

Workplace Language Demands: Employers' Insights on the English Proficiency of Pre-Service Teachers in Malaysia

Nor Izzuani Izhar^{1*}, Nurzahirah Zainal¹, Fairuz Elani Ismail²,
Muhammad Yasir Yahya³

¹Centre for Language and General Studies, Universiti Islam Melaka, Malaysia, ²General Studies Department, Politeknik Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah, Malaysia, ³Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
Corresponding Author Email: *izzuani@unimel.edu.my

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i3/26506>

Published Online: 19 September 2025

Abstract

This conceptual paper examines the language demands placed on pre-service teachers in Malaysia, with a particular focus on employers' perspectives regarding English proficiency. As English continues to function as a lingua franca in Malaysian educational institutions, the ability of future teachers to communicate effectively in professional settings is paramount. Drawing upon theories of communicative competence, workplace literacy, and language socialisation, the paper identifies key challenges faced by pre-service teachers, including limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, and a lack of confidence in oral communication. Employers highlight these issues as barriers to professional performance and employability. The paper proposes strategic curriculum enhancements that embed workplace-relevant language use into teacher education programmes and suggests policy interventions to ensure better alignment between institutional language preparation and real-world professional expectations. The discussion contributes to the ongoing discourse on English language needs in teacher education, offering practical insights for curriculum designers, teacher educators, and policymakers.

Keywords: English Proficiency, Workplace Communication, Pre-Service Teachers, Teacher Education, Employers' Perspectives

Introduction

In many countries, English is considered a universal language and a vital asset in the field of education. As more non-native speakers learn English, it has become the official language in numerous nations worldwide and serves as the dominant language in international business. As such, its significance is undeniable (Dy & Sumoyao, 2023). In the context of teacher education, this global importance translates into a pressing need for teachers to demonstrate not only academic knowledge but also effective communicative competence, as their ability to use English directly influences teaching quality, student learning, and long-term educational outcomes.

English proficiency is a key employability skill in the Malaysian education sector, where it functions not only as a subject of instruction but also as a medium of professional communication (Ag-Ahmad et al., 2023). This makes English not just a desirable attribute but an essential requirement for professional success, particularly for pre-service teachers who will be the future workforce shaping the nation's education system. In recent years, concerns have been raised regarding the readiness of pre-service teachers to meet the linguistic expectations of the workplace, particularly in early childhood and primary education contexts (Al-Malki et al., 2020). Hence, investigating the workplace language demands of pre-service teachers is crucial to ensure that teacher education programmes are producing graduates who are both linguistically competent and professionally credible. This paper presents a conceptual discussion on workplace language demands, highlighting the perspectives of employers regarding the English proficiency of pre-service teachers in Malaysia. The objective is to bridge the gap between institutional language preparation and real-world communication requirements in educational settings.

English plays a pivotal role in Malaysia's education system and broader professional landscape. As a former British colony, Malaysia has retained English as a second language and a key medium for upward mobility, especially in higher education and urban employment sectors (Baharum et al., 2024). The government's language-in-education policies, such as the English Language Education Reform: The Roadmap 2015–2025, reaffirm the need for English proficiency among educators (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Teachers, particularly in early childhood and primary schools, are expected to be fluent in English to facilitate instruction, conduct assessments, and engage with increasingly diverse student and parent populations (Chee et al., 2020). This expectation demonstrates the significance of the present study, as strengthening teachers' workplace English proficiency not only benefits classroom practices but also enhances parental trust, professional collaboration, and institutional reputation.

Within teacher education and practicum settings, English proficiency plays an important role in determining teaching effectiveness. Pre-service teachers must demonstrate their ability to use English in lesson planning, classroom instruction, documentation, and peer collaboration. Despite receiving English instruction during their training, many pre-service teachers struggle to transfer their academic English knowledge to real-world teaching environments (Gutierrez & Panas-Espique, 2020). Practicum placements often expose them to unpredictable linguistic challenges, including communicating with colleagues, supervisors, and parents, which require a different set of workplace-specific English skills. By highlighting these gaps, this study underscores its utility for curriculum developers and policymakers, as it provides evidence of where current teacher training falls short and what interventions are needed to prepare teachers for authentic workplace communication.

The employment landscape for pre-service teachers in Malaysia has grown increasingly competitive, with schools, especially private and international institutions, prioritising strong English communication skills during hiring processes (Iman et al., 2023). In early childhood education (ECE), teachers are expected to interact with children using simple, grammatically correct English while also maintaining clear, professional communication with parents and colleagues. Primary and secondary school teachers face additional expectations, such as managing subject-specific language and adapting instructional language for students

of varying proficiencies. Employers report that communication breakdowns, limited vocabulary, and a lack of confidence in English can negatively affect classroom engagement, student understanding, and overall professional credibility (Lee et al., 2021). Therefore, the study is highly beneficial not only for pre-service teachers themselves, who must enhance their employability, but also for employers and institutions seeking to maintain high teaching standards and educational outcomes.

