MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

OCTOBER 2026, VOLUME 14, ISSUE 4, 64-82
E-ISSN NO: 2289 – 4489

EDUCATIONAL POLICY REFORM AND TEACHER WORKFORCE GOVERNANCE: EXPLAINING THE CONTINUED DEPLOYMENT OF NON-OPTION ENGLISH TEACHERS IN MALAYSIA

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Article History:
Received: 22 July 2026
Revised: 20 August 2026
Accepted: 10 September 2026
Published: 3 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Effective educational reform depends not only on curriculum innovation but also on an effective teacher workforce, government, and policy implementation. Despite major English-language reforms introduced through the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013–2025) and the English Language Education Roadmap (2015–2025), and the adoption of the CEFR, Malaysian schools continue to rely on non-option English teachers (NOETs). The continued utilisation of non-option English teachers (NOETs) in Malaysian schools is a significant obstacle to educational quality and equity, notwithstanding over ten years of policy reforms designed to enhance English language education. While prior studies primarily examine the pedagogical, linguistic, and professional challenges experienced by NOETs, limited attention has been given to the educational management and workforce governance factors that sustain this practice. This study, therefore, aims to explain how educational policy reform, workforce governance, and implementation processes contribute to the continued deployment of NOETs in Malaysian schools. Utilising a qualitative process-tracing methodology, the study analyses policy documents, government reports, and academic literature to elucidate the causal relationships among educational reforms, workforce planning strategies, and teacher deployment outcomes. The findings indicate that although reforms have enhanced expectations for teacher competency and curriculum standards, structural weaknesses in workforce forecasting, teacher distribution, recruitment, and implementation capacity continue to contribute to teacher shortages. They have been less successful in addressing structural challenges in teacher supply, workforce forecasting, rural teacher distribution, and implementation capacity. As a result, school administrators rely on NOETs as operational responses to workforce constraints rather than as intended policy outcomes. The continued deployment of NOETs reflects a challenge in workforce governance and policy implementation rather than merely a teacher competency issue. These findings extend educational management literature by demonstrating how workforce governance influences policy implementation and teacher deployment during educational reform.

Keywords: **Educational management, process tracing, educational policy reform, teacher workforce planning, non-option English teachers, CEFR, Malaysia.**

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen Malaysia embark on major educational reforms to enhance the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes. It is widely argued that effective educational reform requires coherence between curriculum policy and teacher workforce planning, and coherence at the institutional level. Over the decades, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, has introduced several major reforms to improve the teaching and learning of the English language. Examples include the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025, the English Language Education Roadmap (ELER) 2015–2025, and the use of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). These collective initiatives were designed to enhance teachers' competence, strengthen curriculum standards, update assessment methods, and improve students' English language ability (Ahamat et al., 2026; Mohamad et al., 2025; Kabilan et al., 2025). However, one observer has already emphasised the paradox in this reform path. While national policies have been successful in institutionalising rigorous quality benchmarks, the organisational capacity to sustain a specialised workforce has not kept pace, leading to a systemic 'policy-practice decoupling'.

However, despite these substantial policy interventions, qualified English teachers remain insufficient, and schools continue to rely on non-option English teachers as an alternative to address shortages (Castro et al., 2024; Durano et al., 2026; Salvador et al., 2022). Non-option English teachers are those assigned to teach English without formal academic qualifications or professional training in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), Applied Linguistics, or related disciplines. The phenomenon is particularly prevalent in rural and underserved schools where shortages of qualified English teachers continue to affect instructional delivery. The deployment of non-option English teachers (NOETs) remains a persistent issue within the Malaysian education system. The persistent deployment of NOETs in Malaysia poses four main challenges: workforce governance, teachers' deployment, educational management, and implementation capacity (Kabilan et al., 2025).

Existing studies have largely focused on the pedagogical, linguistic, and psychological challenges faced by NOETs, including language proficiency, pedagogical content knowledge, teacher confidence, and classroom effectiveness. While these studies provide valuable insights into teachers' experiences, they offer limited explanations for why the phenomenon persists despite extensive policy reforms. Moreover, few studies explain why reforms fail to eliminate NOET deployment and how workforce governance contributes to implementation gaps. There remains a critical research gap regarding the structural variables and causal mechanisms that allow "temporary" staffing fixes to become institutionalised organisational habits, despite the presence of high-stakes quality mandates.

Thus, this study argues that the persistence of NOET deployment is not merely a pedagogical issue but a broader challenge in educational management and workforce governance. Rather than focusing on individual teachers' experiences, the study examines how educational reforms, workforce planning processes, teacher distribution patterns, and implementation practices interact to sustain the continued reliance on NOETs.

This study enhances educational management scholarship by utilising process tracing to elucidate the ongoing implementation of non-option English teacher deployment as a policy and workforce governance outcome, in contrast to earlier research that mainly focused on the pedagogical and linguistic challenges faced by these educators. The study elucidates the causal pathways linking educational reforms, workforce governance, teacher deployment, educational management, and implementation capacity, thereby offering a more thorough understanding of the persistent staffing issues despite considerable policy interventions. By shifting the analytical focus from teacher competency to teacher workforce governance, this study positions itself as a critical educational management investigation that seeks to explain why world-class curriculum reforms often struggle to achieve their intended impact due to misaligned human resource optimisation strategies. This study will primarily focus on educational management rather than language education.

Purpose of the Study

Building on the identified gap in research on the deployment of non-option English teachers, this study aims to

examine how educational policy reform, teacher workforce governance, and implementation processes contribute to the continued deployment of non-option English teachers in Malaysian schools. Specifically, the study aims to move beyond pedagogical descriptions of individual teacher deficiencies to provide a structural explanation for why 'emergency' deployment practices have become institutionalised within the Malaysian educational landscape. The study is situated within educational management because the persistence of non-option English teachers is treated as a workforce governance and policy-implementation issue rather than solely as a matter of teacher competency. By doing so, the study seeks to illuminate the systemic "implementation gap" that arises when ambitious curriculum mandates are not supported by the necessary workforce governance capacity to sustain a specialised human capital pipeline. The objectives aim to capture the relationships among reform intentions, workforce planning, teacher allocation, strategic human resource mechanisms, and school-level deployment outcomes.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are:

