

Contextualising CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum within the Malaysian preschool landscape

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ABSTRACT

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a framework adopted in many countries worldwide to achieve English language education of international standards. In line with global English language education reform, preschool English language curriculum in Malaysia has been aligned with CEFR. In Malaysia, it is found that there is a dearth of research conducted on CEFR-aligned English language curriculum implementation specifically at preschool level. In addition, there are several areas of concern in preschool education that need to be addressed for successful implementation of the curriculum. The study employed a qualitative case study approach with the aim to explore informants' understanding on CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum implementation in Malaysia. Six informants who fulfilled the purposive sampling criteria were involved in in-depth interview sessions using a set of semi-structured interview protocol. The findings were further supported with document analysis of preschool curriculum document, informants' lesson plans and CEFR-aligned language learning materials. Findings from the study revealed three significant themes related to the understanding of the informants on: i) alignment of preschool English language curriculum with CEFR; ii) strategic plan of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum; and iii) induction of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum by Ministry of Education. Towards this end, this paper proposes the need to contextualise the curriculum within the preschool landscape in Malaysia. Issues related to the implementation of the curriculum and solutions are discussed as well.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been widely adapted in many countries across the globe. Council of Europe states that CEFR is a core instrument in providing transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for development of language syllabuses, guidelines of curriculum, design of teaching and learning materials as well as assessment of foreign language proficiency [1]. The CEFR has been adopted in many countries where the English language is a foreign language. Read [2] highlights the importance of cultural and social experiences in language learning as some countries which have adopted the CEFR made modifications to suit their language practices. In Taiwan, for example, while the framework has been used as a yardstick for English language proficiency, the six levels of

proficiency were calibrated with the existing assessment levels in General English Proficiency Test (GEPT). Similarly, in Japan, Negishi and Tono [3] mention that CEFR-J was developed to suit the level of proficiency among Japanese learners. The CEFR was adapted with the assumptions that the Japanese learners are mainly at levels A1 and A2. A pre-A1 level was added and the A1 level was divided into three sub-levels (A1.1, A1.2 and A1.3) in order to differentiate among Japanese learners with a very basic amount of English ability. While Levels A2 to B2 were further divided into two sub-levels. China also developed a Common Chinese Framework of Reference for Languages (CCFR) to cater to Chinese learners.

In Australia and New Zealand, the curricula and language assessment were very much aligned to existing national framework. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for example, is well established and gives accurate levels of proficiency which are well accepted internationally. However, there are efforts to align local assessment and curricula to CEFR. This is very much contextualised to institutions. In Vietnam, due to the low level of proficiency among the learners, CEFR-V was developed to suit the local context. Khang [4] emphasised that lack of training on CEFR-based materials and assessment is still a challenge although CEFR has been implemented for ten years in Vietnam. Lee *et al.* [5] reviewed execution of CEFR-aligned curriculum in Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, Japan, China, Taiwan and Malaysia. The findings revealed the differences between European countries and Asian countries. It is not compulsory for the European countries to adopt CEFR as it is considered as alternative benchmark as compared to the Asian countries where governments and educational bodies forcefully implemented CEFR to improve English language proficiency. The findings also identified common problems faced by the countries which are insufficient teacher training and professional development. Similarly, Kassim and Hashim [6] pinpointed some issues related to lack of training and appropriate materials based on CEFR implementation in European and Asian countries. In relation to teacher training and professional development, it is crucial for teachers to understand the underlying principles of CEFR and use it appropriately to the social and cultural context.

In a similar direction, in Malaysia, CEFR has been adopted to the national curriculum from preschool to secondary school level since 2015. This paper will discuss ways in which CEFR is contextualised within the preschool landscape. For the purpose of this paper, contextualisation is defined as the process on how CEFR was translated or operationalised for implementation of preschool curriculum in Malaysia. The paper will also highlight areas of challenges and strategies that can be considered as solutions. English language education reform in Malaysia has significantly undergone series of crucial stages in an attempt to achieve English language education of international standards. This is in accordance with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB), Ministry of Education Malaysia [7], a blueprint that describes in detail the development plan for the nation's education. MEB has envisioned eleven shifts as directions for the Ministry of Education Malaysia. In relation to English language, the second shift of the MEB aims for every child to be proficient in Malay language and English language and is encouraged to learn an additional language while the fourth shift is to transform teaching into the profession of choice. The fourth shift promotes the importance of improving the quality of teaching profession through continuous professional development.

