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PROPOSING AN AFFECTIVE LITERACY FRAMEWORK FOR YOUNG LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN MALAYSIAN RURAL AREAS: ITS KEY DIMENSIONS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study investigated rural English teachers' perceptions of factors which influence the literacy development of young learners in rural school settings. This investigation led to a further enquiry on the dimensions of an affective literacy framework to support the English learning of rural young learners.

Methodology – The study employed a qualitative approach to provide a holistic view of the phenomena being studied. Two English optionist teachers and two non-optionist teachers volunteered to participate in the study. The first investigation was based on audio-taped interview sessions with the teachers, and the second enquiry was grounded in video-taped class observations. The raw data from these instruments were used for qualitative content analysis, which resulted in the proposed Affective Literacy Framework for Rural Young Learners (ALFRYL).

Findings – The analysis of interviews indicated that the teachers acknowledged the critical need for creating effective and interesting activities that can engage young learners cognitively and affectively, while arguing that their training background and learning experiences primarily influenced their pedagogical approaches. Classroom observations noted that the optionist teachers were confident in their pedagogical delivery whereas the non-optionist teachers were more challenged in engaging their pupils through learning activities, and hence in need of more support. Based on the analysis of the affective teaching foci illustrated by the teachers in the classroom, six components of an affective literacy framework were identified as a tool to support affective literacy development among rural young learners: learner diversity, engaging pedagogy, meta-cognitive assessment, emotional management, pedagogical resources and positive interaction.

Significance – Providing pedagogical examples of how teachers frame the task of teaching English in rural areas, this study illustrates the realities of their struggle, which teachers in similar situations may face in helping pupils learn English effectively. Positive affective literacy environments would provide opportunities for young learners not only to make meaning but also to reach new language materials and express themselves in new ways. The dimensions that constitute the affective literacy framework makes available an initial reference for teachers to stimulate pupils' learning in challenging contexts where English is used minimally.

Keywords: Affective literacy; English language teaching; teachers' knowledge; teacher reflection; teaching in rural areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, education has gone through a massive transformation, especially in relation to the orientation to teaching and learning, specifically moving from exam-oriented to learner-centered approaches (Blaylock et al., 2016; Slavin, 2010; Zembylas, 2005; 2007). Since the turn of the millineum, this transformation has also begun to take place in Malaysia (Aziz, 2004; World Bank, 2010) as stipulated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2013). The blueprint focuses on learners' development, which is to be given priority apart from closing the gap between urban and rural schools. This is especially so for English language learning. Malaysia Economic Monitor, reported by the World Bank (2010), has referred to the disparity between urban and rural schools as a major hindrance to fulfilling Malaysia's Vision 2020, a Malaysian aspiration to become a high-income, developed nation by 2020.

Rural school students in Malaysia are outperformed by their urban counterparts in all subject areas, particularly English, Mathematics

and Science. Rural English teachers face greater challenges in teaching, monitoring and evaluating learners in the current situation. Literacy development, especially English literacy, has become increasingly mechanical and monotonous (Abdul Rahim, Hood & Coyle, 2009; Husni, Abdul Rahim & Salam, 2012), making learning less fun (Abdul Rahim, 2007). Students' lack of proficiency in the English language seems to be the main reason for uninspired teaching approaches, especially in rural areas, and particularly in primary schools (Cohen, 2001; Deiro, 2005; Farver, Lonigan & Eppe, 2009). However, mechanical and monotonous approaches to learning, which frequently result in repetition and drills devoid of fun, can be detrimental to pupils' future motivation to learn the language as they are unsuitable for their developmental stage as young learners (Hamre & Pianta, 2007; Kennedy et al., 2012; Slavin, 2010).

Pedagogical approaches for young learners in primary school need to be embedded with meaningful yet fun activities in order to engage and motivate them to learn (Abdul Rahim, 2007; Sammons, Kington, Lindorff-Vijayendran, & Ortega, 2014). Research (Blaylock et al., 2016; Creemers, Kyriakides, & Sammons, 2010; Sammons, Lindorff, Ortega, & Kington, 2016) has shown that when young learners are exposed to meaningful and fun activities, these stimulate not only their cognitive and behavioural domains of motivation but also their affective domain (Parson, Richey, & Parsons, 2014). Stimulating all the domains, especially the affective domain, helps learners to sustain in regulating their own learning (Sammons et al., 2014; Blaylock et al., 2016), even if they have to deal with difficult subjects; in this case, it is the English Language, as these learners lack exposure to it. Hence, teachers teaching English in rural schools need to address these challenges well.

However, teachers' capacities and qualifications also add to the existing challenges. English teachers in rural schools include those whose academic major and training were in English Language Teaching (henceforth, optionists) and also those who merely underwent short in-service training, as their initial academic major and training were not in English Language Teaching (henceforth, non-optionists). Both optionist and non-optionist teachers face similar challenges in creating meaningful and fun activities for teaching English in rural schools, although the challenge is even

greater for the latter. To stimulate young learners affectively for literacy development, teachers from both backgrounds would benefit from pedagogical support provided through a framework that focuses on meaningful yet fun learning. Hence, there is a need to develop a framework that emphasises the affective dimension (e.g., ensuring pupils become interested in reading) in its relationship with the cognitive dimension of English language learning (e.g., ensuring pupils get to learn through reading), and especially in the rural context.

