Exploring the Implementation Processes of CEFR-Aligned Preschool English Language Curriculum: Preschool Teachers' Voices

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Abstract
English language education reform in Malaysia has moved forward in aligning the English language curriculum with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to achieve English language education of international standards. It is found that studies on the implementation of CEFR-aligned curriculum and their relation to teaching and learning have been mostly conducted at primary and secondary education levels. There is surprisingly little research on the implementation of CEFR-aligned curriculum for preschool English language Teaching (ELT) context. Furthermore, preschool teachers' low level of English proficiency and lack of confidence in using the language have been linked to the issue of whether preschool teachers are able to conduct the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum accordingly. The other challenge for preschool teachers in the ELT context involves the need to alternate between languages in using English as instructional language. This research elucidates the implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum in preschool setting. Six informants who fulfilled the criteria of purposive sampling were involved in in-depth interview sessions. Document analysis of lesson plans and CEFR-aligned learning materials corroborated the findings of the study. The findings revealed four significant themes mainly; Abiding by Scheme of Work, Using Language Learning Activities and Materials, Employing Differentiation Strategies in the Preschool Classroom and Conducting Assessment for Pupils in the Preschool Classroom. It is recommended that further studies on the implementation of CEFR in the preschool ELT context are conducted to improve the current implementation of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum.
Keywords: Implementation, CEFR, English Language, Curriculum, Preschool Education

Introduction

English language education in Malaysia has gone through substantial development over the years. This is manifested in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB), Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013) through "To Uphold Malay Language and To Strengthen English Language" policy. This policy emphasises on the importance of pupils to be proficient in both languages, Malay language and English language. The inspiration of the MEB is further outlined in the second shift of the MEB which aims for every child to be proficient in Malay language and English language and is encouraged to learn an additional language. In relation to teaching practice, the fourth shift which is to "Transform teaching into the profession of choice" is closely linked to the second shift of the MEB. This shift focuses on the role of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in upgrading the quality of teaching profession. The aspirations set in the MEB are also outlined in the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap, Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015). This Roadmap has been a detailed reference in mapping the English language education in Malaysia to international standards. The English language education in Malaysia has focused on the adoption of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for three key areas; teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment.

The adoption of CEFR has been intensively cascaded through series of trainings highlighted in Teacher Guide: Implementing the CEFR-Aligned Curriculum: Planning and Managing Learning (2019). Figure 1 illustrates the series of Cascade Trainings.
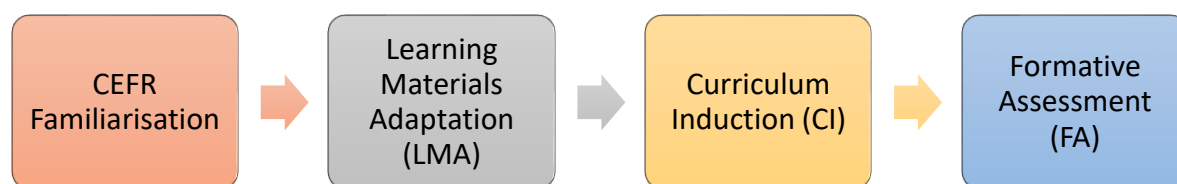

Figure 1. Cascade Trainings

In the initial stage, CEFR Familiarisation was conducted to familiarise the teachers on CEFR. Then, the teachers were exposed to Learning Materials Adaptation (LMA) specifically on how to design and adapt learning materials which are aligned with CEFR. The teachers were later inducted to CEFR-aligned curriculum in Curriculum Induction (CI) based on the different education levels ranging from preschool, primary to secondary levels. The final stage of the Cascade Training involved Formative Assessment (FA) where teachers were trained on how to conduct Formative Assessment in their preschool classroom. The Cascade Trainings were conducted based on Cascade Training Model. English Language Education Reform 2015-2025: Planning in Retrospect, Implementation and Prospective Planning, Ministry of Education Malaysia (2021) highlights the flow of the Cascade Training Model in Figure 2.
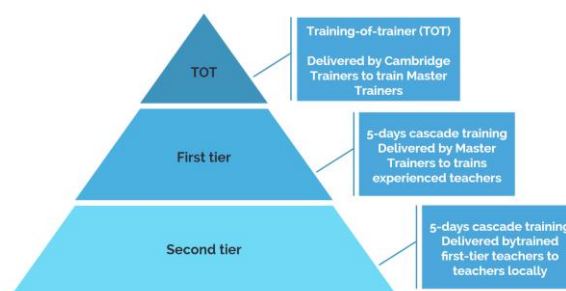
Figure 2. Cascade Training Model

All four Cascade Trainings on CEFR Familiarisation, LMA, CI and FA followed the flow of Cascade Training Model. The first stage of Cascade Training Model is Training of Trainers (ToT). At this stage, the chosen Master Trainers from each state were directly trained by Cambridge Trainers. The Master Trainers were the first group to obtain all the beneficial information from the Cambridge English trainers. These Master Trainers later cascaded the information they obtained from the ToT to the experienced teachers at their states for the first tier. The duration of the Cascade Training at state level was 5 days. Then, for the second tier, the experienced teachers further cascaded the information to the respective teachers at their districts for another 5 days. Through this Cascade Training Model, it is expected that information on the adoption of CEFR in teaching and learning, curriculum as well as assessment is well cascaded to the teachers nationwide. However, it is important to note that this paper zooms into the adoption of CEFR in the preschool English Language Teaching (ELT) context.