In line with the MEB, the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap, Ministry of Education Malaysia [8] is a masterplan in paving the way to improve the English language education standards in Malaysia. The roadmap focuses on the adoption of CEFR in English language curriculum from preschool, primary and up to secondary level in Malaysia. The adoption of CEFR in English language curriculum centres on three key areas mainly; curriculum, teaching and learning as well as assessment. Nawawi *et al.* [9] elaborated initiatives taken by Ministry of Education Malaysia to ensure smooth implementation of CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation. English Language Education Reform 2015-2025: Planning in Retrospect, Implementation and Prospective Planning, Ministry of Education Malaysia [10] has outlined series of training on CEFR-aligned curriculum which are CEFR familiarisation, learning materials adaptation (LMA), curriculum induction (CI) and formative assessment (FA). These training are crucial for effective dissemination of information on CEFR-aligned curriculum in order to successfully implement it.

The CEFR-aligned curriculum is indeed a manifestation of the aims to achieve English language education of international standards. Many countries have aligned their English language education with CEFR. Valax [11], Kantarcioglu [12], Kir and Sulu [13], and Hosseinifar [14] conducted CEFR-related studies focusing on English language teachers' knowledge and attitude towards CEFR, impact of CEFR to curriculum design and alignment of assessment with CEFR. Malaysia has also moved forward in adopting CEFR specifically on curriculum, teaching and learning as well as assessment. In recent years, several studies have been taken to understand the implementation of CEFR in the primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. Goh *et al.* [15] carried out systematic review of barriers and strategies on the use of English as a medium of instruction among preschool teachers. Still focusing on preschool teachers, Goh and Loy [16] further explored factors that influence the use of English as a medium of instruction. However, there is a dearth of research which focus on the implementation of CEFR at preschool level. Therefore, this study aims to explore the understanding of the informants on the implementation of CEFR-aligned preschool English

language curriculum. It is important to study how CEFR is implemented within the preschool context in Malaysia as it will shed light on further enhancement of the framework for the benefit of preschool education.

As CEFR is the focal point of discussion, it is pertinent to highlight its role in reforming the English language education. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment [1] defines Common European Framework (CEF) as what language learners have to learn to do in an attempt to use language for communication and to act effectively. The CEFR consists of six proficiency levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 which is referred as the CEFR global scale. It ranges from A1 and A2 for basic user, B1 and B2 for independent user and C1 and C2 for proficient user. These proficiency levels can measure language learners' progress through the "can do" descriptors. The "can do" descriptors illustrate the role of language users and learners as "social agents" who have to accomplish tasks based on given situations. In accomplishing the tasks, language users and learners have to use their general knowledge and skills to perform all kinds of action. In addition, language users and learners also have to demonstrate their communicative language competence as they use linguistic means in interacting with others. Figure 1 outlines the CEFR global scale in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment [1].

The CEFR global scale is reflected in the aspirational targets set for Malaysia English Language Education. Figure 2 illustrates the aspirational targets in Teacher Guide: Implementing the CEFR-Aligned Curriculum Planning and Managing Learning: Second Edition [17]. Based on Figure 2, the aspirational target for preschool is pre-A1 level. The pre-A1 level refers to a milestone half way towards A1, basic user. This indicates that preschool pupils who are at their early stage of language learning should be able to acquire the basic general and linguistic knowledge as basic users of English language. Thus, it can be concluded that by 2025, the preschool pupils nationwide are expected to at least acquire the basic skills and knowledge as they prepare themselves to be basic users of English language. As CEFR focuses on the importance of communicative competence, preschool pupils are exposed to interesting language learning activities which encourage them to actively use the language. This is in line with the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) which highlight that language learning takes place when learners actively use the target language through various communicative activities. Active communication plays crucial role in language learning of preschool pupils.

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Figure 1. CEFR global scale



Figure 2. Aspirational targets 2025

The other related learning theories include cognitive constructivism by Piaget [18] and social constructivism by Vygotsky and Cole [19]. Piaget [18] draws attention to the importance of mental framework called schema in organising and interpreting information among learners. Learner's construct meaning through their experiences as they actively assimilate new information and link them to their prior knowledge. In addition, learners also learn to accommodate their schema to continuously construct meaning meaningfully. Whereas Vygotsky and Cole [19] pinpoints that learners construct meaning through social interaction with other learners and will later develop themselves individually. It is pertinent to note that preschool pupils indeed go through these phases in constructing meaning as they acquire language. Furthermore, Tyler's rationale [20] which focuses on the principles of developing curriculum is also related to the study. The principles of Tyler's rationale [20] include purposes of the educational institution, educational experiences related to the purposes, organisation of the educational experiences and evaluation of the educational experiences. The CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum is indeed tailored to Tyler's rationale as its principles are taken into consideration in developing the curriculum.

