



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MODERN EDUCATION
(IJMOE)
www.ijmoe.com



CEFR AS A GUIDING FRAMEWORK: ENHANCING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AMONG MALAYSIAN KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

Azlan Abdul Rahman^{1*}, Sharina Saad², Razanawati Nordin³, Chuah Bee Peng⁴, Syahrini Shawalludin⁵

¹ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani
Email: azlanar@uitm.edu.my

² Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani
Email: sharina854@uitm.edu.my

³ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani
Email: razanawati@uitm.edu.my

⁴ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani
Email: jacqueline623@uitm.edu.my

⁵ College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani
Email: syahrini@uitm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 05.01.2025

Revised date: 18.01.2025

Accepted date: 20.03.2025

Published date: 27.03.2025

To cite this document:

Abdul Rahman, A., Saad, S., Nordin, R., Chuah, B. P., & Shawalludin, S. (2025). CEFR As A Guiding Framework: Enhancing English Proficiency Among Malaysian Kindergarten Children. *International Journal of Modern Education*, 7 (24), 1183-1196.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMOE.724083

Abstract:

The increasing global demand for English proficiency has positioned early childhood education as a critical juncture for language acquisition, particularly in Malaysia, where English serves as a second language (ESL) and plays a pivotal role in education and economic development. However, despite ongoing efforts to improve English language teaching, significant challenges persist, particularly in aligning pedagogical practices with internationally recognized frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). While the CEFR has been widely implemented at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels in Malaysia, its application in kindergarten settings remains underexplored, leaving a critical gap in early childhood education. This conceptual paper aims to propose a theoretical framework that aligns CEFR principles with the unique demands of English language teaching among Malaysian kindergarten children. A comprehensive review of existing literature highlights the need for developmentally appropriate approaches, culturally responsive pedagogies, and enhanced teacher training to address disparities in resource availability and multilingual contexts. The proposed framework integrates CEFR's Pre-A1 level descriptors, communicative competence, and task-based language teaching with play-based learning environments ensuring alignment with both

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)



global benchmarks and local needs. Key findings suggest that adapting CEFR principles for kindergarten education can significantly enhance English proficiency while fostering cognitive, social, and academic development. The implications of this study extend to policymakers, educators, and researchers, emphasizing the importance of age-specific guidelines, professional development programs, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. By addressing these gaps, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on early language acquisition and provides a roadmap for enhancing English proficiency among Malaysian kindergarteners. Further research is needed to empirically validate the proposed framework and explore its long-term impact on children's language development and global readiness.

Keywords:

CEFR Implementation, English Proficiency, Malaysian Kindergarten Education, Early Childhood Language Acquisition, Play-Based Learning

Introduction

The demand for English proficiency has grown worldwide making early childhood education a period of significance for second language acquisition. As a second language (ESL) that shapes education, economic development, and international communication in Malaysia, nurturing English proficiency from a young age is imperative (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2021). Proficiency in English not only improves educational performance, but provides learners with the tools they need to be successful in a globalized economy. Despite the persistence of existing initiatives to elevate English language teaching and learning, substantial challenges remain, especially evident through the lack of consistency between results found in language classrooms and universally accepted proficiency reference tools like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was introduced in Malaysia in 2016 based on the government's aim to standardize English language education by establishing a common framework for evaluating language skills and proficiency at six different levels of proficiency (A1 Beginner → C2 Proficient) (Little, 2019). This approach provides structural guidelines while allowing flexibility for developers in context and curriculum design, with a focus toward learner autonomy, communicative competence, and task-based language teaching.

Although the CEFR has been widely discussed, including at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, it has received scant attention in early childhood education, particularly in the context of kindergarten (4–6-year-old) children. This gap is troubling because research repeatedly reaffirms that early childhood is a key stage to learn language when exposure to systematic yet fun language guidance can have a tremendous effect on later proficiency (García & Wei, 2020; Norton & Toohey, 2022). At this developmental stage, young learners are particularly attuned to language input, and early strategies help develop a base for life-long learning. Moreover, research indicates that incorporating CEFR-aligned purposes into playscapes can promote simultaneous linguistic and cognitive development (Nikolov, 2021). For example, Nikolov's (2021) study on early language education shows how interactive and playful activities can support vocabulary learning and pronunciation among young students. Likewise, García and Wei's (2020) work on translanguaging emphasizes the value of drawing on children's

multilingual repertoires to facilitate second language learning; this is a notion with relevance to Malaysia's multilingual environment.