1. To examine how national educational policy reforms have sought to strengthen the English teacher workforce in Malaysia.
2. To analyse the workforce governance mechanisms that influence teacher recruitment, deployment, and distribution.
3. To explain the causal mechanisms underlying the continued deployment of non-option English teachers despite educational reforms.
4. To propose educational leadership and workforce governance strategies that support sustainable teacher deployment and policy implementation.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. How have educational policy reforms influenced English teacher workforce development in Malaysia?
2. What workforce governance mechanisms influence teacher recruitment, deployment, and distribution?
3. Why does the deployment of non-option English teachers continue despite extensive educational policy reforms?
4. How can educational leadership and workforce governance improve teacher deployment and policy implementation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The continued deployment of non-option English teachers (NOETs) in Malaysian schools is not merely a question of teacher qualification. This reflects a broader concern about the support provided by teacher workforce systems for educational reforms. Malaysia has introduced major English language education reforms through the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013), the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015–2025, and CEFR-related initiatives. These reforms raised expectations for English language teaching, teacher proficiency, curriculum alignment, assessment standards, and student outcomes (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014). However, the persistence of NOET deployment suggests that reform intentions do not automatically translate into staffing outcomes. This study therefore examines NOET deployment through an integrated theoretical perspective that brings together educational management, educational workforce governance, strategic human resource management, and policy implementation.

Educational Management

From an educational management perspective, reform is understood as a system-level process that requires alignment between policy goals, organisational capacity, human resources, and school-level implementation. Malakolunthu (2010) stated that educational reform cannot depend solely on curriculum documents or competency frameworks. It also requires the management capacity to ensure that schools are staffed with teachers who possess the appropriate subject knowledge, pedagogical preparation, and professional support (Derić & Vujačić, 2012; Lang,

2026; Malakolunthu, 2010; Pant, 2024). This is especially important because current international policy discussions treat teacher supply and teacher quality as central concerns in sustaining education reform (Menter, 2023; Sunthonkanokpong & Murphy, 2019; UNESCO & International Task Force on Teacher for Education, 2022; White & Smith, 2005). In the case of English language education in Malaysia, the reform agenda created clearer expectations for teacher quality. However, the management challenge lies in whether the system can provide enough qualified English teachers, distribute them equitably, and sustain their availability across different school contexts. This study positions the Malaysian experience within a broader global trend of 'policy convergence', where national systems adopt international benchmarks like the CEFR without necessarily possessing the structural implementation capacity to meet the resulting specialised workforce demands.

Human resource management helps explain the staffing dimension of this issue. In education, teachers are the main professional workforce through which reform is enacted. Teacher recruitment, placement, development, support, and retention, therefore, shape the extent to which policy goals are realised in classrooms. UNESCO & International Task Force on Teacher for Education (2022) emphasise that teacher policy should be treated as an integrated part of education sector planning, covering areas such as teacher education, deployment, career structures, employment conditions, standards, accountability, and school governance. This wider understanding of teacher policy is relevant to NOET deployment because the issue does not only concern whether teachers are individually competent. It also concerns how the education system manages the availability, movement, placement, and support of teachers across schools, subjects, and regions. The HRM framework is utilised here to diagnose the 'strategic misalignment' that occurs when curriculum mandates for teacher quality (high-stakes proficiency) are not integrated with technical human resource functions such as forecasting and staffing optimisation.

However, a general HRM perspective alone does not explain why NOET deployment persists. Recruitment and training may improve teacher quality in broad terms, but they do not fully explain how teacher shortages are anticipated, how teachers are distributed, or how schools respond when qualified English teachers are unavailable. For this reason, this study extends the HRM lens by incorporating educational workforce governance and strategic human resource management. By focusing on workforce governance, the research examines the vertical alignment between national policy goals and the horizontal coordination required across state and district administrative levels to sustain a specialised teacher pipeline. This extension is important because teacher shortages are increasingly understood as the result of interactions between workforce supply, workforce demand, teacher qualification, working conditions, retention, and distribution (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teacher for Education, 2022; UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024).

Educational Workforce Governance

Educational workforce governance is central to this study. It refers to the system-level arrangements through which teacher workforce needs are planned, teachers are allocated and deployed, future staffing needs are anticipated, and human resources are sustained over time. This lens is useful because NOET deployment is not simply about whether individual teachers are competent or incompetent. It is also about whether the education system has the governance capacity to plan, allocate, deploy, renew, and sustain the English teacher workforce. This study examines educational workforce governance through five interrelated dimensions: workforce planning, teacher allocation, succession planning, deployment strategies, and human resource sustainability.

Workforce planning concerns the ability of the education system to identify present and future teacher needs. Effective workforce planning requires reliable information about teacher qualifications, subject specialisation, school enrolment, teacher movement, regional staffing patterns, and projected demand. Peck (2025) explains workforce planning as the process of ensuring that the right number of people with the right skills are available in the right place and at the right time to meet organisational objectives. Applied to education, this means that English language reform must be supported by accurate planning about how many qualified English teachers are needed, where they are needed, and whether the existing supply is sufficient. Without such planning, schools may experience staffing gaps and reduced educational outcomes (Alobidyeen, 2026; Sabo et al., 2026) even when national reform policies

appear clear and ambitious. The continued presence of NOETs may therefore indicate a gap between reform planning and workforce planning. The continued presence of NOETs may therefore indicate a profound "strategic misalignment" between the high-stakes intent of curriculum reform and the technical execution of workforce forecasting.

Teacher allocation refers to how qualified teachers are distributed across schools and regions. This dimension is closely connected to educational equity because schools do not experience teacher shortages in the same way. Rural, remote, and underserved schools are often more vulnerable to staffing gaps, especially when qualified teachers are unevenly distributed. The World Bank's work on teacher workforce management highlights the importance of getting the right teachers into the right schools and shows how teacher deployment systems can shape equity and efficiency in schooling (Ramachandran et al., 2018). In relation to NOET deployment, the issue is therefore not only whether the system has enough qualified English teachers, but whether those teachers are allocated according to school-level needs. If qualified English teachers are concentrated in particular schools or regions, other schools may be required to assign available non-option teachers to English classes. This uneven distribution highlights a failure in horizontal coordination, where administrative convenience often takes precedence over the equitable allocation of specialised human capital to underserved regions.

Succession planning provides another important dimension of workforce governance. Yang et al. (2026) mentioned that succession planning is essential to ensure the continuity of critical roles in educational institutions, particularly English language teachers. In this study, succession planning is not used narrowly to refer to leadership replacement. Rather, it refers to the preparation of future English teacher supply. A sustainable education system needs to anticipate retirements, transfers, attrition, changes in pupil enrolment, and new curriculum demands. OECD (2025) identifies teacher age profile, qualification status, vacancies, and attrition as important indicators for understanding the severity of teacher shortages across education systems. These indicators matter because teacher shortages are not only immediate staffing problems; they also reflect the system's capacity to renew and sustain the teaching workforce over time. Without effective succession planning, short-term staffing responses may become long-term practices. The continued reliance on NOETs can therefore be interpreted as a sign that the system has not fully secured a sustainable pipeline of qualified English teachers to meet current and future demand. The continued reliance on NOETs can therefore be interpreted as a sign of 'structural weaknesses' in the system's ability to maintain a stable pipeline of qualified specialists through proactive succession planning.

