

Exploring Vocabulary Teaching: Planning and Challenges with the Implementation of Audio-Visual Approach in Rural East Malaysian Primary-Level English Language Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is key to effective communication. Previous studies revealed that teachers often overlook vocabulary teaching compared to other language skills such as speaking, listening, grammar, reading, and writing. The integration of technology into the Malaysian education system has raised concerns about how vocabulary lessons are planned and executed in English classrooms, particularly in rural Sarawak schools in Malaysia. Studies in the past found that teachers have been hesitant to use Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) aligned resources despite knowing about their availability. This research was conducted to determine the teachers' vocabulary lesson planning and the challenges teachers experienced when using the audio-visual (AV) approach to teach vocabulary in the primary-level English language classroom. Based on the purposive sampling technique, three primary-level English language teachers from one school in a rural area of Bau, Sarawak, participated in this study to provide rich information relevant to the research questions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and document analysis, and were analysed thematically based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. The findings indicated that teachers referred to CEFR-aligned documents for lesson planning especially when selecting resources and using the framework as a benchmark for practice. The findings indicated that teachers were facing challenges in two primary areas: infrastructure challenges related to information technology and policy challenges related to the CEFR. The results from this study provide practitioners with practical insights into how rural teachers implement the AV approach to teaching vocabulary in their classrooms.

Keywords: Vocabulary teaching; audio-visual approach; primary-level English language classroom; CEFR; rural school

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is the building block for effective communication. Insufficient vocabulary can make communication difficult (Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Sovakandan et al., 2017). Therefore, vocabulary is the key to learning the English language, which serves as the foundation for developing other language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Mohd. Nor et al., 2015; Susanto, 2017). However, in reality, researchers found that vocabulary teaching has

always been outshined by the attention given to teaching grammar, reading, and writing skills (Kalajahi & Poursahian 2012; Lu, 2017; Maizatulliza & Kiely, 2018).

Teaching English in Malaysia can be challenging, especially for teachers in rural schools in Sarawak where English is not the learners' first language. The differences in culture and background between the teachers and students in these schools often affect the pedagogical decisions made by the teachers (Chan & Kapong, 2021; Ler, 2012; Musa et al., 2012).

According to Kiss and Rimbar (2017), the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) has provided resources like English textbooks to teachers. However, these textbooks are difficult to use in rural Sarawak schools due to their foreign cultural content being incompatible with the local setting. Thus, teaching vocabulary based on the textbook was a challenge for the teachers, as opposed to teaching learners in urban schools, which have a more supportive environment, such as access to more up-to-date textbooks and technologies that can support English learning (Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H., 2021). The integration of technology into the Malaysian education system has raised concerns about how vocabulary lessons are planned and executed in English classrooms, particularly in rural Sarawak schools in Malaysia. The findings from this study are significant in providing practitioners with insights into how rural teachers implement the AV approach to teaching vocabulary in their classrooms.

Traditionally, Scott & Nagy (1997) argue that vocabulary teaching was based on the definition approach. Other researchers find it a passive approach because teachers focused on providing students with word definitions (Zeta et al., 2019). In recent years, technological advancement has contributed to the popularity of the audio-visual (AV) approach among Malaysian English teachers to improve students' language acquisition (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum [BPK], 2017).

Generally, AV is derived from the combination of two words: audio, which refers to "what we can hear," and visual, which refers to "what we can see" (Anas & Zakaria, 2019). In education, teachers often use the AV approach to engage learners through both audio and visual resources (Swaran Singh et al., 2021), which targets both the senses of hearing and sight (Anas & Zakaria, 2019). AV approach was also adopted to increase the learners' experience in the classroom (Swaran Singh et al., 2021). In line with the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into our Malaysian education system in 2017, AV resources aligned with the Teacher's Guidebook and Student's Book were provided by MOE Malaysia (BPK, 2017). The CEFR-aligned AV resources were saved in the form of compact discs (CDs) to aid English teachers in lesson planning and practice.

Studies in the past indicated that teachers have been hesitant to use CEFR-aligned resources, such as CDs, despite knowing about their availability (Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H., 2021; Ngu & Azlina, 2019; Utami, 2015). According to Bayuong et al. (2019), even with the availability of AV resources, integrating information technology (IT) in primary schools in Malaysia, especially in rural areas like Sarawak, has proven to be challenging. Past research has found that English teachers from rural schools were facing challenges such as the lack of resources (Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H., 2021; Utami, 2015), poor network coverage (Ngu & Azlina, 2019), lack of equipment and facilities (Wazeema & Kareema, 2017; Yonas et al., 2020), insufficient access to technology (Nawai & Nur Ehsan, 2020) and lack of teacher's training (Aminuddin & Azman, 2017; Azman et al., 2018).