Statement of the Problem
In an attempt to manifest English language education of international standards, many countries have adapted CEFR in their English language education. This global reform has inspired Malaysia to adopt CEFR in its English language education which focuses on teaching and learning, curriculum as well as assessment. Some CEFR related studies on teaching and learning and assessment include Valax (2011), Kantarcioglu (2012), Kir and Sulu (2014) and Hosseinifar (2017). These studies zoom into English language teachers' knowledge and attitude towards CEFR, alignment of assessment with CEFR and the impact of CEFR to curriculum design. Thus far, Malaysia has adopted CEFR to English language curriculum for preschool, primary and secondary levels. Most of CEFR implementation studies conducted in Malaysia are for primary and secondary levels. However, there is limited studies conducted on the implementation of CEFR in the preschool ELT context. The English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap, Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015) has also highlighted some issues which are low level of English proficiency and lack of confidence in using the language among preschool teachers. It is also found that preschool teachers have difficulties in using English as instructional language as they have to juggle using other languages during the teaching and learning.

Research Question
This paper aims to answer the following research question:
RQ 1: How do preschool teachers implement the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum in preschool English Language Teaching?

Literature Review

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (2001) by Council of Europe states that the Common European Framework (CEF) comprehensively depicts what language learners have to learn to do in an attempt to use a language for communication. The skills and knowledge that language learners have to develop are also paramount in order for them to be able to act effectively. The CEF also outlines the six proficiency levels which are A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 where language learners' progress can be measured based on the "Can do" descriptors. The CEF is widely used to organise curriculum, teaching and learning including learning materials and assessment. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment Companion Volume with New Descriptors (2018) has enhanced some of the descriptors in the existing CEFR document produced in 2001. These include the addition of descriptors on online interaction, using telecommunications, expressing reactions to creative text and literature, sign language and young learners.

The CEF adopted an action-oriented approach which perceives users and learners of a language mainly as 'social agents'. Users and learners are considered as members of the society who have to accomplish tasks based on situations in a specific environment. In accomplishing the tasks, users and learners have to demonstrate their general and communicative language competences. General competences include demonstrating general knowledge and skills to perform all kinds of action while communicative language competences require users and learners to demonstrate the ability to use linguistics means in communicating with others. The action-oriented approach is reflected in the six proficiency levels of CEFR. The levels range from A1 and A2 which represent Basic User, to B1 and B2 for Independent User, and C1 and C2 for Proficient User. The "Can do" descriptors outline the kind of tasks users and learners have to accomplish in order to reach the levels. Figure 3 illustrates the CEFR global scale in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (2001).

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 3. CEFR Global Scale

Implementation of CEFR in Preschool English Language Teaching Context

As a way forward to English language education of international standards, Malaysia has adopted CEFR in the preschool English language curriculum. The English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap, Ministry of Education (2015) states that it is important to carry out sequence of procedures outlined in the Roadmap in order to achieve substantial improvement in language education. These sequence of procedures need to be carried out with sufficient determination and rigour to attain excellence at the international level. In terms of curriculum reform, the content standards and learning standards in the previous National Preschool Curriculum Standard (2010) have been mapped and adopted to CEFR in the latest National Preschool Standards-Based Curriculum (2017). Figure 4 illustrates the initial content standards and learning standards in the previous National Preschool Curriculum Standard (2010).

Content Standard	Learning Standards for 4 +	5 +	CEFR
	Listening and Speaking Skills		
(BI I.1) Listen to and discriminate sounds	(BI 1.1.1) Listen to and identify common sounds around them.	(BI 1.1.2) Listen to and identify sounds in the environment.	No match found
(BI 1.2) Listen to and understand meaning of simple words	(BI 1.2.1) Listen to and repeat simple greetings. e.g. good morning, good afternoon. (BI 1.2.2) Listen to and respond verbally to simple greetings with guidance. (BI 1.2.3) Listen to and identify objects in the classroom. (BI 1.2.4) Name common objects in the classroom.	(BI 1.2.5) Listen to and repeat greetings. (BI 1.2.6) Listen to and respond verbally to greetings. (BI 1.2.7) Listen to and identify common objects in the environment. (BI 1.2.8) Name common objects in the environment. (BI 1.2.9) Listen to words said aloud and respond accordingly, e.g.: "show me the picture of a child eating" "draw a flower" "stand up and touch your nose"	Can make an introduction and use basic greeting and leave-taking expressions. Can ask how people are and react to news. Can understand everyday expressions aimed at the satisfaction of simple needs of a concrete type, delivered directly to him/her in clear, slow and repeated speech by a sympathetic speaker.
(BI 1.3) Acquire and use simple phrases and statements	(BI 1.3.1) Talk about familiar things and experiences with guidance.	(BI 1.3.2) Talk about familiar experiences, favourite things and activities around them with guidance. (BI 1.3.3) Talk about the natural environment with guidance. (BI 1.3.4) Talk about happenings around them.	Can describe him/herself, what he/she does and where he/she lives.
(BI 1.4) Listen to and follow simple instructions	(BI 1.4.1) Listen to and follow one word instructions, e.g. "Come". (BI 1.4.2) Listen to and follow simple instructions, e.g. "Please stand up".	(BI 1.4.3) Listen to and follow instructions, e.g. "Please get me the book from the shelf". (BI 1.4.4) Listen to and perform actions based on instructions in activities and games.	Can understand instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions

Content Standard	Learning Standards for 4 +	5 +	CEFR
	Listening and Speaking Skills		
(BI 1.5) Listen to and enjoy nursery rhymes, action songs, poems and stories	(BI 1.5.1) Listen to and recite nursery rhymes and action songs. (BI 1.5.2) Listen to, recite and act out nursery rhymes and action songs.	(BI 1.5.3) Listen to, recite and act out nursery rhymes, action songs and poems. (BI 1.5.4) Listen to and retell simple stories using aids: e.g. picture clues, visual props. (BI 1.5.5) Listen to and role play simple stories. (BI 1.5.6) Listen to and solve simple riddles.	No match found
(BI 1.6) Sing songs and recite rhymes and poems	(BI 1.6.1) Sing songs. (BI 1.6.2) Recite simple rhymes and poems.	(BI 1.6.3) Sing songs with the correct pronunciation and intonation. (BI 1.6.4) Recite rhymes and poems with the correct pronunciation and intonation.	No match found
(BI 1.7) Tell simple stories	(BI 1.7.1) Tell stories about personal experiences with guidance. (BI 1.7.2) Tell stories using visual props with guidance.	(BI 1.7.3) Tell stories about personal experiences with or without guidance. (BI 1.7.4) Tell stories using visual props with or without guidance.	Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places.
(BI 1.8) Dramatize familiar situations and stories	(BI 1.8.1) Role play familiar daily situations with guidance.	(BI 1.8.2) Role play familiar daily situations without guidance. (BI 1.8.3) Dramatise familiar stories without guidance.	No match found

Content Standard	Learning Standards for 4 +	5 +	CEFR
	Listening and Speaking Skills		
(BI 1.9) Perform a variety of language forms and functions in a social context	(BI 1.9.1) Use simple sentences to carry out a conversation: e.g.: to exchange greetings to show appreciation	(BI 1.9.2) Use simple sentences to carry out a conversation: e.g.: to exchange greetings to introduce oneself to show appreciation to express feelings and emotion (BI 1.9.3) Use simple sentences to convey messages.	Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition at a slower rate of speech, rephrasing and repair. Can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
(BI 1.10) Ask simple questions	(BI 1.10.1) Ask simple questions pertaining to oneself	(BI 1.10.2) Ask simple questions pertaining to: stories heard or read, situations (BI 1.10.3) Ask simple "Wh" questions.	Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition at a slower rate of speech, rephrasing and repair. Can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.

Figure 4. Content Standards and Learning Standards in National Preschool Curriculum Standard (2010)

Based on Figure 4, there are mainly ten content standards ranging from BI 1.1 to BI 1.10 with specific learning standards listed under the content standards. These content standards and learning standards are related to listening and speaking skills. The English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap, Ministry of Education (2015) has mapped out the alignment of the content standards and learning standards with CEFR. As illustrated in Figure 4, the content standards and learning standards for BI 1.1, BI 1.5, BI 1.6 and BI 1.8 do not match the "Can do" descriptors of CEFR.

For example, BI 1.1 which focuses on the ability to listen to and discriminate sounds does not match to any "Can do" descriptors. This is due to the fact that CEFR highlights the kind of tasks users and learners have to demonstrate in order to use a language for communication.

The keyword is communication and in the process of communicating with other users and learners, the ability to demonstrate general competences and linguistic competences is crucial for users and learners. However, in the context of preschool ELT, the content standard and learning standards for BI 1.1 only require the pupils to listen to and discriminate sounds. In using English as a language for communication, the ability to listen to and discriminate sounds does not match to any "Can do" descriptors of CEFR. Thus, since this BI 1.1 content standard and learning standards do not involve the listening skills which emphasised on using the language for communication, it is considered not aligned with CEFR. Figure 5 shows the revised Content Standards and Learning Standards in National Preschool Standards-Based Curriculum (2017) based on the alignment with CEFR.

CONTENT STANDARD	LEARNING STANDARD	
	4+	5+
BI 1.0 LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS		
BI 1.1 Listen to and identify sounds	Pupils can: BI 1.1.1 Listen to and identify common sounds in the environment	Pupils can: BI 1.1.2 Listen to and respond to stimulus given: (i) environmental sounds (ii) voice sounds (iii) rhythm and rhyme (iv) alliteration BI 1.1.3 Listen to and identify rhymes in nursery rhymes and songs

CONTENT STANDARD	LEARNING STANDARD	
	4+	5+
BI 1.2 Listen to and respond appropriately	Pupils can: BI 1.2.1 Listen to and recite nursery rhymes BI 1.2.2 Listen to and sing songs BI 1.2.3 Listen to and repeat greetings BI 1.2.4 Listen to and follow simple instructions BI 1.2.5 Listen to and enjoy simple stories	Pupils can: BI 1.2.6 Listen to and recite poems and rhymes BI 1.2.7 Listen to and respond to stories
BI 1.3 Listen to, understand and respond in a variety of contexts	Pupils can: BI 1.3.1 Participate politely in daily conversations to: (i) exchange greetings (ii) show appreciation (iii) introduce oneself (iv) express feelings (v) make simple request	Pupils can: BI 1.3.2 Name favourite things and activities BI 1.3.3 Listen to and respond to oral texts BI 1.3.4 Participate in talk about familiar activities and experiences BI 1.3.5 Participate in talk about stories heard BI 1.3.6 Participate in role play about familiar daily situations