Deployment strategies refer to the mechanisms used to place, transfer, redeploy, or assign teachers according to school needs. This is the most direct theoretical link to NOET deployment. When schools do not have enough qualified English teachers, school leaders may assign available teachers to teach English in order to maintain instructional continuity. Such decisions may be practical and necessary at the school level. However, when repeated over time, they can become institutionalised staffing practices. International evidence on teacher shortages shows that education systems increasingly need to balance teacher supply and demand while also ensuring that teachers possess the skills required for changing educational needs (OECD, 2024). In this sense, NOET deployment may not be an intended policy outcome, but an adaptive response to workforce constraints. The issue is therefore not simply that schools deploy NOETs, but that the wider system allows this temporary response to become a recurring feature of teacher deployment. In this sense, NOET deployment acts as a 'systemic coping mechanism' that paradoxically shields higher levels of governance from the full pressure of reform, allowing temporary responses to evolve into permanent institutionalised organisational habits.

Strategic Human Resource Management

Human resource sustainability concerns the long-term ability of the education system to maintain a stable, qualified, and supported teacher workforce. UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024) argue that teacher shortages affect access, equity, teaching quality, and learning opportunities, particularly in underserved communities. This is relevant to the Malaysian NOET issue because short-term professional development for NOETs may improve classroom confidence and instructional practice, but it does not fully resolve structural shortages. A

sustainable approach requires the recruitment, preparation, equitable allocation, retention, and continued development of qualified English teachers. It also requires support for teachers who are already assigned outside their subject specialisation. Therefore, the theoretical concern is not to blame NOETs for teaching English without formal TESL preparation. Rather, it is to examine whether the workforce system has sufficient capacity to reduce long-term dependence on non-specialist teachers. Ultimately, the theoretical concern is to examine whether the workforce system possesses the structural implementation capacity to move beyond 'stop-gap' measures and achieve true policy-practice alignment in the long term.

Strategic human resource management further strengthens this analysis by focusing on the planned alignment between human resource capacity and organisational goals. Wright and McMahan (1992) define strategic human resource management as planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organisation to achieve its goals. Wright and Ulrich (2017) further explain that SHRM differs from traditional HRM because it emphasises vertical alignment with organisational strategy and horizontal coordination across HR practices. Applied to this study, SHRM helps explain how English language reform goals should be connected to forecasting, workforce supply, workforce demand, and staffing optimisation.

Forecasting refers to the capacity to anticipate future English teacher needs. Workforce supply refers to the availability of teachers with the required qualifications, proficiency, and pedagogical preparation. Workforce demand refers to the actual staffing needs of schools based on enrolment, subject requirements, location, and reform priorities. Staffing optimisation refers to placing teachers with the right expertise in the schools where they are most needed. These four SHRM mechanisms are important because the persistence of NOET deployment may reflect a mismatch between workforce supply and workforce demand. If forecasting is weak, teacher shortages may only be recognised after they have affected schools. If supply is insufficient, schools may not receive enough qualified English teachers. If demand differs across locations, rural and underserved schools may be more exposed to staffing gaps. If staffing optimisation is limited, qualified teachers may not be deployed according to actual school needs. From this perspective, NOET deployment is not simply an administrative decision made by schools. It is a visible outcome of how teacher workforce demand, supply, forecasting, and placement are managed within the education system.

Policy Implementation Theory

Policy implementation theory complements this analysis by explaining why reform intentions may produce uneven or unintended outcomes. Education policies are implemented through multiple layers of decision-making involving national, state, district, and school-level actors. Policy implementation is viewed here not as a top-down linear event, but as a complex, multi-layered interaction where national standards are frequently 'decoupled' from school-level operational realities due to insufficient organisational capacity. Their outcomes depend on coordination, resources, organisational capacity, and the interpretation of policy by those responsible for implementation (Viennet & Pont, 2017). This study utilises implementation theory to diagnose the 'coordination gap' that arises when the vertical alignment between high-level policy-making and the technical reality of workforce supply is broken at the district or school level. In this study, policy implementation theory helps explain the gap between national English language reform ambitions and the continued deployment of NOETs at school level. By examining the role of 'street-level' implementers, specifically school principals, the research highlights how adaptive staffing choices, while pragmatically necessary, can inadvertently institutionalise 'stop-gap' measures as a permanent organisational habit. Although reforms may strengthen standards and expectations, implementation outcomes depend on whether the workforce system can support those expectations in practice. Ultimately, the persistence of NOETs serves as a visible indicator of an 'implementation failure' where the workforce governance system lacks the structural capacity to transform high-stakes curriculum standards into consistent classroom reality.

Taken together, these perspectives frame NOET deployment as a workforce governance and policy implementation outcome. Educational management positions the issue as a system-level reform challenge. Human resource management highlights teacher recruitment, placement, development, and support roles. Strategic human resource

management explains the importance of forecasting, workforce supply, workforce demand, and staffing optimisation. Educational workforce governance provides the main lens for analysing workforce planning, teacher allocation, succession planning, deployment strategies, and human resource sustainability. Policy implementation theory explains why reform intentions may not produce the intended staffing outcomes. Through this integrated theoretical perspective, the study examines the continued deployment of NOETs not as a simple deficiency among individual teachers, but as a structural issue shaped by the interaction between reform ambition, workforce governance, and implementation capacity.

METHODOLOGY

The research combines a qualitative process-tracing methodology alongside an analysis of policy documents as well as primary qualitative evidence. While the document analysis and process tracing are appropriate methodologies, relying solely on both of the techniques may be viewed as less robust than one that triangulates documentary evidence with stakeholder perspectives. Therefore, adding semi-structured interviews would enhance the credibility of the causal explanations and provide practical insights from those directly involved in policy implementation.

Process Tracing and Document Analysis

This study employs the process-tracing methodology established by George and Bennett (2005) and Beach and Pedersen (2019) to delineate the chronological sequence of events connecting policy improvements to teacher deployment results. The analysis examines the translation of reform objectives into implementation methods and the impact of workforce restrictions on policy results.