According to Nurul Farehah and Mohd. Sallehudin (2017), the main reason that teachers were faced with these challenges was due to the lack of CEFR experts to develop and manage the CEFR-aligned resources, and also the lack of training for teachers to implement CEFR-aligned

resources in actual classroom practice. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how teachers plan to use the CEFR-aligned resources for vocabulary teaching and the challenges faced in the implementation process.

Recent studies by Alanazi (2019) and Phan (2021) have found that teachers' lesson planning plays a decisive role in the success or failure of a lesson. Effective lesson planning assists teachers to minimise the possible challenges in the classroom. How teachers teach is influenced by their Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1987; 2004). Shulman developed PCK in 1986 to bridge teachers' pedagogical and content knowledge that influences teachers' lesson planning, thus contributing to the success or failure of each lesson (Muhammad & Keily, 2018; Philip et al., 2019). This is especially crucial for vocabulary teaching as vocabulary was only presented in the form of a wordlist in the CEFR-aligned documents (BPK, 2017) without any specified instruction provided. Thus, how to teach vocabulary in the classroom depends on the teachers' PCK.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine primary-level English teachers' vocabulary lesson planning through the use of the AV approach in the rural classroom. The study aims to achieve two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to examine teacher planning for using AV to teach vocabulary in primary-level English language classrooms. This leads to the first research question: "How do teachers plan to use AV to teach vocabulary in the English language classroom?" Secondly, it aims to explore the challenges faced by teachers in using the audio-visual approach to teach vocabulary in the primary-level English language classroom. This leads to the second research question: "What are the challenges teachers encounter when using the AV approach to teach vocabulary in a primary-level English language classroom?" The findings from this study will be able to contribute to the limited research on vocabulary teaching through the CEFR-aligned curriculum in the Malaysian context.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate teachers' use of the AV approach to plan vocabulary lessons, as well as uncover the challenges teachers face. The value of the qualitative approach is to provide a richer and deeper understanding of how people perceive actions, events, behaviours, and relationships (Yin, 2011).

Since this is a qualitative study, the findings were not meant to be generalised to the entire population, but to provide a deeper understanding of how teachers adopt the AV approach for vocabulary lesson planning, as well as the challenges that they encounter. This qualitative research involved data collection, analysis, and interpretation via interviews, observations, and document analysis, which will be addressed further in the following section.

CONTEXT OF STUDY

The sample school for this study was a National Primary School known as Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) in the rural area of Bau, Sarawak. There are 369 students enrolled at this school, which has the largest student population in the Bau district at the time of the study. The school had 31 teachers at the time of data collection, five of them were English language teachers. English was a compulsory subject in the school which adopted the CFER-aligned curriculum. The English

language proficiency of learners in this school was average. The school was equipped with the basic IT infrastructure which needed to be shared among teachers.

SAMPLING

The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the participants for this study. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is widely used because it enables the researcher to find and choose a participant who may offer rich information relevant to the research question (Cresswell & Clark, 2011; Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling allows the sample size to be flexible depending on the resources, time available, and the research objectives (Bernard, 2002). Given the purpose of this study, three primary factors for the selection of participants were identified, namely (1) teaching English, (2) at least five years of teaching experience in English, and (3) English options.

Three out of five primary-level English language teachers who fit the selection criteria participated in this study to provide rich data relevant to answering the research questions. The other two teachers did not meet the requirements of having at least five years of experience teaching English, and one was unable to participate owing to an extended leave of absence during the data collection period. The three teachers who fulfilled the selection criteria were labelled as A1, A2 and A3. The demographic information of the participants is shown in the following Table 1.

TABLE 1. Demographic Information of Study Participants

Teacher Code	Option / Major	Subject Taught	Experience in the Teaching Field	Experience in Teaching English
A1	English	English	8 years	8 years
A2	English	English	32 years	32 years
A3	English	English	17 years	17 years

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

For this study, data were collected through three methods, which were semi-structured interview, document analysis, and observation.

The semi-structured in-person interviews with the school's teachers were undertaken for this study. Within a week before and after the classroom observation, an interview session with the corresponding teacher will be conducted. The duration of each interview session was approximately forty minutes. The research question served as the basis for the interview questions. With the interviewee's permission, the audio recordings of the sessions were made, and the researcher took notes throughout the interview. A verbatim transcription was drafted following the interview to look for recurring themes or patterns.

For the document analysis procedure, the document collected was the teachers' lesson plan to support their responses from the interview. A lesson plan was collected from each teacher before the observation session to allow the researcher to review the teacher's planning before the implementation process.