While, the use of CEFR has great potentials, the application of CEFR in Malaysian kindergartens is still face additional challenges. Such challenges involve differing teacher training qualifications, scarcity of resources, or the need to manage the tension between local linguistic and cultural diversity and global standards (Nguyen & Hamid, 2023). In addition, teachers are not provided with clear principles and instructions on how to apply CEFR to the context of kindergarten children, for whom age-relevant and play-based approaches are vital to language learning Kalamida (2004) Krampe (2017). Furthermore, as educators need to navigate the complexities of integrating English in teaching—all while upholding and preserving children's native languages, given that no adult language is a stand-alone entity (Lin et al., 2022). This will be achieved through a conceptualization that links theory and practice while offering the tool needed to add CEFR-oriented activities to the work of early childhood educators. Nguyen and Hamid (2023) have recently pointed out the need for professional development programs for early childhood educators, whereas Lin et al. highlight the impact of culturally relevant materials on creating inclusive language learning contexts. The lack of exploration on how CEFR can be adapted to suit the unique needs of the kindergarten children in Malaysia calls for greater attention towards ensuring that the children in Malaysia have access to a language foundation that will assist them in meeting with global language standards.

It was aspiration so in approaching this issue it is very importance when it come to the first year of learning language important for the process become the cornerstone of cognitive, social and academic knowledge. Studies have also consistently demonstrated the positive relationship between early exposure to structured language education and a child's ability to develop linguistic skills, such as vocabulary, pronunciation and comprehension (Bialystok, 2019; Snow, 2021). Moreover, integrating CEFR principles into kindergarten curricula might establish a standardized yet adaptable framework for English education that guarantees alignment of competencies with international standards and studies. Kids just starting their education will grow with good preparation for success if they can read and write well from their formative years — and if they have the communicative skills to survive in the ever-connected future. Academically speaking, this investigation provides critical insights into the aspects of the CEFR integration in kindergarten settings whereby the examination of genuine adoption of CEFR-based methodologies can help promote culturally responsive pedagogies in multilingual contexts.

Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go to implement CEFR-based practices in kindergartens. Most studies on the CEFR implementation have targeted at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Khalid et al., 2021). While studies like those by Rajendran et al. While previous studies such as those by Kaur & Djatmiko (2022) have investigated the challenges of aligning CEFR standards with the Malaysian ESL classrooms, they do not account for the unique needs of kindergarten children and their developmental stages. In addition, while frameworks such as the CEFR promote communicative competence and learner-centered, child-centered approaches, there is a dearth of empirical research on adapting these principles to fit play-based and activity-based learning environments commonly found in early childhood education (Bialystok & Sullivan, 2020). Paradoxically, however, this gap in the literature is troubling, because kindergarten is a critical phase for language acquisition; during this period,

exposure to structured (yet captivating) language instruction can have a large impact on future proficiency (Snow, 2021). The absence of conceptual models specific to the local context of Malaysian kindergarten underscores the importance of probing into the effective implementation of CEFR to facilitate English language proficiency within this demographic. This emphasis is just as important to address this gap, for educators, in creating developmentally appropriate curricula and for Malaysian kindergarteners to develop the necessary foundational skills to achieve global language benchmarks.

This conceptual paper primarily seeks to establish a theoretical framework that bridges the relevance of the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) with the specific demands of the teaching of English as a second language in Malaysian kindergartens. This paper fills the aforementioned gap by rallying the current literature in its attempt to provide an innovative approach on how the CEFR can be ameliorated to suit them. On a more specific note, the three core arguments within this paper focus on contextualising the CEFR into play-based contexts through three lenses: a developmentally sensitive approach, a needed appreciation for culturally responsive pedagogies that consider the multilingual nature of Malaysia and the role of teacher development and training to enact effective CEFR reform. They address the following research purposes: (1) to identify challenges faced in implementing the CEFR in early education and (2) to propose an appropriate framework for English language teaching in kindergarten (3) to delineate the implications for policy and practice in relation to the proposed framework.