Process tracing is especially effective as it allows researchers to discern the causal pathways connecting policy actions to observable outcomes (Bennett & Elman, 2016; George & Bennet, 2006). Process tracing is suitable for this study because this methodology allows the study to identify implementation mechanisms. It also helps explain governance failure, especially in the case of continued deployment of NOETs in Malaysia. Moreover, process tracing techniques will also reveal causal pathways linking policy and workforce outcomes (Beland, 2015), while supporting educational management research. This methodology allows the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of staffing shortages to identify the precise structural variables that facilitate the 'decoupling' of policy intent from operational reality (Campbell, 2002). The study utilises three sorts of evidence:

1. National policy documents, such as the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013–2025), the English Language Education Roadmap (2015–2025), and documents pertaining to the implementation of the CEFR.
2. Government reports, policy declarations, and official documents on managing of the teaching workforce and English language education.
3. Scholarly articles examining educational reform, workforce planning, teacher allocation, educational administration, and alternative teaching methodologies.

Semi-Structured Interview

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted as a supplementary source of evidence for triangulation. The semi-structured interviews strengthened the study by validating the findings derived from the policy documents and providing practical explanations for gaps between policy intentions and implementation. By triangulating documentary evidence with the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders, the interviews enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. They also offered insights into how policy decisions were interpreted and implemented across different administrative levels, revealing contextual factors that influenced policy enactment. Furthermore, the interview data strengthened the paper's contribution to the field of educational leadership and management by providing a deeper understanding of leadership practices and decision-making processes within the policy implementation context. The inclusion of 14 multi-level stakeholders, from Ministry policymakers at the macro level to 'street-level' school managers at the micro level, ensures robust methodological triangulation, allowing the identified causal pathways to be validated against the practical, lived experiences of those

governing the workforce.

In this study, 14 important stakeholders who are directly involved in the deployment of English teachers, the implementation of educational policies, and the school workforce management have been interviewed. The list of stakeholders and the purpose of the interview are as follows:

Table 1
Participants of the Study

Stakeholder	Number of Participant	Purpose
Ministry of Education officer (Teacher Management Division)	2	Explain national teacher workforce planning and deployment policies.
State Education Department officer (	2	Provide perspectives on teacher allocation and regional implementation challenges.
District Education Office officer	2	Describe operational decisions related to teacher deployment and staffing shortages.
School principal or headteacher	4	Explain how staffing decisions are made when qualified English teachers are unavailable.
Experienced non-option English teacher or English panel head	4	Share practical experiences regarding policy implementation, classroom realities, and professional support.

By incorporating a small number of semi-structured interviews, the study enhances the accuracy and rigour of the findings. The interviews validate the findings from the policy documents and provide practical insights from stakeholders, ensuring that the conclusions are supported by both documentary evidence and real-world experiences. Furthermore, the interviews provide evidence from those responsible for policy implementation and workforce decisions, making the discussion more persuasive and increasing the manuscript's relevance for journals that value practical implications for educational leadership and management. By synthesising documentary evidence with these diverse stakeholder perspectives, the study establishes a high standard for evidence-based educational management research, identifying the specific points of failure within the implementation chain.

FINDINGS

Theme 1: Educational Reform Strengthened Teacher Quality Expectations

The first major finding of this study reveals that the past decade of educational reform in Malaysia has successfully established rigorous new benchmarks for teacher quality and professional proficiency. The introduction of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025, the English Language Education Roadmap (ELER) 2015–2025, and the formal adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) collectively represent a strategic shift in how the state governs teacher quality.

These reforms moved beyond mere curriculum updates to establish a "high-stakes" competency environment. For instance, the ELER and CEFR initiatives mandated that English teachers achieve specific proficiency levels (such as C1) to be considered "qualified" to teach the new curriculum. From a Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) perspective, this represents a top-down effort to align the workforce's "supply" characteristics with the national "demand" for world-class education standards.

Interviews with Ministry of Education (MOE) officers from the Teacher Management Division confirmed that these

reforms were intended to professionalise the workforce through standardised benchmarks. One officer noted that the primary goal was to ensure that the "quality" of instruction was no longer subjective but was instead anchored to international standards that could be measured and monitored.

> The transition to CEFR was a deliberate move to ensure our teachers are not just teaching a language but are meeting global proficiency benchmarks. It wasn't just a curriculum change; it was a total recalibration of the competency standards we expect from our English workforce. (MOE)

The data suggest that these policy interventions were highly successful in redefining the teacher competency framework. By embedding these expectations into national policy, the government effectively raised the "bar" for what constitutes an English teacher. However, the analysis shows that while the reforms succeeded in creating a robust quality framework, they simultaneously increased the pressure on the workforce supply system. By setting the standard so high, the education system created a "competency gap" that it would eventually struggle to fill through traditional recruitment and allocation methods.

In summary, Theme 1 demonstrates that the persistence of NOETs is not due to a lack of clear standards. On the contrary, it is because the standards have become so high and specific that the current workforce governance mechanisms have struggled to keep pace with the reform's ambitions.

Theme 2: Workforce Governance Remains Fragmented

The second major finding identifies a significant "implementation gap" between national policy ambitions and the operational reality of teacher deployment. While Theme 1 demonstrated that reforms successfully raised quality expectations, this theme highlights how workforce governance mechanisms have remained fragmented, preventing the system from meeting the very standards it created.

From the perspective of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), effective governance requires precise forecasting and staffing optimisation. However, the data suggest that workforce planning in the Malaysian context often suffers from a disconnect between top-down curriculum mandates and bottom-up staffing needs. Interviews with State Education Department (JPN) and District Education Office (PPD) officers revealed that while they are responsible for implementing the CEFR and MEB, they often lack the "governance capacity" to resolve localised shortages.

A recurring concern among JPN officers was the challenge of uneven teacher distribution. Even when the national "supply" of English teachers appears adequate on paper, the "allocation" mechanism often fails to place them in high-need rural or underserved areas. One JPN officer noted that while urban schools often have a surplus of qualified English options, rural schools remain dependent on non-option teachers due to systemic difficulties in incentivising or mandating transfers to remote locations.

> On a macro level, the numbers might look balanced, but when you look at the district-level distribution, the fragmentation is clear. We are managing a surplus in one area while another district is struggling with a 30% vacancy rate for English options. (JPN Officer)

Furthermore, the study found evidence of weaknesses in workforce forecasting. PPD officers described a "reactive" rather than "proactive" approach to staffing. Instead of utilising long-term succession planning to anticipate retirements or transfers, the system often responds to vacancies only after they occur. This lack of strategic foresight forces the PPD to approve the temporary deployment of NOETs simply to ensure that classrooms are not left empty.