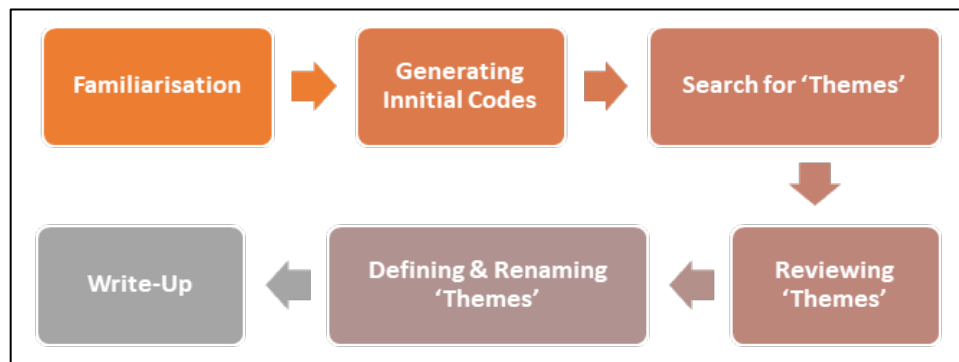
The purpose of the classroom observations was to see if the teacher's lesson was implemented as planned and discover the challenges teachers faced when teaching vocabulary. For every teacher, a sixty-minute observation session was conducted in the classroom. The classroom observation was both audio recorded and written in the observation field-note template with the teacher's permission.

DATA ANALYSIS

For this study, thematic analysis was used as its analytical framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Boyatziz, 1998). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis engaged researchers in the process of seeking themes within the collected data, thus using those themes to address the research question.

This study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method, which consists of six steps, as indicated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Braun & Clarke (2006) Thematic Analysis Method



Before the analysis, data from the interview was transcribed verbatim and thematically examined for this study. Then, by referring to Figure 1, step one began with rereading and getting familiar with the data collected from the interview, observation and document analysis. Step two involved generating a list of initial codes for the data and coding the data. Step three involved sorting the different codes into categories and searching for themes. Step four required the researcher to review the themes. Step five was defining and naming themes. Finally, step six involved a discussion of the emerging themes to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

This study sets out to examine the teachers' planning for vocabulary teaching through the AV approach. The findings were reported in two areas, which are teachers planning to use AV approaches to teach vocabulary and the challenges they encountered.

TEACHERS' PLANNING TO TEACH VOCABULARY USING AUDIO-VISUAL APPROACH

During the interview, the teachers were asked about their planning, and all of them cited CEFR. Therefore, the reporting of the findings centred on CEFR and the teacher's understanding of it. The two major themes that emerged were resources and benchmarks based on CEFR requirements.

RESOURCES

Planning was predominantly based on the support of CEFR-aligned resources which was divided into printed resources and electronic resources (e-resources). This section reports the findings based on the type of CEFR-aligned resources that teachers referred to in planning for vocabulary lessons.

In terms of printed resources, the finding revealed that all the teachers cited the CEFR-aligned curriculum documents provided by MOE Malaysia, such as *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran* (DSKP) and scheme of work (SoW), for lesson planning, this includes vocabulary lesson. As mentioned by teacher A3 during the interview:

“We have the DSKP and SoW for every year. DSKP is the curriculum document and SoW is the scheme of work for teacher's reference. We refer to it when doing our yearly plan and daily lesson plan. The DSKP is details of every topic for each year. SoW comes with suggested teaching activities that we can use and it helps us with writing lesson plans.”

(A3)

Teacher A3 referred to the DSKP and SoW for her daily lesson planning. She explained that DSKP gives detailed information on each topic for each level, whereas SoW includes suggested instructional exercises for teachers' use. All the teachers agreed with teacher A3 that they depended on the DSKP and SoW as the main reference for lesson planning.

Furthermore, the teachers understood the flexibility of the suggested activities in the DSKP and SoW, which they could modify to suit the learners' needs as well as to suit various learning situations. As shared by teacher A1 during the interview:

“Erm, basically SoW is the Scheme of Work prepared by the Ministry of Education Malaysia or the panel of CEFR. They have prepared the SoW as a guideline for us, so we just follow that. But if we want to improvise, we can improvise, and if we want to change the activities, we also can change.”

(A1)

Teacher A1 was aware that the curriculum documents provided by MOE Malaysia were only guidelines, not rigorous regulations to be followed strictly. She understood that teachers were allowed to modify the suggested instructional activities in the SoW to meet the needs of their learners and the classroom environment. This indicated that there was room for teachers to be creative and enhance their lesson preparation. All other teachers responded similarly.

Similarly, to cross-check the teacher's responses during the interview sessions, document analysis was used to compare the teacher's lesson plan to the DSKP and SoW. Findings indicated that the majority of teachers either implemented the activities exactly as recommended by the curriculum papers or modified them to fit the levels and needs of their learners. This is especially noticeable while planning to teach vocabulary because neither the book nor the curricular materials that correlate with the CEFR included information on how to teach vocabulary.