Figure 5. Content Standards and Learning Standards in National Preschool Standards-Based Curriculum (2017)

The National Preschool Standards-Based Curriculum (2017) is the preschool English language curriculum which has been aligned with CEFR. Figure 5 represents the revised content standards and learning standards based on the CEFR "Can do" descriptors. The content standards have been compacted to BI 1.1, BI 1.2 and BI 1.3. As illustrated in Figure 5, the "Can do" descriptors of CEFR are reflected in the revised version. For instance, the content standard, BI 1.1 zooms into the ability to listen to and identify sounds. As for the learning standards, pupils at 4+ years old are expected to be able to listen to and identify common sounds in the environment. Whereas, pupils at 5+ years are required to progress to have the ability to listen to and respond to stimulus provided. These tasks indeed promote active use of the language for communication. It is hoped that by adhering to the CEFR-aligned curriculum, the aspirational targets for 2025 can be successfully achieved. Figure 6 illustrates Malaysia Aspirational Targets for CEFR levels by 2025 in Teacher Guide : Implementing the CEFR-Aligned Curriculum Planning and Managing Learning: Second Edition (2020).

Figure 6. Aspirational Targets 2025

Based on Figure 6, the aspirational target for preschool pupils is Pre-A1 level. The Pre-A1 level indicates that preschool pupils nationwide should reach the Pre-A1 level, which refers to a 'milestone' half way towards A1, Basic User based on the CEFR global scale. In my opinion, the target set for preschool pupils is realistic as they are still at the early stage of language learning and they will gradually progress to be competent basic users of English language.

Cognitive Constructivism, Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction and Herbartian Approach in Lesson Planning
The literature review also covers cognitive constructivism as the main theory, followed by the integration of Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction as well as Herbartian Approach in lesson planning. Piaget (1971) emphasises on the importance of schema as learners actively construct meaning through experiences. The equilibration process involves the assimilation of new knowledge as learners relate it to their existing knowledge. The learners also learn to accommodate their schema if the new knowledge does not fit their existing knowledge. Piaget (1971) also highlights four essential stages in cognitive development which consist of sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational. These stages relate to the mastery approach in language learning where learners have the opportunity to

master specific skills and knowledge for each stage. As for the preschool pupils, the preoperational stage encourages them to construct symbolic thought through real-life objects. At this stage, preschool pupils are introduced to new words as they explore real-life objects in their preschool classroom. The underlying principles of Cognitive Constructivism have indeed reflected in the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum.

In addition, Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction (1985) is in line with the implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum in the preschool classroom. The first event requires teachers to gain attention of their pupils on the lesson that they will introduce. The induction set plays a vital role in setting the flow of the lesson. At this stage, teachers gain the attention of their pupils by using prompting questions to spark their interest on the topic, or using visual or auditory prompts that will gauge their attention on the lesson. The second event which is to inform learners of the objective is also important in lesson planning. Teachers have to inform the pupils of the learning goals of the lesson. Teachers can outline the learning goals and set specific targets to be met. By informing the pupils on the learning goals, pupils will be more focused and motivated to achieve the specific learning goals of the lesson. The next event focuses on the role of teachers to stimulate and recall of pupils' prior learning. This is done through activating their background knowledge of a topic or making connection of the current topic with the previous topics that pupils have learned. Teachers can actively prompt pupils with questions related to the topic in order for the pupils to use their background knowledge and relate them to the current lesson.

After the teachers have stimulated recall of prior learning, teachers move to present the stimulus to the pupils. There are many ways teachers can use in presenting information to their pupils. Teachers can use interactive forms of media such as audios, videos, presentations or even digital tools in imparting the gist of the lesson meaningfully. Using various stimulus to present information will cater to pupils with mixed-ability who have different learning styles and preferences. Once the stimulus has been presented accordingly, teachers have to provide learning guidance for the pupils. At this point in time, teachers continuously guide pupils to ensure that information is stored and retained meaningfully. Teachers can use mnemonics to ease memory retrieval or visual tools to recall meaningful information or concepts learned. Then, teachers can proceed to elicit performance of the pupils. Teachers can conduct interesting classroom activities such as group discussion, presentation, gallery walk or even group project to allow pupils to demonstrate their understanding of the lesson through their performances.