Another important literature that needs to be addressed for this study is cascade training aspect. Gilpin [21] describes cascade model as training which consists of several levels conducted by trainers from a level above. The main aim is to execute changes of a large scale. Gilpin [21] further states that cascade training is cost effective because it employs existing teaching staff as co-trainers. Although it is considered cost effective, Hayes [22] points out the issue of dilution of training in which less and less is understood the further the information is disseminated down the cascade. It is also pointed out that failure of top levels expertise to totally concentrate on training as one of the challenges of cascade training. This has resulted the cascade training to be transmissive at all levels. In an attempt to improve the execution of cascade training, Harper *et al.* [23] propose a conceptual framework on train-the-trainer approaches for professional development. The conceptual framework zooms into three essential domains; substantive, structural as well as relational. Substantive refers to the specified knowledge and skills that are disseminated to the participants of the training. Furthermore, structural focuses on the structure used in transferring the knowledge to the participants while relational points out how the trainers establish productive relationship and engagement with the participants during training.

2. METHOD

This study is qualitative in nature as it focuses on case study. Creswell [24] states that case study is a method of exploring real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases), through in-depth data collection. In the context of this study, case study is relevant as it explores real-world context of the implementation of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum among preschool teachers. Data were gathered through in-depth interview. Morris [25] states that in-depth interview is a process of asking questions and generating responses from experts who has direct experiences on the topic of interest. Therefore, in-depth interview sessions using a semi-structured interview protocol were conducted with six informants who fulfilled the purposive sampling criteria. The semi-structured interview protocol consists of four sections: i) understanding of the informants on CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum; ii) implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum;

iii) benefits and challenges of conducting CEFR-aligned language learning activities; and iv) strategies to improve the implementation of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum.

The questions in the semi-structured interview protocol were designed specifically for informants who fulfilled the purposive sampling criteria. Patton [26] brings about the idea of “information rich” participants in choosing participants for purposive sampling while Bryman [27] further pinpoints the importance of choosing participants based on specific research goals in mind. Therefore, there are some criteria listed for the purposive sampling of the study. The informants should be the preschool teachers teaching national preschool or national-type preschools and have the qualification of diploma or degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme from local or international universities or teacher education institutes. In addition, the informants should have at least ten years of teaching experience teaching preschool pupils and they should have been trained by Cambridge English in Training of Trainers (ToT) conducted in 2017. The informants should represent the five different zones in Malaysia; Central, Northern, Southern, East Coast and East Malaysia.

Document analysis was also conducted to corroborate the findings of the in-depth interview sessions. According to Bloomberg and Volpe [28], document analysis is essential in confirming insights gathered from other data collection methods which reflects the values and beliefs of the informants in the setting. Thus, preschool curriculum document as well as informants’ lesson plans and CEFR-aligned language learning materials were analysed accordingly. In relation to ethics, the study adhered to the ethical procedures set by Ministry of Education Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia’s Ethic Committee. Another important aspect in qualitative study is trustworthiness. Creswell and Dana [29] emphasise on the importance of checking data and interpretations with the informants in order to confirm the credibility of their narrative account. Member checking sessions were carried out with the informants to ensure the accuracy of data. Furthermore, there were nine experts who were involved in validation of semi-structured interview protocol, the themes generated from the data as well as the methodology of the research. An external peer debriefer was also involved in a peer debriefing session. Janesick [30] depicts peer debriefing as a process whereby a qualified peer researcher reviews and assesses the codes, categories and themes from a qualitative study. In terms of data analysis, Flick [31] defines data analysis as the process of making meaning by classifying and interpreting linguistic materials. The data was manually analysed based on Braun and Clarke [32] thematic analysis and Miles *et al.* [33] interactive analysis model.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In contextualising CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum within Malaysian preschool landscape, it is pertinent to discuss the understanding of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum among the informants. The data gathered from informants revealed three main themes: i) alignment of preschool English language curriculum with CEFR; ii) strategic plan of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum; and iii) induction of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum by Ministry of Education. The first theme elucidates the understanding of the informants on the role of CEFR in the preschool English language curriculum. The second theme focuses on teacher’s kit which functions as guideline for the informants in implementing the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. The third theme explores the process of inducting the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum to the informants. Figure 3 illustrates the understanding of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum among the informants.