Findings show that teachers understood that DSKP and SoW focused on language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and language arts. Therefore, the teachers perceived

that vocabulary was not a stand-alone content or language skill, and it needed to be integrated when teaching other language skills as mentioned. As suggested by teacher A3 during the interview:

“Oh, ya [yes]. Like [on] Monday [we are] supposed to [do] listening [skill], [on] Tuesday [we teach] speaking, [on] Wednesday [we are] supposed to [teach] reading, [on] Thursday erm [it’s teaching] writing and [on] Friday [it is] supposed to be language arts. So, when I am teaching vocabulary right, it is integrated in... like on Monday when I [am] teaching listening right, so the vocabulary is inside the listening lesson also.”

(A3)

Teacher A3 explained how she integrated vocabulary into her lesson planning for other language skills. For example, she integrated vocabulary when planning a lesson for listening skills. Her decision to integrate vocabulary shows her understanding of vocabulary being the building block for learning other language skills. The other participants responded similarly regarding this matter.

Another type of printed resources cited by teachers were the CEFR-aligned student’s book and teacher’s guidebook provided by MOE Malaysia. During the interview, the teachers cited the Teacher’s Guidebook for lesson planning. As reviewed by teacher A2 during the interview:

“There is the textbook and the teacher’s book. I will go and refer to the teacher’s book first, we have the teacher’s guide book. From the teacher’s book, there will have the guidelines on how you want to answer, how you want to start your lesson ah. From lesson 1, lesson 2, lesson 3 we follow that guideline. Everything is written in the Teacher’s Book.”

(A2)

Teacher A2 used the CEFR-aligned Teacher's Guidebook as her primary resource for lesson planning since it provided teachers with the suggested instructional activities which linked to the CEFR-aligned Student's Book. She also mentioned that the teacher's guidebook recommended some questions and answers on the topic to help teachers design lessons. Similarly, all of the other teachers agreed that the Teacher's Guidebook provides clear instructions to aid lesson planning. Teachers frequently cross-checked the vocabulary included in the Student's Book with the corresponding tasks from the Teacher's Guidebook when planning a lesson. As mentioned by teacher A1 during the interview:

“Usually for vocabulary, I look at the words in the pupil’s book first, then I refer to the suggested activities in the SoW or the teacher’s guidebook. If suitable, I use, if not sometimes I refer to Teacher Fiera or Teacher Ash too for the activities and the audio-visual materials.”

(A1)

Teacher A1 reviewed that she usually cross-checks the vocabulary listed in both the CEFR-aligned Student’s and Teacher’s Guidebook. She reviewed that if the vocabulary listed or activities suggested in the book were unsuitable for her learners, she would source alternatives online through Teacher Fiera or Teacher Ash's blog. This indicated that the teachers were able to adapt the suggested instructional activities from the CEFR-aligned Teacher's Guidebook into their actual classroom practice. Likewise, teacher A3 agreed with this statement.

Next, in terms of electronic resources (e-resources), CD was one of the e-resources provided by MOE Malaysia. The CDs provided match the content and activities from the CEFR Teacher’s Guidebook and Student’s Book. During the interview, although the teachers provided positive feedback on the content saved in the CDs, most of the teachers admitted that they seldom use it. As reviewed by teacher A2 during the interview:

“Actually, everything is provided for the textbook and teacher’s book. If you look at the textbook, they have the logo of a CD there, and then they can find its audio in the CD. The CDs are paired with the student’s book. There is audio inside, I think there were some short videos in it too. But I am not too sure as I seldom use it.”
(A2)

Teacher A2 agreed that the CDs provided by MOE Malaysia were compatible with the activities listed in the CEFR Student’s Book and Teacher’s Guidebook. The CD logo shown alongside the suggested activities in the book indicates the compatible AV resources, such as audio recordings or short videos. Even though teachers were aware of the benefits of the CD, teachers “seldom use” it due to certain constraints which will be discussed later in the challenges section.

When the teachers’ lesson plans were analysed, only teacher A1 used the content from the CD in her lesson planning. She integrated the use of audio recordings from the CD to help with pronunciation of the vocabulary words related to “objects in the classroom.” Neither teacher A2 nor A3 showed any sign of CD usage when their lesson plan and observation data were analysed. This corresponded to the teachers’ response during the interview that they “seldom use” the CEFR-aligned CDs.