Understanding the perspectives of employers is central to identifying the real-world language expectations placed upon pre-service teachers. Employers (principals, mentor teachers, and school leaders) are firsthand observers of pre-service teachers' communicative competence during practicum and induction phases. Their insights offer valuable feedback on performance gaps and professional readiness, particularly regarding language use in instruction, staff meetings, report writing, and parent communication (Guzman, 2023). Engaging these stakeholders not only improves the reliability of the study but also enhances its effectiveness, as the findings can inform reforms that are directly aligned with workplace realities. Without these perspectives, language training in teacher education programmes risks remaining theoretical and disconnected from practical realities. As such, engaging employers in discussions on language proficiency can inform curriculum design, practicum expectations, and overall educational policy reforms.

This paper aims to achieve the following objectives: (1) To identify the core English language competencies expected by employers in the Malaysian education sector; (2) To examine the perceived gaps between pre-service teachers' English proficiency and workplace communication demands; and (3) To propose curricular and policy interventions to bridge these gaps. The scope of this paper primarily focuses on early childhood and primary education contexts in Malaysia, where English serves as both a medium of instruction and a tool for professional engagement. By adopting a conceptual approach, the paper synthesises theoretical perspectives, empirical insights, and stakeholder feedback to propose a more responsive and contextually grounded framework for language preparation in teacher education.

Background and Context

Malaysia's multilingual landscape necessitates a strong command of English for effective communication, particularly in urban and internationalised educational environments (Baharum et al., 2024). English is often used in teaching, curriculum documentation, and interactions with parents and stakeholders. Pre-service teachers, therefore, face the dual challenge of mastering pedagogical knowledge and acquiring adequate language proficiency (Tanjung et al., 2020). However, empirical observations and anecdotal evidence suggest a mismatch between the expectations of employers and the actual communicative competence of new graduates entering the teaching workforce (Roy & Dhar, 2023).

The status of English in Malaysia's education system has evolved significantly over the past decades. While Bahasa Malaysia remains the national language and medium of instruction in most public schools, English retains its significance as a second language, particularly in urban, private, and international school contexts. According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015), English is essential for preparing Malaysian students for global

competitiveness. Various initiatives, such as the Malaysia Education Blueprint and the Dual Language Programme (DLP), promote English-medium instruction in Science and Mathematics to reinforce bilingual proficiency. Consequently, teacher education institutions are expected to cultivate high English standards among their graduates to align with these national goals.

Within teacher training programmes, English plays a critical role not only in coursework but also in practicum-based learning. Pre-service teachers are required to demonstrate language competency in professional documentation, lesson delivery, classroom management, and reflective journaling (Lee et al., 2021). However, studies have shown that many pre-service teachers lack sufficient exposure to authentic language use in classroom scenarios, which leads to anxiety, miscommunication, and limited instructional clarity (Ag-Ahmad et al., 2023). Despite English being taught as both a subject and medium of instruction in teacher training institutions, there remains a significant gap between academic English proficiency and the kind of communicative English needed in real school environments.

The employment landscape for pre-service teachers in Malaysia is shaped by increasing demand for multilingual and versatile educators, especially in early childhood and primary sectors. Schools, especially private and semi-private institutions, often conduct interviews and classroom observations to assess candidates' language and pedagogical skills (Pazilah et al., 2024). Employers expect candidates to communicate fluently in English, demonstrate classroom management using clear language, and interact confidently with parents. Failure to meet these criteria often results in employability challenges, even among academically strong candidates. Thus, linguistic competence has become a gatekeeping mechanism in teacher recruitment and retention, especially in metropolitan areas where English is widely used.

The rationale for integrating employer perspectives into language education is grounded in the need to ensure that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared for real-world challenges. Employers provide crucial insights into language tasks that go beyond textbooks, such as impromptu problem-solving discussions, managing disciplinary issues with parents, and handling administrative correspondence. Yusof et al. (2023) note that institutional language training often lacks alignment with workplace realities, leading to underprepared graduates who struggle during their induction year. Engaging employers in ongoing curriculum review processes can lead to more practical and contextually relevant language training for future educators.

Conceptual Framework

This paper draws on theories of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), workplace literacy (Holmes, 2005), and language socialisation (Duff, 2010) to frame the discussion. Communicative competence encompasses grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies, all of which are crucial in educational settings. Workplace literacy refers to the ability to use language appropriately in professional contexts, while language socialisation highlights the role of institutional culture in shaping language practices. Together, these frameworks provide insight into the complex interplay between language expectations and professional readiness in educational settings.