The following sections are laid out to serve this function, providing the reader a step by step examination of the topic. The second section follows this introduction with detail literature review where a synthesis of literature regarding CEFR implementation, the early years' language acquisition and the particularities of the Malaysian context are aesthetically scripted. The third section presents the conceptual framework, detailing its theoretical foundations and practical implications. The fourth section discusses the extant literature, identifies future potential research areas including cross-disciplinary areas, suggests policy development, and draws conclusions. The conclusion highlights the main contributions achieved within the framework of the present paper and future lines of research, mainly through empirical studies capable of contrasting the model proposed with data comprised by infrastructures of kindergartens implemented in practice. By adopting this comprehensive framework, the paper intends to chart out a pragmatic path towards improving English capabilities of Malaysian children in kindergarten within the CEFR overarching guides.

Literature Review

Since its inception, the CEFR has achieved widespread adoption across educational systems and contexts in the world, including Malaysia, to gauge, standardize and improve English language proficiency. Though the CEFR has been thoroughly studied and implemented at secondary and tertiary levels, there is a gap in research related to its implementation in early childhood education, especially among kindergarten children. The literature review presented in this thesis seeks to review the relevant literature on the role of CEFR in education, examine the theories and models pertinent to the adaptation of CEFR for young learners, and to highlight key gaps in the current knowledge base. In doing so, this review lays the groundwork for proposing a conceptual framework for improving English proficiency among Malaysian kindergarten children, with the CEFR serving as a guiding framework.

Defining and Explaining the Role of CEFR in Education

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has developed into the globally used framework for measuring language proficiency and informing language teaching. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is a standardized system of describing language proficiencies, developed by the Council of Europe, with six proficiency levels, from A1 (Beginner) to C2 (Proficient). The main purpose of this framework is to increase transparency and consistency in language teaching, learning, and assessment by providing transparent scales of communicative competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Council of Europe, 2020). The approach adopted by the CEFR is characterized by descriptors that are flexible and adaptable enough to be relevant for different contexts and population groups. The CEFR was implemented in Malaysia in 2016, through where it became institutionalized in the national English language curriculum as the government's initiative to standardize the teaching of English language in Malaysia and multiply its learners according to the standards of international learners (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2021). Against this backdrop, this integration is intended to spur learners' global competitiveness, especially in an increasingly globalised world in which English acts as a lingua franca for communication, trade and education (Kirkpatrick, 2020). Nevertheless, although the CEFR has been applied extensively across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education, its application at the general early childhood education remains limited or undertheorized, hence a major gap that needs to be filled.

The CEFR is used in an educational context as ensuring both a diagnostic knowledge and a guide for education process. It is learner-centred, focusing on approaches that promote task-based language teaching, highlighting real-world communicative competence. For example, the framework invites teachers to create tasks that reflect real communication situations, where language can be used meaningfully by students (North, 2020). This focus on actual, hands-on experience can take its place among modern educational principles that promote learning by doing and social learning. Furthermore, the CEFR's emphasis on communicative competence aligns with seminal theories like Krashen's Input Hypothesis, suggesting that language acquisition is most effective when learners are exposed to language that is just beyond their current level of comprehension (Krashen, 2019). In the context of early childhood education, this means that kindergarten would incorporate age-appropriate material and activities that were Pre-A1 aspect of the CEFR range, so that children are able to thrive in challenge without being overwhelmed or under-challenged. The principles of the CEFR also correlate closely to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which highlights the importance of social interaction and scaffolding in both cognitive and linguistic development. We do know that for young learners, vicarious experience through collaborative activity and guided participation have been shown to be powerful mechanisms for gaining a foundation of language skills.

Challenging, so even though the CEFR is widely accepted, its application in early childhood education poses challenges. However, based on research, implementing CEFR in kindergarten classrooms involves sensitivity to the developmental stages as well as socioemotional needs of young learners (Snow, 2021). For instance, the CEFR mainly focuses on academic forms of instruction and therefore should be mindful when aligning with play-based learning environments central to early childhood education. Moreover, the socio-cultural and linguistic heterogeneity among regions of Malaysia makes it more complex, wherein educators often struggle to balance local level language diversity while meeting CEFR requirement on a global level (Cummins, 2021). That effort is challenged by inequities in teacher preparation,

resources to implement those approaches, and the need for pedagogy that is culturally responsive, and respects children's dynamic language use and home languages. It is suggested that a conceptual orientation to bridge the gap between theory and practice by generating a theoretical and practical framework in which educators are affirmed with the information of how they can implement CEFR-oriented tasks into a play-based events. Recent studies by Rajendran et al. as done in (2022), where they argue that such frameworks are beneficial to the holistic language development of Malaysian kindergarteners. In a similar vein, Bialystok and Sullivan (2020) highlight cognitive benefits of bilingualism during early childhood, implying that CEFR-aligned instruction may foster growth not just in terms of language, but cognitive skills as well. These insights highlight the importance of further investigating how the CEFR can be tailored to fit the specific design-related needs of kindergarten children in Malaysia and elsewhere.

