

The Attitude of Malaysian East Coast Early Childhood Educators towards English and Their Language Support Practices

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Abstract: English proficiency is advantageous for any graduate. In Malaysia, despite English being formally introduced around age 5, proficiency in the language is still lacking in some graduates. English should be introduced to children during their formation years so they can be proficient. However, in many private preschools, English proficiency is not a priority in the hiring criteria of early childhood (EC) educators despite the introduction of the Malaysian English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025. With EC educators being a primary provider of input in the system, it is essential to investigate their attitudes towards English, particularly on the East Coast of Malaysia, where English usage is not as extensive as on the west coast, and how these attitudes translate into their practices with the children. A questionnaire of 29 questions was distributed to 114 EC educators. Findings reveal that positive attitude leads to EC educators using English with the children. Although knowledge of the language may be limited, the positive attitude spurs them to find alternative ways to expose English to the children. The findings hence provide insight to how we can upgrade the quality of existing English language education provided in preschools, mapping it to the Roadmap 2015-2025 for the reform to succeed.

Keywords: Attitude, Practice, Early childhood educators, ESL, Preschool

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Introduction

It is advantageous for any graduate to be proficient in English as it is a lingua franca, and perceived as a socially prestigious language (Mourão, 2021). Mourão, (2021) states that it is vital to provide early exposure of the English language to children, for it impacts the mastery and proficiency of the target language of the children. Thus, English should be introduced to children during their formation years (0 to 4) to increase proficiency and provide a head start to children to be employable graduates in the future. According to Mistry and Sood (2020), the first three years are the best opportunity to teach children a language as children's minds are known to easily and quickly acquire what they heard and learned compared to adults. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has included the preschool years (5-6 years old) as part of the English Language Roadmap 2015-2025, acknowledging the importance of developing young children's English language for their success in the school years. Upon leaving preschools, the children are expected to achieve CEFR A1 (English Language Roadmap 2015-2025). Earlier in 2010, the National Preschool Standards-based Curriculum (NPSC) was introduced. In NPSC, all Malaysian preschool teachers were urged to use English to expose and prepare the children to master the target language before entering primary school.

However, even though English is being formally introduced at the ages of 5 and 6, proficiency in the language is still lacking. This is a gripe many industries have with the local graduates, stating that many local graduates lack communication skills in English (Ong et al., 2022) when English proficiency is among the top five skills that employers look for when hiring as revealed by the 2021 Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) Salary Survey for Executives and Non-Executives (Menon & Rajaendram, 2022). Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, great emphasis has been placed on learning English as a foreign language as English has been assigned prestige and high status to those fluent in it (bin Towairish, 2021). In Germany, Hahm and Gazzola (2022) shared that the more proficient German natives are in English, the higher their salary. This suggests that English proficiency is important to get a head-start and despite our current efforts, desired outcomes have not been achieved, which warrants more proactive measures. According to Al-Yaseen (2021), an early exposure to English language which is seen as a global language, could provide better opportunities in terms of education and employment in the future and this notion is supported by Kuwaiti kindergarten teachers who have a strong belief in exposing and teaching English to Kuwaiti children in kindergarten. Therefore, it is imperative to introduce English to children at an earlier stage, ensuring that the primary sources of language input, namely early childhood (EC) educators, possess a high level of proficiency.

Despite the emphasis on English usage by the NPSC, not all EC educators are sufficiently proficient in the language, particularly in private Malay medium preschools, where many lack qualifications to teach English. This becomes evident from the findings of Masturi, Kosnin, and binti Zainudin (2022) who highlighted the challenges faced by teachers in carrying out their teaching responsibilities due to their lack of familiarity with the language they are expected to teach. One contributing factor is that English proficiency is not prioritised in

the hiring criteria of EC educators, despite the introduction of the Malaysia English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025. English proficiency becomes even less of a priority for children under the age of 4, as the emphasis on NPSC primarily targets preschool children between the ages of 5 and 6. Unless explicitly advertised as an English medium preschool, the primary language of instruction in most preschools will be Malay (Kong, 2023; Ting & Jintang, 2022; Yussof & Sun, 2020). Furthermore, in rural areas, English is perceived as a foreign language rather than as a second language as it should be in Malaysia due to students hardly using English for interactions outside the classroom. As reported by Rosli and Radzuan (2020), there is relatively less extensive use of English on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia compared to the west coast.