In addition to these theories, the notion of employability skills offers a relevant perspective, particularly in the context of teacher preparation. Employability skills refer to the transferable competencies that enable individuals to perform effectively in workplace environments, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving (Astrero et al., 2024). English proficiency is situated as a core component of these skills, especially in the Malaysian education sector where teachers are expected to function bilingually or multilingually. According to Biao et al. (2020), linguistic competence is not limited to grammatical correctness but also involves the ability to negotiate meaning, understand context, and adjust tone and register according to professional demands. Therefore, English proficiency should be conceptualised not merely as language accuracy, but as a broader communicative ability that aligns with occupational expectations and institutional culture.

The concept of “language demands” in the workplace encompasses the types of linguistic tasks, communication genres, and interactional routines that employees are expected to navigate (Jaca & Javines, 2020). In the context of teacher education, these demands include lesson delivery, instructional dialogue, classroom management discourse, written documentation (e.g., lesson plans, reports), and professional exchanges with colleagues and parents. These communicative tasks require proficiency across multiple language domains, including spoken fluency, written coherence, and pragmatic awareness. As such, this paper frames “English proficiency” as a dynamic and situated construct, shaped by institutional norms and workplace expectations. It goes beyond standardised testing measures of proficiency, recognising that the capacity to use English effectively in real-time, professional contexts is key to teacher performance and student outcomes (Lopez-Medina, 2024).

This conceptual framing acknowledges the ecological and social dimensions of language use in professional settings. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, the paper recognises that pre-service teachers’ English language proficiency is influenced by multiple layers of context; from teacher education institutions (microsystem) and practicum schools (mesosystem) to national language policies (macrosystem). These contextual factors shape both the perceived and actual language demands of the workplace. The convergence of communicative competence theory, workplace literacy, and employability frameworks thus enables a holistic understanding of how English proficiency functions as a socio-professional asset. This framing is essential to proposing curriculum interventions that address not only the cognitive and linguistic needs of pre-service teachers but also their adaptation to institutional communication norms.



Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking employer expectations, workplace language demands, and curriculum implications in teacher education.

This integrative model highlights the contribution of this paper by positioning English proficiency not as an isolated academic skill but as a socio-professional competence that directly links institutional training to workplace realities.

Workplace Language Demands in the Education Sector

Language use in the teaching profession extends beyond classroom instruction. Pre-service teachers are expected to prepare lesson plans, write reports, engage in professional dialogues, and manage parent-teacher communications, all of which require a high level of English proficiency (Tulomana et al., 2023). In multilingual classrooms, code-switching and translation practices are common, further complicating language use. Employers report that many pre-service teachers struggle with academic writing, oral presentation, and spontaneous communication in English, which can hinder their overall effectiveness and professional confidence (Tahir et al., 2024).

Communication needs in teaching are multidimensional, encompassing verbal fluency, clarity of instruction, and the ability to scaffold student understanding through appropriate language. Teachers must deliver content clearly, ask and answer questions, provide feedback, and manage classroom discussions, all in English, especially in institutions where English is the medium of instruction (MOI). According to Purna (2021), effective classroom communication requires the ability to simplify complex concepts, use appropriate questioning techniques, and adapt language to students' proficiency levels. For pre-service teachers, this requires not only pedagogical knowledge but also a high level of communicative competence. Inability to communicate instructions or explanations effectively can lead to student disengagement and poor learning outcomes, which employers view as a critical professional weakness (Harun & Abdul Samat, 2021).

Beyond instructional communication, language proficiency is essential in fulfilling administrative and reporting duties. Pre-service teachers are required to write daily lesson plans, weekly reflections, assessment records, and formal reports for supervisors and principals. These documents must be coherent, grammatically accurate, and professionally presented. However, studies indicate that many Malaysian pre-service teachers face challenges in writing formal texts, citing issues such as limited vocabulary, poor sentence structure, and weak organisation of ideas (Ibrahim, 2023). These written communication tasks are not merely academic; they reflect teachers' professional identities and are evaluated by stakeholders, including cooperating teachers and school administrators. Employers have noted that deficiencies in written English can undermine pre-service teachers' credibility and hinder their career advancement, especially in urban or private education settings where English is prioritised (Saidin & Jaafar, 2024).