The main focus of this study was the professional development of English teachers who were serving young learners in the rural areas of Malaysia. Among other dimensions related to the issue, this study specifically aimed at exploring teachers' perceptions of the factors which influence the literacy development of the young learners in connection with a framework which incorporates the significant dimensions of affective literacy in their English classrooms. The main research questions guiding this study were: (1) What factors do rural primary school English teachers perceive as influencing young learners' literacy development in challenging situations? and (2) What are the factors of a framework which provides support for the affective literacy of rural young learners? The first question was expected to provide critical information towards the development of the framework which would concentrate on the affective literacy development of young learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to provide a foundation for the current study, a redefinition of affective literacy is made first, and ideas regarding effective management of affective factors in the classroom are discussed in relation to the possibility of promoting positive teacher-pupil interactions in the classroom. The information in this section forms a basis for exploring the essential factors of an affective literacy framework for rural young learners of English.

Affective Literacy for Young Learners of English

In an attempt to determine the essential components of literacy, Kennedy et al. (2012) recommend that "definitions of literacy

should encompass the cognitive, affective, socio-cultural, cultural-historical, creative and aesthetic dimensions" (p. 10). This is not surprising, given that the importance of emotion or affect (in psychological terms) has been emphasized in teaching and learning for the last few decades (Moore & Kuol, 2011; Cole, 2008; Abdul Rahim, 2007). In discussing the role of affect in second language acquisition (SLA), however, Imai (2010) identified some limitations of the SLA research paradigm in understanding the complexity of affect in the learning process. First, a particular type of negative emotion such as language anxiety has been given priority over other positive emotions such as enjoyment, happiness, or gratitude, which learners may experience in the process of language learning. This calls for a research that should focus on the positive emotions. Second, the interpersonal dimension of one's emotions is sidelined by the individualistic view of language learning in relation to affect. This could contribute to teachers' perception of English language learning and teaching as giving individual tasks, usually in the form of individual tests. Third, reflective appraisal methods have been adopted by most researchers in order to measure learners' affective states. Lastly, cognitive appraisal is recognised as the sole antecedent of emotional states and motivational aspects by stimulus appraisal researchers.

However, taking this position is tantamount to totally dismissing the evidence from psychological research that moods can affect one's judgment and interpretation of a situation (e.g., Forgas, 1995). The current study is different from other studies which have attempted to investigate learners' affective states by utilizing retrospective self-report questionnaires. Instead, it conducted observations on teachers and learners' "real-time emotional experiences in naturalistic settings" (Imai, 2010, p. 280). Furthermore, it examined the interpersonal nature of emotions or affective aspects of teachers and students in the real learning process, given the challenges that they faced. This study firmly believes that cognitive and affective aspects of students have mutual effect on the arousal of each other especially when learning (Abdul Rahim, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978).

As theories of literacy move their primary conception beyond cognitive and developmental dimensions, the affective dimension begins to fall into place, and its role in language teaching and learning is discussed in terms of affective literacy. Cole (2008) suggests

a pithy definition of the term as "the ability to communicate and respond to phenomena on the affective level" (p. 45). This view is further supported by Schroeder and Cahoy (2010) who suggest that affective domain should also consist of interests, attitudes and values of a person. Abdul Rahim, Hood and Coyle (2009), whose study focused on the different types of mediation in learning, investigate how learning can be challenged and supported during English and Mathematics lessons. They also found affective mediation, which include the involvement of the teacher to motivate learners in the classroom either by building confidence, providing emotive feedback, using humour and elements of fun as well as promoting good values, to be essential in expanding the learners' capacity to learn (Abdul Rahim, 2007).

Of particular note also is Cole and Yang's (2008) discussion on affective literacy, which is specifically related to the situation of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in China. They used the term for combining research that has explored the affective dimension in second language acquisition and language teaching. They addressed three aspects of affective literacy which are relevant to TESOL in China. Firstly, teachers helped learners to build positive attitudes towards English teaching and learning by attending to the affective environment of the classroom. Secondly, they provided a student-centred pedagogy that rewarded the learners through emotionally satisfying experiences. Lastly, they made sure that interpersonal meaning was a core concern for the TESOL teacher, so that Chinese learners may use English to build relationships.

These aspects seem to be regarded as universal features of affective literacy in other ESL/EFL situations such as in Malaysia, Norway, Turkey, or Korea (Garton, 2013; Koçoğlu, 2011; Malaysian Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2010; Sefton-Green, Nixon, & Erstad, 2009), and may serve to underscore the interrelatedness of the primary concerns of teaching English in these contexts. For instance, promoting learner-centred approach to teaching, making fun and meaningful learning, building confidence and good character are among the foci of English education in Malaysia (see Malaysian Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2010). In relation to these affective aspects, the current study attempted to explore the affective teaching foci of rural primary school teachers through instances of teacher-

initiated affective interaction pedadogies identified in the English classroom, that helps promote fun learning of English among rural young learners. It is crucial that these learners who lack exposure to the English language at home and have limited exposure to it in school, become engaged and stimulated affectively so that they may establish positive reactions towards the English language, and so become motivated to learn it.

