

Language Dynamics in the Agricultural Sector: Determining Language Use and Choices in a Malaysian Organization

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Abstract

In light of globalization and international trade, English plays a predominant role in the agricultural sector. Effective communication in English is essential for agricultural professionals, especially those involved in international markets. However, limited research has been conducted on the linguistic needs of these professionals. This study investigates the extent of English and other language usage across various communication channels within an agricultural organization. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews from employees of a multinational agricultural company. The results indicate a flexible language policy where both Bahasa Melayu and English are used contextually, depending on the situation and organizational interests. The study reveals that while English is crucial for formal communication and professional advancement, adaptability to the multilingual context is vital for maintaining operational efficiency and fostering inclusive workplace communication. These findings provide insights into language use in agricultural companies in multilingual countries like Malaysia, emphasizing the need for continuous language training to bridge proficiency gaps.

Keywords: Agriculture, Language, Language Use, Multinational Companies, Corporate Communication

INTRODUCTION

An organisation's success is highly dependent on its employees' ability to communicate and use language effectively. Proper management, organisation, control, and direction of personnel ensure smooth operations and successful accomplishment of objectives. Effective communication is crucial for optimal performance within an organisation. Research supports that organisations implementing robust communication strategies typically experience higher success levels. Studies by Neves and Eisenberger (2012) and Ramsing (2009) emphasise that strategic communication management, involving both top-level managers and lower-level employees, significantly contributes to project success. Key strategies include PMI communication strategy and selecting appropriate communication channels (Galli, 2020). Moreover, employee motivation and satisfaction, directly influenced by communication at all levels, are essential for organisational success. Effective communication strategies improve morale and alignment with organisational goals (Petković & Rapajić, 2021).

Language plays a pivotal role in all countries and numerous industries, especially as globalisation activities increase. As globalisation accelerates, the importance of language proficiency and linguistic diversity will continue to grow, shaping the way industries operate and countries interact on the world stage. As a developing country, Malaysia must compete aggressively for foreign investments essential for its development and economic growth. Globalisation has increased language diversity in the workplace due to the distinct nature of the languages employees speak. Language can be a communication barrier in workforce diversity, leading to various negative consequences in organisations. For example, poor knowledge of English and Bahasa Melayu can result in accidents and productivity losses.

In higher education, instructors encourage effective communication techniques by requiring students to produce video resumes (Ali et al., 2022) to ensure language fluency. In the workplace, however, language obstacles are skilfully managed and surmounted by both employers and employees through smart means. Previous research on language use in multinational companies has found that multilingualism can create challenging managerial situations with substantial impacts on cross-cultural communication (Marschan-

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Piekkari, Welch, and Welch, 1999b). Efficient communication is essential for enhancing employee productivity. If employers cannot effectively communicate their needs, productivity cannot improve. Therefore, recognising and selecting the preferred workplace language and understanding its role helps organisations achieve their goals and boost productivity.

This study aimed to investigate language use and choice practices in the agricultural workplace. The findings provide a better understanding of the roles of English, Bahasa Melayu, and other languages in this industry, considering that language and communication processes do not occur in a vacuum. The linguistic reality of the agricultural industry was identified by studying the language use and language choice of the users.

Examining language use and preferences in a multilingual organisation is crucial for developing a critical awareness of the complex and dynamic nature of language in the workplace. By understanding practices, patterns, and trends, organisations gain a clearer view of corporate language use, enabling better decisions about language-related matters. This paper aims to address the following research questions:

How often are English and other languages used in different communication events at selected agricultural workplaces?

What are employees' perceptions of the use of English in the workplace?

