CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING OF EARLY LITERACY IN A PRIVATE MALAYSIAN KINDERGARTEN

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FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UIVERSITI MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR
2020

CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING OF EARLY LITERACY IN A PRIVATE MALAYSIAN KINDERGARTEN

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DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL

FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

KUALA LUMPUR

2020

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

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Matric No: PGF 140014

Name of Degree: MASTER OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Title of Dissertation: CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING OF EARLY LITERACY IN A PRIVATE MALAYSIAN KINDERGARTEN

Field of Study: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

Literacy is the different ways that children connect meanings to the various literacy items that they come into contact through the use of reading, writing and oral language. Early literacy or emergent literacy skills begin as soon as a child is born until the time he/she is exposed to formal reading and writing instructions. It includes the literacy knowledge, skills and attitudes that the child acquires throughout this period. Research reveals that early literacy instructions is of utmost importance as these early learning experiences could lead to better educational accomplishment and a more productive adult life. This exploratory qualitative study is undertaken to explore an environment that is conducive for the teaching and learning of early literacy in English at a Malaysian private kindergarten over time. The study is carried out with fifteen children aged four plus and their English teacher in a private kindergarten in a suburban residential area in Selangor that is legally registered with the MOE, whereby its curriculum is guided by the National Preschool Curriculum (2017). The NPSC encourages a play-based approach as a guide to improve the quality of teaching and learning of the preschool children. Since the aim of the NPSC is to develop the potential of preschoolers holistically, a well-developed theory of human development is suitable to provide the framework for this study. Hence, the Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development is selected for this study. Besides this, the Total Physical Response Method which states that children learn a second language in the similar way as they learn the first language and the Constructivist Theory which states that children construct meaning based on first hand interaction through play as they learn and develop in a holistic manner have also influenced this study. Data for this study is collected via the process of observation, interview and document analysis. The data is analysed using the Braun and Clarke six-step thematic analysis. The findings of this study revealed that the limited space available in the kindergarten was a hindrance

in carrying out play-based activities, and the lack of storage for teaching resources restricted the teacher from adding new resources to her collection. In addition, the result also showed that the teacher lacked understanding on how English is taught as a second language to kindergarteners and also knowledge on Early Childhood Development. The findings of this study will firstly provide an insight to future planners and designers of kindergarten buildings into how the physical environment of the classroom affects the learning of the English Language. Therefore measures have to be taken to plan appropriate features in the buildings to accommodate play base activities. Secondly, this study will enlighten kindergarten administrators on the importance of setting aside a substantial amount of funds for teaching aids and storage space for these resources. Finally, this study will provide a clear insight to the English Language teacher on the skills that is needed to be an effective English Language teacher in a kindergarten.

Keywords: conducive environment, early literacy, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory,

Total Physical Response Method, Constructivist Theory.

Abstrak

Persekitaran yang Kondusif untuk Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Literasi Awal di

sebuah Tadika Swasta di Malaysia

Bahasa Inggeris di kenalkan kepada seorang murid di Malaysia apabila dia berada di prasekolah dan ia akan terus diajar sebagai mata pelajaran yang wajib pada perinkat sekolah rendah ke sekolah menengah sampai ke tahap pengkajian tinggi. Pada masa kini, Bahasa Inggeris telah diberi pengiktirafan oleh dasar pendidikan dan perancangan sebagai 'second language' iaitu bahasa kedua di Malaysia. Oleh demikian Bahasa Inggeris mesti diajar dengan berkesan untuk menjadikan warga Malaysia di bawa Sistem Pendidikan Nasional untuk bertutur dengan lancar di bahasa ini. Kementerian Pelajaran telah pun melaksanakan Kurrikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan (KSPK) yang menggalakkan pendekatan berasaskan permainan sebagai panduan untuk meningkatkan taraf pengajaran and pembelajaran murid murid prasekolah. Oleh kerana Bahasa Inggeris bukan bahasa pertama murid murid di Malaysia, pembelajaran bahasa ini mesti di kenalkan dengan cara yang begitu menyeronokkan dan bermakna untuk memudahkan pembelajaran bahasa inti. Oleh demikian kajian kes kualitatif ini di laksanakan untuk meneroka persekitaran yang kondusif untuk pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris di sebuah tadika swasta di Malaysia. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan lima belas murid berumur 4+ dan guru Bahasa Inggeris mereka di sebuah tadika swasta yang terletak di kawasan perumahan di pinggir bandar Selangor. Tadika ini di daftarkan dengan Kementerian Pelajaran dan kurrikulum dipandu oleh KSPK. Oleh kerana matlamat KSPK adalah untuk mengembangkan murid murid prasekolah secara holistic, satu theory perkembangan manusia yang sempurna digunakan sebagai rangka kerja kajian ini. Theory Bronfenbrenner tealah di pilih untuk kajian ini. Selain daripada itu, Model Total Physical Response yang menyatakan murid murid mempelajari bahasa kedua dengan

cara yang sama mereka mempelajari bahasa pertama mereka juga mempengaruhi kajian ini. Teori Konstruktivis yang menyatakan murid murid membina makna dengan berinteraksi semasa bermain sambil belajar dan mengembang secara holistic juga mempengaruhi kajian ini. Data untuk kajian ini di kumpul secara pemerhatian, temuduga dan juga analisis dokumen. Data di dianalisikan dengan menggunakan „Braun and Clarke six-step thematic analysis'. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan kekurangan ruang dalam kelas adalah halangan untuk menjalankan aktiviti aktiviti berasaskan permainan dan juga kekurangan ruang untuk menyimpan alat alat pengajaran. Ini menhalangkan cikgu untuk menambah lagi koleksi alat alat pengajaran. Selain daripada itu cikgu Inggeris yang memperolehi kelayakan dalam Inggeris dalam Komunikasi Perniagaan menyatakan bahawa dia kurang memaham bagaimana mengajar Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua untuk murid murid tadika dan juga kurang pengetahuan dalam pendidikan awal kanak kanak. Hasil kajian ini juga akan memberi pemahaman untuk perancang dan pereka bangunan tadika bagaimana persekitaran fizikal yang sempurna membolehkan guru untuk menjalankan aktitiviti aktiviti yang menyeronokan di dalam and di luar kelas. Selain daripada ini kajian ini akan mencerahkan pentadbir tadika untuk menyediakan pembelajaan untuk alat alat yang digunakan untuk mengajar dan ruang untuk menyimpan alat alat ini. Akhirnya kajian ini akan memberi wawasan yang jelas pada guru guru, kemahiran yang di kehendaki untuk menjadi seorang guru bahasa Inggeris yang berkesan di tadika.

Kata kunci: Persekitaran Kondusif, Bahasa Inggeris, pengajaran, pembelajaran, berasaskan permainan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

By the grace of Almighty God, this six year journey which was full of challenges and heart breaks has finally come to an end. It is indeed a joyous moment when I finally get to give thanks to those who are responsible for my success. First and foremost I would like to thank Dr. Diana Lea Baranovich for agreeing to be my supervisor for my dissertation and guiding me throughout this study. My heartfelt thanks also go to my readers Dr. Mohd. Nazri bin Abdul Rahman and Dr. Fatiha Senom whose valuable input allowed this study to take shape and come to a completion. Another wonderful person who played a significant role in this journey was Dr. Loh Sau Cheong who patiently explained to me step by step certain concepts which I thought were far beyond my understanding but she was able to do it and this gave meaning to the research that I was doing.

I would also like to thank my life partner, my husband for motivating me with his encouraging words and helping me out whenever he could. Besides, I would like to thank my loving sister Josephine and dear friend Ng Lee Kean who kept in touch with all that was happening in my life and giving me their support by listening to me and advising me whenever it is needed. I really thank Dr. Kuang Ching Hei for giving me her expert opinion on my dissertation which has further added value to my research.

Last but not least I would like to dedicate this masters degree to my three dear children and three grandchildren for being the best part of my life and this was what inspired me not to give up despite all the many challenges and I know they too will make me proud just as I had made them proud of me.

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LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

NPSC	National Preschool Standard Curriculum
KSPK	Kurrikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan
L2	Second Language
L1	First Language
MOE	Ministry of Education
TPR	Total Physical Respond
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
JAIN	Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
DSKP	Dokumen Standard Kurrikulum Dan Pentaksiran
ELA	English Language Arts
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
MBMMBI	Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris
NPQS	National Preschool Quality Standard
SKPK	Standard Kualiti Prassekolah Kebangsaan

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literacy according to Frankel, Becker, Rowe, and Pearson (2016) is the different ways that children connect meanings to the various literacy items that they come into contact through the use of reading, writing and oral language. As for early literacy or emergent literacy skills, its development starts as soon as the child is born till the time he/she is exposed to formal reading and writing instructions. Therefore early literacy includes the literacy knowledge, skills and attitudes that the child acquires throughout this period (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). Research reveals that early literacy instructions is of utmost importance as these early learning experiences could lead to better educational accomplishment and a more productive adult life (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006).