Eliciting performance of the pupils is an essential event in Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction. It provides opportunities for teachers to identify the progress of their pupils. Once teachers have elicited the pupils' performance, the next event is to provide feedback to the pupils. Teachers can provide constructive feedback in which pupils are informed of their current progress of the topic and steps on how to effectively move forward to progress for the next lesson. By providing constructive feedback, pupils will be aware of their current progress and work towards progressing more in the future. Furthermore, the next event requires the teachers to assess performance. Teachers can use many assessment strategies and tools to assess the pupils accordingly. Assessment is important as it will provide room for improvement in terms of teaching and learning. Teachers can

design more suitable learning activities that will promote meaningful learning while pupils can progress gradually based on the assessment conducted by the teachers. The last event of Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction is to enhance retention and transfer. Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to recall and retain what they have learned through enrichment activities. By exposing pupils to many interesting and meaningful enrichment activities, it is hoped that pupils will be able to experience meaningful learning.
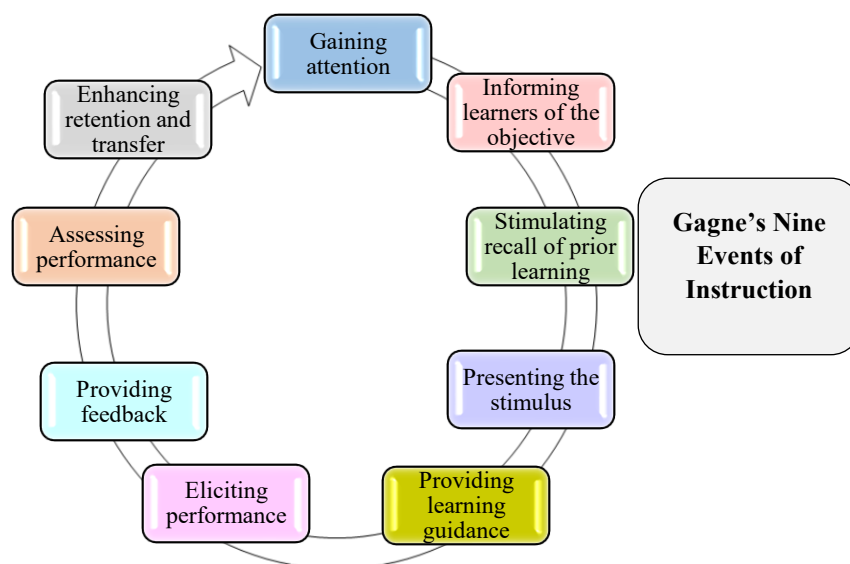Figure 7 shows Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction.

Figure 7. Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction

Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction (1985) is interrelated with Herbartian Approach (1911). Herbartian Approach suggests five steps in lesson planning which are preparation, presentation, association and comparison, generalisation and application. These steps are pertinent as they depict the steps that teachers have to go through in order for the teaching and learning to be successful. The initial step is preparation, where teachers prepare their pupils for the topic that they are going to teach. Teachers can inform the pupils of the learning objectives expected of the lesson and activate their schemata on the topic. The next step involves the presentation of the learning content of the lesson. Teachers use interesting learning activities to grab pupils' attention and keep them actively engage in the activities. Teachers then provide opportunities for pupils to associate and compare the information gained from the learning process. In addition, teachers also allow pupils to turn the abstract ideas of the new information to form general understanding of the topic. Teachers further give pupils the chance to apply what they have learned in new situations. Figure 8 outlines the Herbartian Approach.
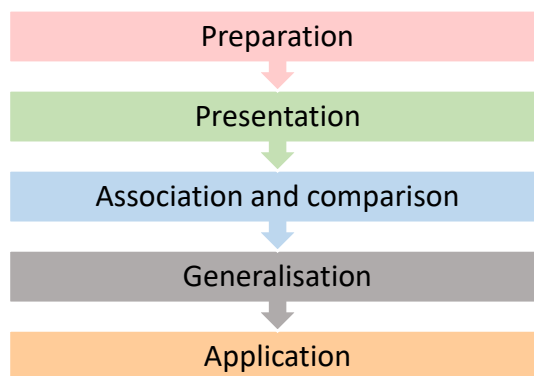
Figure 8. Herbartian Approach

Research Methodology
This study employs qualitative research approach which focuses on case study. Creswell (2013) defines case study as a method of exploring real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) through in-depth data collection involving various sources of information and presents the description and themes of the case. Yin (2018) further highlights case study as an empirical method which explores a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in detailed within its real-world context. For the purpose of this study, in-depth interview sessions which involved six informants who fulfilled the criteria of purposive sampling were conducted using a set of semi-structured interview protocol. There are some criteria that informants must fulfill for the purposive sampling. Firstly, the informants are preschool teachers teaching at National Preschools or National-Type Preschools. Secondly, the informants must have graduated with a diploma or degree in Early Childhood Education Programme from local or international universities or teacher training institutes. The next criteria requires informants to have at least ten years of experiences teaching at National Preschools or National-Type Preschools. Finally, the last criteria is the informants must have completed the Training of Trainers (ToT) conducted by Cambridge English.

Document analysis was also conducted to further explore the case of the study. The informants' CEFR-aligned lesson plans as well as CEFR-aligned language learning materials were analysed accordingly. In terms of ethics, the study has followed the ethical procedures outlined by the Ministry of Education's and university's ethics committees. Another crucial aspect is trustworthiness in qualitative study. Member checking sessions were conducted to check the accuracy of the data gathered from the informants. In addition, the study has nine experts who validated the semi-structured interview protocol, the themes generated from the informants as well as the methodology of the study. Peer debriefing was also conducted with an external peer debriefer. As for data analysis, the data gathered from the informants were analysed manually using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) as well as Interactive Analysis Model by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014).