The agricultural sector in Malaysia has been relatively understudied. To better understand language use and choices within this industry, it is important to analyse various communication channels within the workplace and employees' perceptions of English. These communication channels are integral to the research, as they offer a comprehensive view of the communication dynamics within the organisation under study. Such insights are invaluable for organisations to manage their operations effectively, as language plays a fundamental role in the workplace. Recent studies have highlighted the role of English in professional contexts within the Malaysian agricultural sector, emphasising its economic value and career progression potential (Bhar & Rafik-Galea, 2022). Additionally, research on intercultural communication within Japanese companies in Malaysia identifies language proficiency challenges faced by Malaysian employees (Yeoh & Singh, 2020). The adoption of English as a medium of instruction in higher education institutions in Malaysia further underscores its importance for internationalisation and employability (Rahman & Singh, 2022). In the Malaysian legal system, the use of both English and Malay illustrates the significance of bilingualism in professional settings (Powell & Saw, 2021). Clearly, these insights from various industries highlight the multifaceted role of language in organisational communication and the need for effective language management strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Education: Historical and Policy Perspectives in Malaysia

The history of English in Malaysia is closely linked to its colonial past and the country's educational policies over the years. This review looks at how English language education in Malaysia has evolved, focusing on major policy changes and their effects. English came to Malaysia during British colonial rule in the 18th century. When the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 gave the British control over Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, it led to significant immigration from China, South India, and Ceylon. This era set the stage for Malaysia's diverse and multilingual society. In 1948, the Federation of Malay States was formed, and Malaysia gained independence in 1957. A census from that time showed the population consisted of Malays (50%), Chinese (37%), Indians (11%), and others (2%).

Malaysia was formed in 1963, merging Tanah Melayu, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak, though Singapore withdrew in 1965. Post-independence, there was a gradual phasing out of English from education and bureaucracy. By 1969, Malay had become the medium of instruction in schools, and by 1983, it was also the medium in higher education. The National Culture Policy of 1971 further emphasized the promotion of Malay language and traditions.

In 2002, Prime Minister Mahathir introduced a bilingual education policy, with Mathematics and Science taught in English to enhance English proficiency for global competitiveness. However, this policy faced significant

challenges, including resource limitations and insufficiently trained teachers. Consequently, in 2009, Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced the discontinuation of teaching Science and Mathematics in English from 2012, reinstating Malay as the medium of instruction (Zaaba, 2011; Gill, 2012).

Critics argue that prioritizing Malay over English may hinder Malaysia's economic growth compared to English-speaking neighbors like Singapore. Surveys by Lan, Khaun, and Singh (2011) and the Malaysian Employers Federation (2004) highlight the importance of English proficiency for career success and the existing gap between industrial needs and graduates' skills. Dumanig, David, and Symaco (2012) noted that top-down language policies create competing roles for English and Malay, leading to inconsistencies between policy and practice.

The tension between global demands for English proficiency and nationalistic pressures to preserve Malay as a symbol of national identity results in complex policy dynamics. While the government acknowledges the necessity of English for economic advancement, various initiatives to improve English education face implementation challenges. These challenges, such as insufficient resources and lack of trained teachers, hinder effective execution, leading to a gap between policy goals and actual outcomes.

The historical developments in Malaysia's education system reflect the ongoing struggle to balance the need for English proficiency with the preservation of national identity through Malay. Addressing the discrepancies between policy and practice is crucial for achieving the desired outcomes in English education and ensuring Malaysia's competitiveness in the global market.

Agricultural Industry

The agricultural sector plays a vital role in the Malaysian economy. The agriculture sector contributed RM101.5 billion or 7.1% to the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 and 2021 (Salleh et al., 2021; Sulaiman, 2023). Beyond contributing to the GDP, the agricultural sector also offers employment, increases the income of those in the rural areas, and helps to ensure national food security (Dardak, 2014). The agricultural sector encompasses numerous sub-sectors, such as oil palm, rubber, livestock, forestry and logging, fisheries, aquaculture, and a variety of other agricultural products including paddy, fruits, vegetables, coconut, tobacco, tea, flowers, pepper, cocoa, and pineapple.

Malaysia's agriculture sector possesses considerable potential to significantly boost national income and strengthen the ringgit's foreign exchange value. This potential is fueled by the rising global demand for agricultural products, the growing world population, and a strong global economy. The industry also relies heavily on foreign labor, with about 85% of its foreign workforce coming from neighboring countries like India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Cambodia (Yee & Yuen, 2014). Migrant workers constitute about 3.1 million of Malaysia's workforce, with a significant portion employed in agriculture, filling essential roles in plantations and other agricultural activities (Santos et al., 2014). In 2019, Malaysia had around 2 million registered migrant workers, many of whom are integral to maintaining productivity in the agricultural sector (Said et al., 2020). However, this dependence on foreign labor also presents challenges in terms of wages and employment conditions (Crowley, 2020). There is a notable lack of empirical research on language use in the agricultural industry. Therefore, this study aimed to address this gap by examining the use and role of language within the plantation sector.