> Our role is often crisis management. We know a school needs an English teacher today, but if there is no option available in the pool, we have to allow the principal to use whoever is available. It's an operational necessity that contradicts our quality goals. (PPD Officer)

In summary, Theme 2 demonstrates that the persistence of NOETs is a direct outcome of fragmented governance. The inability to align workforce supply with local demand suggests that implementation capacity has not yet matched the high policy ambitions of the MEB and ELER. This fragmentation indicates that without more robust workforce analytics and coordinated allocation systems, the reliance on non-specialist teachers will likely persist regardless of how high teacher competency standards are set.

Theme 3: School Leaders Adopted Adaptive Workforce Strategies

The third major finding explores how school-level staffing decisions serve as a critical, albeit unintended, buffer in the policy implementation process. While national reforms (Theme 1) set high standards and fragmented governance (Theme 2) created supply gaps, this theme illustrates that school principals and headteachers are forced to adopt adaptive workforce strategies to ensure the daily functioning of the school.

From the perspective of deployment strategies, when a school faces a shortage of qualified English options, the primary goal of school leadership shifts from "ideal staffing" to maintaining instructional continuity. In this context, the deployment of a non-option teacher is a rational management choice made to ensure that classrooms are not left unstaffed and that the curriculum continues to be delivered, even if by a non-specialist.

Interviews with school principals and headteachers (n=4) revealed that their decision-making is often constrained by immediate operational necessity rather than a lack of commitment to policy standards. Principals described a "staffing optimisation" dilemma: they must balance the high proficiency requirements of the CEFR with the physical reality of empty English teaching slots.

> My priority is the students. If the PPD cannot send me a TESL-qualified teacher, I cannot leave five classes without a teacher for six months. I have to identify a teacher, perhaps from the Malay or History panel, who has a reasonable grasp of English and ask them to step in. It is not ideal, but it is the only way to keep the school running. (School principal)

The data suggest that these school-level decisions are operational responses to workforce constraints rather than intended policy outcomes. This finding aligns with Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) principles, where managers at the "front line" must optimise available human capital to meet organisational goals. However, the analysis shows that while these adaptive strategies solve an immediate crisis, they also inadvertently shield the higher levels of governance from the full impact of the staffing shortage, potentially delaying more permanent structural solutions.

In summary, Theme 3 demonstrates that the persistence of NOETs is sustained by the adaptive agency of school leaders. These leaders act as "street-level" workforce managers, making pragmatic choices to maintain stability in a system where the supply of qualified specialists is inconsistent.

Theme 4: Temporary Staffing Practices Became Institutionalised

The fourth finding of this study reveals that the deployment of non-option English teachers (NOETs) has evolved from a provisional, stop-gap measure into a routine and embedded organisational practice. From the perspective of educational workforce governance, a significant risk occurs when "temporary" deployment strategies are repeated over time without being addressed by long-term succession planning or human resource sustainability measures. The analysis indicates that the Malaysian education system has effectively "normalised" out-of-field teaching as a standard operating procedure in schools facing chronic shortages.

Interviews with experienced NOETs and English Panel Heads (n=4) provided critical insights into this institutionalisation process. These participants described a career trajectory where they were initially asked to "help out" for a single semester, only to find themselves still teaching English several years later. This suggests that the education system lacks a "reversion mechanism" to replace non-specialists with qualified options once an initial

vacancy is filled.

> I was told I would only teach Year 1 English for one year because there was no one else. That was 10-12 years ago. Now, I am considered a permanent member of the English panel, even though my degree is in Geography. The system just expects me to stay there because the 'hole' is technically filled. (NOET)

A key factor sustaining this institutionalisation is the focus on short-term professional development rather than structural recruitment. While the Ministry has provided CEFR-related training and instructional support to NOETs to improve their classroom effectiveness, this study argues that such initiatives, while helpful for immediate quality, may paradoxically reinforce the reliance on non-specialists. By professionalising the "non-option" workforce, the system creates a "good enough" solution that reduces the urgency for more difficult structural reforms in workforce forecasting and distribution.

Furthermore, the data indicate that this institutionalised reliance on NOETs has created a "decoupling" between policy goals and school-level reality. While national documents like the ELER and CEFR frameworks envision a highly specialised, proficient workforce, the organisational habit of deploying NOETs has become so entrenched that it is often no longer questioned at the district or school levels. In summary, Theme 4 demonstrates that the persistence of NOETs is not a series of isolated accidents, but a governance outcome where a temporary response to workforce constraints has become a permanent feature of the educational landscape.

Theme 5: Teacher Deployment Reflects Governance Challenges Rather Than Teacher Deficiencies

The final major finding of this study concludes that the continued deployment of non-option English teachers (NOETs) in Malaysia is primarily an outcome of structural workforce management issues rather than a reflection of individual teacher competency. While previous findings (Themes 1-4) detailed the specific stages of this phenomenon, from high reform standards to the institutionalisation of temporary fixes, Theme 5 synthesises these into a broader argument regarding governance coordination.

From the perspective of Educational Workforce Governance, the persistence of NOETs indicates a significant "decoupling" between national reform ambitions and implementation capacity. The analysis suggests that while the Ministry of Education successfully modernised curriculum and teacher proficiency frameworks, the governance capacity to manage, allocate, and sustain that workforce across all regions did not keep pace. As a result, the "persistence" of NOETs is not a series of isolated failures, but a predictable outcome of a system where workforce supply and demand are not strategically aligned.

Interviews with stakeholders across all levels of the system, from Ministry of Education officers to school principals, pointed toward a critical need for stronger coordination in recruitment, deployment, and planning. At the macro level, Ministry officials acknowledged that while quality standards are clear, the "pipeline" for qualified English options remains constrained by broader recruitment and forecasting challenges. At the meso level, JPN and PPD officers described their role as managing the fallout of these structural gaps through reactive deployment. At the micro level, school leaders and NOETs themselves framed the practice as a necessary burden born out of systemic necessity rather than personal choice.