Effective Management of Affective Factors in the Classroom

Although the affective domain has captured the attention of many educators and researchers, a renewed concern has been extended to "the emotional politics of curriculum development and educational reform, and the implications for teacher education" (Zembylas, 2007, p. 57). It is already acknowledged that the affective domain is inextricably interwoven in educational discourses and pedagogical practices (Boler, 1999), which adds to the emotional strain of teachers (Zembylas, 2005). Nevertheless, a body of research (Cole & Yang, 2008; Cunningham, Zibulsky & Callahan, 2009; Farver et al., 2009) has also provided a wealth of insights into the promotion of emotional skills in the primary school classroom, which can lead to "improved learning outcomes, more prosocial behaviour, and positive emotional development" (Yan, Evans, & Harvey, 2011, p. 82). Along this line of research, Yan, Evans, and Harvey (2011) investigated six New Zealand primary school teachers' management of emotional events and their positive strategies in handling them, through 60 hours of observation. These observations were assigned to the following categories: (1) fostering classroom relationships; (2) setting and managing emotional guidelines; (3) being emotionally aware; and (4) managing emotional situations. Although the six teachers were identified as those who had an exceptionally positive classroom environment, this study provides solid evidence that a key feature of implicit teaching dealing with emotion-related behaviours is to translate emotional skill development to the naturalistic classroom setting, "whereby emotions are shaped and managed and modelled in a positive manner by these emotionally skilled teachers" (Yan, Evans, & Harvey, 2011, p. 96).

Of critical importance is how this line of research provides good examples of how the findings may translate into the primary school classrooms. Undeniably, teachers play an important role in the

development of emotional and social skills of young learners during their formative years in the primary school (Deiro, 2005; Evans, Harvey, Buckley, & Yan, 2009; Papaleontiou-Louca, 2003). Besides, it is also noteworthy that Goleman's (1995) idea of emotional intelligence has been expanded to Cohen's (2001) concept of social and emotional literacy (SEL) which deals with the ability to decode one's own and others' emotions, to solve social-emotional problems by using decoded information, and to be creative and helpful learners. SEL is comparable to the notion of affective literacy in this study, but the social-emotional problems seem to have direct association with interpersonal and emotional obstacles facing young learners when they learn English in the current study.

The effect of teacher-young learner interaction is not limited to the affective and social aspects, but extended to literacy and language skills. According to recent studies, young learners' exposure to interactions of mediocre quality with teachers has a significant impact on the development of their literacy and language skills during early childhood (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Howes et al., 2008; Hamre et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2012; Sammons et al., 2016). The quality of interactions that impact on their development also rests on the quality of the teachers and their ability to enhance diverse learners' capacity to learn (Abdul Rahim, 2007; Sammons et al. 2016). Having learners of diverse background and abilities in the classroom also may pose challenges for teachers to cater to their different needs and capabilities, especially if teachers themselves are not equipped with the knowledge to tackle or manage learner diversity (Sammons et al., 2014, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to provide support for these teachers so that they may provide meaningful learning and promote learning engagement among their young learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Procedures

This study employed a qualitative approach as it would be able to provide a holistic view of the phenomenon being studied (see Creswell, 2013). The research was divided into five main phases: Firstly, a literature review was conducted to analyse the dimensions

of the theoretical framework, resulting in the development of the instruments for the interview and classroom observation. Secondly, the selection of the school and teachers was made based on a voluntary basis. The northern region of Malaysia was preferred due to the location of the researchers' institution. Thirdly, interviews and classroom observations were used to obtain the data for qualitative content analysis, which was the fourth phase. Finally, an Affective Literacy Framework for Rural Young Learners (ALFRYL) was proposed as a tool to support the affective literacy development of rural young learners.

Participants

Teacher participants in this study were selected on a voluntary basis. Ethical considerations were made to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the teachers and students involved to ensure that the participants would not be at a disadvantage. Consent letters were also obtained from parents for the participation of their children. Four English teachers who taught at the same school volunteered to participate: teacher A (TA), teacher R (TR), teacher Z (TZ), and teacher S (TS). All of them graduated from teacher training colleges, but had different academic majors and years of teaching experience (see Table 1). Two were optionist (O) teachers while the other two were non-optionist (NO) teachers, and only TZ was a male.