METHODOLOGY

Research Site and Research Methods

The present study obtained data from GreenLeaf Plantations; a multinational company involved in the agricultural industry. GreenLeaf Plantations is a Malaysian-based diversified multinational corporation involved in many sectors, including plantations. The company manages over 600,000 hectares of oil palm plantations across Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, producing approximately 2.5 million metric tonnes of crude palm oil (CPO) annually. GreenLeaf Plantations employs more than 80,000 people worldwide, with 41,201 employees in Malaysia, and was listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE)

in 2017. The researcher investigated the plantation headquarters and the downstream operation in one of the estates.

Research Design

The research is a descriptive study that employs a mixed-method approach for data collection, utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve triangulation. The primary data collection methods include a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire survey was conducted among employees within the selected agricultural workplace, gathers data on the frequency of language use across various communicative events. To complement this, semi-structured interviews with a subset of employees provide deeper insights into their perceptions and attitudes towards the use of English in the workplace. This mixed-method approach enables a comprehensive analysis by combining the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative insights, ensuring a robust and nuanced understanding of the research questions.

Research Samples

The samples are divided into two categories. One is for survey which involved 65 employees while there are 25 employees were interviewed for the semi-structured interview. Generally, both instruments contain items to identify the types of communicative functions prevalent in the organisations and the languages used to communicate effectively among employees. For the interviewees, they were allowed to talk about the descriptions and experiences that were relevant to the study. Each interview took approximately 30 to 50 minutes and were transcribed. All the interviews were conducted on the research site premises, at the headquarters and estate. On a different note, pseudonym for examples Susan, Usha, Jas, Zul and etc were used when reporting the interview findings.

Research Instrument

The primary data for this study were collected through survey questionnaires, supplemented by interviews. Of the 100 distributed questionnaires, 65 were returned, resulting in a 65% response rate. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from those developed by Briguglio (2005b) and Rafik-Galea et al. (2010). Briguglio (2005b) explored the use of English as a global language in multinational environments, focusing on language practices in multinational companies in Hong Kong and Malaysia. Rafik-Galea et al. (2010) investigated language use and management communication practices in agricultural organizations in Malaysia. These questionnaires were chosen because their focus on language use and communication practices in workplace contexts closely aligned with the research questions of the current study.

Data collection

The process of gathering the data involved seven steps. First, information on demographics, language use, and communication preferences was gathered by giving surveys to 65 participants. Second, SPSS Version 16 was used to analyse the questionnaire responses for both descriptive and inferential statistics. Third, qualitative data was gathered through interviews. Fourth, the interview data were transcribed with an emphasis on keywords, episodes, and phrases in accordance with Dumanig's (2010) convention. Fifth, themes that were pertinent were found by classifying the open-ended responses. Sixth, important words and noteworthy events were carefully highlighted by going over the interview transcripts several times over through reads and listening sessions. The integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, with themes arranged and classified using a circular methodology, constituted the seventh and final step. Although labour-intensive, this meticulous procedure yielded a thorough grasp of workplace. Figure 1 shows the data collection procedures of the current study.