The aim of this study is to explore the attitudes and practices of EC educators in the East Coast region of Malaysia regarding the use of English language in early childhood education (EC education) settings. Despite the increasing importance of English proficiency in a globalized world, there is a significant gap in the literature concerning the specific attitudes and practices of educators in this region. Existing research has predominantly focused on larger cities such as Kuala Lumpur (Nordin et al., 2022; Goh & Luen Loy, 2021; El Masry & I Alzaanin, 2021), resulting in lesser understanding of the unique socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics of the East Coast. Furthermore, a considerable proportion of private sector preschool teachers in Malaysia possess minimal qualifications and experience (Foong et al., 2018), with English proficiency not being the primary hiring criterion. In Malaysia, the requirement to become a private preschool teacher is set as minimum as to having Malaysia Certificate of Education (MCE/ SPM). In some cases, some private preschools accept Form 3 Assessment (PT3/PMR) candidates to become a part of the workforce. The priority of hiring preschool teachers is not directed to those who are proficient in English but to those who have skillful experience in taking care of children (Foong et al., 2018).

However, recent initiatives, such as the Malaysia English Language Education Roadmap (2015-2025), have placed greater emphasis on the educational background of EC educators. As a result, more teachers possess ECE qualifications but may not be proficient in English. Similar challenges have been observed in Kuwait, where teachers' lack of confidence and proficiency in English, particularly in pronunciation, have led to the use of the first language as a teaching medium (Al Yaseen, 2021). While Al Yaseen (2021) also reported that the use of first language provides a feeling of security and validation allowing children to express themselves better, the researcher asserts that the teachers could have used pictures, posters, picture books and videos as teaching aids to facilitate learning so that the target language becomes more comprehensible to the children. Since the intention behind this approach was primarily to prevent the children's target language from being compromised or distorted, it is important to investigate how these attitudes and practices impact language learning outcomes, specifically the attitudes and practices of EC educators towards English in the East Coast region of Malaysia.

Attitude

Attitude plays a crucial role in shaping human behavior, influencing perceptions, and guiding decision-making processes (Grimley & Burnard, 2021; Moreno et al., 2021). It holds particular significance when examining

individuals' attitudes towards specific objects or concepts, such as the English language in educational contexts. Understanding the factors that shape these attitudes and their impact on teaching practices and learner outcomes is of utmost importance. This paper aims to explore the concept of attitude, specifically focusing on attitudes towards English in the context of EC education. By delving into relevant literature and research findings, we seek to uncover the relationship between EC educators' attitudes and teaching practices.

According to Fishbein (1961: p. 233), “An individual’s attitude toward any object is a function of his beliefs about the object (i.e., the probability that the object is associated with other objects, concepts, values or goals) and the evaluative aspect of those beliefs (i.e., the attitude towards the related objects)”. When considering attitude towards English, it is “a collection of feelings (good, bad, neutral) regarding language use and its status in society” (Ahmed, 2015: p.7). According to Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) who examined teachers' perceptions of their preparedness in inclusive education, as well as the teachers’ views on the significance of related skills, attitude towards the teaching of English includes elements such as “liking, enjoyment, enthusiasm for teaching English, and confidence in their own teaching abilities (Ernest, 1989: p.25)”. Attitude, therefore, affects practice, affects the children’s interest and attitudes to English and its learning.

Language Support Practices

Activities in preschools should encourage children to develop their skills in life holistically, namely language, thinking, social and creativity skills. The NPSC developed by Ministry of Education Malaysia (2017) emphasizes children’s growth in terms of communication, spirituality, attitudes, and values as well as creativity, critical thinking and innovative, to name a few. Similar to Malaysian EC education aims, the preschool curriculum designed by the Ministry of National Education Turkiye also focuses on children’s learning by discovery and some of the activities listed and proposed involves language, art, drama, music, movement, play, science, mathematics, early literacy and field trip (Dere, 2019). Dere (2019) conducted a study with the children investigating their creativity after spending time in preschool. Findings from the analysis done from Torrance Creative Thinking Test (TCTT) which was developed by Torrance (1966) shows that the duration children spent time in the preschool impacts the creativity of the children positively. In other words, children were found to be more creative when they have spent a full day taking part in all the activities conducted in the preschool compared to other children who spent a half-day.