This qualitative study is undertaken to explore the conducive environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in a private Malaysian kindergarten. This study focuses on the English Language which is introduced to the Malaysian child as early as in preschool, when the child is 5-6 years old, and is continued to be taught as the second language in the national curriculum from primary to secondary school. Then it will continue to be a compulsory language from post-secondary to tertiary levels. On average, the Malaysian child will receive 14-15 years of English Language education (Azman, 2016). As such, the authorities concerned in the education sectors have the responsibility to create the right and suitable environment to assist learners to acquire the English Language.

According to Muliana & Yunus (2014), early childhood education in Malaysia was first started by Christian missionaries who also took the responsibilities to manage them as well. Dahari & Ya (2011) stated that in the earlier days early childhood education

was only exclusively available for children of those who were able to afford it. It was only during the 1970s that the Malaysian Ministry of Rural Development started a government initiated preschools which was known as KEMAS for children from the low income bracket and those living far away from the city (Rashid, 1993).

In the year 1969, the Asia Foundation contributed funds to the Worker Society of Malaysia to start off preschool education which was similar to the Head Start Project in America (Zabariah et al. 2005). This project was first developed in America to eradicate the negative effects of poverty on the development of children.

In 1972, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) drafted the *Kaedah-Kaedah Guru/ Kaedah-Kaedah Kindergarten dan Sekolah Asuhan (Pendaftaran) 1972 Warta Kerajaan P.U. (A) 414.* This provided the guidelines on the procedures that need to be adhered to in the process of registration of kindergartens, teachers and their board of governors. This was the first legal document concerning the registration of early childhood education.

Ever since then, kindergartens in Malaysia have grown by leaps and bounds and there are kindergartens that are set up not only by government organisations whose main aim is to provide early education for the children living in the rural and suburban areas, there are also private sectors that provide this service as an option for parents who could afford it. To date, it has been seen that these private kindergartens have found favour among the majority of parents as these private preschools are able to provide children with the necessary basic knowledge before further studying in primary schools (Mustafa & Azman, 2013).

Preschool education was included into the national education system through the Education Act 1996 (2006). It also establishes that regardless of their types, whether private or government-owned, preschools have to adhere to the national statutory preschool curriculum i.e. the National Preschool Standard-based Curriculum (NPSC). The NPSC is the current Malaysian preschool curriculum which is still in use since its first enforcement in 2010.

There has been a revision to the curriculum in 2016 in conjunction with the recent Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013) and the immediate needs. The NPSC"s intention is to produce pre-schoolers" to be all-rounded children which includes spiritually, socially, and intellectually, "through safe and conducive learning environment, and fun, creative and meaningful activities" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2). This is in line with the National Education Philosophy which aims to produce holistic individuals for the improvement of society and country (Ministry of Education, 2013).

In Malaysia, kindergarten education is not compulsory till children attend formal schooling at the age of seven. However, the recent statistics from the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu, 2015) showed that Malaysian preschool enrolment has risen to 84.27% at the end of 2014, compared to 77% as of June 2011 (Ministry of Education, 2013). The Malaysian Education Blueprint is working towards a 100% enrolment for all levels including early education (Ministry of Education, 2013). Due to the increasing number of children attending preschools, the National Preschool Curriculum should ensure high quality to enable children to benefit at the early years of their lives in order to build a strong human capital for the nation in the near future.

The two important languages learned in all Malaysian public and private preschools that adhere to the NPSC (2017) are Bahasa Malaysia and the English

Language. As for Bahasa Malaysia which is the national language is used as the medium of instruction at national public schools while English is taught in kindergartens as a second language and it continues as a second language and a compulsory subject in the national curriculum at the primary and secondary levels and goes on till post secondary and tertiary education. Meanwhile to exemplify the spirit of pluralism, ethnic languages such as Mandarin and Tamil are permitted as mediums of instruction at private kindergartens in the nation and English and Bahasa Malaysia are also taught here as compulsory subjects (Mustafa & Azman, 2013).

In Malaysia, Bahasa Malaysia is considered as the national language and English is placed as the second language or L2 (Gill, 2002). Therefore Malaysia practices a bilingual system of education of which English is a compulsory subject at all levels of education, "side by side with strong indigenous languages, widely use in speaking, often at official functions, as the language of politics, the media, jurisdiction, higher education, and other such domains" (Thirusanku & Melor, 2012, p.2). Since Malaysians being a pluralist society, the learners are not only bilingual but trilingual and some are even multilingual as well.

Thirusanku & Melor (2012) stated that English is an essential language in many parts of the world and according to Baskaran (1985), English is not only used as a tool for communication but also for other functions as well. He further stated that English is considered as a link language in Kenya and Nigeria, an associate official language in India, an additional language in Ghana, a bridge language in Singapore, a coordinate language in the Philippines and a strong second language in Malaysia.

Malaysia boasts a history of English that is more than a century old due to the British colonial rule in the country. However, there was a very noticeable decline in the English language competency level of students over the past several decades and the

main reason for this predicament could be due to the education policies that are inconsistent with changes taking place very often even before a policy is fully implemented. According to Abdul Rahman (2005) and Ismail (2008), the teaching and learning of this language has brought about much dissatisfaction mostly among the educators, students, policy makers and the public at large. It cannot be denied that Malaysian students who have gone through 11 years of learning English in schools have unfortunately failed to achieve the desired literacy skills (Kaur, 2006; Jalaludin, Mat Awal & Abu Bakar, 2008).

Therefore, there is an urgent need to discover the root of the problems which is at the kindergarten level. Hence, this study is undertaken to explore the environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy with focus on English in a Malaysian kindergarten. This study is exploratory in nature and it is a qualitative study which will be conducted in a kindergarten in a suburban area in Gombak, Selangor. It is the researcher's belief that this study will help policy makers in devising appropriate initiatives for effective teaching of early literacy in English Language and providing the suitable environment as an effective and motivating factor for the teachers as well as the children. It is also hoped that more studies are carried out to determine an ideal environment for the teaching and learning of the English Language.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

In the Malaysian scenario English is regarded as unimportant because it is a subject that does not require a pass to get through the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) certificate. However, English is considered as a world language in business as well as science, therefore it is given much importance among the educated Malaysian citizens (Darmi et al. 2017).

The crucial period for learning and development to occur in young children is during the early years (Winskel et al, 2016). It is during this stage children become exceptionally receptive to learning other languages besides their mother tongue. Hence it is important for parents and early childhood educators to prepare, stimulating and rich linguistic environment in which learners will be able to engage and interact actively with each other just as their first language experience (ibid, 2016).

The NSPC (2017) has designed the English syllabus with the aim to enable preschool children to communicate actively with those in their immediate environment and develop an appreciation of the language through the medium of stories, rhymes, poems, songs and games. Vocabulary is expected to be developed by using the language to relate familiar experiences of children with things that are found in the environment as well as simple selections from children"s literature. Listening and speaking skill is acquired through verbal and non-verbal communication and written skill is developed through reading as children learn the letters of the alphabet, simple words and phrases which will later build into simple sentences (Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, Souriyavongsa, Da, & Ong, 2011).

The NPSC has stipulated a play based learning for preschools. Play according to UNICEF (2018), is an excellent way in which young children are able to gain essential knowledge and skills. Consequently, it is the responsibility of early childhood educators

to provide play opportunities and an environment that is conducive to promote play, exploration and hands-on learning experience.

The findings of many reports, research and test scores revealed that children who cooperate well during play with their peers fair generally better academically, behaviourally and socially than those who are unable to participate in play activities (Gray, 2011; Hanline, Milton, & Phelps; Reynolds, Stagnitti & Kidd; Roskos & Christie, 2011). Nevertheless, if the school administrators failed to understand the need for play in early childhood education and often focus on academic skills. This will lead to the complete eradication of play from the children's kindergarten school days.

According to Leinonen and Venninen (2012), the four essential stimuli necessary for an ideal classroom environment are movement, comfort, competence and control. Movement in the classroom means the space available in the classroom should enable children to move about safely and comfortably to explore the materials or events around them. On the other hand, competent means to be able to carry out the given responsibility without encountering any difficulties and at the same time to be able to utilise their own teaching aids and equipment in the given space and control means to be able to take charge of the given space they are occupying in the environment. Regrettably, there are still no researches that are carried out to determine the best design for Malaysian kindergarten children (Mohidin, Ismail & Ramli, 2014).

1.3 Problem Statement

Preschool education in Malaysia has been a major agenda in the National Education Philosophy through the Education Act 1996 (2006) and it emphasizes a holistic approach which covers the learners" physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual aspects. Today, the English Language has been recognised as the „second language" in the Malaysian education policy and planning. Hence, this L2 has to be given due respect by being taught in an excellent manner to Malaysians who are in the national education system to enable them to communicate well in the language (Asmah, 1981, pp.230-231).