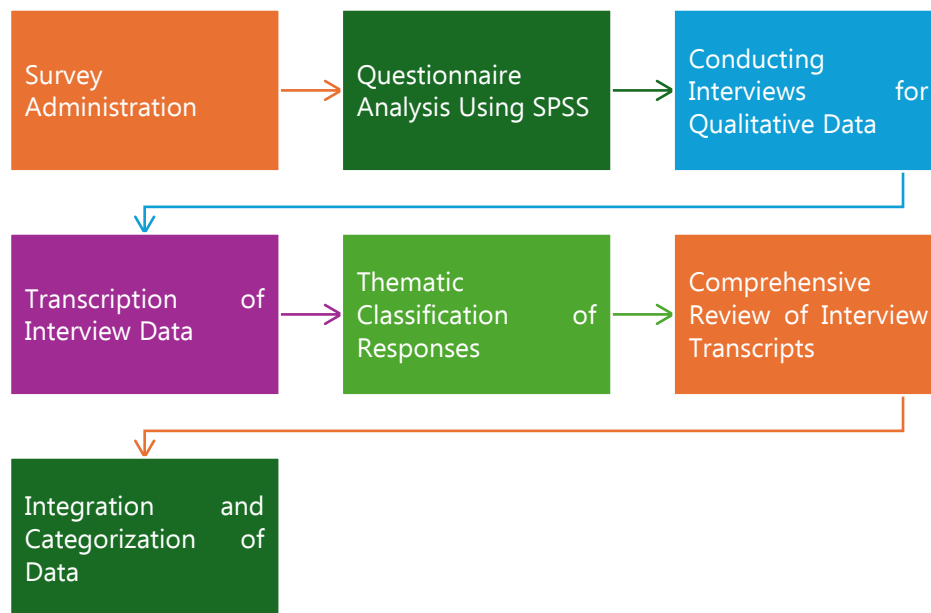


Figure 1 Data collection procedures in the study

DATA ANALYSIS

Two types of methods were used to analyse the qualitative and quantitative data. To analyse the survey data and provide descriptive and inferential statistics, SPSS Version 16 was utilised. While Dumanig's (2010) transcribing standard was used to analyse the content of the interview data, which were then grouped thematically. Using the technique described by Dey (2003), this in-depth analysis provided a clear picture of the demographics, language use, and communication preferences of participants.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: The use of English and other languages across communicative events in agricultural workplaces

The findings for Research Question 1 are presented in both quantitative and qualitative formats. The former is presented using frequency while the latter is presented in themes namely “The use of English and Bahasa Melayu in Listening and Speaking in GreenLeaf Plantations”, “The use of English and Bahasa Melayu in written communication” and “The use English and Bahasa Melayu in reading”).

The use of English and Bahasa Melayu in Listening and Speaking in GreenLeaf Plantations

Table 1 shows that respondents at GreenLeaf Plantations frequently use English for spoken presentations (M=4.23) and telephone conversations (M=4.13). This choice of language for these activities is influenced by the formality of the speech event and the employees' language backgrounds (Evans, 2013). This is further supported by the fact that approximately 55% of the employees rated their oral skills as good or excellent.

Table 1 Frequency of Listening and Speaking Communication Events in English and Bahasa Melayu at GreenLeaf Plantations

Listening and Speaking Communicative Events	Bahasa Malaysia	English
Seminars	2.94	3.87
Conferences	2.77	3.9

Staff training/development	3	4.1
Oral presentations (company/product)	2.9	4.23
Speaking on the telephone	3.55	4.13
Teleconferences	2.87	3.74
Appraisal Interviews	3.03	3.87
Face to face impromptu communication	3.97	3.9
Among colleagues	3.9	3.9
Day to day administration	3.71	4.03
Informal meetings/discussions	3.61	4
Formal meetings/negotiations	3.52	4.1
Communicating orally with government organisations/clients	3.97	3.97
Communicating orally with international clients	3.1	3.77
Communicating orally with local clients	3.29	4.1

These findings are consistent with other research that found English primarily used for spoken presentations and telephone conversations specifically by business professionals, engineers (Kaewpet 2009; Kaneko, Rozycki & Orr 2009; Male, Bush & Chapman 2009; Evans 2010; Kassim & Ali 2010; Spence & Liu 2013), and professionals in European multinationals. English has been adopted as the corporate language by many European multinationals to facilitate cross-border communication and enhance competitiveness. Studies highlight this strategic move to integrate into the global market (Fredriksson et al., 2006; Lutz, 2009; Maclean, 2006; Heikkilä & Smale, 2011). This trend reflects historical and economic influences as well as a strategic intent to streamline operations.

Surveys indicate strong support for English proficiency among EU citizens, viewing it as essential for professional and personal development in a globalized world. This underscores English's role as a lingua franca in business and education (Arvidsson & Jemstedt, 2022). Emphasis on English proficiency drives individual and organizational success, aligning with globalization trends.