Table 1

Profiles of the Four Teachers Involved as Participants

	TA (O)	TR (NO)	TZ (O)	TS (NO)
Academic Qualifications	English major	Science major	English major	Science major
Teaching Experiences	22 years	15 years	12 years	23 years
Classes Assigned	Year 1 and 6	Year 1 and 3	Year 5	Year 5
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Female

Literature Review and Instrument Development

Literature review was conducted to analyse the theoretical aspects of this research that would lead to the identification of components,

towards the construction of the ALFRYL. This phase also included the development of the instruments for data collection, which involved qualitative content analyses such as interview and classroom observation. An initial cycle of study was conducted on three teachers who shared similar characteristics with the actual participants in order to evaluate the feasibility of the interview questions and the initially identified components of the affective literacy framework. As a result, some of the questions were modified because they seemed to require the participants to elaborate too extensively on their teaching methods, which prolonged the interview sessions (one hour interview instead of just 20 minutes). Their responses were also used for the formation of classroom observation rubrics.

Interviews and Classroom Observations

The interviews were conducted by one of the researchers to identify significant pedagogical challenges faced by the four teachers when they implemented English literacy education for young learners in rural areas. The questions were primarily focused on the teachers' experiences of the literacy process, their reflections on pupils' characteristics, their own roles, and their pedagogical practices (see Appendix 1 for interview questions). Classroom observations were made on two days to identify and measure the critical components of the affective framework that were being implemented by the four teachers in their classroom sessions. At this juncture, the observation rubrics were used to bring to light the dynamic aspects of the teaching and learning sessions (see Appendix 2 for observation rubrics). The participants' interview sessions were audio-taped and their classroom teaching practices were video-taped. The audio- and video-taped data were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were used for further qualitative analysis.

Qualitative Procedures and Analysis

Qualitative procedures were employed in this study to provide an in-depth investigation of data with the aim of understanding the challenges faced by the teachers and the process of change which students and teachers went through. The qualitative methodology included content analysis of interviews and classroom observations, in which the data were categorised under common categories and themes or components that helped to build the affective literacy framework.

FINDINGS

This study investigated the perceptions of English teachers in a rural area about factors which influenced young learners' literacy development in rural school settings, and examined the dimensions of an affective literacy framework for rural young learners. The findings of the two research questions are explained as follows:

Pupils' Background of English Language Learning

It was found that the rural primary school English teachers in this study were conscious of the negative impact of their pupils' background on English language learning. Although most of the pupils in this study went to pre-school, even those who belonged to the class of good performers were not well prepared for the learning of English. In the class of poor performers, only one of the 23 pupils was able to read English materials, which caused the pupils to become reluctant to speak in English during classroom interaction, as indicated in the classroom observation. They also did not have parents and significant others to learn English from and interact with in English at home as well as in school. This situation bodes ill for the literacy development of those pupils, and is further hampered by other local problems facing learners living in these areas.

Teacher Role in Literacy Development

The corollary of the previous issue is that the teachers in this study acutely perceived the need to take a more significant role in modelling pupils' learning of the English language. In the same vein, they found it essential that teachers of English should create an interesting and fun learning environment that can engage students cognitively and affectively in the process of learning the English language. It was another way of arguing for the urgent need to the mediate learning of the English language by engaging student's emotion.

Best Perceived Method of Teaching English

In relation to the mediation of English learning and affective elements, TA (O) made one of the most noteworthy statements:

> *For me, I like to teach through song, stories, sometimes, songs, rhymes, chart and just to encourage the student to learn English to create the happy moment that they love to learn English. Not to stress them.*

She put great emphasis on providing happy and intriguing moments for the young learners of English in the classroom setting. She was a strong believer in the connection between happy experiences and good memory. The same sentiment was shared by TS (NO) and TZ (O) who also believed that English learning should be fun and interesting. They indicated the use of games as the best method of teaching English. TZ (O) specifically highlighted watching of cartoons, putting great emphasis on the aspect of appealing to students' interest and preferences and not imposing on instrumental reasons for learning English. It seemed that all teachers reached a consensus on the significance of entertaining students through various pedagogical resources to motivate the students in rural area to learn English in a more active manner.

On ther other hand, the two non-optionist teachers seemed to agree to the significance of the affective aspect in principle, but both of them pointed to some thorny issues faced in their classrooms. TR (NO) who taught Year 1 pupils had a great misgiving about providing them with happy moments, not least because she had some pupils who were a handful, who always acted up in the classroom. She already felt a great burden in managing these pupils and others who did not reciprocate her efforts to get the lesson across in an amicable atmosphere. According to the classroom observations of her lessons, pupils seemed to get the upper hand, taking advantage of her warm character and gentle interactions. However, these challenges seemed to be similar in kind, if not degree, to the cases which the optionist teachers (i.e.. Teacher TA and TZ) had experienced.

Effective Flow of English Class

A significant difference was observed between the two optionist teachers in terms of managing the flow of class. TA (O) started each class with singing songs as a warmup, which was followed by reviewing lessons from the previous class. Then she initiated the main part of the lesson by using reading materials, and led pupils through guided practice, finishing the lesson with a writing activity.