Another area where language proficiency plays a significant role is classroom management and interaction with parents. Managing student behaviour often requires assertive, clear, and respectful verbal communication, including issuing instructions, correcting misbehaviour, and negotiating conflict. Miscommunication in these contexts can escalate tensions or result in misunderstandings, making effective use of language essential to maintaining a conducive learning environment (Yusof et al., 2023). Additionally, parent-teacher communication through meetings, phone calls, or written correspondence; demands sensitivity, professionalism, and clarity. Parents expect updates on their children's progress,

explanation of school policies, and meaningful dialogue about educational concerns. According to Lee et al. (2021), many school leaders observe that pre-service teachers lack the pragmatic competence to manage such interactions diplomatically in English. This gap creates a mismatch between workplace expectations and teacher preparation programs.

In multilingual classrooms, the complexity of language use increases. Malaysian classrooms often consist of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, requiring teachers to navigate between English, Malay, and sometimes vernacular languages such as Mandarin or Tamil. Code-switching is often used to aid comprehension, manage classroom dynamics, and build rapport with students (Tahir et al., 2024). However, over-reliance on code-switching may undermine students' exposure to English, especially in schools designated as English-medium. Employers note that pre-service teachers often struggle to maintain a balance between accessibility and language policy compliance. Moreover, limited proficiency in English may restrict their ability to manage linguistic diversity effectively, reducing their confidence and adaptability in the classroom (Harun & Abdul Samat, 2021). This highlights the need for teacher education programs to address the socio-linguistic realities of Malaysian classrooms more explicitly.

Finally, workplace language demands are shaped by the expectations of various stakeholders, including school principals, senior teachers, colleagues, and parents. Each of these stakeholders holds different perspectives on what constitutes adequate English proficiency. Principals often expect teachers to represent the school professionally during external engagements and to comply with institutional policies regarding language use. Colleagues expect professional collaboration in English through staff meetings, peer observations, and shared teaching materials (Lee et al., 2021). Parents, particularly in urban and private schools, associate fluent English use with teacher competence and the quality of education their children receive (Ibrahim, 2023). As such, language proficiency is not only a functional requirement but also a symbol of credibility, professionalism, and trust. Employers frequently highlight a gap between these expectations and the actual communicative abilities of fresh graduates, pointing to the need for more workplace-oriented language training in teacher education.

Employers' Perspectives on English Proficiency

Employers in the education sector (including principals, school administrators, and supervising teachers) have expressed concerns about the limited communicative competence of some pre service teachers. Key issues include inaccurate grammar, limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and difficulties in adapting language for different audiences (Belangoy et al., 2024). Employers also highlight the importance of interpersonal communication skills, which are often overlooked in language training programmes (Bankole, 2023). These insights underscore the need for a more targeted and practical approach to language development in teacher education.

One of the most cited concerns among employers, especially in the early childhood education (ECE) sector, is the inability of pre-service teachers to use English effectively in real-time interactions with children, colleagues, and parents. Early childhood teachers are expected to model correct language use, simplify concepts, and engage children through storytelling, questioning, and instructional dialogue (Chee et al., 2020). Employers report that

many ECE pre-service teachers lack the fluency and confidence to maintain extended verbal exchanges in English, often switching to Malay or code-mixing to compensate for limited vocabulary or hesitation (Harun & Abdul Samat, 2021). This not only affects the language learning environment but also undermines the linguistic goals of institutions that aim to provide immersive English exposure in the early years.

Another major issue raised by employers concerns the perceived disconnect between pre-service teachers' academic training and their workplace language demands. Although teacher education programmes include language proficiency components, employers feel these are often too theoretical and insufficiently aligned with real classroom communication needs (Pazilah et al., 2024). For instance, pre-service teachers may be able to complete written academic assignments but struggle to write clear lesson plans, professional emails, or reflective journals that meet workplace standards. This gap reflects a lack of genre-specific writing instruction in teacher training curricula. Furthermore, oral communication skills such as delivering clear instructions, participating in meetings, or engaging parents are rarely practised in simulated workplace scenarios during their training (Jaca & Javines, 2020). This mismatch signals a need for more experiential language learning, including school-based microteaching, professional dialogues, and mock parent-teacher conferences.

Survey data and institutional reports provide additional evidence of employers' dissatisfaction with English language preparedness. For example, a 2020 nationwide tracer study by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia found that 42% of employers across various sectors including education rated graduates' English communication skills as "below expectations" (MOHE, 2020). Similarly, some pre-service teachers were unable to conduct storytelling or circle time activities confidently in English, citing lack of vocabulary and fear of making grammatical mistakes (Chee et al., 2020). Anecdotal evidence from supervising teachers in practicum schools also highlights recurring patterns: pre-service teachers tend to avoid English interactions with parents, defer to mentor teachers during formal meetings, and exhibit reluctance to speak spontaneously in English (Tahir et al., 2024). These patterns suggest that language anxiety and lack of communicative rehearsal play a significant role in shaping teachers' professional behaviour.

