

Foreigners hired as locals can't speak English, MEF says

[Minderjeet Kaur](#)

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Malaysian Employers Federation says workers from Myanmar and the Philippines preferred to fill vacancies in sales and services.



PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) has voiced frustration over the continued shortage of qualified English-speaking workers, saying it is costing the country dearly.

Its executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said despite there being about 200,000 jobless graduates in Malaysia who could fill vacancies in the sales and services sectors, many companies were hiring foreigners who spoke English for these positions.

He said the services industry which accounted for 60% of the economy required workers who could converse well in English.

“Even for simple sales jobs, we depend on people from Myanmar and the Philippines to fill the void,” he told FMT.

“We are constantly facing problems to fill positions requiring locals to speak and write in English. This is not good for us.”

He said years of “flip-flopping” in regard to education policies had contributed to the problem.

The education system has had to bear with inconsistent policies with no priority given to learning English, he added.

Shamsuddin said one way to overcome the shortcoming was for youths to work towards improving their communication skills, especially in mastering the language.

“They can learn from YouTube or register themselves in language schools. It is not very expensive,” he said, adding that there was not enough effort put into such initiatives.

He added that employers also needed people talented in big data – a skill to analyse large data sets to reveal patterns, trends, and associations – to help identify economic conditions.

Shamsuddin said Malaysian employers were currently hiring experts from Bangalore, India, to perform this specialised work.

“About 20% of our economy is based on the digital economy. But shockingly we are not prioritising on developing big data analysts,” he said.

He added that there did not seem to be any plan to develop local talents to meet this demand in the future.

He urged the education ministry, private sector and universities to nurture skills in big data as these were relevant in all sectors.

“We need to look into this immediately. We cannot be looking at outside sources all the time,” he said.