Findings and Discussion
This section aims to discuss how the informants implemented the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. The data gathered from informants revealed four main themes mainly, (1) Abiding by Scheme of Work, (2) Using Language Learning Activities and Materials, (3) Employing Differentiation Strategies in the Preschool Classroom and (4) Conducting

Assessment for Pupils in the Preschool Classroom. The first theme, (1) Abiding by Scheme of Work pinpoints the crucial role of the Scheme of Work, in which informants have to abide accordingly. The Scheme of Work is a comprehensive guideline of the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. It describes the aspects that the informants have to comply in implementing the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. The next theme, (2) Using Language Learning Activities and Materials focuses on the kind of language learning activities and materials used by the informants based on the topics in the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. In this section, the theme reveals effective language learning activities conducted by the informants and the types of materials used in the preschool classroom.

The other theme related to the implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum is (3) Employing Differentiation Strategies in the Preschool Classroom. This theme highlights various differentiation strategies employed by the informants in their teaching and learning process. These differentiation strategies were suggested in the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. Furthermore, the last theme, (4) Conducting Assessment for Pupils in the Preschool Classroom stresses on assessment strategies and tools used by the informants for assessment purpose. The focus on how assessment is conducted in the preschool ELT context is further described in this section. The four main themes illustrates the flow of processes involved in implementing the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum.

Figure 9 represents the infographic of the four main themes for implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum.
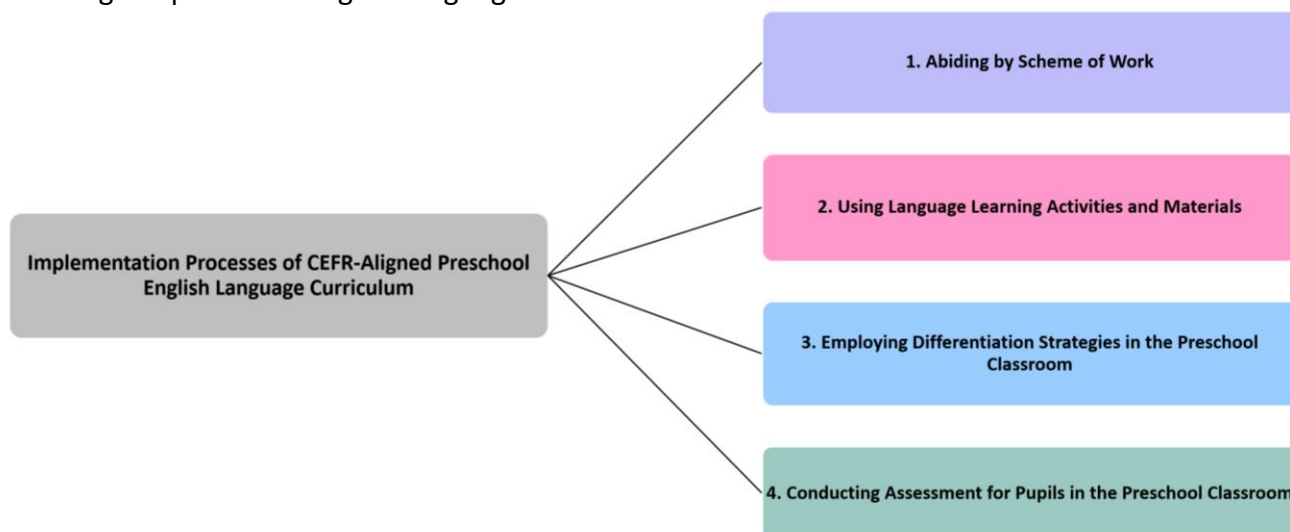

Figure 9. Implementation Processes of CEFR-Aligned Preschool English Language Curriculum

The first theme (1) Abiding by Scheme of Work emphasises on the role of the Scheme of Work as the main guiding document in implementing the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. The informants agreed that it is crucial for them to abide by the Scheme of Work accordingly. One of the aspects that the informants must conform to is how to set the objectives of the lesson. Since the content standards and learning standards of the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum have been revised and adopted to CEFR, the informants must abide by the revised version. They should set the objectives of the lesson by

following the latest CEFR-aligned content standards and learning standards. The importance of setting the objectives based on the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum is highlighted as it has helped the informants in designing the language learning activities for their preschool classroom. Informant 2 in the following excerpt expresses his view on the matter.

> "To set the lesson objectives, we usually refer to the Scheme of Work. Based on the Scheme of Work, we arrange the content standard and learning standard. Then, the objectives must be based on the learning standard. Next, we design activities that support learning and use the EEE Model. We also use suitable learning materials related to the lesson." (In-Depth Interview 2, lines 125-128)

The other aspect that is paramount in (1) Abiding by Scheme of Work is the role of Encounter, Engage and Exploit (EEE) Model. The informants have demonstrated their sound knowledge on the EEE Model in conducting their English language lesson. The initial stage required the informants to introduce the lexical items related to the topic of their lesson. At this stage, the informants activated pupils' schemata on the topic and gradually introduced the lexical items which represented the vocabulary that pupils have to learn for the lesson. Then, the Engage stage involved the informants to repetitively engage pupils in game-based language learning activities. The keyword for the Encounter stage is repetition. The informants agreed that by engaging the pupils in repetitive controlled language learning activities have indeed assisting them in their language learning. The final stage which was Exploit pinpointed the ability of the pupils in applying what they have learned autonomously in freer contexts. The Exploit stage allowed pupils to exploit the lexical items learned in different contexts as this proved that pupils have really understood the meaning of the lexical items. Informant 1 stresses on the importance of EEE Model in ELT.