Employers also express expectations that go beyond basic language accuracy. They value teachers who can demonstrate pragmatic competence (knowing how to tailor language appropriately depending on the audience and context). For instance, communicating with a three-year-old child requires different lexical and tonal choices than discussing a child's behavioural development with parents or presenting progress reports to principals. Many pre-service teachers, however, are unprepared to navigate these linguistic shifts, resulting in overly formal or overly casual communication (Ibrahim, 2023). This pragmatic gap can lead to misunderstandings, diminished credibility, or breakdowns in collaboration. Employers recommend that teacher education institutions incorporate more situational practice and feedback sessions focusing on tone, register, and purpose-driven communication. Such efforts would help bridge the gap between classroom proficiency and workplace performance, ensuring that future teachers are not only linguistically competent but professionally articulate.

Implications for Teacher Education and Curriculum Design

The findings suggest that teacher education programmes must place greater emphasis on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), focusing on the linguistic functions required in school environments. This includes integrating language support into pedagogical courses, offering targeted workshops on academic and professional English, and incorporating workplace communication tasks into assessments. Moreover, practicum experiences should include language focused mentoring to help pre-service teachers develop confidence and competence in real-time communication (Tulomana et al., 2023).

Curriculum revision should begin with a detailed needs analysis to identify the specific communicative tasks that pre-service teachers are expected to perform in different educational contexts, especially in early childhood and multilingual settings. Research has shown that language competence in professional environments is task-based and context-sensitive (Saidin & Jaafar, 2024). Thus, teacher education institutions should develop syllabi that align language instruction with authentic classroom demand such as conducting parent-teacher meetings, writing observation reports, storytelling, and participating in staff briefings. Embedding such real-world tasks into coursework and assessments not only makes language learning more relevant but also helps bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace application (Pazilah et al., 2024). Additionally, institutions should work closely with schools and employers to co-develop language benchmarks that reflect industry expectations, thus ensuring curriculum responsiveness and graduate readiness.

Another significant implication is the need to embed language development holistically across the entire teacher education programme, rather than isolating it within a single English course. Many institutions treat English proficiency as a prerequisite skill, often measured by entry tests or early semester modules, without continuous scaffolding throughout the teacher training journey (Ag-Ahmad et al., 2023). However, the complexity of workplace language demands calls for sustained exposure, practice, and feedback. One effective model could be Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), where English instruction is embedded within pedagogical content courses, allowing students to acquire language skills in parallel with their professional knowledge (Bascones et al., 2024). In Malaysia, such an approach could be particularly useful in training pre-service teachers to handle subjects taught in English, while simultaneously refining their language use in contextually meaningful ways.

Moreover, institutions should establish support systems that offer ongoing English language development beyond the classroom. This could include writing centres, conversation clinics, peer mentoring, and language bootcamps tailored to the communication tasks encountered during practicum and the first year of teaching. For example, writing centres can assist with composing lesson plans, incident reports, or reflective journals, while speaking labs can simulate parent engagement or team-teaching sessions (Iman et al., 2023). Schools can also play a vital role by assigning language mentors during practicum who can provide feedback on linguistic aspects of performance. Importantly, feedback should focus not only on accuracy but also on appropriateness, clarity, and fluency (qualities often required in fast-paced teaching environments) (Lee et al., 2021). By embedding such support structures, teacher education providers can better equip pre-service teachers with the communicative competence needed to thrive in diverse and dynamic school settings.

Finally, institutional policy should acknowledge language development as a shared responsibility, involving collaboration among language instructors, content lecturers, practicum supervisors, and employers. A cross-disciplinary language policy framework can help ensure that all faculty members are aware of the language demands in their respective courses and are equipped to offer linguistic scaffolding where necessary (Saidin & Jaafar, 2024). Faculty development workshops on how to embed language awareness into content instruction can further strengthen this effort. Additionally, assessment rubrics should explicitly include language use as a criterion (especially in practicum evaluations and portfolio submissions) thus reinforcing its importance in professional readiness. By adopting a whole-programme and stakeholder-driven approach to language enhancement, teacher education institutions can close the gap between graduate capabilities and workplace expectations, ultimately improving the employability and performance of pre-service teachers in Malaysia's increasingly multilingual and English-oriented education landscape.

Recommendations

To bridge the gap between institutional preparation and the communicative realities of the teaching profession, targeted and evidence-based policy and practice recommendations are essential. Stakeholders (including higher education institutions, practicum coordinators, supervising mentors, and education policymakers) must collaborate to ensure that English language training is not only academically sound but also functionally aligned with workplace demands. The recommendations below draw on empirical findings, national education blueprints, and international best practices to strengthen language readiness among pre-service teachers.

