

**Flawed data used to praise Malaysia's English standards, says DAP's Zairil**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**March 29, 2015**

Deputy Education Minister P. Kamalanathan had resorted to using an unscientific and statically invalid survey to claim that Malaysians have the best command of English in Asia, a DAP lawmaker said today.

Bukit Bendera MP Zairil Khir Johari said the survey Kamalanathan had cited yesterday, the English Proficiency Index by Sweden-based EF Education First, drew its results from a sample that was not representative of the population.

"While our government may be desperate to highlight any positive results, they should not resort to using unscientific and questionable studies to convince themselves," said Zairil in a statement today.

"In the case of EF Education First's English Proficiency Index, the sample is neither representative nor randomly selected. Instead, participants voluntarily choose to take part, hence greatly increasing the margin of error and the probability of an unrepresentative sample. Such a survey cannot be considered scientific or a statistically valid evaluation."

He said a proper survey methodology required unbiased sampling that selected a subset of individuals from within a statistical population, according to estimate characteristics of the whole population.

But EF Education First derived its conclusions from data collected via English tests available for free over the Internet, and anyone could take part in it, said the DAP assistant publicity chief.

Yesterday, Kamalanathan told a students' conference in Kuala Lumpur that Malaysians' English was better than Singapore's, and that the country ranked number one in Asia, news portal Malaysiakini reported.

"We are number one and you will be happy to know that behind us is Singapore. And this is not what I said. I've given you the reference point. They (EF Education First) give you a good explanation on how this research is done and where we are," he was quoted as saying in the report.

Kamalanathan reportedly said EF Education First was a research website focused on the use of English in the business community among 65 countries in which English was not a native language.

"When we are doing well, we don't talk about it, but when we do something bad, everyone talks about it," he was quoted as saying at the conference titled "Moderation: youth empowerment and education towards Vision 2020' by What Youth Should Know.

Zairil said today that it did not take a "genius to realise the fallacy of such a study", given that the hypothesis went against all evidence.

He said last year, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) highlighted the poor English skills among Malaysian graduates by quoting a 2011 study by the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), which found that 60% of firms surveyed said an applicant's low command of English was the main reason he failed the interview.

He said WSJ further cited the results of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) for March and July last year, which saw only two out of around 100,000 candidates scoring band 6 or "very good."

While 10,000 candidates scored "good" (band 5) or "competent" (band 4), the other 90,000 candidates received bands ranging from 1 to 3, representing "modest," "limited" and "extremely limited", said Zairil.

"If 90% of our pre-university students cannot score better than 'modest' in their MUET, how is it even possible that our command of English could be said to be the best in Asia?"

Zairil added that the government was aware of the deteriorating standard of English in Malaysia, and this was why it had pumped billions of ringgit into programmes to improve the teaching of the language in the past five years.

He said the Native English-speaking Mentor Programme (PPJBI) cost the Education Ministry RM270 million to hire 360 foreign native English speakers as mentors to train local primary school English teachers.

"Despite questionable results after three years of implementation, such as poorer performance in the UPSR English paper, this programme was renewed at a cost of RM184.4 million for two years from October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2015," said Zairil.

He added that Putrajaya spent more than RM200 million annually on the Upholding Bahasa Malaysia and Strengthening English (MBMMBI) programme since it was launched in 2010, at a total cost of more than RM1 billion over the last five years.

"If our level of English is indeed the 'best in Asia', then why do all the facts, including the government's own actions, say otherwise?"

"Instead of making empty boasts based on questionable sources, our education ministers should concentrate on improving our quality of education," said Zairil. – March 29, 2015.

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/flawed-data-used-to-praise-malaysias-english-standards-says-daps-zairil>