On the other hand, TZ (O) preferred the traditional way of teaching by using "chalk and talk" to newer or more innovative ways. TZ (O) believed that the former was a clear and effective way to deliver each lesson to pupils within a short class period (i.e., 30 minutes). It did not necessarily mean that he stuck to this method throughout his English classes. He seemed to be concerned about the balance between a lesson delivery session and a follow-up session when he could explain further, using worksheets and group work. The difference between these two teachers makes sense, considering that they taught different groups of pupils: TA (O) taught Year 1 and TZ (O) Year 5. When TA (O) taught Year 6, she did not follow the routine adopted in Year 1 class. She also tended to use more of the traditional "chalk and talk". TA (O)'s pedagogical approaches and focus differed when she taught Year 1 as compared to when she did Year 6, in that the latter level required more concentration on preparing students for the national examination.

Influence of Teachers' Learning Experiences on Teaching Practices

One of the major findings of this study was that the differences in teachers' qualifications and training were the key features which determined the course of pedagogical approaches that they adhered to. This aspect is important in that their teaching practices are critically connected to the quality of students' literacy development. The non-optionists were less confident in the ways in which they carried out their lessons and interacted with their pupils, compared with those who obtained professional language teaching qualifications. The non-optionists also seemed to be lacking in the competence to lead their pedagogical practices smoothly and to engage students in effective and enriching learning experiences. They tended to resort to the traditional method of teaching using paper, pencil and workbook. Their situation was represented by the following remarks of TR (NO):

> *I am not creative. I don't know how to make it fun. When TA (O) taught it was fun (.) but when I teach my way the students cannot accept it they say it's slow and not fun just like a normal class nothing interesting (.) no creativity depends on the topic.*

Despite the differences in qualification and training background, most of the teachers' pedagogical approaches were also strongly influenced by how they learned the English language. Teachers' experiences of learning English were found to be very important in their teaching practice, not least because they were virtually reflected in the teaching methods and resources in one way or another. Take TA (O) and TS (NO), for instance. TA (O) proactively employed songs, storytelling, and games in her lesson to create happy moments for L2 learning, following the footsteps of their inspiring English teachers. TS also mentioned the use of games, scrapbooks and pictures to evoke the creativity of pupils, recreating her own experiences of learning English.

> *She, Miss L.C., I still remember her name....and she teach through sing in her lesson and then story too like Cinderella and then role play in classroom and shortplay....*(TA)

> *Yeah, that's how I pick up the language ....I learn English through English movies, my children also like that watching cartoon and playing games.* (TS)

The teachers usually resorted to their personal ideas and experiences as they tried to figure out how to solidify their ideas of teaching L2 in pursuing a significant conception such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). They did not depend on academic literature or their education in learning about CLT to form their views and to execute them in teaching sessions. This is not surprising (see Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).

The Proposed Affective Literacy Framework for Rural Young Learners (ALFRYL)

As a result of the continuous discussion of pedagogical concepts regarding teachers' perceptions and practices of literacy development, an affective literacy framework for rural young learners framework is proposed. This framework was obtained from a synthesis of the literature, teacher interviews and classroom observations. The six categories of the framework were identified as follows: *Positive Interaction* refers to teacher-initiated interaction aiming to promote students' positive emotion while *Engaging Pedagogy* refers to attractive and interesting ways of teaching to

draw students' attention to learning. *Meta-cognitive Assessment* refers to teachers' assessment of students' cognitive processes and the emotional dimension which accompanies them. *Emotional Management* on the other hand refers to teachers' ways of managing emotional events which may influence students' learning processes. The two other dimensions are *Pedagogical Resources,* which include teaching materials to maximize the effect of positive interaction and engaging pedagogy and finally, *Learner Diversity* which refers to teachers' consideration of students' different levels of language learning achievement and emotional development.

Components of the Affective Literacy Framework

The six categories of affective literacy seem to be interrelated to the three broad domains of teacher-child interaction proposed by Hamre and Pianta (2007), i.e., emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. They were hypothesized to facilitate children's developmental progress as a result of their experiences in classrooms. In the final analysis, it was found that emotional support would be closely related to positive interaction and engaging pedagogy in our study, classroom organization to emotional management and metacognitive assessment, and interactional support to pedagogical resources and learner diversity. Some of the prominent features found in the analysis of interviews and classroom observations are presented under these categories as follows:

Positive Interaction and Engaging Pedagogy. Each of the teachers had their own unique way of increasing interaction outside or during the class, by promoting positive interaction between them and their pupils using informal ways such as looking at pupils' mood, giving reward, teacher professional attitude and greetings outside the classroom. Teacher A was more prominent than the other teachers in attempting to take the initiative to interact with pupils, which aimed to promote their positive emotion. In teaching Year 1 pupils, she was seen to be very active in promoting interaction through speaking and listening at the individual or group levels. Starting with songs as a warm-up, she continued to encourage pupils to speak out and engage in activities in a free but dynamic manner. The classroom atmosphere seemed to be out of hand, but it was under her control. She was intent on nurturing the free and natural expressions of pupils

who were sheepish or shy. Just as she pointed out, it was found that she tried to treat pupils as daughters and sons, sometimes patting them on the back if the circumstances allowed it.