Findings revealed that teachers preferred using online resources over CDs when planning vocabulary lessons due to the accessibility of those materials. Several popular sources were recommended by the teachers during the interview, including Telegram Group, YouTube, Facebook, Teacher Feira, and Teacher Ash blogs. The most popular e-resources among teachers were obtained from the Telegram Group, which teachers used as a platform to share teaching and learning materials. As mentioned by teacher A3 during the interview:

“When I plan for teaching vocabulary, the teaching materials, I don’t like use the CD. I always just use the one download from Teacher Feira Telegram group. Telegram we can type there and then there we can find the audio, videos, flashcards and sometimes worksheet also have. Then, we can use for the lesson. Sometimes the teachers share their lesson plan too in there. It makes it easier for planning the how to teach the words.”
(A3)

“The videos online are easier to download, and also, it’s up-to-date, not like CDs, the video not updated unless change new CD. But with videos online, it is always up-to-date.”
(A3)

Even though AV materials were provided in the CDs, Teacher A3 preferred to source teaching resources online rather than using the CDs. The Telegram group was her main source of information as there were a variety of teaching resources available in Teacher Feira’s Telegram Group such as audio, videos, flashcards and worksheets. She also reviewed that sample lesson plans were sometimes shared by English teachers in the telegram group. She also reviewed that online resources were kept up-to-date as it provides flexibility for teachers to update or modify the teaching materials easily rather than the pre-saved materials on the CD. Similarly, teachers A1 and A2 also preferred the use of online resources for lesson planning due to their accessibility, as well as being user-friendly.

In reality, findings showed that the availability of the resources determined the teachers’ choice of approach for vocabulary lesson planning. From this study, the AV approach was the most popular choice among teachers. Thus, teachers preferred to use AV materials to engage learners’ sense of sight and hearing when teaching vocabulary. As teacher A1 had mentioned during the interview:

“Okay. For me, when I use the word cards, it's not really works. So, I have to start with the pictures first, then I say the words, they repeat. After I introduce the words with the pictures so they can remember the words. The next lesson, they will remember the words because they can see the pictures, they can hear the words, they can say the words, and they can see the spelling.”

(A1)

Based on the findings, the primary factor that influenced teacher A1's vocabulary lesson planning was her prior experience of using the AV approach in the classroom. According to her, using the AV approach was able to provide opportunities for learners to “see the pictures” and “see the spelling” through the sense of sight, as well as being able to “hear the words” and “say the words” through the sense of sound simultaneously. Thus, the variety of AV resources available allows teachers to be creative in vocabulary lesson planning. Teachers A2 and A3 also responded similarly regarding this matter.

Apart from that, the video was another popular choice of AV resource among teachers. Findings from the interviews indicate that all three teachers find videos effective for teaching complicated vocabulary, especially when they find it hard to explain verbally or visually alone. As mentioned by teacher A1 during the interview:

“Erm audio-visual.... picture cards with the recording, yes. But video I seldom use, unless very complicated topic and words because pupils can see and hear at the same time. Picture card is good for simple vocabulary.”

(A1)

Teacher A1 admitted that she only uses videos when teaching complicated topics with difficult vocabulary mainly due to the characteristics of videos which accommodate both audio and visual elements. Videos, she believed help learners to visualise and understand the words better. Teacher A2 and teacher A3 responded similarly on this matter.

BENCHMARK

In general, CEFR language proficiency levels were used as a reference to develop the levels of achievement (*Tahap Penguasaan*) as documented in the Standard Curriculum for Primary School (*KSSR or Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah*) in Malaysia (BPK, 2017).

Findings from this study indicated that teachers were aware of the CEFR proficiency levels being the benchmark for international language proficiency levels. All the teachers were able to list out the six language proficiency levels listed in CEFR in general. For instance, as mentioned by teacher A3:

“CEFR is the Common European Framework Reference for language languages. Scales A1 A2 which is for beginners or basic, B1 B2 for independent, and C1 and C2 for proficient level. So, we have to plan activities to see which scale they can reach to.”

(A3)

Teacher A3 was able to list out the six CEFR language proficiency levels ranging from A1 to C2. She was aware that scales A1 and A2 refer to the basic learner; scales B1 and B2 refer to the independent learner; and scales C1 and C2 refer to the proficient learner. She understood that these CEFR language proficiency levels served as a reference for planning and designing instructional activities aiming to reach the targeted language proficiency level. However, when teachers were asked to explain how the CEFR proficiency levels were implemented, their explanations shifted to the KSSR levels of achievement, which are *Tahap Penguasaan* (TP), ranging from 1 to 6.

