. | CIPP Evaluation Model | 58 |
| 3.1. | Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method | 62 |
| 3.2. | Phase 1 of the Quantitative Data Collection Procedure | 64 |
| 3.3. | Phase 2 of the Qualitative Data Collection Procedure | 65 |
| 3.4. | Front Page of the Questionnaire (QT) | 75 |
| 3.5. | Students' Written Test: "Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle" | 87 |
| 3.6. | Sample of Students' Oral Test | 95 |
| 4.1. | Genders of the English Language Teachers | 111 |
| 4.2. | Distribution of EL Teachers Based on Race | 112 |
| 4.3. | Distributions of Students According to Forms | 114 |
| 4.4. | Distribution of Students in Co-teach and Non-co-teach Classes | 115 |


05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi
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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| COC | Classroom Observation Checklist |
| EL | English Language |
| ETA | English Teaching Assistant |
| JPN | Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri (State Education Office) |
| MACEE | Malaysian-American Commission on Educational Exchange |
| MBMMBI | Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris |
| MoE | Ministry of Education |
| NS | Native Speakers |
| OT | Oral Test |
| PPD | Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah (District Education Office) |
| PPJBI | Program Penutur Jati Bahasa Inggeris |
| PPSMI | Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris |
| QT | Questionnaire |
| RS | Researcher |
| SBOA | School Based Oral Assessment |
| TaL | Teaching and Learning |
| TA | Teaching Assistant |
| WT | Written Test |

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# APPENDIX


| | |
|---|---|
| A | Approval Letter from Ministry of Education to Conduct Research in Schools |
| B | Questionnaire |
| C | Classroom Observation Checklist |
| D | Writing Test Stimulus |
| E | Oral Test Stimulus |
| F | Semi Structured Interview |


05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi
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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Introduction

The first chapter will introduce and discuss details of the research including the research background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, concepts and operational definition of the research, as well as the significance of the research conducted. This chapter will deal with the preliminary issues related to the Upholding Bahasa Malaysia and Strengthening English Language policy.

'Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia, Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris' (henceforth, MBMMBI) or Upholding Bahasa Malaysia and Strengthening English Language (Circulation 2/2010) is a new Government policy initiated to replace the Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris (henceforth, PPSMI) or in English, the Teaching of Science and Mathematics in

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English language which was found ineffective in its implementation (PEMBINA, 2008). The chief aims of the MBMMBI Policy are first, to uphold the Malay language in line with the Education Act 1996 which emphasises Malay language as the medium of instruction in all primary and secondary schools. The policy also aspires to strengthen the English language mastery among Malaysian students, enabling them to explore knowledge which is more accessible in this international language (MoE, 2014)

To materialise the MBMMBI policy, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has laid out eight strategies in support of the policy. One of the strategies is the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program (henceforth, ETA Program). The Fulbright ETA Program is a collaboration between the Malaysian and the American governments and it is jointly supervised by the Ministry of Education (henceforth, MoE) and the Malaysian-American Commission on Educational Exchange (henceforth, MACEE). The ETA Program commenced in the year 2012 and schools with low performance in English from Band 5 or 6 are selected for the program (ETA Program Guidelines, n.d.: pg. 1). It endeavours to; first, increase the students' interest towards English and thus, improve their communicative skills; second, enhance students' ability and confidence in using English; third, encourage students to actively participate in curricular and co-curricular activities; and finally, engage students in cultural exchange activities (ETA Program Guidelines, n.d.).

On the 27th April 2014, during a meeting held between the Malaysian government with the United States of America, the Prime Minister of Malaysia and the President of the United States of America came to an agreement that the ETA

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Program which then had been implemented for two years, will be further extended for another 3 years (2015 – 2017). In addition, a total amount of RM18 million will be invested for the ETA Program through the MBMMBI policy for those 3 years' time, where 100 ETAs will be placed in the chosen schools in Malaysia each year (Berita Harian, 2014; 28th April).

Since its inception in 2012, the ETA Program has yet to be subjected under rigorous research. For a large-scale international education program, an evaluation on the program is crucial to ascertain the efficiency and efficacy of its implementation. Such evaluation will provide invaluable insights on the detailed implementation of the program highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. Hence, the current study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program in Malaysia.

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## 1.2 Problem Statement

In the year 2003, the MoE implemented the PPSMI policy in Malaysian schools under the resolution of the Malaysian Cabinet on the 19th of July 2002. The policy stresses on the use of English language as the medium of instruction in the teaching of Mathematics and Science, for the purpose of improving students' command of English in Malaysian schools (MoE, 2015)

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However, it was found that the PPSMI policy had failed to achieve its objectives and more importantly the students' achievement in the Science and Mathematics subjects had dwindled (Mohd Rasdi, 2003; TIMSS, 2007; and PEMBINA, 2008). This widened the gap between the students in rural and urban schools in terms of achievement of these subjects (Mohd Rasdi, 2003; TIMSS, 2007; and PEMBINA, 2008). The PPSMI was, thus, abolished in 2009 and in its place, the MBMMBI Policy was introduced in 2010