Activities in a preschool can be categorized into 2 categories: cognitively stimulating high-yield activities and least stimulating low-yield activities (Smidt & Embacher, 2020). Examples of cognitively stimulating high-yield activities are role-playing, oral communication, and constructive games, while napping, care-taking routines and circle games are examples of the least stimulating low-yield activities. In developing children’s proficiency and mastery particularly in oral communication, read-aloud is one the teacher-led activities that is expected to be conducted with the children at preschools. However, the Sweden preschool teachers reported that read-aloud was difficult to organize due to some reasons (Alatalo & Westlund, 2021).

In conclusion, attitudes towards English in EC education should have a profound impact on teaching practices and children's attitudes towards language learning. The various dimensions of attitude, including beliefs, and the language support practices, highlight the complexity of this topic. To address such a gap, following research questions were asked in this research:

- (1) What are Malaysian East Coast early childhood educators' attitudes towards English language?
- (2) How do these attitudes translate into their language support practices with the children?

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen (1991) developed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which is a psychological theory that aims to explain how attitudes, beliefs and perceptions effect an individual's behavior. Through the context of this study, the TPB is used to assess and comprehend an EC educator's thought process and emotions towards the teaching of English to young children, along with how such thought and emotion influences their actions. The TPB hypothesizes that three factors determine a person's actions; their attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control. Attitudes encompass the opinion and emotions for a behavior such as teaching English, subjective norms pertains to the social pressure and expectations experienced from peers or guardians and perceived control reflects the level of faith in the individual's ability to carry out the action (in this case, teaching English to young children). Figure 1 portrays the theoretical framework of the TPB.

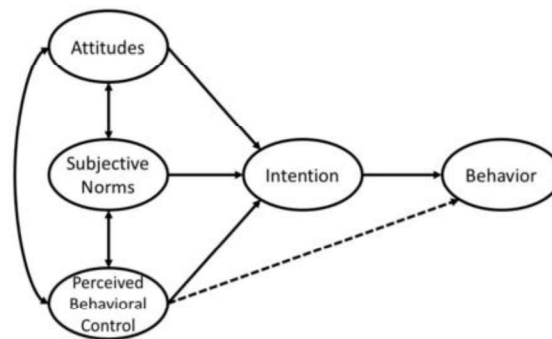


Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) Framework (Ajzen, 1991)

By utilizing the TPB, this study was able to understand the EC educators' attitudes to teaching English, the expectations of them from others, and their confidence in being able to do so, in order to assess and facilitate the intentions and practices they had in English instruction. This framework shed light on why some educators exhibit more enthusiasm and confidence in teaching English, while others may feel uncertain or less motivated. Phuong et al. (2023) conducted a study that utilized TPB to examine how teaching beliefs influence the selection of techniques by English instructors for teaching young language learners. Similarly, Ateş and Yılmaz (2023) employed TPB to investigate the intentions of both pre-service and in-service teachers regarding the use of mobile-based assessment in their classrooms. Additionally, Kim and Jeong (2023) utilized TPB as the basis

of their research, focusing on the acceptance of coding education among kindergarten teachers. These studies share a commonality in recognizing TPB as a crucial theory for understanding teachers' attitudes, intentions, and decision-making processes. Overall, TPB helped in understanding how the thoughts, emotions, and perceptions of EC educators regarding English teaching impact their instructional practices, which, in turn, can have implications for children's language learning outcomes. In this paper, the focus will be only on the attitudes and how they are translated in language support practices.