Emotional Management and Metacognition Assessment. Most of the teachers were found to have their own way of managing emotional events which may influence pupils' learning processes (i.e., *Emotional Management*). TS (NO) said that whilst she needed to be strict, she never punished pupils. Instead, she tried to provide some competition in pupils' activities so that they could be motivated to study English more.

In addition, it was interesting to discover that the use of pupils' L1 has a dual function in the classroom: to promote cognitive understanding among pupils and to manage emotional events. Three teachers. with the exception of TZ (O), mentioned a significant use of the L1 to get the message across to pupils. TA sometimes used the L1 to convey the teaching points to her Year 1 pupils, but she placed a greater emphasis on pupils' need to speak in English. However, TS (NO) spent around 50% of Year 5 class time in using the L1 to explain the meaning of gestures and other unclear things to pupils. TR (NO) spent around 65% of Year 1 class time using the L1, probably because the pupils in her class had a low level of academic achievement. On the other hand, she used the pupils' L1 in her Year 3 class only when she was angry with pupils' behaviours. This was a case of using the pupils' L1 as a signal to sound the alarm to manage the emotional event in the classroom.

This dimension of emotional management was closely related to their assessment of pupils' cognitive processes and the emotional dimension which accompanied them (*Metacognitive Assessment*). Like other ordinary English teachers, all the four teachers continuously evaluated pupils' cognitive progress as well as their current level of L2 performance. TS (NO)'s case is noteworthy in this aspect. She took care of the occasions to acknowledge pupils' effort and tried to nurture pupils' motivation to improve their performance by providing each of them with their TOV (Take Off Values) (i.e., achievement goal) for next year. On the other hand, TA (O) said that she always tried to check pupils' moods by using routines or songs. She was concerned about ways of handling pupils' boredom, such as using games and singing songs. Integrated consideration about

cognitive and affective aspects is the core of the extended concept of metacognition.

Pedagogical Resources and Learner Diversity. All the four teachers seemed to be versatile in the use of teaching materials to maximize the effect of positive interaction and engaging pedagogy in their classrooms (Pedagogical Resources). From textbooks through Big Books to Internet resources, they tried to capitalize on the effects of various pedagogical tools to appeal to pupils' attention and interests. TS (NO) acknowledged that as long as teachers had good materials, pupils can be engaged in learning, but the problem of how to look for and prepare good and effective teaching resources remained quite pressing. However, she did take the diverse abilities of the pupils into account. Most of them who belonged to the lower level of English achievement would not have been able to carry out the activities without their peers' immediate assistance or teachers' timely help. Thus, the pupils in Year 1 demonstrated the dynamic nature of their interaction among themselves and between them and the teacher in performing the activities.

DISCUSSION

With regards to understanding critical factors which influence rural young learners' literacy development, pupils' background takes on a tremendous significance. It primarily serves to determine the pre-condition of young learners of English. This issue is especially problematic given the low quality of pre-school education and the role of English teachers in the primary school setting. Poor preparedness among young learners of English can be traced to kindergarten teachers who are not successful in using effective strategies to teach early literacy skills in an explicit way, while interacting pupils (see Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Callahan, 2009). There is evidence that effective strategy use and explicit interaction are essential for children who are exposed to risk of school failure (see Farver, Lonigan, & Eppe, 2009). American data on prekindergarten education suggest that the average child is likely to experience teacher-child interactions of mediocre to low quality which plays a significant role, particularly in children's development of literacy skills (see Hamre et al., 2012). This is also probably true of the kindergarten situation in Malaysian rural areas. This problem then escalates when the pupils enter primary education.

In a context where young learners are neither exposed to effective pre-school learning experiences, nor have significant others or parents to interact with in English, the role of English teachers is of paramount importance for their literacy development. As previous studies (e.g. Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Howes et al., 2008) have argued, teachers' mediocre interactions with young learners stunt their development of literacy and language skills during early childhood. Unless these learners have effective and caring English teachers in the early years of primary school, chances are they will perennially hover at beginners' level of English and struggle to read, write, and participate in meaningful interpersonal interactions. Given this scenario happening in rural areas, it is imperative that primary school teachers and kindergarten teachers alike should be equipped with effective education to promote the literacy development of children.

The significant role of teachers in this setting is also in keeping with Tin's (2013) emphasis in a study of interest in learning English. He maintains that especially in the early years or primary level, learners' interest in learning English are activated or triggered by three resources: the attractiveness and enjoyment derived from the support of significant others; peers and close friends; and teachers (pp. 136-137). Considering the susceptible nature of young learners, their goals and interest in English language learning are likely to be formed primarily by the influence of the English teachers that they encounter in their school setting every day. Furthermore, the teachers' support, which highlights the dimension of incorporating fun elements into teaching, resonates with Abdul Rahim's (2007) notion of affective mediation, where students are engaged to learn in an affective way, and Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the importance of emotion and that it cannot be separated from cognition.