The MBMMBI Policy strives to enhance students' mastery in Bahasa Malaysia and reinforce their proficiency in English language. English language is reinforced through several strategies and one of the most notable strategies is the implementation of Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program. The term Teaching Assistant (TA) is common in the world of education. Depending on the country and the needs of its educational institutes such as schools, teaching assistants were hired as an effort to guide and assist the students on different matters (Giangreco, 2007). Certain countries hired TAs to assist students with learning disabilities, while some hired the TAs to support low achieving students in various subjects in schools. In Malaysia, TAs were hired to assist the students in secondary schools around rural areas with low achievement of Band 5 or 6 in English language, with the aims to improve their mastery of English language (MoE, 2015).

Despite the good intention from the MoE to assist the students' of low proficiency in EL, ever since its implementation, studies have yet to be conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of the program in Malaysia. Even though there were existing literature on TAs, little research was conducted on English Teaching

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Assistant (ETA) in Malaysia, specifically. Certain research regarding TAs have shown that the effectiveness of TAs were questionable, with little or no conclusive evidence that the use of TAs would have positive effects on the students' overall abilities or self-esteem.

Besides that, implementing a new policy or a program and transform them into practice will encounter many problems and obstacles (Ono, 2010). There are many factors that the stakeholders should consider before implementing a new policy or program, as Vespoor (1989) mentioned that when implementation aspect is neglected, even a good idea or innovative policy would result in low outcomes. For instance, the discontinuity of PPSMI Policy indicates that the macro-level of the policy had not paid sufficient attention to the micro-level realities that might obstruct the successful translation of policy goals and their implementation in the country (Chua, 2006; Chua & Baldauf, 2011). In fact, several studies have highlighted on how a program or curricula that was implemented does not always reflect what the program or curriculum designers have in mind (O'Sullivan, 2004; Smith and Southerland, 2007). Similarly, Akker (1998) mentioned that there is a large gap between the intended (ideal) and implemented (perceived or operational) curriculum, which lead to an unsatisfactory attained.

Hence, the current study aims to replicate the study by Mazura (2016, unpublished), which primarily concentrated on the implementation of MBMMBI Policy. This study, however, will focus on the evaluation of the ETA Program in Malaysian secondary schools and to determine its effectiveness.

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## 1.3 Research Objectives

The research was carried out to:

- identify the discrepancies between the actual implementation of the ETA Program in Malaysian secondary schools and the ETA Program Guidelines;

- determine the oral and written proficiency of students in classes guided by ETAs and students who were not guided the ETAs; and,

- ascertain the perception of the teachers and students on ETAs and the ETA Program.

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## 1.4 Research Questions

This thesis endeavours to answer the following research questions:

- Are there any discrepancies between the actual implementation of the ETA Program in Malaysian schools and the ETA Program Guidelines?

- Are there any discrepancies in the language proficiency of the students guided by ETAs and students who were not guided by the ETAs?

- What is the perception of the EL teachers and students on ETAs and ETA Program?

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## 1.5 Significance of Research

As aforementioned, since the beginning of the Fulbright English Teaching Assistants Program in 2012, it has yet to be subjected to any rigorous research. Hence, the current study will inevitably add to the existing literature on ETAs and ETA Program.

The ETA Program will be extended to 2017, thus the results of the current study will provide invaluable insights to the stakeholders namely, MACEE, MoE, the State and District Education Departments on the effectiveness of this program so that weaknesses and issues pertaining to its implementation can be addressed. In addition to the stakeholders, the results of the study are priceless to teachers and school administrators who are the implementers of the ETA program so that they are able to execute the program better in their respective schools.

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## 1.6 Operational Definitions

This section discusses the operational definitions that are frequently used throughout this dissertation.

### 1.6.1 Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program

The Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program (ETA Program) is a collaborative effort between the Malaysian and the USA governments and jointly supervised by the Ministry of Education (MoE) with the aim of escalating the use of English among

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secondary school students. Parallel to the implementation of the MBMMBI Policy, the ETA Program aims to boost students' confidence and interest towards English, encourage students to actively participate in curricular and co-curricular activities and engage them in cultural activities (MoE, 2015).

### 1.6.2 English Teaching Assistant (ETA)

In the study, the English teaching assistants or ETAs refer to graduating college seniors or young professionals from around United States of America, who were sent abroad to different countries for a year-long assignment as teaching assistants. Their role is to help increase students' interest, confidence, ability and mastery of English language, as well as to encourage them to actively engage in co-curricular and curricular activities (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2014). In Malaysia, ETAs are assigned to secondary schools with low performance in the English subject, particularly schools with Band 5 or 6 (MoE, 2015).

### 1.6.3 Mentors

Mentors are EL teachers who are appointed by the school Principals with the responsibilities to monitor, advise, assist and guide ETAs in all school activities (ETA Program Guidelines, n.d.). A mentor will be assigned to each ETA and a monthly allowance of RM300 will be given to mentors upon their appointments.

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