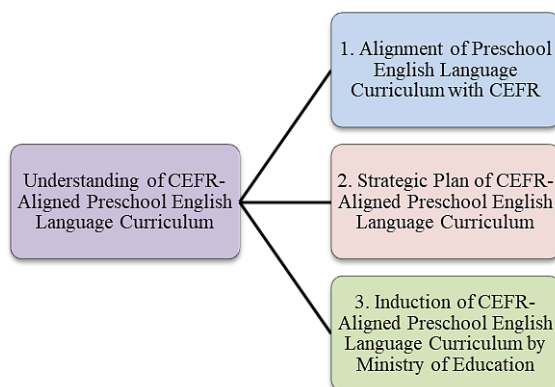


Figure 3. Understanding of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum

3.1. Alignment of preschool English language curriculum with CEFR

The first theme highlights the knowledge of the informants on the alignment of the preschool English language curriculum with CEFR. Informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 demonstrated basic knowledge on CEFR. They knew the basic concept of CEFR as a framework for language proficiency and pointed out the level in which the preschool pupils should achieve. They were aware that the aspirational target for preschool pupils is set at pre-A1 level. However, when they were further prompted on their knowledge of how the preschool English language curriculum was aligned with CEFR, they could not really explain it. Informant 2 expresses his basic understanding of CEFR in the following excerpt.

“From my understanding, CEFR is an English curriculum that we use for preschool. An approach that we use based on international reference. A reference that we use as a guideline for English language.” (In-depth interview 2, lines 25-27)

Alih *et al.* [34] revealed similar findings of teachers' knowledge on CEFR. It is found that although the teachers were aware of the CEFR levels, not all teachers were well versed of what each level indicated. It is also identified that not all teachers were aware of the aims and objectives of the CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation as some teachers mentioned it was imperative for them to do so. However, Informant 5 and Informant 6 demonstrated sound knowledge on CEFR. Informant 5 in the following excerpt expresses her comprehensive knowledge on CEFR.

“During the Curriculum Induction Training of Trainers, Cambridge English did explain about CEFR. In CEFR, they have a global scale. So, let's say, for the preschool pupils' level, the level is pre-A1 level. We have A1 and A2 for Basic User, B1 and B2 for Independent User, and C1 and C2 for Proficient User. So, that's roughly the CEFR levels. So, we hope that all preschool pupils, regardless of their backgrounds, will reach one level of English proficiency in CEFR, which is the pre-A1 level. The same goes to other language learners according to their educational levels, whether it is preschool, primary, secondary or the following level.” (In-depth interview 5, lines 12-18)

The other aspect highlighted by the informants on the alignment of preschool English language curriculum with CEFR is progression of language skills. It can be seen that the CEFR descriptors portray the progression of mainly the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Informant 4 expresses her view on the progression of language skills in the following excerpt.

“We also have CEFR for Year 1. It might be a little bit different in terms of games, or the levels might be higher. The target for CEFR in preschool is more listening and speaking, so when they are in Year 1, they are already familiar with the words, so it will eventually help in their language learning. I also look at Year 1 syllabus, because my children are also learning it. The games are different and the sentences are longer. They also learn more vocabulary. Like preschool, the sentences are shorter, easier and repeated.” (In-depth interview 4, lines 93-98)

Based on the excerpt, it is evident that the informant understands that pre-A1 level set to be achieved by the preschool pupils indeed prepare them to progress gradually in the four language skills in order to be basic users of English. The knowledge on CEFR as well as the progression of language skills represent the integration of the principles of CLT with CEFR. Preschool pupils are encouraged to actively use English during the various and interesting English language activities prepared by the informants. In the process of communicating through the various language activities, preschool pupils gradually progress in the four language skills.

Another crucial aspect to be looked into is in terms of the understanding of the informants of how CEFR descriptors were translated or operationalised in the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. Uri [35] discovered that most of the teachers agreed that it is challenging for them to integrate CEFR in their teaching if they did not fully comprehend the CEFR descriptors. Therefore, it is crucial for the informants to fully comprehend the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum so that they will be able to translate it in their English language lessons accordingly. Furthermore, the informants also shared the fact that many teachers in their states had little confidence in implementing the lessons due to the lack of proficiency in the language. This issue could be common as most preschool teachers are not trained to teach English Language. In the effort to contextualise the curriculum, this issue needs to be addressed.