Consequently, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has implemented The National Preschool Standard Curriculum (2017) as a guide to improve the quality of teaching and learning of preschool children. However, according to (Whitebread, Basilio, Kuvalija, & Verma, 2012), it is almost impossible to determine the quality of service each of this early childhood institution is willing to provide as the quality is determined by the way teaching and learning is conducted daily.

According to the NPSC (2017), the English Language is given equal importance as Bahasa Malaysia which is the official language as both have been allotted the same duration in the timetable which is 600 minutes per week. The syllabus has been designed to provide the following learning experiences before they begin formal schooling:-

- Listen and respond using appropriate verbal and non-verbal responses

- Communicate using simple sentences with manners

- Read and understand simple sentences

- Write words and phrases

  (NPSC, 2017, pg. 37)

The NPSC (2017) has given a comprehensive syllabus whereby importance is given to the English Language Art which consists of four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. A strong foundation in these skills will enable children to express themselves and appreciate the English Language through activities such as songs, rhymes, poems and plays.

The teacher is sure to succeed in delivering the Content Standard provided by the NPSC if she understands the topics and the children are provided with the right approach or strategies in carrying out the topics.

However, this is not possible as the current English Language scenario in Malaysian preschools has revealed several challenges among which are teachers" low levels of English Language proficiency. This predicament was revealed by the Performance Management and Delivery Unit, also known as PEMANDU (2013) that 93% of preschool teachers have not undergone any formal training. These preschool teachers are mainly from the private sector that lacks monitoring and control in terms of teacher employment. This lack of training has become one of the main reasons in teachers being unable to provide developmentally appropriate practice for children"s optimal development.

Kindergarten teachers who are themselves weak in English are unable to interact in the language with their children. This has led to the low proficiency of English among the children as claimed by Rohaty (2013). In comparison with English teachers in primary and secondary schools, a number of 61,000 English teachers in the first batch (out of 3 batches) in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 have been trained in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) to teach English to primary and secondary school students. Regrettably, the preschool teachers were not given this

opportunity; hence, they are not competent enough to deliver the teaching in English that has also affected the students" motivation too (Mustafa, Mazlina & Ahmad, 2017).

Another challenging factor according to Mustafa et al. (2017), of the English Language teachers is the constant need to use the first language of the children to translate the English Language.. The rationale given by the teachers for this condition is that the children understand better and their understanding could encourage them to interact in English. In reality, children who have not been exposed to the use of the English Language might feel difficult to understand English words if the teachers had not translated the English words to the mother tongue (Mustafa et. al., 2017).

Meanwhile, a study by Hall and Cook (2013) revealed that in general teachers are of the opinion that the English Language should be used extensively. However, they also indicated that the learners" first language could also be used in the classroom to a certain extent. On the other hand, Hall and Cook (2013) suggested that there is a need to study the acceptable amount of L1 (first language) usage in the classrooms. The findings of the study of Hall and Cook (2013) also showed that most of the teacher training did not encourage the use of L1 in the second language teaching. However, there is a need for appropriate teacher training to introduce the benefits of L1 and a framework clarifying the need of using L1 which might help teachers adapt L1 use to their context in a principled manner.

Second language learning lessons should be planned using interesting teaching methodologies to captivate children"s interest and encourage students to learn the language explicitly and implicitly (Anil, 2017). However, the situation in Malaysia is in direct contradiction with the NPSC as numerous research evidences have pointed out that formal learning is still being used as the main approach of teaching in most early childhood settings across the nation (Ali, Aziz, & Majzub, 2011; Ali & Mahamod,

2015; Chen & Chong, 2014; Abu Bakar, 2009; Abu Bakar et. a., 2015; Majzub, 2013; Puteh & Ali, 2013). This implies that large numbers of young Malaysian pre-schoolers especially in private organisations are still learning in conventional and prearranged classrooms which are academic and repetitive in manner in their daily schedule. This contradicts with the ideal teaching and learning approach for young children, which should comprise of active exploration in an environment that is conducive where learners are actively engaged in hands-on playful learning activities and develop holistically (Tee & Nor, 2018).

One of the important aspects to consider when setting up a kindergarten is the physical environment which includes planning the space to support quality learning in an attractive manner along with fittings that are in line with the needs of the kindergarten and keeping in mind the safety of the children in an environment that is comfortable (Davison & Lawson, 2006). This involves the social as well as the physical side of the learning environment that should be included in the learning programs for kindergarten children to maximise their development (Loebach, 2005). Although a standard guidelines to setup preschool in Malaysia is provided by the "Garis Panduan Penubuhan Tadika dan Taska" (Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Semananjung Malaysia, 2012), this is something new and it does not show any comprehensive requirements on the design aspect. Furthermore, according to Abbas, Othman & Rahman (2012), and Ghazali (2010) most of the policies have ignored social environments by giving preference to teacher training and curriculum and have only allocated the minimum amount for the purpose of the physical environment.

The NPSC promotes play based approach towards teaching and play based activities requires ample space in and out of the kindergarten classrooms to be effective but most Malaysian kindergartens are not designed in such a way. A study by (Puteh, Sharifah, Ali & Aliza, 2013) on the use of play-based approach in language and literacy

concluded that although teachers were in favour of a play-based approach they lacked knowledge on how to implement it in their classrooms. Factors such as the allocation of time for play activities, limited space and space that is unsuitable for play, and teachers" lack of knowledge on the skills that were required to implement the learning through play methodology made them to resort to a didactic teacher-directed approach in their classrooms. Therefore it was suggested by the researchers that intervention programs and collaborations among the agencies providing preschool education should be established to ensure the effective implementations of the new curriculum.

Second or foreign language teachers should implement a myriad of instructional materials to "help to teach language learners" (Harsono, 2007, p. 170). These materials can be in the form of digital devices, video blogs, educational platforms as well as textbooks. However, according to a study by Tee & Nor (2018) on three preschool teachers in the Klang valley revealed that English lessons consist mostly of completing workbooks or worksheets with hardly any concrete teaching aids as well as an environment that does not support active learning and teaching due to space constraint indoor and outdoor. Another setback was insufficient time for fun and hands-on activities that will help children to understand what they are studying.

Malaysian private kindergarten English teachers are faced with various challenges in teaching the English Language. Among them are, the teachers" lack of training, a formal teaching method instead of a play-based approach as suggested by the NPSC, lack of teaching resources, and environment that does not support active learning and teaching due to space constraint indoors as well as outdoors. In order for the children to learn the English Language effectively, these issues have to be tackled.

Through this study the researcher aims to explore the environment for the teaching and learning of the English Language in a private Malaysian kindergarten.

1.4 Research Objectives

To achieve the research purpose, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To investigate if the physical classroom environment is conducive for play based activities.

2. To explore the various resources available in the teaching and learning of early literacy.

3. To find out how the English Language teacher can contribute towards the children's early literacy teaching and learning environment.

1.5 Research Questions

The corresponding research questions in this research under each of the objectives are:

1. Is the physical classroom environment conducive for play-based activities?

2. What are the resources available for teaching and learning of early literacy?

3. How can the English Language teacher contribute towards the children's early literacy teaching and learning environment?

1.6 Significance of the Research

Through this study, the researcher hopes to examine the environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in a Malaysian kindergarten. The environment in the context of this study is the physical setting of the kindergarten, the various resources available for the teaching and learning of early literacy and how the English Language teacher contributes towards the children's early literacy in English Language teaching and learning environment. When these three aspects are given importance the process of learning a second language will be a pleasant and fruitful experience for the teachers as well as the children.

The NPSC (2017) encourages a play based approach towards the learning of the English Language; the availability of space in and out of the classroom plays an important role in carrying out activities that would make early literacy activities interesting and fun. This study will provide an insight to future planners and designers of kindergarten buildings into how the physical environment of the classroom affects the learning of the English Language. In view of this situation future planners and designers could plan and provide an ideal physical setting to carry out interesting activities in and outside the classroom.

Early Childhood Educators teaching the English Language have to provide various resources when implementing early literacy activities which will enable children to master the language in a fun-filled way. However, it should be noted that teaching resources requires a certain amount of funds as well as proper storage space for the purpose of recycling these items. Consequently this study will enlighten kindergarten administrators on the importance of setting aside a substantial amount of funds for teaching aids and provide storage space for these resources. This will create a meaningful learning environment for the teachers and children of the kindergarten.

This study will also enable early childhood administrators to become aware of the need for appropriate training for their teachers which will allow them to have more confidence in their teaching and carry out lessons that will be effective in assisting the learners to become competent in the English Language.

Finally, to be an effective English Language teacher in a kindergarten, the teacher needs to have knowledge of teaching English as a second language as well as Early Childhood Education as it will allow teachers to understand the development of children and how they acquire a second language. Hence this study will provide a clear insight to the English Language teacher on the skills that is needed to be an effective English Language teacher in a kindergarten.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This research is an exploratory qualitative study therefore the findings are not intended to be generalized to the entire population of the kindergartens in Malaysia. In addition, this research is confined to only one private Malaysian kindergarten to explore the environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy with focus on the English Language. However, the findings may be relevant, beneficial and transferable to some other kindergartens in Malaysia where English is taught as a second language with a 100% Malay population. It should also be noted that the resources available in this schools would not match options at other schools. The following section will present the definition of terms of the words and phrases used in the title of this study.