Establish Clear English Language Benchmarks for Pre-Service Teachers

One of the first steps in aligning pre-service teacher training with professional expectations is the establishment of standardised English language proficiency benchmarks. The Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015) has acknowledged the importance of English in national and international communication, but the implementation of consistent and context-specific standards for pre-service teachers remains underdeveloped. Establishing proficiency benchmarks aligned with internationally recognised frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) would provide clarity on the expected levels of communicative competence at different stages of teacher preparation (Tahir et al., 2024). These benchmarks should include not only general language skills but also professional communication tasks, such as classroom instruction, conflict resolution, and school documentation. Incorporating such standards into university entry requirements, graduation criteria, and practicum evaluations would incentivise consistent language development and provide measurable targets for students and educators alike.

Strengthen Partnerships between Teacher Education Institutions and Schools

Robust collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools is vital for ensuring that pre service teachers experience authentic language use in realistic teaching environments. Currently, limited dialogue exists between curriculum designers and school administrators regarding workplace language expectations, resulting in a mismatch between academic training and professional realities (Baharum et al., 2024). By formalising partnerships, institutions can co-develop language-integrated practicum guidelines, co-assess student-teacher performance, and gather longitudinal feedback from schools on language-

related challenges. For example, structured school-university dialogues and feedback loops can help institutions adjust course content to better reflect the real-world communicative demands teachers face particularly in multilingual and early childhood classrooms (Yusof et al., 2023). Moreover, teacher mentors at practicum sites can be trained to offer constructive language feedback, helping to scaffold the development of workplace-relevant English in a supportive and developmental manner.

Provide Continuous Professional Development on Workplace Communication

English language proficiency should not be viewed as a static competence to be mastered before graduation, but rather as a professional skill requiring ongoing refinement. Continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities focused on workplace communication both during and after initial teacher education can enhance pre-service and early-career teachers' confidence and effectiveness. CPD modules could include topics such as handling parent-teacher conferences, writing formal reports, using digital communication tools in English, and managing disciplinary language in the classroom. These sessions should prioritise functional and pragmatic language use over theoretical grammar instruction. As Tahir et al. (2024) suggest, targeted CPD programmes that simulate real communication scenarios are particularly effective in building language competence in educational settings. Such initiatives can be supported by both universities and district education offices, ensuring sustainability and scalability. Additionally, access to online platforms and mobile apps for autonomous English learning can further extend the reach of CPD programmes, especially for teachers in rural areas.

Encourage Reflective Language Practice Through Teaching Portfolios and Feedback Mechanisms

Finally, incorporating reflective language practice into the teacher education curriculum encourages metacognitive awareness and ongoing self-assessment. Teaching portfolios, for instance, provide an excellent platform for students to document their language use in various teaching scenarios such as lesson plans, reflection journals, and video-recorded teaching segments. These portfolios should be reviewed not only for pedagogical quality but also for language accuracy, clarity, and appropriateness. Furthermore, structured feedback mechanisms such as language audits by practicum supervisors or peer assessments; can help identify communicative strengths and areas for improvement (Dy & Sumayao, 2023). Reflective practice also aligns well with constructivist principles in teacher education, fostering agency and autonomy in language learning. When supported by institutional policies and rubrics that value communicative competence, these reflective tools can meaningfully contribute to language development across the teaching continuum. In conclusion, addressing the workplace language demands faced by pre-service teachers requires coordinated policy responses and institutional reforms that cut across curriculum design, practicum implementation, and teacher development. By establishing clear benchmarks, fostering school institution collaboration, offering targeted CPD, and promoting reflective practice, stakeholders can create an ecosystem that not only enhances English language proficiency but also strengthens the professional identity and employability of future educators. Given Malaysia's multilingual context and the growing emphasis on English as a medium of instruction and global competence, such policy and practice shifts are both timely and imperative.

Conclusion

English language proficiency remains a critical component of teacher employability and professional success in Malaysia, particularly in a globalised and multilingual educational context. By incorporating the perspectives of employers (principals, administrators, and supervising teachers), this paper underscores the urgent need for teacher education programmes to respond to the real-world language demands encountered in schools. The evidence discussed reveals that many pre-service teachers, especially in early childhood and multilingual settings, struggle to meet the oral and written communication expectations of the workplace (Yusof et al., 2023). These challenges, if left unaddressed, may hinder not only their professional development but also the quality of education delivered to learners.

A central argument of this paper is that current language training in teacher education does not sufficiently address the specific and functional communication tasks required in Malaysian classrooms. General English courses, while necessary, are not enough to prepare pre-service teachers for the complex roles they assume in real school environments that demand competencies in lesson delivery, classroom management, professional reporting, and parent-teacher communication (Baharum et al., 2024). As such, there is a compelling need to integrate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and workplace literacy frameworks into teacher education curricula (Ibrahim, 2023). Doing so would ensure that language instruction is more targeted, authentic, and responsive to the communicative realities of the teaching profession.