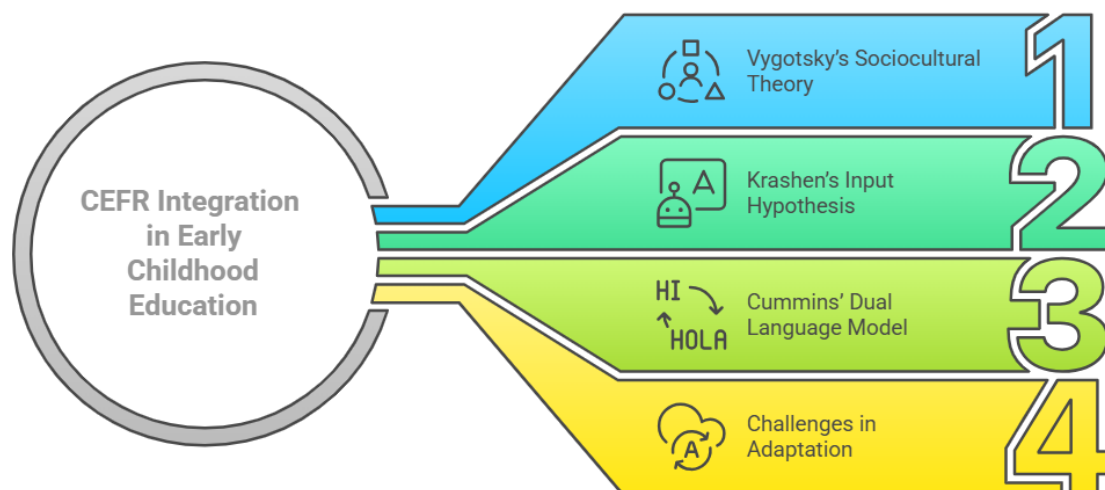
Relevant Theories and Models in Early Childhood Language Acquisition

There are a variety of theoretical origins which supported embedding CEFR principles in early childhood education, especially in relationship to second language acquisition (SLA). One theory that forms the foundation of our understanding of this process is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which stresses that social interaction and scaffolding are essential in cognitive and linguistic development (Vygotsky, 1978). Drawing from a prescriptive understanding of this theory, it is argued that young learners receive the greatest benefit from collaborative activity and guided participation, both of which are closely aligned with the CEFR's focus on communicative competence and task-based learning (Shen, 2007 cited in Edelenbos, Johnstone and Kubanek, 2006). In kindergarten programs, for instance, play-based interactions are generally settings in which children can be taught new vocabulary and have practice opportunities with English in ways that feel more natural than formal drills.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis is another relevant model of interest, whereby language acquisition occurs when learners have access to comprehensible input (i.e., language that is understood) which is slightly above their current level of proficiency (Krashen, 2019). This means that kindergarten-appropriate textbooks/activities that suit Pre-A1 should be integrated into kindergarten curriculum and not too much nor too little should be offered for young learners in this period according to CEFR. Moreover, the Dual Language Model author by Cummins emphasizes the fact that relying on children's first language (L1) can aid second language (L2) learning; a perspective that is consistent with our multilingual context as in Malaysia (Cummins, 2021). Incorporating these theories, teachers can create CEFR-aligned activities that are developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant for kindergarteners in Malaysia to promote comprehensive language development.

But this transliteration into kindergarten space does not come without its challenges. While the CEFR has clear competencies descriptors, incorporating these into real, practical teaching methods in teaching young learners is a challenge, as we must consider their cognitive and socioemotional development. Moreover, the absence of standardized guidelines for implementing CEFR in early childhood education highlights the necessity for customized frameworks that cater to these distinct challenges. Theoretical Frameworks for CEFR in Early Education is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Theoretical Frameworks for CEFR in Early Education