“Okay. CEFR is erm... CEFR is erm... an international standard that is used by our Ministry of Education of Malaysia to improve English language proficiency of Malaysian students. The benchmark for English standard in Malaysia is like 6 levels, there are 6 levels. Erm.. but in school, we have our own benchmark *tahap penguasaan satu, dua, tiga, empat, lima dan enam [achievement level one, two, three, four, five and six]*. Level 3 or TP 3 - *Tahap Penguasaan tiga [achievement level 3]* is the minimum requirement. We refer to the TP when deciding what to teach and how to assess the pupils”

(A1)

Based on the findings, although Teacher A1 had the basic knowledge that the CEFR proficiency level was used as the international benchmark by MOE Malaysia when implementing it in the classroom, she explained that TP was used as the benchmark in school. This shows that the teacher viewed CEFR language proficiency levels and KSSR levels of achievement as two different things. In reality, the KSSR level of achievement is derived from the CEFR language proficiency levels. Teachers A2 and A3 also show having limited knowledge regarding CEFR language proficiency levels and they referred to the KSSR level of achievements instead for lesson planning and assessment in the classroom.

CHALLENGES IN USING THE AV APPROACH TO TEACH VOCABULARY

Findings show that teachers were faced with challenges in terms of planning how to use an AV approach to teach Vocabulary. Based on the data, the challenges that teachers faced were categorised into two main themes, which are the infrastructure and the policy challenges.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The first theme that emerged from the findings was the infrastructure-related challenges. It will be reported based on two categories, which are the lack of information technology (IT) infrastructure, and convenience of access.

The findings indicated that the lack of IT infrastructure in school was one of the main challenges faced by the teachers. During the interview, teachers A1, A2 and A3 expressed their desire to use the AV approach to teach vocabulary as they were aware of its benefits, however, they were faced with challenges due to the lack of IT infrastructure provided in school. As mentioned by teacher A1 during the interview:

“Sometimes I feel like showing them videos, but *susah juga kena bawa laptop dan pasang LCD [this is not easy as I have to bring the laptop and put on the LCD]*... Ya, [Yes] but I think, if possible *la*, video would be a good choice.”

(A1)

Teacher A1 expressed her desire to “use videos to teach” in the classroom, but she did not have the IT infrastructure needed to operate it. If she wanted to show videos, she needed to bring the laptop and Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) projector to the classroom and assemble it herself. As stated by teacher A2 in the interview sessions:

“If LCD and speaker is provided, of course, I would want to use audio-visual because it will make the class lively. Students can see it with their own eyes, and easier to understand. If [I am] teaching new vocabulary, just play the video, *murid akan tengok dan faham sendiri, kan senang [students can watch and understand]*, ...But we don’t have that here, so...”

(A2)

Findings show that teacher A2 believed that the AV approach helped to make teaching and learning in the classroom lively, whereby learners will be able to “see” with their own eyes, thus making vocabulary learning easier. Teacher A1 and A3 shared similar opinions during the interview. However, they seldom had a chance to use AV resources such as videos due to the lack of IT infrastructure in the classroom. To apply the AV approach, they had to bring a portable LCD into class as an alternative. During the interview, teacher A2 shared:

“If in the classroom, we got that limitation. Usually, we can paste the white paper, then bring in LCD to project on the white paper as screen. That’s why we seldom use video to teach, very *susah* [difficult] and waste a lot of time. Mostly use flashcards and audio recording.”

(A2)

Teacher A2 shared her challenge when using the AV approach. As an alternative, she had chosen to “paste the white paper” as a temporary screen for the portable LCD that she brought into the classroom. She reviewed such action as “difficult” and time-consuming. Similar opinions were voiced by the other teachers during the interview too.

The second challenge found in relation to IT infrastructure was the issue regarding convenience of access. Based on the findings, the convenience of access can be divided into two subcategories, which are the issue of not having a laptop with a CD player and time consumption.

During the interview, teachers mentioned that they had trouble accessing the AV materials on the CD since their laptops did not include a CD player. This was one of the reasons teachers decided to source the AV materials online instead. As responded by teacher A3 during the interview:

“...and also because my laptop cannot play the CD, so I just search from Youtube, it’s easier and it’s the same. I no need to waste time to find ways to play the CD.”

(A3)

Teacher A3 addressed the challenge she faced for not being able to play the CD provided with her laptop without a CP player. So, she decided to source for the AV materials from YouTube instead. Similarly, teachers A1 and A2 also preferred to source AV resources online, especially through the “Telegram Group” which they believed to be more convenient than wasting time looking for alternate ways to access the information on the CD.

Undoubtedly, the infrastructure challenges will affect the teachers' lesson planning as well as the choice of approaches used to teach vocabulary.

POLICY CHALLENGES

The second theme that emerged from the finding was the incompatibility of the learner's competency with the policy associated with the CEFR. Therefore, the policy challenges reported in this section were divided into two: (1) the issue of cultural unfamiliarity, and (2) the issue of the learner's language proficiency level.

The issue of cultural unfamiliarity appeared in two areas for this study: the content and the accentedness, which was unfamiliar to the teachers.