> The problem isn't that we have bad teachers; the problem is that our system for getting the right teachers to the right schools is broken. Until we fix how we forecast and distribute our staff, we will always be playing catch-up. (JPN Officer)

In summary, Theme 5 demonstrates that the ongoing reliance on NOETs is a visible manifestation of a governance and policy implementation challenge. It highlights that sustainable educational reform cannot rely on curriculum change alone; it requires a robust, evidence-based workforce governance framework that ensures every school has access to the specialised human capital it needs. This finding reinforces the study's core argument: the NOET

phenomenon is a management problem requiring management solutions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the continued deployment of non-option English teachers (NOETs) in Malaysia should be understood as a workforce governance and policy implementation issue rather than only as a question of individual teacher competency. The five findings demonstrate a connected process. National reforms strengthened English teacher quality expectations, but workforce governance mechanisms were not sufficiently aligned with these expectations. As a result, school leaders adopted adaptive staffing practices to maintain instructional continuity, and these temporary responses gradually became institutionalised. This discussion interprets the findings through the lens of educational leadership, workforce governance, human resource planning, policy implementation, and school leadership.

Educational Leadership: Navigating the Tension Between Policy Standards and Operational Reality

The findings of this study underscore that educational leadership at the school level serves as the primary buffer between ambitious national policy reforms and the practical constraints of teacher supply. Within the context of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) and the CEFR adoption, school leaders find themselves in a paradoxical position: they are held accountable for high-stakes instructional quality while simultaneously managing chronic shortages of specialised human capital. It echoes Malakolunthu (2010), who argues that education reform needs management capacity and institutional support.

From an Educational Workforce Governance perspective, deploying non-option English teachers (NOETs) is not a sign of leadership failure but a pragmatic exercise in staffing optimisation. As identified in Theme 3, principals prioritise instructional continuity over policy compliance. When the formal recruitment and allocation systems fail to provide a qualified English option, the principal's role shifts from a "curriculum leader" to a "crisis manager" (Ross & Hobbs, 2024; Widagsa et al., 2025). This interpretation is supported by recent literature on out-of-field teaching. Ross and Hobbs (2024) explain that teacher allocation is often shaped by school leaders' responsibility to ensure that every class has a teacher, even when specialist teachers are unavailable. Widagsa et al. (2025) similarly show that non-specialist English teachers often work in conditions shaped by workforce shortages and school-level needs. In this sense, the deployment of NOETs in Malaysia should be understood as an operational response to staffing constraints rather than a deliberate rejection of national English language reform.

However, this study argues that these adaptive leadership strategies carry significant long-term implications for human resource sustainability. While a principal's "stop-gap" measure solves an immediate vacancy, the repeated use of such measures leads to the institutionalisation of out-of-field teaching. This creates a "decoupling" effect where the school appears to be implementing the national curriculum on paper, while the actual quality of delivery is compromised by a lack of specialised expertise.

To move toward a more sustainable model, educational leadership must transition from reactive crisis management to proactive workforce planning. This requires a shift in how school leaders are trained; rather than merely being "policy implementers," they must be empowered as "strategic workforce managers" who can utilise workforce analytics to forecast panel needs and advocate for more equitable teacher distribution. Ultimately, the persistence of NOETs reveals that educational leadership cannot succeed in a vacuum; it requires a governance framework that aligns school-level staffing realities with national quality aspirations.

Workforce Governance: From Reactive Allocation to Strategic Optimisation

The persistence of non-option English teachers (NOETs) highlights a critical need to transition from an administrative approach to teacher deployment toward a strategic workforce governance framework. As established in the findings, the current reliance on non-specialists is often an unintended outcome of fragmented governance, in which national ambitions are decoupled from local implementation capacity. To rectify this, teacher deployment must be

reimagined through the lenses of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) and long-term human resource sustainability.

First, strategic governance requires a shift toward proactive workforce forecasting. Rather than responding to vacancies after they occur – a practice that forces school leaders into the adaptive strategies identified in Theme 3 – the Ministry of Education should utilise workforce analytics to anticipate future needs. This involves integrating data on teacher age profiles, retirement projections, and transfer trends with the proficiency requirements of the CEFR and MEB. By accurately predicting workforce demand at the district level, the system can ensure that the "pipeline" of qualified English options is prepared and distributed before shortages become acute. This finding is supported by OECD (2024), which argues that balancing teacher supply and demand has become an urgent priority for education systems that aim to ensure high-quality and equitable teaching and learning outcomes. OECD (2024) also emphasises that addressing teacher shortages requires attention not only to the number of teachers, but also to whether teachers possess the skills required for changing educational needs. In the Malaysian context, this means that workforce forecasting should not be based only on general teacher headcount. It should also consider subject specialisation, TESL qualification, CEFR-related proficiency, school location, and district-level demand.

Second, achieving "high-impact" governance requires a focus on staffing optimisation and equitable allocation. The findings suggest that national supply often fails to reach rural and underserved areas, leading to localised reliance on NOETs. A strategic approach must prioritise distributing qualified specialists to these high-need regions through evidence-based deployment policies. This necessitates "horizontal coordination" between the Ministry's Teacher Management Division, State Education Departments (JPN), and District Education Offices (PPD) to ensure that the goal of teacher quality is not sacrificed for the sake of mere administrative placement. This argument is consistent with Ramachandran et al. (2018) who emphasise that getting the right teachers into the right schools is central to both equity and efficiency in education systems. The issue is therefore not only whether enough qualified English teachers exist nationally, but whether they are distributed equitably across schools and regions. If qualified teachers are concentrated in certain locations, schools in rural, remote, or underserved areas may continue to depend on NOETs even when the system appears adequately staffed overall.

Finally, strategic governance must prioritise human resource sustainability over short-term professional development. While training NOETs may improve immediate classroom confidence, it does not address the structural gap in specialised expertise. A strategic governance model focuses on building a sustainable pipeline of qualified TESL professionals and implementing robust succession planning to ensure that, once a qualified teacher is placed, the system can sustain that specialist presence over time. By treating teacher deployment as a system-level management function (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024) rather than an isolated school-level problem, the Malaysian education system can finally bridge the gap between its world-class policy standards and its classroom realities.

Human Resource Planning: Analysing the Disconnect Between Reform Ambition and Workforce Projections

The findings of this study indicate that a primary reason for the persistence of NOETs is a profound disconnect between educational reform planning and teacher workforce planning. While the Malaysian education system has been successful in creating ambitious policy documents like the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), these initiatives often lack the integrated human resource planning necessary to ensure their success.

From a Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) perspective, effective planning requires a precise alignment between workforce supply and workforce demand. However, this study suggests that workforce projections in Malaysia are frequently insufficient because they rely on macro-level data that fails to account for localised staffing complexities. For instance, while national statistics may show an adequate number of English options, these projections often overlook the high rate of attrition, regional transfer patterns, and the specific proficiency requirements (such as C1 level) mandated by the CEFR. When projections are based on general headcount rather

than specialised competency, a "competency gap" emerges that the system is unprepared to fill (Peck, 2025).