Another key insight emerging from this conceptual paper is the importance of stakeholder engagement and policy alignment. The Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015) has outlined the importance of communicative competence for 21st-century educators, yet the implementation of such policies at the institutional level remains uneven. Strengthening partnerships between universities and schools, standardising English proficiency benchmarks, and embedding continuous professional development in language use are essential for achieving alignment between academic training and workplace realities (Saidin & Jaafar, 2024). These structural reforms must be complemented by pedagogical innovations, such as reflective portfolios and practicum-based language mentoring, which can support pre-service teachers' communicative growth over time (Lee et al., 2021).

The implications of these findings go beyond academic outcomes; they are closely tied to student learning experiences, school communication effectiveness, and the reputation of teacher training institutions. Teachers serve as communicative models in the classroom, and their language use shapes students' cognitive, linguistic, and social development (Purna, 2021). When teachers are unable to communicate effectively, it can result in misunderstandings, mismanagement, and diminished learning outcomes. Therefore, aligning teacher education with workplace language demands is not only a matter of employability but also of educational quality and equity, especially in multilingual and underserved communities.

Future research should take a longitudinal and evidence-based approach to further investigate this issue. Studies that track the development of pre-service teachers' English proficiency across different phases of training, such as coursework, practicum, and early career induction, would offer valuable insights into critical intervention points (Yusof et al.,

2023). In addition, empirical studies exploring the impact of ESP modules, language-focused CPD workshops, and practicum-based mentoring on teacher language performance are needed to build a stronger case for curricular and institutional reforms. Mixed-methods designs that combine institutional data, classroom observations, and employer interviews can provide a richer, more contextualised understanding of the communication challenges teachers face in different educational settings.

This paper calls for a systemic rethinking of how English language proficiency is conceptualised, taught, and assessed in teacher education in Malaysia. The alignment of language training with workplace demands must become a central concern for policymakers, curriculum designers, and educators. Doing so will not only enhance the employability and professional identity of pre-service teachers but also ensure that Malaysian schools are staffed with educators who can communicate effectively, confidently, and professionally in diverse and evolving educational environments.

Acknowledgement

This paper is a provision from the Phase 3.0 Research Incentive Grant managed by the Research Management Centre (RMC), Universiti Islam Melaka (UNIMEL).

References

- Ag-Ahmad, N., Syed Mohamed, A. T., & Bakar, E. W. (2023). Systematic review on issues and challenges of pre-service English teachers in Malaysia. *TEFLIN Journal-A Publication on the Teaching and Learning of English*, 34(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v34i1/1-20>
- Al-Malki, M. A., Weir, K., & Usher, W. (2020). Feedback on the classroom performance of pre-service English language teachers in Oman. *Arab World English Journal*, 11 (2) 18- 36. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no2.2>
- Astrero, M. K., Galo, D. K., Doyaoen, S. I., De Vera, A. M., & Eugenio, E. (2024). English language competence, communicative competence, and public speaking anxiety of pre-service teachers. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 7(11), 153-167. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2024.7.11.18>
- Baharum, N. N., Ismail, L., Ismail Shauki, N. B. (2024). Beliefs on second language learning among pre-service teachers in a public university in Malaysia. *Journal of Digital Sociohumanities*, 1(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.25077/jds.1.1.1-11.2024>
- Bankole, O. F. (2023). Dynamics of pre-service teachers' employability in 21st-century Nigeria: A focus on English language teachers in Ekiti State. *JOEL: Journal of Educational and Language Research*, 2(11), 1267–1278. <https://doi.org/10.53625/joel.v2i11.5978>
- Bascones, C. D., Abellana, A. L., & Borres, T. C. (2024). English language competence and teaching efficacy of English pre-service teachers. *International Journal of All Research Writings*, 6(6), 102-111. Retrieved from <http://ijarw.com/Users/ManuScript/ManuScriptDetails/81baa470-6128-4f0e-9e70-1ba83c472395>
- Belangoy, P. B. G., Reyes, H. D. D., Leon, G. S. D, Antiveros, M. J. P., Viña, M. T., Bayog, M. E. M. (2024). Level of speaking proficiency of ESL pre-service teachers when grouped according to sex, age, and year level. *Psych Educ*, 16(7), 753-770. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10546723>