Research Methodology

To measure preschool teachers' attitude based on their beliefs and practices in using English, this study employed an Early English Beliefs and Confidence Survey (EEBCS) that was adapted from a questionnaire developed by Chen et al. (2014) called Early Math Beliefs and Confidence Survey (EM-BCS). The decision to employ this questionnaire as the quantitative data collection instrument was based on its efficiency in gathering comprehensive responses from respondents within a short timeframe (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The adaptation of the EM-BCS questionnaire was deemed suitable because its design aligned with the current research focus, although Chen et al. (2014) primarily emphasized early mathematics beliefs among preschool teachers. In this study, the questionnaire was modified to address beliefs and confidence specifically related to the English language rather than mathematics. Several modifications were made to the original EM-BCS items. Examples of the modifications are shown in Table 1, which presents selected items from the original EM-BCS alongside their adapted versions.

Table 1. Original Items from EM-BCS (Chen et al., 2014) and Adapted Items in EEBCS

Original Items	Adapted Items
Most children in my class entered preschools with little Mathematics knowledge.	Most children in my class entered preschool with little English knowledge.
I am confident in my ability to plan activities to help children learn Mathematics.	I am confident in my ability to plan activities to help children learn English language.
I can easily convert fractions into percentages and decimal numbers.	I can translate Bahasa into English and vice versa easily.
I am confident in my ability to plan activities to help children learn Mathematics.	I am confident in my ability to plan activities to help children learn English language.

The questionnaire was administered personally by the researchers as it provides the ability to establish a relationship and motivation with the respondents as doubts can be clarified, it is less expensive, can achieve almost 100% response rate, and anonymity of respondents is high (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The questionnaire consisted of 3 parts: Part A – Demographic details, Part B – Attitude (14 items) and Part C – Practice (15 items). For Part B, respondents were to rate their agreement with the statements on a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) with a value of 5 associated with a *Strongly Agree* opinion and a value of 1 for *Strongly Disagree* and for Part C, the value of 5 was associated with *Always* and 1 for *Never*. The Cronbach Alpha for the questionnaire is

0.92 which is considered high validity value (Cronbach, 1951). Table 2 shows the interpretation of mean scores for this study.

Table 2. Interpretation of Mean Scores

Mean scores	Interpretation
1.00 – 2.00	Low
2.01 – 3.00	Moderately low
3.01 – 4.00	Moderately high
4.01 – 5.00	High

For the Likert-type items in the questionnaire, we utilized the interpretation of mean scores based on Oxford's (1996) approach. This provides us with information on the strength of the EC educators opinions on the items in the questionnaire. Means ranging from 1.00 to 2.00 indicated low agreement and 2.01 to 3.00 indicated moderately low agreement. While those ranging from 3.01 to 4.00 were interpreted as moderately high and 4.01 to 5.00 indicated as high agreement.

Participants

In this study, purposive sampling was utilized to select the participants. One of the criteria for selection was that the respondents had to be EC educators teaching in the East Coast region of Peninsula Malaysia, specifically in Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang. The selected respondents were provided with a set of EEBCS questionnaires, which had been adapted from Chen's et al. (2014) EM-BCS items. The demographic data collected from 114 EC educators who returned the questionnaires are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Early Childhood Educators Experience, Qualification and Age

Teachers Experience	N	Highest Qualification	N	Age	N
<1 Year	17	PT3/SPR/PMR	2	<20	2
1 - 3 Years	34	MCE/ SPM	45	21 - 25	40
4 - 6 years	36	Diploma	44	26 - 30	29
7 - 9 Years	6	Degree	22	31 - 35	17
10 Years>	21	Master	1	36 - 40	12
				40>	14
Total	114		114		114

Based on the responses as illustrated in Table 3, 36 educators had 4 to 6 years of work experience, followed by 34 educators with 1 to 3 years of experience and 21 educators with more than 10 years of work experience. In addition, 17 educators had less than 1 year of work experience and 6 educators had 7 to 9 years of work experience. It is believed that teachers with different years of experience have different personalities, beliefs, and methods of teaching, and this increases the depth and opulence of the data obtained (Singh et al., 2018). The

expectation is that the varying amount of teaching experience would reflect different (if not the same) beliefs and practices.

In terms of respondents' education qualifications, the data revealed that the highest qualification was a Master's degree, which was reported by 1 respondent. 45 educators were Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE/SPM) holders, followed by 44 educators with a Diploma and 22 educators with a Degree. The lowest qualification reported was Form 3 Assessment (PT3/SRP/PMR), which was indicated by 2 respondents.