1.8 Definition of Terms

The following words from the title of this study and the research question were defined as follows:-

1.8.1 Teaching

Paul Hirst (1975) concluded "being clear about what teaching is matters vitally because how teachers understand teaching very much affects what they actually do in the classroom". Hirst (1975) makes two very important points. For him teaching should involve:

- Setting out with the intention of someone learning something
- Considering people"s feelings, experiences and needs. Teaching is only teaching if people can take on what is taught.

- Teaching has to take place in the acquisition of the English Language. Patil (2008) stated that when English is taught, not only knowledge is being transmitted to the students; instead it enables them to read, to speak and to write with fluency (Hirst, 1975).

Bhallah, Jajoo and Kalantri (2002) have expressed that to be able to teach is an art and the quality of teaching depends on the love, devotion, and dedication of the teacher towards the subject of the knowledge. The quality of any teaching program is on par with the quality of its teachers. A teacher has the responsibility to influence a student's learning and interest of the subject.

For this study teaching refers to the teaching of early literacy in English Language to kindergarten children aged four plus in a private Malaysian kindergarten as stipulated by the English syllabus of the KSPK or NPSC (2017).

1.8.2 Learning

Vygotsky's ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) states that learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that functions only when there is interaction and communication with the people in his/her environment and this is an important feature of learning. Accordingly the Vygotskian paradigms promote the idea that learning is a social process that takes place when learners interact, with an expert, with each other and with their environment (Srivastava & Joshi, 2014). Furthermore, Vygotsky also claims that the secret of effective learning came from the social interaction between two or more people with different levels of skills and knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978).

For this study learning refers to the learning of the English Language by kindergarten children aged four plus in a private Malaysian kindergarten as stipulated by the English syllabus of the NPSC (2017).

1.8.3 Conducive Environment

During the school years, a child spends from 6 to 8 hours at school, therefore the school environment plays a significant role in child development and Byoung-suk (2012) stated that children need a safe, healthy and stimulating environment to assist them in their growth as well as learning.

According to Shaari and Ahmad (2015), a conducive environment for teaching and learning includes, good spatial and esthetical qualities, safety features, appropriate use of material, finishes and furniture. When there is lack of human comfort in the physical environment, it affects the child‟s behavior which influences learning (Abbas, Othman & Rahman, 2012).

According to Singh (2014), it was stated in her article entitled "Conducive Classroom Environment in Schools" that the term ‚environment‟ covers not only the layout, furniture and decoration but also the emotional climate that is created as well. It was further stated in the article that children who are able to feel comfortable and stimulated in the environment are able to settle in and enjoy the process of learning. Simultaneously, the children‟s early years experience is able to create their understanding of many concepts, such as spatial awareness, educating their senses, nourishing their sense of curiosity and encouraging their interaction. As for parents a safe and secure environment for their children would have a positive impact towards the learning institutions.

For this study environment refers to three elements embedded in the three research questions which are the physical setting, resources for teaching the English

Language and the teacher's contribution towards the teaching and learning environment of the early English literacy.

1.8.4 Early Literacy

An early literacy planning and assessment guide (Campana, Mills, & Ghoting, 2016) developed specifically for public libraries in the United States have stated:-

"Early literacy is what children know about communication, language (verbal and nonverbal), reading, and writing before they can actually read and write. It encompasses all of a child's experiences with conversation, stories (oral and written), books, and print. Early literacy is not the teaching of reading. It refers to laying a strong foundation so that when children are taught to read, they are ready"

(Campana, Mills, & Ghoting, 2016, p. 5).

For this study early literacy refers to only early English Language literacy and not the other languages that are taught in Malaysian kindergartens such as Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin and Tamil.

1.8.5 Kindergarten

Education centers for children aged four to six years old, whether private or public, comes under the jurisdiction of three governmental bodies:

- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Rural and Regional Development
- Department of National Unity and Integration, which is under the Prime Minister's Department.

The preschool centers may be known as:

- *Tadika* (an acronym of *Taman Didikan Kanak-kanak*),

- *Tabika* (an acronym of *Taman Bimbingan Kanak-kanak*), or

- *Prasekolah* (direct translation of "preschool").

Both *Tadika* and *Tabika* literally mean „centers for the teaching of children" in the national language. A „kindergarten" is a preschool registered under the MOE as a private kindergarten (tadika swasta).

„Kindergarten" is the conventional English word used for *Tadika* or *Tabika*. In Malaysia, private preschools are usually called *Tadika* ("kindergarten" in English); while public preschools managed directly under the Ministry of Education are called *prasekolah* (literally "preschools"). Therefore in the Malaysian context, despite the generic meaning of „preschools", it would be more accurate to refer to a „private kindergarten" rather than a „private preschool".

1.9 Scope of this Study

This study is conducted in a private Malaysian kindergarten in a suburban residential area that is registered with the MOE and has adopted the NPSC (2017). This qualitative study will explore a conducive environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy with emphasis to the English Language. The participants of this study are fifteen kindergarteners aged four plus to five year old. The elements that were researched to explore an environment that is conducive for the teaching and learning of early literacy are; the physical setting of the classroom, the teaching resources that are available to teach the English Language and the contribution of the English teacher towards the teaching and learning of the English Language environment.

1.10 Summary

Early Childhood Education was introduced in Malaysia by the religious bodies and non-governmental organisation before the 1960s. Through the Education Act 1996 (2006) preschool education was included under the national education system and regardless of their types whether private or government owned they are required to adhere to the NPSC (2010). The curriculum was revised in 2016 due to the current needs and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025). The KPSK or NPSC (2017) gives importance to Bahasa Malaysia which is the national language and the English Language which is the second language. There are a few major setbacks in the learning of the English Language although the NSPC has provided a comprehensive syllabus which cannot be fully implemented due to the teacher‟s low English proficiency level. Apart from this the NPSC which encourages a play-based learning approach cannot be practiced due to space constraint in kindergartens. Since there is a sharp decline in the English Language proficiency, this qualitative study is undertaken to explore the conducive environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy. Through the three research questions, the researcher will be able to explore the environment for the teaching and learning of early English literacy by examining the various resources available in the classroom, the availability of space in the classroom environment to carry out play-based activities and the English teacher‟s contribution towards the teaching and learning environment. Apart from this, key terms such as „conducive environment,‟ „teaching‟, „learning‟, „early literacy‟ and „kindergarten‟ were defined. In addition to this, the significance of the study, limitation of the study and the scope of the study were discussed. The following chapter discussed the literature review of this study

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by introducing the theoretical framework of this study which consists of two theories and a teaching model and how they influence the study. This will be followed by the history of early childhood education in Malaysia and continues with a discussion on the public and private kindergartens and the difference between these two types of early education centres in Malaysia. Next the English syllabus of the KPSK or NPSC (2017) is discussed and this is followed by a discussion on the importance of the English Language in Malaysia as well as its importance globally. Simultaneously, some past studies on this topic are highlighted and it concludes with literature on the three core factors of the research questions which are the physical setting, teaching resources and teacher factor.

2.2 Related Theories and Models

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory study was to explore the environment of teaching and learning of early literacy in English in a Malaysian private kindergarten set in a suburban area of Selangor. The three areas investigated for this study are the physical setting of the kindergarten, the resources available for the teaching of the English Language and the teacher"s contribution towards the children"s teaching and learning of early literacy environment.

According to Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield and Karnik (2009), it is important to be explicit about the theoretical framework that guides an empirical study for the sake of clarity and integrity of scientific thought, compatibility of findings, and also for enhancing the understanding of a particular theory.   The research problem in this

research stems from concerns relating to the aim of NPSC to develop the potential of preschoolers holistically. Therefore, the idea of development is an important consideration in this research and it follows that a well-developed theory of human development is suitable to provide the framework for this study. Thus, the Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development is selected for this study.

2.2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development

In the bioecological model, development is defined as

"the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups… over the life course, across successive generations, and through historical time, both past and future"

(Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 793).

The bioecological model does not assume change for the better or that the characteristics of the same person will remain over time. Rather, the model views these changes or characteristics as issues to be investigated. This model then is suitable for this research because it allows probing into an environment that is conducive for the teaching and learning of English in a Malaysian private kindergarten which will provide insight to the authorities concerned who are in a position to take the necessary actions which in turn will be able to promote holistic development.

Other reason the bioecological model of human development is suitable in this research is the model's interdisciplinary and integrative focus on childhood and adolescence. The focus in this research is on exploring an environment that is

conducive for the teaching and learning of early literacy in English Language and it is believed that the findings may have implications on different disciplines as the NPSC encourages a play-based approach which involves the physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development as well as educational psychology, curriculum development, and social engineering. The age range in focus is early childhood (preschoolers aged four plus).