The non-optionist teachers confessed that they lacked creative ideas to make learning activities fun and meaningful, which was likely to be connected with the inability to manage the classroom by intriguing activities and attractive strategies. TS (NO) and TR (NO) shared similar experiences with TA (O). While TA (O) also indicated lack of ideas as a challenge, her case, however, seems to reflect her continuous willingness to develop her professional expertise,

looking for better and more effective strategies and activities, which were envied by other teachers. Besides, her remarks on her multiple roles as a teacher, facilitator, mother and friend, were noteworthy. She highlighted three roles that teachers should play in building the English skills of pupils: facilitator, mother (to Year 1 pupils), and friend (to Year 6 pupils). This finding may be a significant pointer that English teachers should be English majors, who would not merely undergo professional education on language teaching, but would have different mindsets and values on teaching and learning English compared with non-optionist teachers. No schools are in more need for these teachers than rural schools, where English teachers should be the major English input provider and English interaction partner, as TA (O) pointed out.

It was found that there is a consistent need for professional development targeting effective teacher-child interactions. The missing piece for schools seems to be teachers' procedural knowledge about how to translate research on literacy development, particularly affective literacy into school and classroom practices that would lead to improved reading performance for their students (Yan, Evans, & Harvey, 2011). Of critical importance is how this study provides an example of how a practitioner-researcher puts affective literacy framework into practice.

The ALFRYL (Affective Literacy Framework for Rural Young Learners) proposed in the current study helps to identify the emphasis of recent studies and explore their underpinning assumptions. Affective literacy environments, in some contexts, provide opportunities for children not only to make meaning but also to reach new language materials and express themselves in new ways. The elements that constitute the framework provide an initial reference for teachers to stimulate pupils' learning in challenging context in which English is spoken minimally.

The intention of the research was not to simply present some seminal practices of teachers, but rather to present some real examples of how teachers can frame the task of teaching English within their individual contexts in the rural areas of Malaysia. In addition, the researchers suggest that this "research framework may also serve as a model for future large-scale research projects focusing on" affective literacy which rural young L2 learners need to develop (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 158).

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study showed how four differently trained English language teachers struggled to enhance the English literacy of their pupils in a rural school. These pupils, in general, lacked exposure to English and many also lacked the motivation to learn the language. Hence, the teacher played an important role in ensuring appropriate assistance for the learners to thrive in their second language development. This study also argued that the teachers' previous experiences of learning the English language and their perceptions of pupils' learning process significantly influenced their pedagogical approaches. Their pedagogical practices which underscored their concern in making learning fun resonated well in ensuring that learners became engaged in their learning. Nonetheless, in order to help pupils benefit from the affective aspects of learning, the teachers were required to consider a positive interaction with their pupils, managing pupils' emotions, employing an engaging pedagogy that focused on making learning English interesting, using varied resources and assessments that encouraged pupils to think and catering to learner diversity. These components were the major elements which had been initially identified through the analysis of literature and confirmed through interviews and classroom observations.

Given the influence of differences in professional qualifications and learning background on their pedagogical practices, obtaining qualified English majors for teaching positions is seen to be of primary importance for the development of young learners' literacy in challenging contexts. This is supported by the evidence from non-optionist teachers who struggled to create an engaging learning environment. What is more apparent is that not only do these teachers struggle to improve their pupils' English. they also had difficulties in enhancing their own English proficiency.

Another important finding of this study was the notion of establishing a learning community within the school. This was exemplified by TR (NO) and TA (O) in that the former used the latter as the point of reference for ideas on how to teach pupils using creative ways like songs and rhymes. The learning community in this school was also facilitated by the pedagogical support of a mentor who participated in the native speaker programme organised by the Ministry of Education (MoE). This programme was especially effective for the non-optionist teachers whose confidence in using English and

leading English classes had improved through interactions with the native speaker mentor.

ALFRYL is a framework that was initially developed through the analysis of related literature and further fine tuned through validation from the data gathered in this study. This framework can be used as an effective guide on how teachers can make the most out of classroom interactions that promote the affective learning of English in a challenging situation. Therefore, ALFRYL can be integrated into Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) or Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) teacher training programmes. Given that numerous schools in rural areas still face a shortage of English teachers, the chances for high for newly graduated pre-service teachers to be posted in the rural areas. Pre-service teachers should be exposed to the six components of the framework represented in Figure 1 (i.e., positive interaction, engaging pedagogy, emotional management, metacognitive assessment, pedagogical resources and learner diversity) so that they are better equipped with knowledge of how to engage learners in a fun and interesting learning environment that caters to the pupils' needs. It should be noted here that the limited exposure of pupils in rural areas to the English language requires teachers to play a more significant role in mediating pupils' learning of English.