Table 3 also includes data on the age distribution of the respondents. The largest group consisted of educators between the ages of 21 to 25, with a total of 40 respondents. There were 29 educators aged 26 to 30, followed by 17 educators aged 31 to 35. Additionally, 14 educators were above 40 years old. Lastly, only two educators were below 20 years old.

Results and Discussion

In Part B of the questionnaire, an exploration of the EC educators' attitudes towards English on the east coast of Malaysia is conducted and the effects of these attitudes on their practices are considered. The discussion of findings for Part B is followed by the discussion of findings for Part C.

Early Childhood Educators' Attitude based on Beliefs

In Part B of the questionnaire, EC educators were asked to rate their confidence in their English language skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and proficiency. The responses were analyzed using SPSS and the statements were arranged in decreasing order of Mean values for better understanding. Table 4 presents the findings of Part B, which gauge the attitudes of EC educators towards their overall English language competence and their proficiency in using English with the children in their kindergarten.

Table 4. Early Childhood Educators' Attitude based on Beliefs

No.	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	I am confident in my ability to incorporate English language into learning during daycare activities (e.g., art or role play).	114	4.05	0.66
2	I am confident in my ability to plan activities to help children learn English language.	114	4.03	0.72
3	I am confident in my knowledge of the best practices and strategies for helping children to use English.	114	4.02	0.77
4	I am confident in my ability to improve children's English language knowledge when they make spontaneous English comments.	114	3.99	0.69
5	I am confident in my knowledge of the best way to assess children's command of English language.	114	3.9	0.74
6	I am confident in my knowledge of reasonable English goals for the children (able to	114	3.89	0.73

	read and write).			
7	I am confident in my ability to make sense of children's confusion when they learn English language.	114	3.89	0.73
8	I am confident in my ability to evaluate the children's knowledge about English language.	114	3.79	0.78
9	I am confident that it is easy for me to name objects in English.	114	3.76	0.69
10	I am confident that English was one of my favourite subjects in school.	114	3.53	0.77
11	I am confident that I can construct English sentences easily.	114	3.5	0.88
12	I am confident in my knowledge of the children's English language proficiency level when they enter the daycare.	114	3.42	0.80
13	I am confident that I can translate Bahasa Melayu into English and vice versa easily.	114	3.4	0.77
14	I am confident that I am good at pronouncing English words.	114	3.30	0.78

Based on the results, the EC educators demonstrated a moderately high attitude in which the minimum mean score was 3.30 and the highest mean score was 4.05. The three (3) items with the mean score above 4 are “*I am confident in my ability to incorporate English language into learning during day care activities (e.g., art or role play), I am confident in my ability to plan activities to help children learn English language and I am confident in my knowledge of the best practices and strategies for helping children to use English*”. With a mean score of 4.05, it shows that majority of the EC educators are very positive and confident in their knowledge to incorporate English learning into common preschool situations (such as art or dramatic play), which are considered cognitively stimulating high-yield activities (Smidt & Embacher, 2020). They even plan activities to help the preschoolers learn English (Item 7), with the mean score of 4.03. Furthermore, they are so positive that they have the knowledge of the best practices and strategies for helping preschoolers learn English (with the mean score of 4.02, Item 3).

In addition to that, with the mean score of 3.99, Item 8 shows that these EC educators strongly believe that they have the knowledge to further preschooler's English language acquisition when they make spontaneous English comments or discoveries. The lowest mean score is 3.3 which is *I am very good at pronouncing English words* (Item 14). It means that out of all the items, they are least confident in their English pronunciation. The next lowest is Item 12 with the mean score of 3.4 where these EC educators indicated that they lack the confidence in translating Malay to English and vice versa. It can be interpreted that these EC educators exhibited moderately positive attitude towards the use of English in teaching and learning to the children at their kindergarten. The findings of the current research are supported by the findings of Kouba et al. (2020) who found Lebanese preschool educators understand their role in developing language in the children. The findings are also supported by Goh's (2019) study in which the EC educators admitted the need and importance to have better language knowledge to assist children's language development and to perform more effectively in the classroom.