Furthermore, the model is explicitly interested in applications to policies and programs related to enhancing early literacy in English Language which occupies a prominent position as a second language in the National Education Policy. The aim of this research is to glean understanding on the way forward for the related policies or program (NPSC) which is directly related to enhancing the development of children. Therefore the broad feature of the bioecological theory of human development is found most suitable to provide the theoretical framework for this research.

There are four defining properties of the bioecological model: *Process*, *Person*, *Context*, and *Time*. These four essential elements of the bioecological theory are discussed next, in successive order.

2.2.1.1 Process

Process constitutes the core of the bioecological model. Process refers to "particular forms of interaction between organism and environment, called *proximal processes*, that operate over time and are posited as the primary mechanisms producing human development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) explain the distinctive features of „proximal process‟:

- For development to occur, the Person must engage in an activity.

- To be developmentally effective, the activity must take place on a fairly regular basis, over an extended period of time, and continue long enough to become increasingly more complex.

- Developmentally effective proximal processes are not unidirectional; there must be influence in both directions and some reciprocity in the exchange.

- Proximal processes are not limited to interactions with people; but can include interaction with objects and symbols in the immediate environment that invite attention, exploration, manipulation, elaboration, and imagination.

- The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes vary because of the interactions of the characteristics of the developing person, the environment, the nature of the developmental outcomes and social continuities and changes occurring through the person‟s life span and the historical period during which the person has lived.

(Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p. 798)

In sum, the power of a Process to influence human development is presumed to vary substantially depending on the characteristics of the developing person, the environmental Contexts, and the time periods, in which the proximal processes take place.

2.2.1.2 Person

Three types of Person characteristics are identified as most influential in deciding the course of development because they affect the direction and power of proximal processes throughout a person‟s life span. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006):

1. „Dispositions‟ can set off proximal processes in a particular developmental domain and sustain their operation. Dispositions include temperament, motivation, and persistence.

2. „Bioecological resources‟ are necessary for proximal processes to function effectively at a given developmental stage. These resources include ability, experience, knowledge and skill.

3. „Demand‟ characteristics encourage or discourage reactions from the social environment that can strengthen or weaken the proximal processes. Examples of demand characteristics are age, gender, and physical appearance.

The differentiation of „dispositions‟, „resources‟ and „demand‟ leads to different combination patterns in the Person structure that can further account for differences in the direction and power of proximal processes to influence the Person‟s development.

These three types of Person characteristics are also incorporated into the „microsystem‟ as characteristics of parents, relatives, friends, teachers, and others who come in contact with the developing Person on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Hence, the Person‟s development is also influenced by the dispositions, resources and demand characteristics of the Person‟s „significant others‟ (Mead, 1936 as cited in Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

2.2.1.3 Context

Context involves four interrelated environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge et al., 2009):

1. The „microsystem" is the setting in which the Person lives. This includes the Person"s family, peers, school, and neighbourhood where the most direct interactions with social agents take place. The Person contributes towards the construction of the settings and is not just a passive recipient of experiences.

2. The „mesosystem" involves relations between microsystems as the Person spends time in more than one microsystem. An example of the mesosystem would be the relation between family experiences and school experiences. An instance of this would be children who are rejected by parents might have difficulty developing positive relations with teachers (and perhaps with God as well).

3. The „exosystem" consists of links between a social setting in which the Person does not have an active role and the Person"s immediate context. For example, a child"s experience at home may be influenced by a mother"s experience at work. The mother"s work might require frequent travel and thereby affecting the patterns of interaction with the child.

4. The „macrosystem" involves the culture in which Person live. Culture refers to the patterns, beliefs, and all other products of a group of people that are transmitted through the generations.

2.2.1.4 Time

Tudge et al. (2009) identified three categories of time in the bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006) as:

1. „Microtime‟, which refers to continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal process, or what is occurring during the course of some specific activity or interaction.

2. „Mesotime‟, which is the recurrence of these episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks. It is the extent to which activities and interactions consistently occur in the developing Person‟s environment.

3. „Macrotime‟, which focuses on the changing expectations and events in larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life span. Developmental processes are likely to vary according to the specific historical events that are occurring as the developing Persons are at different ages. Macrotime is termed as „chronosystem‟ in versions of Bronfenbrenner‟s theory prior to 1990s.

   (Tudge et al. 2009).

2.2.2 Qualifying Bronfenbrenner's Theory in the Present Study

Tudge et al. (2009) are of the opinion that to treat a study as being based on the "mature" or "complete" version of Bronfenbrenner‟s bioecological theory, it is imperative for the research to focus on the core element of Process (proximal processes). Secondly, considerations of at least some Person characteristics must be present. Thirdly, there should also be an evaluation of some different Contexts. Finally, regarding the element of Time, the research should be longitudinal to evaluate the

influence of proximal processes, as they are mutually influenced by Person characteristics and Context, on the development outcomes of interest.

In this research, Process is the teaching of English as a second language to kindergarten children. Persons are kindergarten children age four plus in a private kindergarten with a 100% Malay population and the English Language teacher of the particular class that has been selected for this study. Contexts are the children whose mother tongue is Malay being taught the English Language which originates from a totally different culture.

Regarding the element of Time, it is acknowledged that this research is not longitudinal and therefore the application of Time in the bioecological theory may be limited in this research. Tudge et al. (2009) concedes that it is perfectly fine to base a study on a limited set of concepts from the bioecological theory, as long as it is made explicit. This is to avoid misrepresentation of the theory so as to uphold its integrity. In this research, the cross-sectional nature of the case study research design limits the discussion of the Time element of the bioecological theory.

Nevertheless, a somewhat meaningful discussion on the element of Time may still be possible if findings manage to uncover sufficient insights into the challenges of teaching English to kindergarten children age four plus. It would then be possible to tease out a glimpse of children's development over a time period of three years in preschools.

For a diagram depicting the application of the bioecological theory in this research, Figure 2.1 is offered. The smallest circle represents Process that is at the core of the theory. Process is in a bigger circle of Person and both are in the biggest circle of Context. These three circles together with the double-headed arrows depict that the power of a Process to influence human development is presumed to vary substantially

as a function of the developing Person's characteristics, of the environmental Contexts, and the Time periods, in which the proximal processes take place. Time is depicted as an arrow because time moves in linear fashion. Time is put in a box outside the circles to represent that its application may be limited in this research.
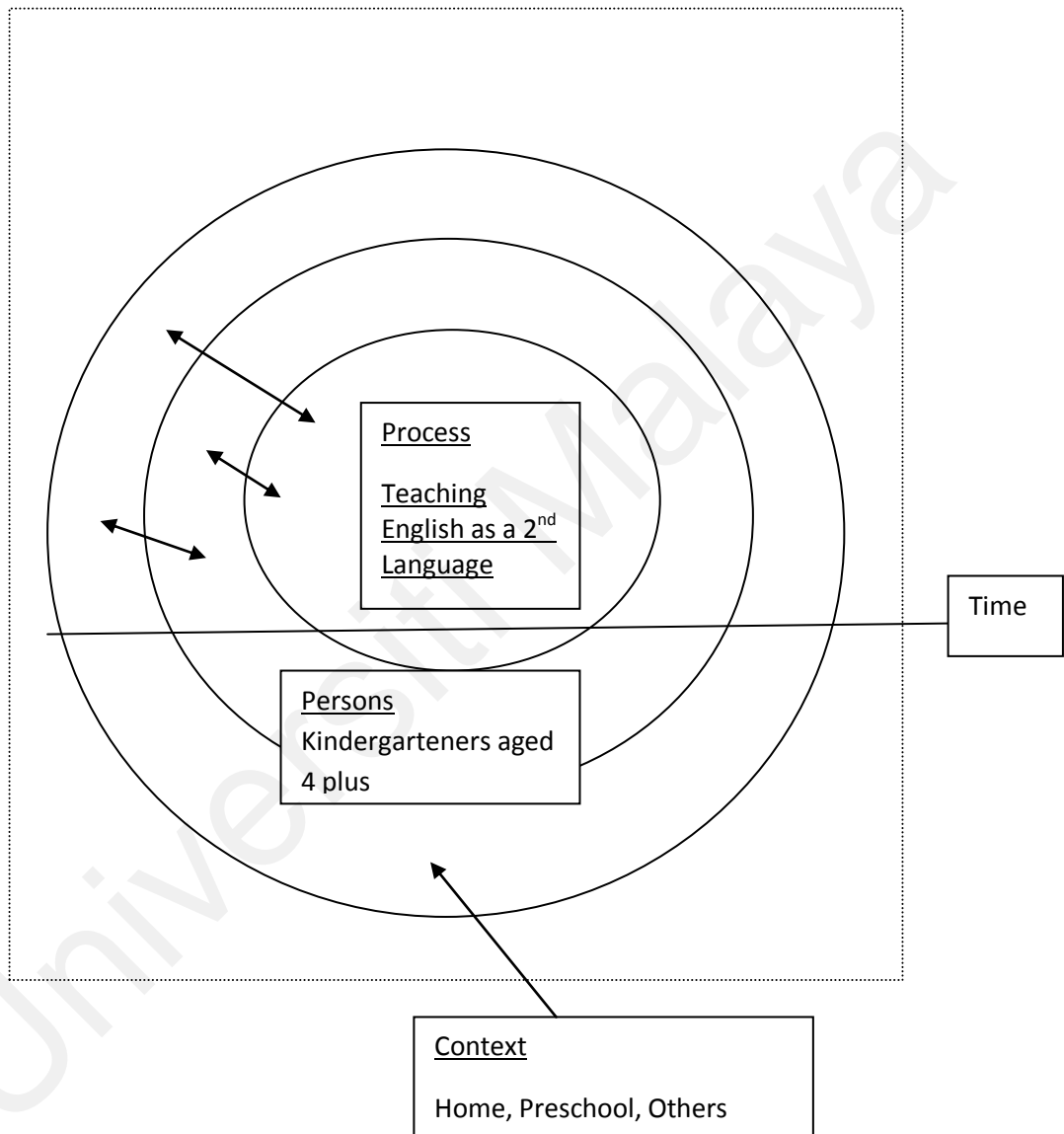
Figure 2.1 Drawing depicting the application of Bronfenbrenner theory in this research