In addition, the interviewees highlighted the use of English in formal settings, such as meetings and presentations. This preference is largely influenced by the need for professionalism and clarity when communicating with higher management and international clients. Susan and Usha shared the use of English in their related tasks:

In our formal meetings, we predominantly use English because it's important to ensure everyone understands, especially when we have international stakeholders. Using English helps to avoid any miscommunication (Susan)

Presentations are always in English. It's the language we are most comfortable with when presenting technical information to the management (Usha)

Alternatively, Bahasa Melayu is predominantly used for speaking and listening activities, particularly in face-to-face impromptu communication (M=3.97) and oral interactions with government agencies (M=3.97). The data show that both English and Bahasa Melayu are favored for listening and speaking in communicative contexts.

However, the mean scores for oral interactions with government organizations and clients reveal that Bahasa Melayu is used more often than English. Consequently, Bahasa Melayu serves as the primary language for interactions with public organizations.

The evidence is illustrated by two employees who highlighted the role of Bahasa Melayu in dealing with government agencies and supported the findings from the survey as shown below:

With government agencies sometimes we use BM (Bahasa Melayu) and if their people can speak English we will use English also. For example when the Labour Department come to visit they will speak in English and BM (Susan)

If it involves the government department it will be in Bahasa Melayu (Usha)

The findings from the two employees align with Phang (2006), who claimed that the government sector is the primary sector in Malaysia still utilizing Bahasa Melayu. This observation is consistent with the language planning policies enforced by the government, particularly the National Language Act of 1967, which declares Bahasa Melayu as the official language of Malaysia. Bahasa Melayu is constitutionally mandated for use in all official ceremonies, government administration, communication between the government and the public, and as the medium of instruction in schools and universities.

Recent developments further underscore this stance, as evidenced by Anwar's directive to companies and universities to correspond with the government in Malay. This directive, issued on October 25, 2023, reiterates the importance of Bahasa Melayu as the national language, in accordance with Article 152 and the National Language Act of 1967.

Thus, Bahasa Melayu is the chosen language to best serve the employees' communicative purposes in dealing with government agencies. Consequently, organizations have accommodated the governmental organizations' needs by opting for Bahasa Melayu.

While English is preferred for formal communication, Bahasa Melayu and other ethnic languages are often used in informal interactions, particularly among employees of similar linguistic backgrounds. This flexibility helps in fostering a sense of camaraderie and ease in day-to-day operations. Rosie and Uma shared the uses of the language as evident in these excerpts:

During our breaks or casual conversations, we switch to Bahasa Melayu or sometimes even Tamil, depending on who we're talking to. It makes the environment more relaxed and friendly (Rosie)

We use Bahasa Melayu a lot when chatting with colleagues in the canteen or during informal gatherings. It's easier and more natural for most of us (Uma)

Moreover, the choice of language when dealing with government agencies is predominantly Bahasa Melayu. This is due to the official status of Bahasa Melayu and the expectations set by government protocols. Susan and Usha shared their experience in this regards:

When we deal with government departments, we mostly use Bahasa Melayu. It's the standard practice and also shows respect for the national language (Susan)

If we're communicating with government officials, it's almost always in Bahasa Melayu unless they prefer English. But generally, Bahasa Melayu is the norm (Usha)

The use of English and Bahasa Melayu in written communication

Likewise, Table 2 demonstrates that English is the predominant lingua franca at GreenLeaf Plantations. The data indicate that English has a mean score of 4 or above for writing tasks, compared to Bahasa Melayu. This suggests that employees predominantly use English for writing tasks, as it is the corporate language of GreenLeaf Plantations and is essential for formal communication. Specifically, English is most frequently used for writing letters (M= 4.32), internal emails (M= 4.26), and minutes of meetings (M= 4.29). Conversely, the mean score for Bahasa Melayu is below 3, indicating its infrequent use within the company.