Furthermore, the study reveals a significant weakness in succession planning. A sustainable education system must anticipate retirements and transfers well in advance to maintain a stable pipeline of qualified specialists (OECD, 2025). The findings suggest that the current system is largely reactive; teacher shortages are often only identified after they have already impacted school operations, forcing a reliance on "emergency" NOET deployment. Without robust workforce analytics, including teacher age profiles and regional vacancy trends, the education system remains trapped in a crisis management cycle rather than strategic preparation.

Ultimately, workforce projections remain insufficient because the governance mechanisms at the national level are "decoupled" from the implementation realities at the district and school levels. To achieve human resource sustainability, the Ministry of Education must move beyond administrative data and adopt evidence-based forecasting that treats teacher supply as a central component of every curriculum reform. Without this shift, NOET deployment will remain a permanent, institutionalised solution to a failure in long-term planning.

Policy Implementation: Explaining the Gap Between Reform Ambition and Staffing Outcomes

The findings of this study provide a critical explanation for why extensive English language reforms have failed to eliminate the deployment of non-option English teachers (NOETs). From the perspective of Policy Implementation Theory, educational reform is not a linear process of "top-down" command; rather, it is a complex, multi-layered interaction involving national, state, district, and school-level actors. The persistence of NOETs reveals a significant "decoupling" between the policy intentions of curriculum modernisation and the organisational capacity of the workforce system to support those changes.

As established in Theme 1, the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) were highly successful in strengthening standards for teacher proficiency and curriculum quality. However, the implementation of these standards depends entirely on whether the workforce system can provide teachers who meet these specific benchmarks in every school. The analysis suggests that while the "curriculum reform" has been successfully institutionalised through new textbooks and assessments, the "workforce reform" has been hindered by structural weaknesses in implementation capacity.

This gap is best understood through the concept of implementation coordination. High-impact reform requires vertical alignment between the Ministry's policy goals and the District (PPD) or school-level staffing realities (OECD, 2024). The data indicate that when the workforce supply is insufficient, the system resorts to "pragmatic" adjustments, such as assigning non-specialists to maintain instructional continuity. From an implementation standpoint, this creates a paradox: the school appears to be "implementing" the English reform because classes are being held and the curriculum is being followed, yet the policy's substantive quality is compromised because the teacher lacks the required TESL preparation.

Furthermore, the study suggests that institutionalising NOET deployment (Theme 4) acts as a "coping mechanism" that shields the system from the full impact of the staffing shortage. Because schools manage to keep English classes running through adaptive deployment, there is less external pressure on higher governance levels to fix the underlying issues in workforce forecasting and distribution. In summary, the persistence of NOETs is a visible manifestation of a policy implementation challenge where the "quantity" of teachers available has taken precedence over the "quality" of specialised human capital mandated by the reform. Sustainable reform, therefore, requires more than just updated curriculum documents; it requires a workforce governance framework capable of turning policy standards into classroom reality.

School Leadership: Balancing Policy Expectations with Staffing Realities

The study's findings indicate that school-level leadership is where the "decoupling" between national reform ambitions and operational reality becomes most visible. According to the Educational Workforce Governance lens,

school principals and headteachers function as "street-level" managers who must reconcile the high-stakes demands of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) and CEFR with the immediate, localised reality of teacher shortages.

A critical finding of this research is that school leaders frequently prioritise instructional continuity over policy fidelity. When a qualified English specialist is unavailable due to fragmented distribution or forecasting failures, the principal's decision to deploy a non-option English teacher (NOET) is a pragmatic, "adaptive workforce strategy". From a management perspective, this reflects a rational choice: ensuring that every classroom has a teacher is seen as a more urgent operational requirement than strictly adhering to the "option-match" proficiency standards. In this context, NOET deployment is an operational response to workforce constraints rather than a deliberate policy goal.

However, this study argues that while these leadership decisions solve a short-term staffing crisis, they inadvertently contribute to the institutionalisation of out-of-field teaching. By successfully "managing" the shortage through adaptive deployment, school leaders may unintentionally shield higher levels of governance, such as the District (PPD) or State (JPN), from the true severity of the shortage, thereby reducing the urgency for structural recruitment reforms.

To move toward a more sustainable governance model, the study suggests that school leadership development programs must be redesigned to include robust strategic human resource management and workforce planning elements. Rather than being viewed merely as "curriculum implementers," principals must be empowered with the data and authority to participate in staffing optimisation. This would transition the role of the principal from one of "crisis management" to one of "strategic staffing," where the goal is not just to fill a vacancy, but to advocate for the equitable distribution of specialised human capital across the system.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The findings of this study provide several critical implications for the management of the teaching workforce and the implementation of educational policy in Malaysia. By reframing the persistent deployment of non-option English teachers (NOETs) as a governance and management challenge, the following recommendations are proposed to support sustainable teacher deployment and policy implementation.

Leadership

Educational leaders must move beyond viewing teacher staffing as a purely administrative task and instead integrate workforce planning into broader school improvement strategies. Leadership at the national and state levels should recognise that the success of curriculum reforms, such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB), is intrinsically linked to the strategic management of human capital. Leaders should foster a culture of strategic alignment, ensuring that policy ambitions for teacher quality are always matched by the organisational capacity to deliver qualified specialists to every classroom.

Human Resource Management

Teacher deployment processes should transition toward an evidence-based model supported by workforce analytics. The management of the English teacher workforce should not rely solely on macro-level headcount but should utilise data-driven insights to identify specific competency gaps and regional shortages. Human resource management (HRM) practices must prioritise staffing optimisation, ensuring that teachers with the right expertise are placed in schools where they are most needed, particularly in rural and underserved areas that currently bear the brunt of NOET deployment.

Governance

The Ministry of Education should prioritise strengthening teacher forecasting and allocation systems. Governance must become less reactive and more proactive by adopting long-term succession planning that anticipates retirements, transfers, and future enrolment trends. To reduce fragmentation, there must be enhanced "horizontal

coordination" across different departments and "vertical alignment" between national policy goals and the operational realities at the district (PPD) and state (JPN) levels.

School Management

To bridge the gap between policy and practice, school leaders, including principals and headteachers, should receive structured training in workforce planning and strategic staffing decisions. Currently, school managers often adopt "adaptive strategies" as crisis management to maintain instructional continuity. Professional development for these leaders should empower them to act as strategic workforce managers who can forecast panel needs, manage the distribution of specialised staff within the school, and advocate for more equitable allocation from higher administrative levels.