Additionally, the findings presented in Table 4 are aligned with the TPB by Ajzen (1991). According to TPB, attitudes play a crucial role in influencing behavior. In this study, the results indicate that the majority of the

educators demonstrated a positive attitude, as reflected by the moderately high mean scores. These positive attitudes can be interpreted as an indication that the educators believe in their ability to effectively teach English to young children and incorporate it into various preschool activities. This aligns with the TPB's notion that attitudes influence behavioral intentions and subsequent actions. In this case, the positive attitudes of the educators may lead to an increased intention to teach English and the implementation of language learning activities in their classrooms. It is evident that EC educators in the present study understand their role to develop children's language competence and they have moderately high confidence in their knowledge and competencies in English language. To sum up, the EC educators have positive attitudes towards the use of English language in their teaching practices.

The Practice of Early Childhood Educators in Using English

Table 5 presents the findings regarding the language support practices implemented by EC educators in preschools

Table 5. The Practice of Early Childhood Educators in Using English

No.	Items	N	Mean	S.D
1	I tell stories to the children	114	3.20	0.95
2	I read English storybooks to the children	114	3.09	0.98
3	I do outdoor activities in English	114	3.07	1.08
4	I do artwork in English	114	3.04	1.10
5	I correct their English language mistakes (implicit e.g. plural vs singular, tenses, pronunciation) in English	114	2.94	1.05
6	I do writing activities in English (e.g. postcards, speech card)	114	2.89	1.11
7	I give learning session instruction in English	114	2.82	0.96
8	I discipline the children in English	114	2.77	1.04
9	I do Circle Time activities in English	114	2.71	1.11
10	I give daily routine instructions in English	114	2.66	1.01
11	I sing English songs/ nursery rhymes with the children	114	2.64	1.06
12	I use English in my everyday greetings	114	2.51	1.86
13	I let children watch English cartoons	114	2.21	1.95
14	I praise the children in English	114	2.20	1.03
15	I count in English	114	1.97	0.89

Notably, the results indicate that a majority of EC educators engage in storytelling sessions with the children, achieving a commendable mean score of 3.2. Furthermore, they actively read English storybooks to the children, garnering a respectable mean score of 3.09. Additionally, outdoor activities conducted in English received a mean score of 3.07, showcasing the educators' efforts to incorporate the language into various settings. Another noteworthy practice with a mean score above 3.0 is the incorporation of English into artwork, indicating the educators' recognition of the language's role in creative expression. Conversely, the most unexpected finding

pertains to the infrequent use of English for counting, as reflected by an average mean score of 1.97. This observation may be attributed to the prevalent use of the native language when interacting with children in preschools, including counting activities. However, it is important to acknowledge that counting in English, or any other language, is fundamental to language learning.

Another unexpected finding that emerged from the study, was that the EC educators seldom praise children in English or allow them to watch English cartoons in kindergarten. The mean scores for these aspects were notably low, at 2.20 and 2.21 respectively. The use of English expressions like "Very good!" or "Great job" does not seem to be commonplace among these EC educators. Interestingly, the children were also not given frequent exposure to English cartoons at the preschools, making it unexpected that the EC educators were not utilizing this resource to help children acquire the English language. From the low mean scores of between 1.97 to 3.20 in the items, it can be interpreted that these EC educators seldom interact in English with the children nor do they incorporate English much into their teaching practices. These findings contradict the positive attitude towards English reported in Part B, where the EC educators expressed confidence in their English proficiency. However, when it comes to applying this knowledge in everyday interactions, English usage with the children is infrequent.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that some of the EC educators in preschools did utilize English to a moderate extent (i.e., those who scored their practice high), which is commendable considering that English is not compulsory in their curriculum. August et al. (2014) asserted that explicitly teaching reading skills to English language learners such as phonological awareness, phonics, and oral reading fluency is beneficial for children. Although many of the EC educators might not explicitly have taught these skills, reading storybooks to children exposes them to new vocabulary and correct pronunciation.