**Figure 1: Theoretical Frameworks for CEFR in Early Education****Relevant Past Studies**

The table 1 summarizes significant studies of the last five years on CEFR implementation in Malaysia education environment related to early childhood education. Khalid et al. A systematic review of 30 studies by Elen and qualified in 2021 found that CEFR-aligned teaching tools and training for teachers were unevenly distributed, with minimal recommendation for early education — generally suggesting that early childhood education is therefore considered as still largely an unexplored area where a CEFR model could contribute by building a framework specifically tailored for this targeted professional group. Similarly, Rajendran et al. use of a mixed-method approach including surveys and interviews with 120 preschool teachers, results illustrated how educators grapple with integrating the principles of CEFR into play-based learning contexts. Their study highlights the importance of professional development programs and culturally responsive materials to close this gap. A longitudinal study conducted by Bialystok and Sullivan (2020) also reported on language acquisition in bilingual pre-schoolers, noting that these infants obtained and developed structured language exposure in early childhood expressions (ECE) which positively effects vocabulary and understanding.

They claim that the Pre-A1 level of the CEFR is a suitable baseline for young learners. A qualitative case study conducted by Kaur and Singh (2020) in several primary and secondary schools elaborated on previous findings, revealing discrepancies in teacher readiness to adopt CEFR and proposing age-appropriate modifications of CEFR standards, especially in relation to younger learners. Snow (2021) added to these arguments through a meta-analysis of 50 studies of early language acquisition that underscored the importance of early instruction in determining future proficiency and argued for the inclusion of CEFR-aligned activities in

kindergarten curricula. Lastly, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2021) conducted a policy analysis in its progress report and reported moderately successful implementation of CEFR at higher levels of education, but identified an absence of wait on early childhood education. Overall, these studies cumulatively underline the critical necessity of having an early language curriculum that is evidence-based and a conceptual framework of CEFR that best correspond to the developmental learning needs of Malaysian kindergarten children in order for young learners to be equipped with communicative abilities to meet global standards.

Table 1: Relevant Past Studies

Author(s)	Year	Title	Method	Key Findings
Khalid et al.	2021	Challenges in Implementing CEFR-Aligned English Language Teaching in Malaysian Schools	Systematic review of 30 studies on CEFR implementation across Malaysian educational levels	Identified significant gaps in teacher training and resource availability for CEFR-aligned teaching. Early childhood education was highlighted as an underexplored area requiring tailored frameworks.
Rajendran et al.	2022	Bridging the Gap: Aligning CEFR Standards with Malaysian Preschool Education	Mixed-methods study involving surveys and interviews with preschool teachers (n = 120)	Teachers reported a lack of clear guidelines for adapting CEFR principles to play-based learning environments. Recommendations included professional development programs and culturally responsive materials.
Bialystok & Sullivan	2020	Language Learning and Cognitive Development in Bilingual Preschoolers	Longitudinal study tracking language acquisition among bilingual preschoolers (n = 200)	Found that structured language exposure in early childhood significantly enhances vocabulary and comprehension skills. Suggested CEFR's Pre-A1 level as a suitable starting point for young learners.
Kaur & Singh	2020	Implementation of CEFR in Malaysian ESL Classrooms: Challenges and Opportunities	Qualitative case study of primary and secondary schools (n = 5 schools)	Highlighted disparities in teacher preparedness and called for age-appropriate adaptations of CEFR standards
Snow	2021	Early Language Foundations: Setting the	Meta-analysis of 50 studies on early	Emphasized the critical role of early language instruction in shaping future proficiency. Advocated for integrating

		Stage for Lifelong Learning	language acquisition	CEFR-aligned activities into kindergarten curricula to build foundational communicative skills.
Ministry of Education	2021	Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025: Progress and Achievements	Policy analysis and progress report	Reported moderate success in implementing CEFR at higher educational levels but noted a lack of focus on early childhood education. Stressed the need for evidence-based practices in kindergarten settings.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, Figure 2, below is designed to illustrate how the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) can serve as a guiding framework to enhance English proficiency among Malaysian kindergarten children. It incorporates key components such as CEFR principles, developmental considerations, and contextual factors specific to Malaysia's multilingual environment