The bioecological theory of human development is able to encompass the dynamics of a wide range of Processes, Persons, and Contexts to influence human development over Time. Since the teaching of the English Language is prescribed under

the strand of Communication according to the NPSC alongside Bahasa Melayu which emphasises verbal and non-verbal communication which must be learnt by all preschool pupils, it would be sensible to also consider a model that specifically addresses the language development of the kindergarten children.

2.2.3 The Total Physical Response Method

A child's emotional, physical, cognitive and language development takes place actively during their initial years. Hence, parents and early childhood educators should utilise this period effectively by teaching young children a second language or languages. There are various methods and techniques in teaching foreign languages; however, the most appropriate one for young children is Total Physical Response (TPR) method. In this method children are taught a new language which involves the coordination of speech and actions through the use of activities (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). TPR attracts the attention of young learners because there is no text in the teaching environment but there is teaching via songs, games, stories accompanying actions which are also in line with the NSPC which emphasises learning through play. When learning is planned and structured with the element of play, it provides pupils with opportunities to learn in a free and safe environment which is enjoyable and meaningful. Through play activities, pupils are able to explore, make discoveries and build experiences in a natural way which will be an ideal way to teach early literacy to young children before the learn a new language.

Total Physical Response is a language teaching method developed by James Asher, a psychology professor at San Jose State. It is similar to the way children acquire their native language (Asher, 1977). When teachers give instructions, learners listen to it and carry it out accordingly. However, children are only required to speak when they feel ready after having internalised a sufficient basis in the language and they feel confident

enough to speak. Teacher acts as the model and takes on the role of the parent while giving prompts, setting patterns, playing games and the student then responds physically to the instructions given.

According to (Peck 2001, pp. 140-145), when children learn they do it in a wholesome manner that involves the social, mental, physical and emotional element. Since language is a means of communication, the learning of language should cater to the needs of the children and focus on meaning rather than accuracy. Activities should be planned with a lot of movements that are interesting and fun and language that is repetitive to enable children to familiarise with the target language.

Children are able to learn new concepts easily through the use of their body without much explanation or translation from the teacher as children can carry out the teacher"s commands by just observing and imitating. Teachers can bring a lot of fun and excitement into the lessons by thinking of various interesting actions for the children to imitate and learn language in an enjoyable manner while strenghthening their understanding of the language (Curtain and Dahlberg 2010, 64).

Stories for children are written in such a way that it is embedded with movement and actions. Teachers can make stories come alive by practicing these actions before telling stories and while the story is being told children can carry out these actions. This will make the story telling activity active, interesting and meaningful for the children (Shin 2014, 221).

The motivating factor is the positive responds of the teachers when the children carry out instructions correctly in the same way as parents do when they succeed in the tasks that are given. This would reinforce the learning and encourage further steps. TPR is most effective when it is followed by games, songs, stories or demonstrations.

The following diagram depicts the influence of the Bronfenbrenner's theory on second language learning through the Total Physical Respond Method.
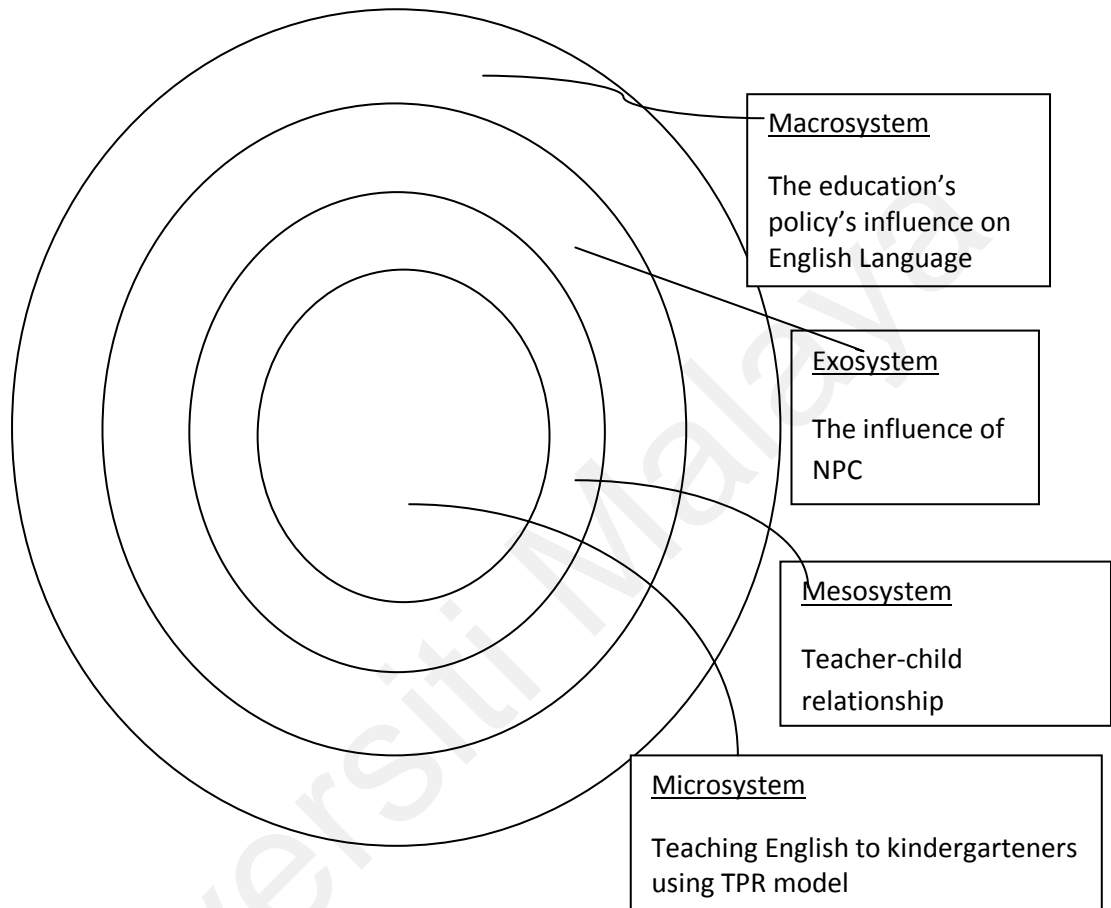
Figure 2.2 The application of Bronfenbrenner's theory on English Language teaching using the Total Physical Response Method

2.2.4 The Application of Bronfenbrenner's Theory on English Language Teaching Using the Total Physical Response Method

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is selected to serve as a framework for this study because it focuses on the connection between home and school that influence children's development and learning. The four systems that are identified by

Bronfenbrenner ecological theory of development are: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem and if one level of the ecological system theory fails to work together as a system, it negatively affects the child"s development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Zygmunt-Filwalk (2006) suggested that both parents and teachers are members of a child"s microsystem.

According to the TPR model developed by James Asher (1977), children learn a second language the same way they learn their native language. While children learn their native language from their parents, listening to them speak, receiving affirmation for their response which goes on to reinforce and motivate them to learn the language, the teacher plays the same role in teaching a second language. Additionally, this interaction between the teacher and child is the second level of the ecological system which is the mesosystem which is crucial for the children"s learning process.

Following this is the exosystem which is the "larger level of social system in which the child does not function directly" (Gestwicki, 2007, p. 446). In this study the exosystem is the school system which has adopted the NSPC and the teaching of the English Language is prescribed under the strand of Communication in the NSPC alongside Bahasa Melayu.

Finally, the macrosystem which is the largest and in this study is the education policy has a significant influence on the children as the English Language is given importance as it serves as a second language which is taught in kindergarten and throughout their tertiary education. When effective partnerships are established each of these systems will be able to exchange information and support children"s development and academic learning while working towards common goals (Getswicki, 2007).