In Goh's (2019) study, EC teachers acknowledged frequent code-switching between English, the Malay language, and the children's mother tongue. The authors' personal observations in kindergartens also revealed frequent instances of code-switching. Hansen and Broekhuizen (2021) argue that the quality of the language-learning environment positively impacts toddlers' vocabulary development. This environment was measured by the educators' responsiveness, both verbal and non-verbal, their ability to expand children's ideas and vocabulary, and their encouragement through questioning and active listening. For EC educators to achieve this, they have to be proficient in the target language and to consistently use it with the children. To support their confidence in using the language with the children, Fauzi et. al (2021) recommended to use an application called Kindy Talk Application which was specifically developed to assist EC educators in their English communication in preschool context. However, native English speakers and specialized English teachers were still voted as the best instructors for teaching English in Catalonian kindergartens (Waddington, 2021). While adopting similar recommendations in the Malaysian context is feasible, careful consideration is required in multiple aspects.

The findings also shed light on the language support practices employed by EC educators in preschools and their

alignment with TPB. The results indicate that EC educators engage in certain language support practices in their preschools. When analyzed through the lens of TPB (Ajzen, 1991), it suggests that despite positive attitudes and beliefs, external factors or barriers influence educators' behavior. These factors include the prevalent use of the native language in kindergartens, code-switching practices, and limited exposure to English children's programmes and cartoons. Consequently, educators demonstrated a moderate level of English language support practices in their interaction and activities with the children. The findings imply that although EC educators demonstrated a moderate level of English language support practices, there is room for improvement in terms of consistent and effective language usage. Understanding the factors influencing their behavior can inform the development of interventions and strategies to enhance the integration of English language learning in the preschool environment, aligning with the principles of TPB.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, the studies only involved EC educators from Malay medium private kindergartens located in the East Coast of Malaysia. Therefore, the findings should be cautiously interpreted as these are the reflections of these specific participants only. Future studies might include Chinese and Tamil medium private kindergartens in the East Coast or perhaps covering the whole of Malaysia to comprehensively examine the attitude and practices of the EC educators in terms of English language teaching and learning. Next, this study employed quantitative research design. More comprehensive findings can be achieved through data triangulation from both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Despite the limitations, the findings of this study shed light on the use of English language and language support practices by EC educators in private Malay medium preschools in the East Coast of Malaysia. The study reveals that EC educators possess positive attitude towards English language and their ability in using the language, even though it is not fully reflected in their practice with the children in the preschools. Those who used English with the children used English even though it was not part of the curriculum. Hence, the use of English was moderate; and in several areas, improvement is needed.

One key finding is the infrequent use of English praise and limited exposure to English children's programmes and cartoons. This indicates missed opportunities for children to develop their English language skills through positive reinforcement and engaging educational content. Therefore, EC educators should be encouraged to incorporate more English language usage and praises in their interactions with children. This can enhance children's exposure to English and create a supportive learning environment.

Additionally, code-switching practices between English and Malay, the children's first language were observed, suggesting a need for clearer language boundaries and consistent language usage. Professional development programmes should be offered to EC educators to enhance their proficiency in the English language and provide them with effective strategies for language support. Furthermore, clear language policies and guidelines should

be established in preschools to minimize code-switching and promote consistent language usage. Perhaps, there should also be opportunities to collaborate with native English speakers or specialized English teachers. This would be beneficial in providing language input and modeling correct English usage.

On the whole, the results ultimately highlight the importance of a high-quality language-learning environment in fostering children's English language development. EC educators should strive to be proficient in the target language, actively engage children in verbal and non-verbal communication, expand their vocabulary, and encourage children through active listening and thoughtful questioning. By implementing these recommendations and addressing the identified areas for improvement, Malaysian preschools can create a more conducive environment for English language learning, ultimately benefiting the language development and future academic success of young children.

Most importantly, recognizing the significance of fostering positive attitudes towards English among educators and learners is crucial for creating an effective language learning environment. By nurturing favorable attitudes, we can enhance teaching practices, stimulate children's interest in English, and promote their language development. The findings, hence, provide insight to how the quality of existing English language education provided in preschools can be upgraded and mapped to Malaysia English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025 for the reform to succeed. It is recommended that the Malaysia Education Ministry should make it compulsory for private preschools to use English as their medium of instruction and communication because the educators are actually quite capable of using English with the children but they do not do so because it is not compulsory. Furthermore, early English language exposure has been found to profoundly contribute to a more proficient mastery of English over the long term.

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