Table 2 Frequency of Written Communication Events in English at GreenLeaf Plantations

Written Communicative Events	Bahasa Malaysia	English
Writing Promotional Materials	2.52	4.16
Writing Minutes of Meetings	2.74	4.29
Writing Reports	2.87	4.26
Writing External e-mail messages	2.87	4.23
Writing Internal e-mail messages	2.87	4.26
Writing Faxes	2.77	4.1
Writing Memos	2.97	4.23
Writing Letters	3.1	4.32

The interviewees discussed the challenges of operating in a multilingual environment, particularly the difficulties non-native English speakers face in mastering English for professional use. Rosie and Uma shared their experiences.

One of the biggest challenges is ensuring that everyone understands the technical jargon in English. Some of our staff, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, find it difficult (Rosie)

We have training sessions to improve English proficiency, but it’s still a challenge for many. The language barrier can sometimes lead to misunderstandings (Uma)

Furthermore, they expressed the need for more structured training programs to enhance English proficiency among employees, particularly those in lower hierarchical positions.

There’s a real need for continuous language training. It would help us a lot in improving our efficiency and reducing errors caused by miscommunication (Rosie)

More workshops and practical sessions focused on English communication would be very beneficial. It’s something that should be prioritized (Uma)

The use English and Bahasa Melayu in reading

Table 3 displays the mean scores for reading tasks for GreenLeaf Plantations. English is most frequently used for reading letters (M= 4.29), external email messages (M= 4.26) and memos (M= 4.25). English is least used for reading promotional material (M= 3.74), professional journals (M= 3.79) and newsletters or circulars (M= 3.86). The mean range for the communicative tasks is below 3 for Bahasa Melayu, indicating the minimal use of national language for reading tasks.

Table 3 Frequency of Reading Communication Events in English and Bahasa Melayu at GreenLeaf Plantations Malaysia

Reading Communicative Events	Bahasa Malaysia	English
Reading Promotional Materials	2.39	3.74
Reading Legal Documents	2.29	3.9
Reading Circulars/Newsletters	2.42	3.86
Reading Websites	2.32	3.92

Reading Professional Journals	2.39	3.79
Reading Minutes of Meetings	2.26	4.01
Reading Reports	2.48	4.16
Reading External e-mail messages	2.52	4.26
Reading Internal e-mail messages	2.74	4.15
Reading Faxes	2.55	4.13
Reading Memos	2.74	4.25
Reading Letters	2.77	4.29

Brandt (2015) pointed out that reading and writing are closely interrelated language processes that explain why some reading and written communicative events received a mean score of 4. Additionally, reading was identified as one of the basic work skills employers expect every employee to have as efficient workers in a survey conducted among employers from the United States (Bramucci, 2000). A significant activity that arose was reading webpages, as indicated by the high mean scores it received. According to Ali, et.al (2022), research web-based materials are an excellent means for improving language ability when it comes to learning English. This emphasizes how effective digital platforms can be as instruments for language learning in both professional and educational contexts (Ali, et., 2018, Ali, et., 2020). In summary, the results indicate that both reading and writing in English are fundamental skills for the agricultural workplace, specifically those with a more extensive international presence to facilitate communication.

Research Question 2: Perceptions of employees towards English in the workplace

To address Research Question 2, three sub-themes were developed after data were gathered for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative data was analysed using frequencies, and the qualitative data was analysed using theme analysis. The three themes that have been identified are "Language Combinations at GreenLeaf Plantations," "Importance of English at GreenLeaf Plantations," and "Challenges Faced in Using English at GreenLeaf Plantations."

Table 4 shows the overall responses from the respondents on their perceived importance of English. Most employees from GreenLeaf Plantations believe that English is necessary for their jobs ($M= 4.39$), and it is an important language for business ($M= 4.39$). Most of the employees in GreenLeaf Plantations also stated that there is a need to use English daily at work ($M= 4.29$), and English is used frequently at the workplace ($M= 4.29$). Nevertheless, they also perceived that English is vital for doing their job well ($M= 3.13$).