Figure 1. Affective Literacy Framework for Young Learners

Apart from introducing the framework in pre-service teaching, ALFRYL can be incorporated in in-service continuous professional development programmes related to English language teaching. It may offer English teachers baseline data against which their current and further experiences can be mapped when teaching English to disadvantaged pupils in rural settings. The framework can also be integrated into a mentor-mentee programme that mirrors the native speaker programme because the framework will be relevant to the context in which the teachers will be placed, i.e., in rural schools which have many students with minimal English exposure in their own learning environment. In such programmes a mentor may serve as a counselor to other teachers from a few schools located within the vicinity. The affective literacy framework also highlights specific foci for further research. Within the operational dimension, further qualitative research may examine how children are active in managing and navigating affective literacy environments and in turn investigate ways of encouraging children to reflect on and further develop strategies for meaning-making in interpersonal interactions.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions:

Teachers' Experiences of Literacy Process

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Where did you receive your teacher training?
3. Do you enjoy reading in English? Why or why not?
4. I believe that different people learn English in different ways so how did you learn English?

Influences of English Language Lesson

1. In your view, what actually influence English language learning?
2. What are the crucial factors that influence English language learning?
3. What are the best methods to teach English?
4. Do you think that English language learning should be fun?
5. When preparing the English lesson:
   (1) What kind of preparation do you do before the lesson?
   (2) Do you think that the activities that you prepare will help your students apply in their daily life? Why?
   (3) What usually happen during English lesson?
   (4) What kind of activities do you use in your lesson? Why?
   (5) How do you know whether you have achieved the learning outcomes of the lesson?

Goal Setting and Assessments

1. Is it important for student to set learning goals when learning English? Why?
2. How do you guide/motivate so that student could achieve these goals?
3. Do you provide all students with multiple assessment opportunities to demonstrate what they can say, write, and read? Please explain.

Reflection on Learners

1. Do all the students attend the preschool?
2. What relevant prior literacy experiences does your student have?
3. Upon entering Year 1, what did your students already know?
4. What are the learning needs of your student?
5. Do you consider the learning styles of your student when teaching?

Reflection on Teachers

1. How do you perceive your role as a teacher?
2. Could you give me some examples of what you do to achieve that role?

Reflection on Pedagogical Practices

1. What would you do to help your students learn?
2. Besides the above, what other supports do you give to help your students learn?
3. How do you cater to the needs of mixed ability groups in your class?
4. Do you let your students know of their progress?
5. How do you enhance interest in your students to learn the language?
6. How do you build up students' level of confidence to use the language?
7. What other resources do you use to support your student's progress?
8. How do you make your class interesting and fun?
9. How do you make your class friendly and comfortable?
10. When and how do you use the *Bahasa* Malaysia when teaching English?

APPENDIX 2

Observation Rubrics

Observer's Name : Teacher's Name : Class Name :				**Date of Observation:** **Time :**	
	Not observed **1**	**Could Improve** **2**	**Acceptable** **3**	**Excellent** **4**	**Score**
POSITIVE INTERACTION					
Builds students confidence	**No attempt** to build positive interaction with students	**Little Effort** in building positive interaction with students	**Some effort** in building positive interaction with students	Gr**eat effort** in building positive interaction with students	
Gain trust from students					
Becoming friendly with students					
Verbal expression of the student					
Invites class discussion					
Sharing personal information with students					
Using humour					
Show concern and motivate student					
Solicits student input					
Showing warmth to student					
Involves a variety of students					
Promoting Values					
ENGAGING PEDAGOGY					

(continued)

Observer's Name : Teacher's Name : Class Name :				**Date of Observation:** **Time :**	
	Not observed **1**	**Could Improve** **2**	**Acceptable** **3**	**Excellent** **4**	**Score**
Employs small group discussion, student-led activities	**No attempt** to engage pedagogy toward students	**Little effort in** engaging pedagogy towards students	**Some effort in** engaging pedagogy towards students	**Great effort in** engaging pedagogy towards students	
Use engaging activities for students					
Use fun activities for students to do					
Delivers well-planned lesson					
Make connections among current, previous and future experiences					
Encouraging creativity and element of fun					
ASSESSMENT (METACOGNITION)					
Communicates to students to show their success in learning	**No attempt** to do assessment with students	**Little effort** in assessing with students	**Some effort** in assessing with students	**Great effort** in assessing with students	
Encouraging student positive decision making					
Using terms of endearment (using kind words)					
Praise the students (emotive feedback)					
Encourage students to take ownership in learning					
Encourage students to plan					
Encourage students to check/monitor their progress					

(continued)

Observer's Name : Teacher's Name : Class Name :				**Date of Observation:** **Time :**	
	Not observed **1**	**Could Improve** **2**	**Acceptable** **3**	**Excellent** **4**	**Score**
EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT					
Gesture expression of the student	**No attempt** to manage with students emotion	**Little effort** in managing students emotion	**Some effort** in managing students emotion	**Great effort** in managing students emotion	
Managing students emotion					
RESOURCES					
Provides well-designed materials	**No attempt** to find other resources	**Little effort** in finding other resources	**Some effort** in finding other resources	**Great effort** in finding other resources	
Employs other tools/instructional aids (i.e. technology, computer, video, overheads etc)					
LEARNER DIVERSITY					
Demonstrates awareness of individual student learning needs	**No attempt** to aware student needs	**Little effort** to aware student needs	**Some effort** to aware student needs	**Great effort** to aware student needs	
				Total Score	