> "Let's say, the preschool pupils learn how to read simple sentences. It's their first time of learning "has" or "had". They do not know how to pronounce them. So, we teach them how to read. When we ask them the next day, they already know how to pronounce "has" or "had" because we have gone through the Encounter stage. Then, for the next lesson, we can proceed with the Engage stage. Engage and repeat the words." (In-Depth Interview 1, lines 219-223)

The second theme (2) Using Language Learning Activities and Materials depicts the kind of language learning activities and materials that the informants used in their teaching and learning. The theme further elaborates the importance of game-based language learning activities in the preschool classroom context. In addition, the use of various language learning materials is also highlighted in this theme. The informants agreed that game-based language learning activities provided meaningful language learning for the pupils. The informants conducted various game-based activities suggested in the Scheme of Work as they implemented the EEE Model accordingly. The excerpt illustrates the view of Informant 4 on how language learning takes place when the pupils learned through game-based language learning activities.

> "The CEFR-aligned language learning activities consist of a lot of games and allow preschool pupils to play. Sometimes, we do not realise that through play, preschool pupils learn faster because when they play, they will easily absorb and remember what they learn." (In-Depth Interview 4, lines 374-376)

Furthermore, the informants have used various language learning materials ranging from printed to online materials in their preschool classroom. The informants have chosen suitable language learning materials which catered to the mixed-ability pupils throughout the implementation of the EEE Model in the language learning activities. The opinion of Informant 3 on the use of flashcards and pictures especially in the Encounter stage is illustrated in the following excerpt.

> "Preschool teachers have to prepare materials for CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum when they plan to conduct game-based activities. Let's say, preschool pupils are going to learn the word "sunny" or "rainy". How do we introduce the words to the preschool pupils? We have to prepare flashcards and label the pictures, so that preschool pupils can identify the weather based on the pictures. Cambridge English gave examples of materials during the Training of Trainers, but preschool teachers still have to prepare materials for other topics when they go back to school" (In-Depth Interview 3, lines 100-106)

The third theme, (3) Employing Differentiation Strategies in the Preschool Classroom explores the use of various differentiation strategies to cater to mixed-ability pupils in preschool ELT context. The informants mentioned that they have employed suitable differentiation strategies suggested in the Scheme of Work during the teaching and learning process. There are six differentiation strategies suggested in the Scheme of Work mainly: differentiation by the type and amount of support teachers provide, differentiation by outcome teachers expect from pupils, differentiation by the time teachers allow pupils to complete a task, differentiation by supporting individual learning preferences and needs, differentiation by the type of questions teachers ask and differentiation by the feedback teachers give. Therefore, the informants chose suitable differentiation strategies based on their mixed-ability pupils. The following excerpt illustrates the view of Informant 5 on differentiation by outcome teachers expect from pupils in the preschool classroom.

> "For example, let's say differentiation in terms of how do you want your pupils to respond. For the weak pupils, if they can at least mime and respond just by using their body gesture, I think that is good enough. This is for the very weak ones who are not confident. For those intermediate and strong pupils, we expect them to be able to answer using simple sentences. We must support and guide them during the activity." (In-Depth Interview 5, lines 148-152)

The last theme, (4) Conducting Assessment for Pupils in the Preschool Classroom discusses how the informants assessed the pupils in the preschool ELT context. The informants indeed employed suitable assessment strategies and tools for assessment purpose. Since the focus of assessment is on preschool pupils, it is important to note that this group of learners is still at the very early stage of language learning. Therefore, the informants mostly conducted observation as one of the assessment strategies in the preschool classroom. The pertinent

role of observation as one effective strategy and checklist as a tool in assessing pupils is expressed by Informant 4.

> "For my personal record in the preschool classroom and as evidence if there is any monitoring from the observer on assessment, it is easy to use checklist. Based on my observation, I will record the progress of pupils in terms of words they have acquired or simple sentences they have read." (In-Depth Interview 4, lines 183-186)

They also mentioned the importance of the element of performance standards in the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. The informants fully adhered to the levels and descriptors of the performance standards when they assessed the pupils. Informant 2 compared the previous preschool English language curriculum with the revised version of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum.

> "The CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum has the Scheme of Work which provides a complete guideline of what preschool teachers need to do. It also has the performance standard, with performance levels and descriptors on what pupils should be able to achieve for the language skills. The step-by-step guideline of how to practise EEE Model is provided too. That's the major difference. The previous English language curriculum does not have the element of performance standard." (In-Depth Interview 2, lines 47-52)

The four significant themes, (1) Abiding by Scheme of Work, (2) Using Language Learning Activities and Materials, (3) Employing Differentiation Strategies in the Preschool Classroom and (4) Conducting Assessment for Pupils in the Preschool Classroom address the research question on how the informants implemented the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum in ELT. These themes are in line with Cognitive Constructivism, Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction (1985) as well as Herbartian Approach (1911). The first theme, (1) Abiding by Scheme of Work pinpoints the importance of setting lesson objectives which aligns to Gagne's second event of instruction, informing learners of the objectives of the lesson. This event is also related to the first step of lesson planning in Herbartian Approach which is the preparation stage. Both stages emphasise on how the informants prepared the pupils prior to the lesson. At this stage, the informants informed the pupils of the learning objectives and gauged their attention to the topic of the lesson. Pupils were aware of the expected outcomes of the lesson.