Policy

National policy monitoring and evaluation systems must transcend a narrow focus on curriculum implementation and instead include specific workforce indicators. Evaluation frameworks should track metrics such as teacher shortages, deployment equity, and the long-term sustainability of staffing. By including these workforce outcomes alongside instructional measures, the Ministry can more effectively identify where governance failures occur and implement targeted interventions to reduce the institutionalised dependence on non-certified instructors.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study provides significant insights for educational leadership and management by shifting the discourse on teacher shortages from a pedagogical problem to a structural governance challenge. The contributions are categorised into theoretical and methodological advancements as follows:

Theoretical Contribution

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the introduction of "Teacher Workforce Governance" as a robust explanatory perspective for understanding policy implementation outcomes in education. While existing literature on non-option English teachers (NOETs) predominantly focuses on individual teacher competencies, language proficiency, or pedagogical effectiveness, this study extends educational management scholarship by positioning NOET deployment as a structural manifestation of governance failure.

By integrating Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) with Policy Implementation Theory, the study develops a multilevel framework to explain the "decoupling" between national reform ambitions (e.g., CEFR and MEB standards) and school-level staffing realities. This framework identifies how fragmented governance, specifically weaknesses in workforce forecasting, teacher allocation, and succession planning, creates an implementation gap that forces school leaders into adaptive, but ultimately institutionalised, staffing responses. Consequently, this research contributes a new theoretical lens for analysing why world-class curriculum reforms often struggle to achieve their intended impact due to misaligned human resource optimisation strategies.

Methodological Contribution

Methodologically, this study demonstrates the significant value of qualitative process-tracing in educational leadership and management research, a technique that remains underutilised in the Malaysian context. The use of process-tracing allows for the identification of specific causal pathways and mechanisms that link high-level policy actions to observable workforce outcomes in schools. This approach moves beyond mere descriptive analysis to explain the "how" and "why" behind the persistence of out-of-field teaching despite over a decade of sustained reform.

Furthermore, the study strengthens the rigour of educational management research through methodological triangulation. By combining extensive documentary analysis of national blueprints and government reports with semi-structured interviews with 14 key stakeholders, ranging from Ministry of Education officials to frontline school

principals and NOETs, the research provides a comprehensive, multi-perspectival account of policy implementation. This robust design validates the causal mechanisms identified in policy documents with the practical, lived experiences of those responsible for workforce decisions, establishing a high standard for evidence-based research in the field.

Practical Contribution

This study offers significant practical value by providing evidence-based recommendations for school leaders and district-level administrators to improve teacher workforce planning and deployment. For school principals and headteachers, the research provides a framework to transition from reactive crisis management toward strategic workforce management. By understanding the causal mechanisms behind teacher shortages, school leaders can better utilise available human resource analytics to forecast panel needs and advocate for more equitable teacher allocation from higher administrative levels. Additionally, the study offers a practical roadmap for managing the existing cohort of non-option English teachers (NOETs). Rather than viewing their deployment as a temporary error, the study suggests implementing structured professional development pathways that enhance the instructional quality of these teachers while long-term, structural workforce solutions are being developed. This practical focus on staffing optimization ensures that instructional continuity is maintained without sacrificing the long-term goal of specialised teacher quality.

Policy Contribution

From a policy perspective, this research supports future educational reforms in Malaysia and similar contexts by identifying the structural variables that sustain the reliance on non-certified instructors. It provides a critical evidence base for the Ministry of Education to strengthen workforce governance and implementation strategies beyond the current focus on curriculum and teacher proficiency standards.

A key contribution to policy design is the recommendation to move toward evidence-based deployment policies that prioritise the equitable distribution of specialised human capital to rural and underserved regions. Furthermore, the study argues for a fundamental shift in policy monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Future reforms should transcend narrow curriculum implementation measures and instead incorporate specific workforce indicators, such as teacher-to-option ratios, regional deployment equity, and staffing sustainability, to ensure that the necessary organisational capacity supports national reform ambitions. Ultimately, this study contributes to a more sustainable model of educational reform where workforce planning is treated as an integrated, rather than secondary, component of national education sector planning.

CONCLUSION

The continued deployment of non-option English teachers should be understood as a teacher workforce governance and educational policy implementation challenge rather than solely as a teacher competency issue. While Malaysia has made substantial progress in strengthening curriculum standards and teacher competency frameworks, these reforms have not been matched by equally robust workforce planning and deployment systems. Sustainable educational reform therefore requires stronger educational leadership, strategic workforce governance, improved teacher forecasting, equitable deployment mechanisms, and coordinated implementation across all levels of the education system. Addressing these structural issues will enable future policy reforms to achieve their intended outcomes and support a more equitable distribution of qualified teachers across Malaysian schools.

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that the continued deployment of non-option English teachers (NOETs) in Malaysian schools must be understood as a workforce governance and policy implementation challenge rather than a reflection of individual teacher competency. While the Malaysian government has successfully introduced world-class reforms, including the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013–2025), the English Language Education Roadmap (2015–2025), and the CEFR framework, this research identifies a critical "implementation gap" where equally robust workforce planning systems have not matched high policy ambitions.

The evidence suggests that structural weaknesses in workforce forecasting, recruitment, and regional distribution continue to undermine national quality goals, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Without a stable pipeline of qualified specialists, school leaders have been forced to adopt adaptive workforce strategies, deploying non-specialists to maintain instructional continuity. What began as a provisional staffing measure has, over time, become an institutionalised organisational habit, shielding the wider governance system from the full impact of teacher shortages while simultaneously decoupling policy intentions from classroom reality.

Ultimately, achieving sustainable educational reform in Malaysia requires a shift from reactive crisis management to strategic workforce governance. This transition necessitates Enhanced Educational Leadership, which specifically focuses on empowering school managers as strategic workforce planners rather than just curriculum implementers. Secondly, Evidence-Based Forecasting, which focuses on utilising workforce analytics to anticipate and resolve competency gaps before they manifest in the classroom. Finally, Vertical and Horizontal Coordination, especially in strengthening the alignment between national policy goals and the operational realities of State (JPN) and District (PPD) education offices.

Addressing these structural and management-level variables is essential for the Malaysian education system to move beyond its dependence on non-certified instructors. By prioritising staffing optimisation and equitable distribution, the Ministry of Education can ensure that the intended outcomes of its major reforms are realised in every school, thereby securing both educational quality and equity for all students.

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