Table 4 Perceived Importance on English at GreenLeaf Plantations

Statement	Mean
English is necessary for me to do my job.	4.39
English is a very important language for business.	4.39
I need to use English at work almost every day.	4.29
I use English with many of our customers/clients.	4.29
I need to improve my spoken English skills.	4.1
I need to improve my written English skills.	4.06

If I improve my English I will have better chances of promotion within my organization.	4.06
I use English at work with almost all the people I work with.	3.97
I use English at work only with colleagues who speak only English.	3.84
Sometimes misunderstandings occur in my job because people are using English but are from different cultural backgrounds.	3.77
Sometimes when I speak English I feel that I cannot be as fluent as I am in my first language.	3.48
I can do my job very well without much use of English.	3.13

The interviews revealed a consensus on the importance of English proficiency for career advancement and effective communication in the company. Employees generally recognize the value of improving their English skills. Kim and Leena shared their thoughts:

English is crucial for our work here. Most of our documentation and communication with clients are in English, so being proficient is a must (Kim)

We need English to interact with our international clients and partners. It's essential for career growth and professional development (Leena)

Table 5 Extracts from Questionnaire on Importance of English at GreenLeaf Plantations

Respondents	Extracts
Kim	Everything is conducted in English in our company. We have to learn and also use it at all times.
Salleh	As we are a multinational company. We need English to communicate with people around us and our clients overseas.
Paul	English is important because we need to compete in this organisation.
Kamal	We must always use English with our friends and clients in our company. So, it is important we work on improving it.

English plays a more dominant role than Bahasa Melayu in employees' working lives, especially for written communication. The findings confirm that English is the preferred language for written communication in the Malaysian agricultural industry. Interviews with employees revealed that English is recognized as their corporate language. Consequently, writing letters, emails, meeting minutes, and other forms of written communication are governed by the corporate language policy. While this policy is not officially documented, it is a directive communicated by top management to all employees.

Top management and lower-level employees perceive language matters differently, with top management being comfortable operating in English. The findings highlight differences in resolving language issues due to the diverse nationalities of employees at GreenLeaf Plantations, where English is considered the working language. The results also support Piekkari et al.'s (2014) concept of a language ladder, which describes how boards approach language issues over time.

Language combinations at GreenLeaf Plantations

The language combination helps to answer Research Question 2 by providing detailed insights into how different languages are utilized across various communicative contexts within the organization. Based on the previous discussion and the presented quantitative and qualitative data, employees at GreenLeaf Plantations use various language combinations for communication. Moreover, GreenLeaf Plantations demonstrates a strategic use of language combinations to navigate its multilingual environment. The first combination involves communicative events centered on local or domestic matters, conducted exclusively in the national language due to the absence of foreign participants. The second combination features interactions among multilingual

employees from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In these scenarios, language use significantly depends on the target audience and situation.

We produced Figure 2 to further highlight the various language combinations at GreenLeaf Plantations. It shows that written communications and formal meetings are primarily conducted in English. Professionalism and clarity are ensured by this procedure, particularly when dealing with foreign clientele. Conversely, Bahasa Melayu is employed in interactions with local government agencies, aligning with national policies and ensuring effective communication. This dual-language approach not only facilitates smoother operations but also respects the linguistic diversity of the workforce.