In terms of content, all three teachers agreed that the CEFR-aligned curriculum covered a wide range of topics with foreign cultures to which they were unfamiliar. Thus, it is a problem for teachers to plan how to teach foreign cultures as they find it difficult to relate to our local Malaysian culture. As shared by teacher A1 during the interview:

“Level 2, it is very difficult because we have to learn other cultures, foreign cultures. For example, when..when we go to the topic about food, some of the foods mentioned in the book are not the food we have here, for example tortillas. So, it's hard to relate it to Malaysia *sedangkan* [whereas] in the book we talked about the foreign country and foreign culture, so it's quite difficult.”

(A1)

It was challenging for Teaching A1 to relate the foreign culture covered in the Level 2 syllabus to the local culture. This was a big challenge for her as it was difficult to explain foreign content which is very different from his own culture. For example, it was difficult for her to help the learners understand what is a “tortilla” because it was not available locally. Teachers A2 and A3 responded similarly on this issue.

Besides the content, the unfamiliarity of the accentedness was another challenge faced by the teachers. The AV materials provided by MOE Malaysia were developed by Cambridge which integrated the foreign culture and accent into its content. Teacher A2 were concerned about the native accent presented in the CEFR-aligned materials provided. As mentioned by teacher A2 during the interview:

“If for the slow students, maybe they don't really understand because have foreign slang and speak very fast... We have to tell them and stress on what are being told in the audio. We repeat it with our own voice.”

(A2)

Teacher A2 expressed her concern regarding the use of the AV materials as it was recorded with a British accent in which the pronunciation of the English words may differed. Teacher A2 was concerned that the slow learners would struggle to keep up with the teaching process due to a lack of understanding of the native accent and slang, paired with native speakers speaking at a fast pace. Therefore, the teachers needed extra effort to repeat the content in their own words and stress the main points for the learners to understand.

The issue of the learner's language proficiency level was another sub-theme for policy challenges. According to the findings, all of the teachers saw the inequalities in the language skill levels of the learners as part of the issue when adopting CEFR-aligned content. This was primarily due to learners having different standards and learning at different rates. As mentioned by teacher A3 during the interview:

“Nowadays, I think it is quite challenging. Challenging in a way that if we see from the student's background as this language is not their mother tongue. So, it is very challenging, erm how to say, it's the responsibility for the English teacher to teach this language to them.”

(A3)

Teacher A3 addressed the challenge she had faced in teaching learners from different backgrounds who speak different languages. She understood the responsibility of teaching the English language falls on the shoulders of teachers, especially when the learners do not come from an English background. All the teachers responded similarly regarding this issue.

DISCUSSION

The findings were discussed based on two major themes, which are related to the resources that supported vocabulary lesson planning, and the challenges encountered by teachers in using the AV to plan and teach vocabulary.

Lesson planning plays a decisive role in the success or failure of a lesson (Alanazi, 2019; Phan, 2021). With the introduction of CEFR in our Malaysian English language curriculum, a variety of printed and e-resources were provided by MOE Malaysia to assist teachers with the implementation of the AV approach in the actual classroom (BPK, 2017).

The findings of this study reported that the teachers' vocabulary lesson planning was predominantly based on the CEFR-aligned resources available. All three teachers cited the printed resources, such as curriculum documents (the DSKP and Scheme of Work), as their main reference for lesson planning. Based on their lesson plans, the teachers were discovered to be either directly incorporating the suggested activities into their lessons or choosing to modify them. This was consistent with the findings of Ngu and Azlina (2019), who discovered that the teachers' lesson planning and classroom practises were positively impacted by the CEFR-aligned curriculum. However, previous research has found that teachers do not see vocabulary as a priority in their classroom (Maizatulliza & Kiely, 2018), as vocabulary only appeared in the DSKP and SoW as a wordlist with no further instruction (BPK, 2017; Maizatulliza & Kiely, 2018). As such, teacher pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) was the basis for their decision-making and lesson preparation about vocabulary. The PCK of the teacher was crucial in bridging the gap between the pedagogical knowledge of "how to teach vocabulary" and the content knowledge of "what is vocabulary" (Pompea & Walker, 2017; Shulman, 1987; 2004). The teachers had to rely on their PCK to integrate the AV resources into the vocabulary lessons because there was not much guidance on teaching vocabulary in the curriculum documents. In relation, the findings of this study show that teachers decided to incorporate vocabulary instruction into teaching other language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This shows that the teachers understood that vocabulary acts as a building block for learning other English language skills (Mohd. Nor et al., 2015; Sovakandan et al., 2017).