2.2.5 Constructivist Theory

The Constructivist Theories occupies a significant position in this research as the NPSC has established the "learning through play" approach as an effective teaching and learning approach for meaningful learning experiences (Ministry of Education, 2017). This is in accordance to constructivist learning theories whereby learners construct meaning based on first hand interaction through play as they learn and develop in a holistic manner.

Learning theories that focus on early age development have touched on how young children could establish psychological developments based on the constructivist cognitive theory that was laid by Jean Piaget (1896-1980). School programs that have adopted Piaget's theory allow children to become more hands-on by exploring their environment freely while constructing meaning and according to Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological system the varied systems of the environment and the inter-relationships among the systems shape a child's development (refer to Figure 2.3). The philosophical founder of this approach is John Dewey (1933/1998) while Bruner (1990) and Piaget (1972) are considered the chief theorists among the cognitive constructivists.

The major theorist among the social constructivists is Vygotsky (1978) whose assumptions of the Zone of proximal development refers to a piece of work that is not within the capacity of the child to carry out on his/her own but is able to do it with assistance of an adult who has knowledge of the task who is referred to as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). (Gredler, 2008), this falls into the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory which would be the relation between those in microsystem such as family, home, peers and schools (refer to Figure 2.4). The following section will discuss Cognitive Constructivism and Social Constructivism and how it affects children's learning.
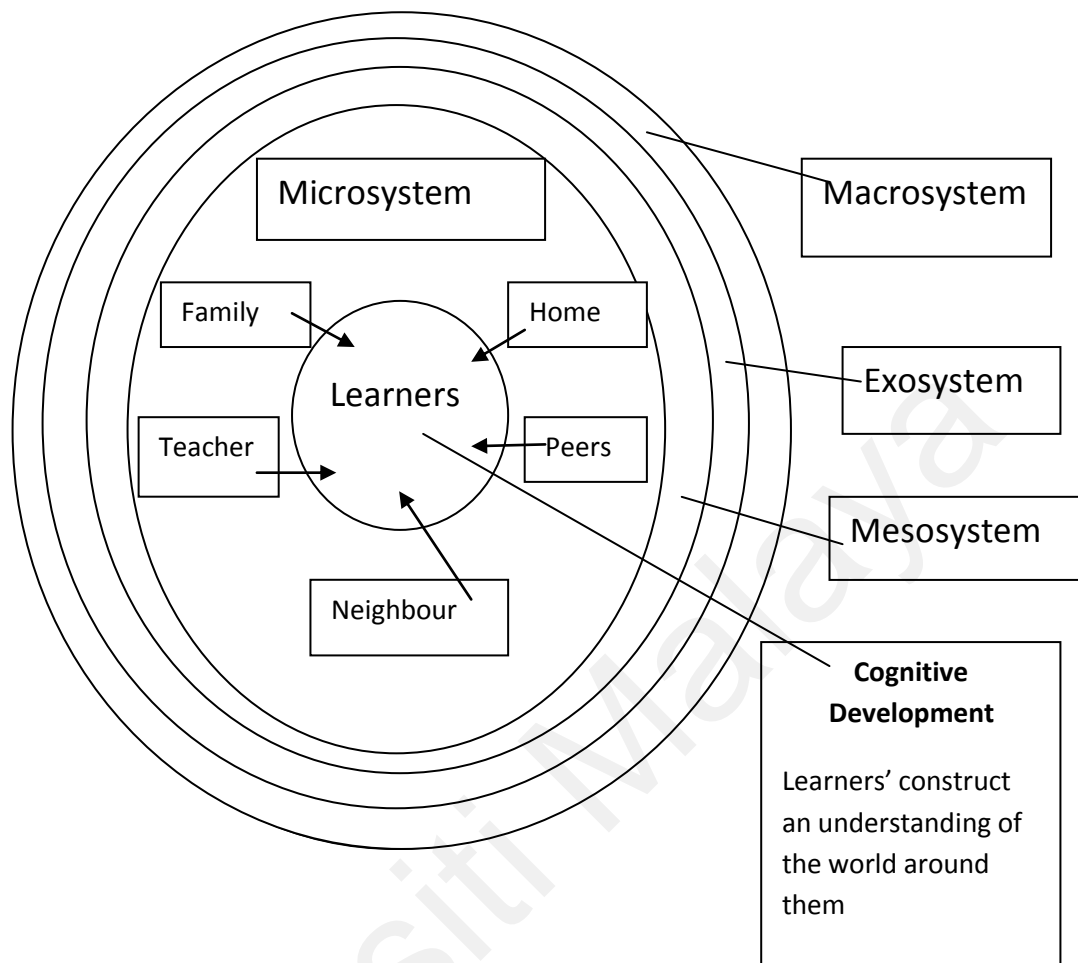
Figure 2.3 Diagram depicting Cognitive Constructivism in Bronfenbrenner Theory

2.2.5.1 COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM

According to Piaget (refer to Figure 2.1), cognitive development is a progressive reorganisation of mental processes which is the result of biological maturation and environmental experience. When a learner construct an understanding of the world around them, they experience a lack of similarity between what they already know and what they discover in their environment (refer to Figure 2.3). There are three basic components to Piaget"s Cognitive Theory (McLeod, 2018).

1. Schemas (building blocks of knowledge).
2. Adaptation processes that enable the transition from one stage to another (assimilation, accommodation and equilibration)
3. Stages of Cognitive Development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational.

Schemas which is considered as the key concept of Piaget"s genetic eipistemology refers to the way the world is perceived, interpreted and reflected upon and it is the basis of human knowledge. Schemas are categories of knowledge that help learners to interpret and understand the world (Piaget, 1983). According to Piaget"s view a schema includes a category of knowledge and the process of obtaining the knowledge. As the child encounters a new experience, this new experience is used to modify, add or change previously existing information or schemas.

Assimilation occurs when a learner incorporates new information into the existing schemas. This new information adds to extend the learner"s cognitive structures if it is similar to the learner"s existing knowledge. If the new information is different, the schema is likely to differentiate in order to accommodate the new objects; in this way the schema will be able to evolve (Piaget, 2011).

Accommodation refers to the process by which the learner adjusts the old schema to build a new schema on the basis of the old one in order to accept and accommodate the new information when it fails to conform to the learner's schema. Accommodation indicates the process whereby the learner influences the new information to be modified and transformed. On the other hand assimilation indicates the process of how the learner modifies and transforms the new information. This shows that assimilation and accommodation represent the interaction between the learner and the new information (Lei, 1987).

Equilibration is the cognitive process that takes place when one is able to bring about to new information received with the old information. According to Piaget this form of cognitive development takes place in stages rather than at the same phase.When the child's prior knowledge or schema is able to accept new information the process of assimilation takes place. Nevertheless, disequilibrium takes place when the process of assimilation fails when the new information cannot be absorbed into the existing schemas.This phase is very important as it motivates the child to continue to find progess in their learning process and avoid frustration. Therefore a balance is achieved by mastering the new challenge and accommodation takes place and this new schema will continue till the next time it needed to be adjusted through the same process of equilibration, assimilation and finally accommodation (McLeod, 2018).

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) developed the theory of genetic epistemology that compared the development of the mind to evolutionary biological development and highlighted the adaptive function of cognition. According to Piaget, there are four stages in human development: the sensorimotor stage, the preoperational stage, the concrete operational stage, and the formal operational stage.

The Sensorimotor Stage takes place from birth to two years of age. During this stage children learn how to adapt to their environment and develop an elementary understanding of the things around them as this is also a stage whereby they acquire language which will enhance their social and intellectual development. Object permanence is one of the main developments during this stage. The child will come to an understanding that an object still exists, even if it is hidden. It requires the ability to form a mental representation (i.e. a schema) of the object.

The sensori motor stage is followed by the preoperational stage which occurs around age two and last until age seven. The child's thinking during this stage is pre (before) operation which means the children are thinking at a symbolic level but are not using cognitive operations yet; therefore they cannot use logic or transform, combine or separate ideas (Piaget, 1951, 1952). During this stage, the child is building experiences about the world through adaptation and working towards the (concrete) stage when it can use logical thought. At the end of this stage, the child can mentally represent events and objects (the semiotic function), and engage in symbolic play.

The third stage in Piaget's theory of cognitive development is the concrete operational stage which occurs around seven to eleven years of age. This stage is the major turning point in the child's cognitive development, because it is the beginning of logical or operational thought. The child at this stage is able to use logical thought or operations (i.e. rules) but can only apply logic to physical objects (hence concrete operational).

The final stage of Piaget's theory of cognitive development is the formal operational stage which begins at approximately age twelve and lasts into adulthood. During this stage children begin to form ideas without the presence of the real objects (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958).

Piaget‟s theory of cognitive development has inspired several important educational principles such as; discovery learning, sensitivity to children‟s readiness, acceptance of individual differences and the belief that learners create their own knowledge rather than be forced on them. Piaget also proposed that learning is a dynamic process comprising successive stages of adaption to reality during which learners actively construct knowledge by creating and testing their own theories.