- Biao, L. P., Sani, B., & Md Azmin Nur, Aizuri. (2020). Investigating Mentor Teachers' Roles in Mentoring Pre-Service Teachers' Teaching Practicum: A Malaysian Study. *English Language Teaching*, 13(11), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n11p1>
- Chee, S. C., Dinham, J., Sau, J. C. Y., & Williams, P. (2020). Comparing reflective practices of pre-service teachers in Malaysia and Australia: A mixed-methods approach. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(4), 1264-1285. Retrieved from <https://www.iier.org.au/iier30/choy.pdf>
- Dy, A. S., & Sumayao, E. D. (2023). Influence of the pre-service teachers' language proficiency to their teaching competence. *AJELP: The Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 11(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ajelp.vol11.1.1.2023>
- Gutierrez, J., & Panas-Espique, F. (2020). Competencies of pre-service language teachers: Towards developing a language training program. *Philippine Education Research Journal*, 1(2), 11-28. Retrieved from <https://peac.org.ph/2020-1-02/>
- Guzman, R. B. (2023). Perception, challenges, and academic performance of pre-service teachers in student teaching. *Journal for Educators, Teachers, and Trainers*, 14(5), 239-253. <https://doi.org/10.47750/jett.2023.14.05.024>
- Harun, A. S., & Abdul Samat, N. (2021). Teaching literature among pre-service teachers: Challenges and solutions. *LSP International Journal*, 8(1), 95-103. <https://doi.org/10.11113/lspi.v8.17182>
- Ibrahim, R. (2023). Investigating pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and motivation to teach English language learners. *International Journal of Modern Education Studies*, 7(1), 75-105. <https://doi.org/10.51383/ijonmes.2023.293>
- Iman, I., Parama Iswari, W., & Anggriyani, D. (2023). Pedagogical competence of pre-service teachers of English department Mulawarman University during online teaching practice. *E3L: Journal of English Teaching, Linguistic, and Literature*, 6(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.30872/e3l.v6i1.2390>
- Jaca, C. A. L., & Javines, F. B. (2020). Oral communication needs of pre-service teachers in practice teaching. *Randwick International of Education and Linguistics Science Journal*, 1(1), 67-73. <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v1i1.31>
- Lee, J., Butler, Y. G., & Peng, X. (2021). Multiple stakeholder interaction to enhance preservice teachers' language assessment literacy. *Languages*, 6(4), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages6040213>
- Lopez-Medina, B. (2024). Pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning and communication strategies: Does language proficiency make a difference? *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 21(2), 198-214. <https://doi.org/10.56040/btlm2122>
- Pazilah, F. N., Hashim, H., Md Yunus, M., & Md Rafiq, K. R. (2024). Exploring Malaysian ESL pre-service teachers' perceptions on knowledge of learners, digital literacy and 21st century competency. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 23(1), 300-317. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.1.15>
- Purna, B. K. (2021). Understanding of pre-service teachers' employability skills at Tribhuvan University. *Tribhuvan University Journal*, 36(1), 173-185. <https://doi.org/10.3126/tuj.v36i01.43619>
- Roy, P., & Dhar, D. (2023). Necessity of pre-service teacher education programme for the improvement of secondary education. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 4(7), 785-789. Retrieved from <https://ijrpr.com/uploads/V4ISSUE7/IJRPR15310.pdf>

- Saidin, A-N., & Jaafar, F. (2024). Exploring teaching anxiety in pre-service ESL teachers within the Malaysian context: Conceptual study. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Education and Society*, 6(1), 418-423. <https://doi.org/10.55057/ijares.2024.6.1.37>
- Tahir, N. A., Ramalingam, S., Azizan, E. A., Azmi, F. U., Hadzir, N. I., & Che Pi, N. (2024). A review on the experiences faced by ESL trainee teachers during teaching Practicum. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 9 (56), 322-334. <https://doi.org/10.35631/IJEPC.956021>.
- Tanjung, F. Z., Musthafa, B., & Wirza, Y. (2020). Proficiency and motivation: Foundation of pre-service English teachers' professional identity development. *Advances in Social Science Education and Humanities Research*, 513 (4), 337-344. <https://doi.org/10.2291/assehr.k.201230.128>
- Tulomana, J., Tagimaucia, V., & Chand, S. P. (2023). Assessing the readiness of pre-service teachers to teach English to ESL learners in Fijian secondary schools: A study of their language learning experiences and perceptions. *Brazilian English Language Teaching Journal*, 14(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.15448/2178-3640.2023.1.44931>
- Yusof, N. M., Thivany, M., & Hemavathi, T. (2023). Microteaching as a method in developing teaching skills: Pre-service English teachers' experience around secondary schools in Selangor. *Journal of Creative Practices in Language Learning and Teaching*, 11(2), 48- 56. <https://doi.org/10.24191/cplt.v11i2.21327>