As mentioned earlier, in contrast to the urban schools, Kiss and Rimbar (2021) have addressed the increasing challenges faced by rural school teachers to adopt the CEFR-aligned resources in their classes. The lack of locally relevant content in the CEFR-aligned teaching resources was the main reason leading to the challenges faced by teachers when they plan to use the resources for vocabulary teaching in rural classrooms. The CEFR-aligned resources provided by MOE Malaysia, including the teacher's guidebook, student book, and AV resources, largely reference other cultures, which leaves a lack of locally relevant cultures. This is similar to Ngu and Azlina's (2019) research. The tools' broad usage of foreign cultures can be confusing to teachers and students, which makes adaptation in the local classroom challenging. Accordingly, the teachers in this study were still dealing with the difficulties of cultural unfamiliarity and unfamiliarity with accentedness due to a lack of localised context, which is similar to the issues that teachers had previously faced and were identified in studies by Nurul Farehah and Sallehuddin (2017) and Ngu and Azlina (2019). Therefore, the findings from this study reflected the need to train more CEFR experts who are able to cater to the context of the Malaysian classroom while at the same time not losing the essence of the global context in CEFR. Similarly, Nurul Farehah and Sallehuddin's (2017) study has also proposed that Malaysia needs more CEFR experts to create locally aligned resources.

Additionally, as technology integration becomes more prevalent in Malaysian educational systems, an increasing number of e-resources—like CEFR-aligned AV resources—are being produced by subject-matter experts and kept on CDs (Ngu & Azlina, 2019). Even though MOE Malaysia offers AV resources in that format, the study's findings nevertheless demonstrated that teachers were reluctant to use the CDs. Consistent with Ngu and Azlina's (2019) study, the results indicated that most teachers opted to obtain AV resources online for vocabulary lesson planning, instead of using pre-saved resources on CDs. Nonetheless, teachers did recognise the advantages of using AV to teach vocabulary, especially those related to foreign cultures and difficult for teachers to explain orally. However, to maximise the impact of AV, educators needed to prepare ahead of time. The teachers involved in the study were still facing challenges in utilising the AV resources that had been included on CDs because they lacked expertise in doing so (Nawai & Nur Ehsan, 2020; Nurul Farehah & Mohd. Sallehudin, 2017). This addressed the necessity that policymakers provide suitable resources to support teachers in teaching vocabulary, particularly concerning other cultures.

In terms of challenges encountered by teachers in using the AV approach, findings from the previous studies addressed the physical challenges faced by teachers, such as the lack of resources (Utami, 2015;), poor network coverage (Ngu & Azlina, 2019), and lack of equipment and facilities (Wazeema & Kareema, 2017; Yonas et al., 2020). Even though MOE Malaysia has provided support to teachers by preparing AV resources to assist teachers in implementing the CEFR-aligned curriculum, it is not adequate to accommodate all the schools in the country (Ngu & Azlina, 2019), especially in rural schools in Sarawak. Likewise, the teachers in this study who taught in the rural school had similar challenges, such as a lack of IT infrastructure and convenient access. In reality, no technology can be applied to all situations because every classroom is unique (Mutanaga et al., 2018). As a result, teachers must be aware of the constantly changing connections between content, pedagogy, and technology. To overcome these challenges, policymakers should take into account the need to provide IT support and improve IT infrastructure to assist teachers in their lesson delivery. Previous studies made similar recommendations, urging schools to provide supportive environments for technology integration in the classroom (Ajloni, 2019). I hope that the teachers' acceptance and readiness to teach vocabulary using the AV approach will increase.

Future research ought to investigate how policymakers may support teachers' professional dispositions in planning and delivering CEFR-aligned curricula in schools, especially to improve vocabulary acquisition because vocabulary is the foundation for learning the English language. Understanding the perspectives of educators is crucial to assisting policymakers in planning effective professional development sessions for teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study provides insight for other researchers regarding teachers' vocabulary lesson planning. The outcomes of the study shed light on how teachers plan to use the AV approach to teach vocabulary in a primary-level English language classroom. The findings showed that when teachers were given the autonomy to plan and decide how to approach vocabulary teaching, it depended on the teachers' PCK. The findings of this study suggested that teachers understood the flexibility of the CEFR-aligned resources which serve as a guideline to help teachers integrate vocabulary into teaching other language skills. Findings also show that teachers still faced challenges when adopting the AV approach to planning and teaching vocabulary in a rural school

in Sarawak. Even though they were aware that MOE Malaysia provides CEFR-aligned AV resources, teachers at the rural school were found to be dealing with a lack of IT infrastructure and ease of access. This study also reflected on policy challenges that occur in the classroom, such as the issue of cultural unfamiliarity and the learner's language proficiency level. The findings of this study provide useful insights for practitioners on how teachers in rural areas adopt the AV approach to teaching vocabulary in their classrooms. The findings also provide policymakers with information about the policy and infrastructure challenges that teachers face in vocabulary teaching. Finally, the result of this study could contribute to the limited research on vocabulary teaching through the CEFR-aligned curriculum in the Malaysian context.

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