3.2. Strategic plan of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum

The second theme pinpoints the role of the teacher's kit as the main guiding document in implementing the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. The teacher's kit outlines the flow of English language lessons the informants adhered to. Informant 6 expresses her point of view on the comprehensiveness of the teacher's kit as a guideline for the informants in the following excerpt.

"In order to conduct our English language lessons, we are provided with the teacher's kit. Everything has been arranged for us. For example, the teacher's kit has complete lessons. If you cannot conduct them, it means you do not want to do it. You do not have to do anything because everything is there for you. You just have to follow them as the lessons have been arranged in such a way for you to carry out the lessons." (In-depth interview 6, lines 56-60)

Based on Informant's 6 point of view, the teacher's kit serves as a complete guide for the informants in conducting their English language activities in the preschool classroom. The teacher's kit developed by the Curriculum Development Division, Ministry of Education has indeed portrayed the integration of cognitive constructivism by Piaget [18], social constructivism by Vygotsky and Cole [19] and Tyler's rationale [20]. The English language activities suggested in the teacher's kit activate the preschool pupils' schema as they construct meaning through their experiences in their language learning. In addition, the preschool pupils also construct meaning through active interaction with their peers as they actively interact during the English language activities conducted by the informants.

The teacher's kit has also comprehensively developed according to the curriculum development principles of Tyler's rationale [20]. The purposes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum have been set based on MEB, Ministry of Education Malaysia [7] and English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap, Ministry of Education Malaysia [8]. Then, the educational experiences related to the purposes were designed and organised accordingly. The design and organisation of the educational experiences carefully took into consideration the kind of language learning activities suitable for the preschool pupils and the CEFR aspirational target set to be achieved by them at the preschool level which is the pre-A1 level. The design and organisation of educational experiences were based on the CEFR descriptors set for pre-A1 level. The final principle requires the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum to be evaluated in order to provide improvement for future curriculum development.

Another aspect that is highlighted in this theme includes the role of encounter, engage and exploit (EEE) model in English language teaching (ELT). The EEE model is introduced in the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. Encounter stage focuses on the informants introducing new words and phrases preschool pupils have to learn through sight, hearing and movement. Then, the engage stage stresses on the informants engaging the preschool pupils with the language in controlled situations. The controlled situations refer to repetitive language learning activities that are meaningful for the preschool pupils. The last stage which is the exploit stage highlights the informants encouraging preschool pupils to exploit the language that they have learned in freer contexts. The EEE model in ELT reflects the development of the four language skills specifically for preschool pupils at young age. The EEE model also portrays the principles of CLT when the preschool pupils are engaged with repetitive language learning activities that encourage them to actively communicate with their peers. Informant 4 in the following excerpt expresses her view on the flow of the EEE model in ELT.

"In CEFR-aligned curriculum, we do not teach preschool pupils to spell. Instead, we introduce the words first. Then, we conduct various activities so that pupils are engaged with the words. Pupils will easily remember the words when they love the activities. Reading will be later acquired naturally." (In-depth interview 4, lines 242-244)

Basically, in this theme, the informants have revealed their positive take on how the teacher's kit has been organised, providing huge support and clarity for preschool teachers.

3.3. Induction of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum by Ministry of Education

The third theme emphasises on the process of inducting the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum to the informants. The information on CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum was cascaded through cascade training model. The cascade training model consists of ToT, first tier and second tier. In ToT, master trainers from each state in Malaysia were chosen and trained by Cambridge English Trainers. They were the first to be getting the information on CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum on national level. Then, for the first tier, the national master trainers cascaded the information down to the experienced teachers at their states. Finally, for the second tier, the first-tier

experienced teachers further cascaded the information to other local preschool teachers at their respective districts. Informant 6 expresses her concerns in terms of dilution of information when the cascade training model was used in the following excerpt.

“I am lucky to be the master trainer for my state. As master trainers, we get firsthand information and firsthand training. Although there might be possibility of dilution of information in the process, but when we conduct the cascade training based on the materials provided, it should go well because everything has been arranged for us. The teacher’s kit has all the complete lessons.” (In-depth interview 6, lines 52-55)

Similarly, Informant 5 points out the possibility of dilution of information in implementing the cascade training model.