The second theme, (2) Using Language Learning Activities and Materials conforms to the Gagne's fourth event; presenting the stimulus and the fifth event; providing learning guidance. At these stages, the informants used interesting game-based language learning activities in presenting the stimulus related to the lesson. This stimulus were basically the lexical items which consist of the vocabulary that pupils have to learn for the lesson. Then informants then guided the pupils in the learning process. This theme also conforms to the second step of lesson planning of the Herbartian Approach. The second step focuses on presentation, where the informants presented the stimulus to the pupils and engaged them actively in the lesson. The third theme, (3) Employing Differentiation Strategies in the Preschool Classroom is in accordance with Gagne's fifth event; providing learning guidance, sixth event; eliciting performance as well as the seventh event; providing feedback. The

informants indeed guided the pupils as they employed suitable differentiation strategies based on the mixed-ability group. The informants also elicited pupils' performance from the language activities and provided feedback on their performance too. The third theme is also related to the Herbartian steps of lesson planning which are association and comparison, generalisation and application. As the informants employed suitable differentiation strategies in their preschool classroom, they provided opportunities for pupils to associate and compare ideas, turn abstract ideas into general concept as well as apply what they have learned in other contexts.

The fourth theme, (4) Conducting Assessment for Pupils in the Preschool Classroom is in line with Gagne's eight event; assessing performance. This event specifically zooms into the role of assessment in the teaching and learning. The informants employed suitable assessment strategies and assessment tools in assessing the pupils. They also took into account the role of performance standards in assessing the pupils. The informants determined pupils' performance standard based on the performance levels and descriptors outlined in the Scheme of Work. The Herbartian Approach does not explicitly outline assessment in the steps of lesson planning. However, assessment could take place as the informants observed pupils on how they engaged in the language learning activities as they associated and compared their new knowledge, processed information and generalised them, and finally applied them in other contexts. As for document analysis, CEFR-aligned lesson plans and language learning materials were analysed accordingly. It is found that the informants' CEFR-aligned lesson plans as well as language learning materials adhered to the Scheme of Work, used game-based language learning activities, employed differentiation strategies based on the mixed-ability pupils and portrayed assessment in the preschool classroom too. The document analysis triangulated the data gathered from the informants.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the research question on the implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum is addressed through the four main themes, (1) Abiding by Scheme of Work, (2) Using Language Learning Activities and Materials, (3) Employing Differentiation Strategies in the Preschool Classroom and (4) Conducting Assessment for Pupils in the Preschool Classroom. The themes portray clear guideline on how to implement the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum among preschool teachers. This study would be beneficial to the preschool ELT body of knowledge as it describes how to effectively implement the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum specifically in the preschool classroom setting. Preschool teachers should follow the flow of the implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum appropriately in order to ensure successful implementation to take place. This will indeed improve the preschool teachers' ELT practice and develop preschool pupils' communicative competence in using English language.

This study is yet another research that further supports Piaget's Cognitive Constructivism theory that language is constructed through a variety of suitable learning activities in a language rich environment. The present study revealed this as evident through the implementation of the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum in Malaysia. The mastery approach adopted in the curriculum is a clear indication of Piaget's contention that children construct knowledge in stages. This further implies classroom environment should

encourage active learning, and teaching in ways to optimise children's learning. The implementation processes of the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum adheres to Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction (1985) and Herbartian Approach (1911). This proved that although both theory and approach have been established long before, the latest teaching and learning processes still adhered to the flow in both the theory and approach. However, improvement in terms of the use of technology in the ELT context has been integrated to further enhance the implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum. In addition, this research also contributes theoretically in terms of the use of CEFR as a framework for language proficiency across the globe. Malaysia has moved forward to be on par with other countries worldwide as our Ministry of Education has aligned the preschool English language curriculum with CEFR. Therefore, it is crucial for preschool teachers at the ground level to actively carry out the teaching and learning to ensure successful implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum.

Another crucial area that this study has positively contributed is in terms of its contextual contribution to the preschool ELT context. Based on the problem statement, it is found that there is limited studies conducted on the implementation of CEFR-aligned English language curriculum at preschool level. It is hoped that this research will shed light on the reality of the current implementation processes of CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum so that the stakeholders involved in the Ministry of Education Malaysia can take necessary actions to further enhance the curriculum implementation in the future. It is also important to highlight that Early Childhood Education is the foundation of preschool English language learning, thus making it the most essential stage to be explored by the preschool pupils nationwide. Therefore, preschool teachers are responsible to effectively implement the CEFR-aligned preschool English language curriculum so that the aspirational target for preschool pupils to achieve Pre-A1 level can be achieved successfully. This achievement will definitely reflect that the aspirations set in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB), Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013) and the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap, Ministry of Education (2015) have been successfully manifested.

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