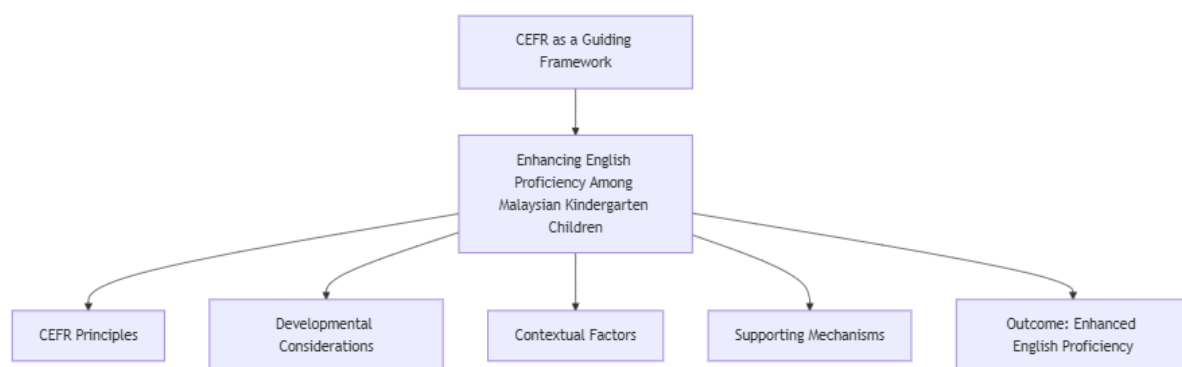


Figure 2: The Conceptual Frameworks

Using the CEFR as a framework, the shift towards the aim of "Improving English Proficiency of Malaysian Kindergarten Children" serves as the conceptual steer of the process. The main idea behind the framework is based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language acquisition, highlighting the importance of social interaction and scaffolding, especially between learners when involved in collaborative & play-based activities (Vygotsky, 1978). This interaction is scripted around three key components – CEFR principles, developmental considerations and contextual factors, which interlock to underpin this central focus. The principles guiding CEFR, including the development of Pre-A1 level descriptors, communicative competence and task-based language teaching, create a coherent framework for language instruction, while its descriptors include across-the-board expectations that are aligned with global benchmarks while not being too rigid for early childhood education (Council of Europe, 2020).

In addition, these principles are democratised through developmentally appropriate, play-based, and cognitively relevant activities, critical for facilitating meaningful language learning in kindergarten. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (2019) emphasizes that exposure to comprehensible input relevant to the specific developmental stage of a child ensures better learning. Moreover, the implementation of CEFR is also influenced by contextual factors such as Malaysia's multilingual context, cultural diversity, and limited resources, which require culturally appropriate and locally relevant approaches (Cummins, 2021). Bridging these elements is the role of supporting mechanisms —teacher training, parental engagement, adaptation of resources. Professional development initiatives teach educators CEFR-intentional methods, and parents in a supportive home context engage in language acquisition. CEFR compliance and cultural appropriacy are ensured through resource adaptation. These elements, individually and as a whole, contribute to the desired result — improving English proficiency of Malaysian kindergarten children and helping them become better prepared for their academic years ahead by providing them with the means of communication to globalise themselves too (Snow, 2021).

Identifying Gaps in the Current Literature

Despite the increase body of research surrounding the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and its usage in different educational contexts, there still exists a great deal of lack of knowledge when it comes to the application of CEFR in early childhood education, specifically Malaysian kindergarten children. Whereas existing studies have largely concentrated on primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, kindergarten education remains relatively unexplored (Khalid et al., 2021). For example, although frameworks such as the CEFR promote exploratory, learner-centered approaches to pedagogy, there is a lack of research that investigates how these principles can be efficaciously implemented in early childhood pedagogy which frequently emphasizes play and active learning (Bialystok & Sullivan 2020). In addition, the specific implications of CEFR implementation in a multilingual and multicultural context like Malaysia, where English is used as a second language (ESL), are often neglected. This is concerning because kindergarten is a very important time for language acquisition, where exposure to structured, yet creative language instruction can have a huge impact on later language competence (e.g., Snow, 2021). Furthermore, there is little consideration of how CEFR-aligned practices may be adapted to consider a lack of teacher training, teaching resources, and parent engagement, which are all needed to successfully implement CEFR-aligned practices in kindergarten contexts.

Proposed Areas for Further Research

Based on the identified gaps within current literature, there are a number of areas that remain to be explored in future research. This article highlights the need for more extensive cross-disciplinary investigation into the application of CEFR principles in early childhood settings, drawing on insights from linguistics, psychology, and education. For instance, research might investigate crossover between Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Krashen's (1977, 1982, 1985, 1994, 1996, 1999) Input Hypothesis to create purposeful, developmentally and academically-appropriate CEFR-tied tasks within the kindergarten environment. Such studies may also investigate the contributions of cognitive maturation, socioemotional determinants and cultural variations to understand the processes of language learning in early childhood. Furthermore, there is a strong demand for policy-related studies on the embedding of CEFR standards in national education frameworks of early childhood education. Future studies may also explore the design of age-related CEFR-based guidelines for kindergarten curriculum that

would assist in fulfilling the educational objectives of Malaysia's education mission while ensuring an appropriate match with the nation's cultural context. Researchers are encouraged to also look into the implications of government policies to mitigate resource constraints, the promotion of teacher training programs, and the engagement of parents in early language education as well (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2021).