“As master trainers, we have already trained our district trainers. But when they trained their teachers at their respective districts, some might use “short cut” to disseminate information and some might not really follow the flow of the information in the cascade training. So, there might be dilution of information there too.” (In-depth interview 5, lines 314-317)

The issue of dilution of information is discussed in the implementation of cascade training model. As defined by Gilpin [21], cascade training model is conducted by trainers from a level above which consists of several levels with the aim to execute changes of a large scale. However, Hayes [22] stresses on the possibility of dilution of information in which less and less is understood the further the information is cascaded down the cascade training model which causes the training to be transmissive at all levels. In relation to the cascade training model used in cascading the information on CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum from the ToT to the second tier, it was identified that the informants voiced out the issue of dilution of information. Harper *et al.* [23] propose a train-the-trainer conceptual framework which zooms into three crucial domains; substantive, structural and relational. It focuses on the specified knowledge and skills cascaded in the training; the structure of how the specified knowledge and skills are transferred as well as the relationship of the trainers with the participants of the training. In conclusion, the three domains; substantive, structural and relational must be cohesively integrated in order to ensure successful and effective cascade training.

In an attempt to corroborate the data from the in-depth interviews, documents such as preschool curriculum document, informants’ lesson plans and CEFR-aligned language learning materials were analysed accordingly. Based on the documents analysis, it can be concluded that the three themes are also reflected in the documents. The informants adhered to the preschool curriculum document, which is the teacher’s kit as main reference. The latest content standards and learning standards which were aligned with CEFR were also used in preparing the lesson plans and language learning materials. The content standards and learning standards represent the knowledge and skills preschool pupils set to acquire. The lesson plans together with the language learning materials prepared by the informants adhered to the teacher’s kit. The documents also followed the flow of the EEE model highlighted in the teacher’s kit. The document analysis indeed portrayed that information on the induction of the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum has been cascaded to the informants accurately.

With regards to the implementation of the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum, though data from the discussion revealed that preschool teachers have sufficient knowledge on CEFR, there are issues that require attention. In Malaysia, preschool teachers have qualification in ECE obtained from universities or teacher education institutes. The ECE curriculum emphasises on the syllabus related to child development. Very little focus is given to the development of English language proficiency among the preschool teachers. The Cambridge Baseline Study conducted by Cambridge English in 2013 as reported in English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap, Ministry of Education Malaysia [8], revealed that most of the preschool pupils have low English Language proficiency (below A1). This issue is also apparent among the preschool teachers as they are not English language teachers. Data from this study also highlights the issue as the informants highlighted that some of the preschool teachers at their states were not confident in teaching English as they lack English language proficiency. It is of utmost importance that efforts are taken to enhance preschool teachers’ level of proficiency in English language. Language training through continuous professional development should be provided as well as additional support in terms of pedagogies, methodologies and teaching resources. This is supported by Kaur *et al.* [36] in their recent study which highlight that teachers did face challenges in terms of lack of resources and pedagogical issue in implementing the CEFR-aligned curriculum.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum has indeed paved a way forward for preschool English language education in Malaysia to be on par with other countries which have also adapted CEFR in their English language educational reform. However, it is important to consider the need to contextualise the CEFR in the preschool ELT context in order to further cater to Malaysian preschool pupils. In addition, issues such as the lack of English language proficiency which leads to having low confidence level in conducting English language lesson should also be addressed accordingly. It is hoped that future enhancement of the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum takes into account the need to provide continuous professional development specifically in language training to further enhance preschool teachers' English language proficiency. The novelty of the study is reflected in its unique contribution to the global body of knowledge of preschool education specifically in ELT practice. The study further redounds to Malaysian preschool ELT practice as it revealed the reality of the current implementation of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum and addressed the issues related to the implementation accordingly. The study also supports language learning theories such as cognitive and social constructivism in ELT for preschool pupils. In addition, the study significantly highlights the crucial principles of Tyler's rationale and their relation to CEFR as a framework for language proficiency. It is recommended that future studies reach out to a larger sample of preschool teachers in order to gain more insights for further improvement on preschool English language curriculum development.

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Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the

institutional review board or equivalent committee from Ministry of Education Malaysia with the reference letter number, KPM.600-3/2/3-eras(14947).

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [NI], upon reasonable request.




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