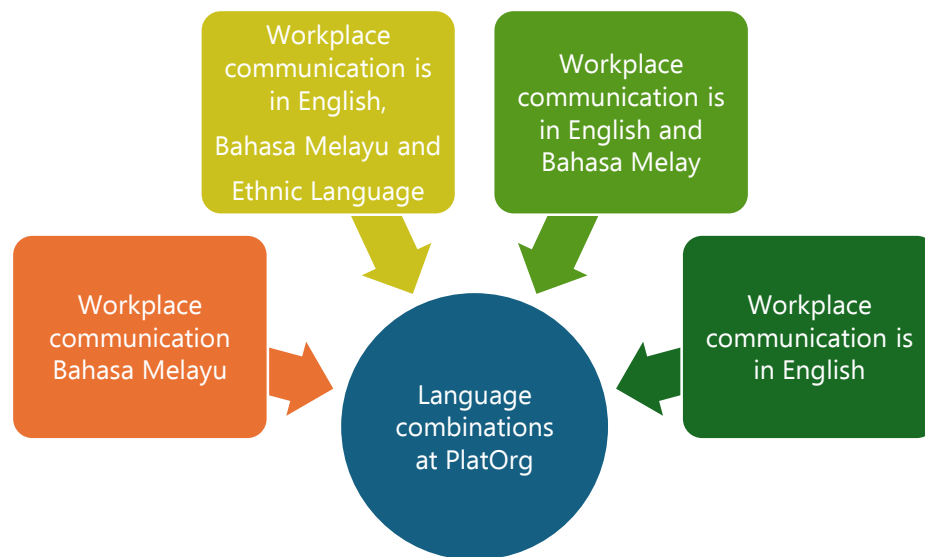


Figure 2 Strategic language use at GreenLeaf Plantations

The qualitative data corresponds to the language combination. It highlights the importance of English for career progression and the need for continual improvement in language skills. Jas and Zul asserted:

English is important for career growth here. We are encouraged to improve our skills continually (Jas)

The company supports us in learning English because it's vital for our roles and interactions with international clients (Zul)

In summary, the qualitative data provides a deeper insight into the dynamic nature of language use in the multinational agricultural company. It highlights the flexibility required to navigate a multilingual environment and underscores the critical role of English in formal and professional settings while acknowledging the comfort and practicality of using Bahasa Melayu and other ethnic languages in informal contexts. These findings suggest that while English is indispensable for business operations and career advancement, there is a need for enhanced language support and training to bridge proficiency gaps among employees shows the shared perception of the organisations. This analysis is depicted in Figure 3, reflecting the shared perceptions of the interviewed employees

Therefore, the perception of English's role and value in communication can significantly influence language use and choice in the workplace. Employees and employers often prefer using English because it is widely seen

as the language of business and career progression. This preference is rooted in the belief that proficiency in English opens up greater opportunities for professional development, networking, and accessing global markets. Abdullah (2008) asserts that Malaysians study English not only to improve their chances of getting into college and finding employment, but also because it is a required subject in schools. The pursuit of English is motivated by its ability to lead to successful careers. Additionally, fluency in English is critical for job interviews and significantly enhances employability. Employers in Malaysia prioritize candidates who can communicate effectively in English, which is essential for various professional interactions and customer service roles (Ne'matullah et al., 2023).

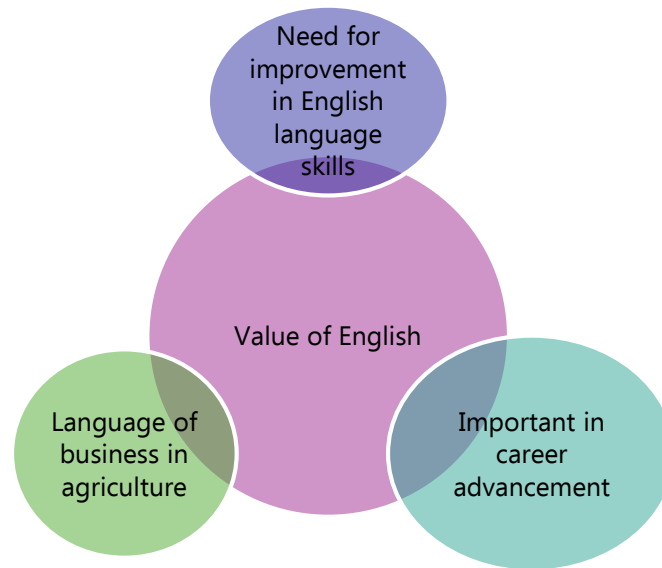


Figure 3 Value of English in GreenLeaf Plantations

CONCLUSION

The study shows that English is the predominant language in agricultural workplaces, especially among higher management, where formal written communication is expected to be conducted in English. Bahasa Melayu, however, plays a supportive role, especially among estate workers who are less proficient in English. This linguistic divide presents challenges in standardizing language policy but highlights the necessity of adopting English as the corporate language due to its global business relevance. Flexibility in communication is valued, with management recognizing the need for proficiency in both English and Bahasa Melayu to ensure productivity. The study underscores the conflict between Malaysia's national language policy, which emphasizes Bahasa Melayu, and workplace demands for English proficiency. This discrepancy impacts Malaysian graduates' employability, suggesting a need for practical management of language policies to meet business needs and support career progression in the agricultural sector.

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