Although conceptual frameworks allow us to provide theoretical assumptions, theories must be tested in practice. Subsequent work needs to build, then, by testing and fine-tuning suggested models via longitudinal research, classroom observations, and assessments of children's language ability. For example, research may assess the effects of CEFR-aligned play-based practices on Malaysian kindergarteners' vocabulary learning, pronunciation, and comprehension (Rajendran et al., 2022). In view of Malaysia's rich linguistic and cultural environments, future study can likewise consider contextualizing CEFR ideologies to acknowledge and leverage locals' linguistic diversity. Research may explore if implementing bilingual or multilingual approaches lead to the continued development of English proficiency without compromising children's native languages as a part of Cummins' Dual Language Model (Cummins, 2021). Finally, there is a need to develop standardized guidelines and training programs for implementation of CEFR in kindergarten settings as this highlights a key area for future research. Overall, studies could consider the effectiveness of professional learning programs that prepares educators with CEFR-aligned methods of foreign language instruction, exploring concrete tools and resources that can readily be adopted in a playful and active learning setting (Kaur & Singh, 2020). These research directions hinge on a shared theoretical foundation of the CEFR principles that, if integrated into Malaysian kindergarten education, would offer a comprehensive framework for the progressive amalgamation of CEFR in its context.

Recommendations

Following the gaps and areas for future research identified, some recommendations are offered here to improve the adoption of CEFR in Malaysian kindergarten practice. Content should be age-specific and match the developmental needs of kindergarten children at appropriate CEFR levels. Policymakers and educators should reach a consensus to that effect. In practice, these descriptors should be focused around Pre-A1 levels coupled with appropriate activities where play is certainly in the driving seat, so that young learners are not overwhelmed or under-stimulated. Moreover, it is significant to adopt culturally responsive materials and activities to fit CEFR principles into Malaysia with its multilingual and multicultural landscape. By supporting local speech whilst engendering English literacy, thus, promoting an inclusive and efficient classroom. Since there is no standard training, teacher training programs could include modules in CEFR training for early childhood education. They need to center on actionable techniques like shell-based language advising and scaffolding that become customizable in kindgartens' classrooms.

Finally, parents can provide a strong support system for their children's learning, so schools and policymakers can also promote parental involvement by offering families resources and tips on how to help support CEFR-aligned learning at home, forming a collaborative ecosystem for language development. Further empirical studies are needed to explore the long-term effect of CEFR-aligned practices on children's language proficiency via longitudinal studies. These long-term studies can focus on outcomes like academic performance, communicative competence, and global readiness, providing empirical data on the effectiveness of using CEFR

in early childhood. Finally, professionals from varied fields, such as linguistics, psychology, and education, must collaborate and brainstorm to explore new creative and innovative ways to establish CEFR-structured tests or exams worldwide. These findings require interaction between linguists and educational psychologists to develop holistic frameworks, which will not only consist of language-based dimensions of language acquisition, but also socioemotional dimensions.

Conclusion

This article examined the potential of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a guiding framework to establish English proficiency for Malaysian kindergarten children. Combined, the points from each section create a significant leverage for exploring the integration of CEFR approaches to early childhood education as a potential best practice model for addressing challenges unique to the Malaysian linguist, cultural and societal context. The consulted literature made evident a significant lack of studies, particularly those focusing on kindergarten education within the context of the more extensive discussions around CEFR implementations. It highlighted the necessity for bespoke frameworks that integrate CEFR standards into the developmental trajectory of young learners, promoting age-appropriate activities, play-based approaches, and culturally responsive pedagogies.

The proposed conceptual framework serves to bridge these gaps by offering an integrated version of its concepts where core components like CEFR principles, developmental considerations and contextual factors are united through enabling mechanisms like teacher training, parental involvement and resource adaptation. Drawing on theoretical foundations such as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, this framework offers a structured, flexible method for empowering Malaysian kindergarteners' communicative competence. Moreover, the articulation of research gaps and suggestions for future research — from cross-disciplinary exploration to policy development — highlights the complexity of this undertaking.

CEFR as a Guiding Framework: Enhancing the English Proficiency of Malaysian Kindergarten Children" can establish a set of foundational baseline for early language education that is uniquely bendable while simultaneously offering a standard that can be acknowledged by the rest of the world. The framework also ensures this alignment by adapting global benchmarks without losing its contextual sensitivity, by applying descriptors at the Pre-A1 level and the principle of task-based language teaching. Finally, the theoretical framework should be empirically validated through longitudinal studies and classroom observations to examine its long-term effects on children's language proficiency, academic success, and global preparedness. Moreover, reinforcing teacher training programs and promoting parent involvement are essential strategies in ensuring the effective application of CEFR-aligned practices within the kindergarten setting.

But to truly unlock this potential collaboration — between academicians and policymakers and between employers/industries — is necessary. Academicians can engage in rigorous research to refine and validate the proposed relational framework while policymakers can support these efforts through age-specific guidelines and inclusive educational diplomacy. Conversely, employers and sectors can contribute to this movement by identifying English knowledge as a main part of future labor readiness and international discourse. As such

collaborative efforts continue, they will not only boost English proficiency among young learners, they will equip them to flourish in an even more interconnected world.

Ultimately, introducing CEFR into Malaysia's kindergarten education is a crucial and timely move in preparing children to have the vital skills necessary for life-long learning and global involvement. This framework can revolutionise early language education in Malaysia by addressing these existing gaps and promoting interdisciplinary collaborations, ultimately paving the way towards a more inclusive, equitable, and globally competitive future. More data and ongoing dedication from all stakeholders remain critical to the success of this initiative and its potential to scale.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Kedah State Research Committee, UiTM Kedah Branch, for the generous funding provided under the Tabung Penyelidikan Am. This support was crucial in facilitating the research and ensuring the successful publication of this article.

References

- Bialystok, E. (2019). *The bilingual mind and what it tells us about language and thought*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bialystok, E., & Sullivan, M. (2020). Language learning and cognitive development in bilingual preschoolers: Implications for early education. *Journal of Child Language*, 47 (3), 532–549. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S030500091900082X>
- Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment—Companion volume*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>
- Cummins, J. (2021). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire* (3rd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2020). Translanguaging and multilingual education: Bridging theory and practice. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 17 (4), 456–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2018.1549800>
- Kaur, J., & Singh, M. K. (2020). Implementation of CEFR in Malaysian ESL classrooms: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Language and Education*, 6 (3), 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2020.10744>
- Khalid, N., Yunus, M. M., & Embi, M. A. (2021). Challenges in implementing CEFR-aligned English language teaching in Malaysian schools: A systematic review. *International Journal of Instruction*, 14 (2), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2021.14212a>
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2020). English as a lingua franca in ASEAN: Implications for language education. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41 (6), 537–550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1650029>
- Krashen, S. (2019). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Routledge.
- Lin, A., Fang, Y., & Zhang, L. (2022). Culturally responsive materials in early language education: A case study of multilingual classrooms. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 21 (2), 123–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2021.1987645>
- Little, D. (2019). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Perspectives on its origins, achievements, and prospects. *Language Teaching*, 52 (3), 281–295. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000187>

- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2021). Malaysian education blueprint 2013-2025: Progress and achievements. Ministry of Education.
- Nikolov, M. (2021). Play-based language learning in early childhood: Insights from classroom research. *Language Learning Journal*, 49 (4), 412–425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2020.1846789>
- Nguyen, T., & Hamid, M. O. (2023). Challenges and opportunities in implementing CEFR in multilingual classrooms: A focus on teacher training. *TESOL Quarterly*, 57 (1), 89–112. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3214>
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2022). Social and cultural dimensions of early language learning: Implications for policy and practice. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 13 (3), 345–367. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2021-0021>
- Rajendran, A., Lee, L. Y., & Ng, C. S. (2022). Bridging the gap: Aligning CEFR standards with Malaysian preschool education. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 15 (2), 89–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2022.2035678>
- Snow, C. E. (2021). Early language foundations: Setting the stage for lifelong learning. *Child Development Perspectives*, 15 (1), 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12397>
- Snow, C. E., Porche, M. V., Tabors, P. O., & Harris, S. R. (2020). *Language development in early childhood* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.