John Dewey‟s theory of constructivism was against the notion that schools should focus on repetitive, rote memorisation and instead he proposed a method of "directed living" whereby students would engage in real world, practical workshops in which they would demonstrate their knowledge through creativity and collaboration. He suggested that students should be provided with ample opportunities to think for themselves and articulate their thoughts. Dewey also called for education to be grounded in real experience. He wrote, "If you have doubts about how learning happens, engage in sustained inquiry: study, ponder, consider alternative possibilities and arrive at your belief grounded in evidence."

Bruner‟s theory on constructivism is encircled by the idea that learning is an active process wherein learners are able to form new ideas based on their past knowledge as well as their current knowledge. The learner will take pieces of their past knowledge and experiences and organise them to make sense of what they know, then base further concepts and solve additional problems based upon a combination of what they already processed and what they think should be processed next. The resources provided by the teacher should be able to encourage students to uncover the main principles on their own. Communication between teacher and learner in the form of asking and answering questions should stimulate critical thinking while drawing out ideas and underlying presumptions. As this theory involves using known information to

further explain the new information, teacher lesson plans, teacher worksheets, or resources should in fact be constantly building the learner's knowledge in a spiral manner.

According to Bruner's theory, when the teacher is evaluating the study skills of the child, it is suggested that the teachers be clear regarding organisation, which will help the learners to focus on the larger task at hand as well as the goals instead of concentrating on minor details or frustrations. Teachers should readily praise the efforts of the learners as they help them to focus on relevant items while encouraging them to practice and rehearse what they have learned.
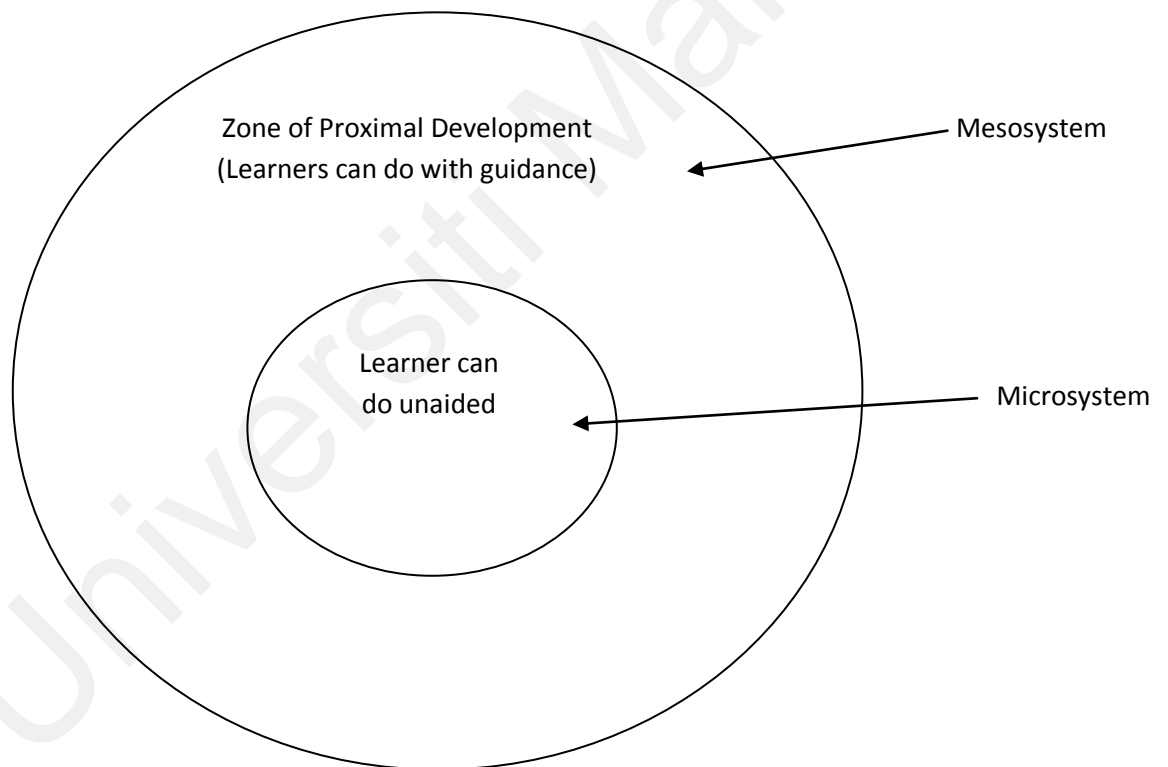
Figure 2.4 Diagram depicting Social Constructivist Theory in Bronfenbrenner Theory

2.2.5.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

A social constructivist approach influenced by Vygotsky's work, (refer to Figure 2.4) emphasizes "the social contexts of learning and that knowledge is mutually built and constructed" (Bodova, & Leong, 2012 & Gauvanin, 2008). Interaction with others allows students the opportunity to share their ideas which will be able to generate a shared understanding related to the concept. From Piaget to Vygotsky, "the conceptual shift is from individual to collaboration or assisted performance, social interaction and sociocultural activity (Gredler, 2008). In Vygotsky's theory content of the knowledge is influenced by the culture which includes language, beliefs important to that culture and skills considered important in that culture such as computer skills, communication skills and collaboration skills (Holzman, 2010).

Two important assumptions in social constructivist approaches are: Situated cognition "refers to the idea that thinking is located in social and physical contexts not within individual's mind" (Gauvanin, 2008) which means that knowledge is tied to the situation in which they are learned and it is difficult to apply in other situations. So, learning situations should be as close to real life situations as possible.

Zone of proximal development refers to "the range of tasks that are too difficult for children to accomplish independently" but can attain mastery if they are provided assistance and guidance by the adults or more able peers or More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). (Gredler, 2008) (Refer to Figure 2.4). With the increasing use of digital media the social aspects of learning as described by Vygotsky have become more useful for organizing educational activities involving a distributed but intercommunicating audience. Constructivist approach has a primary goal: helping students learn "How to learn" which fosters critical thinking and learners are more motivated and independent.

2.2.5.3 CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM

The constructivist classroom is one that is centred on the students and they are being guided by a teacher who takes up the role as facilitator. Constructivist classrooms are planned in such a way that allows students to be engaged in meaning-making inquiry along with action, interaction as well as personal reflection. A constructivist teacher needs to be able to recognise how the students use the experiences they gain from their prior experiences, the physical and interpersonal environments to construct new information (Gray, 1997).

Children in a constructivist classroom are able to build their own knowledge through their prior experiences and collectively by what the others contribute. Teachers planned their lessons to include the contribution of learners and are flexible even to modify the education programme so that learning becomes a collaborative effort between the learner and the teacher who acts as the facilitator who stimulates children's ideas into meaningful learning experience (Thakur, 2014).

The focus of the constructivist classroom is on social and communication skills as well as collaboration and exchange of ideas and children work mostly in groups in which learning and knowledge are interactive and dynamic. On the other hand, in the traditional classroom children mostly work alone and learning is achieved through repetition and the subjects are strictly guided by a textbook (Bhattacharjee, 2015).

A Constructivist teacher needs to encourage students to constantly assess how the activity is helping them gain understanding. By questioning themselves and their strategies, students in the constructivist classroom ideally become "expert learners." This gives them ever-broadening tools to keep learning. With a well-planned classroom environment, the students learn „HOW TO LEARN" (Bada, & Olusegun, 2015). The following section will discuss the history of Early Childhood Education in Malaysia.

2.3 The history of Early Childhood Education in Malaysia

Early Childhood Education Centres in Malaya was established in an informal way during the British Colonial era in the early 1900s by various communities such as the religious bodies and non-governmental organisations. When the first legal document, the Kaedah-kaedah Guru/Kaedah-kaedah Kindergarten dan Sekolah Asuhan (Pendaftaran) 1972 Warta Kerajaan P.U. (A) 414 was drafted, it acted as a guideline to the process of registering the early childhood premises and their educator as well as those in the management board.

From then on, many of the government sectors began to operate their own preschools focussing on the 4-6 years age group, and one of the earliest is Tabika KEMAS which started its operations in 1971 under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development with the aim to serve the children that comes from sub-urban, rural and remote areas with family of very low income. This was followed by the setting up of preschools in the late 1970s by the Department of National Unity and Integration. These preschools were set up in urban areas where there is „Rukun Tetangga," a friendly neighbourhood scheme. These schools which were known as PERPADUAN preschools were conditioned to accept students from the different races and by the year 2013, there were 1496 PERPADUAN preschools.

Then, in 1992, the Ministry of Education started preschools known as „prasekolah" as a pilot project annexed to existing primary schools (Foong, Veloo & Dhamotharan, 2014). These preschools were aimed to serve the children from families who fall within the poverty bracket and living away from the city.

In 2003, these preschools which were known as „prasekolah" took effect and were put into practice throughout the nation and on this year too, all preschools, both

from the public and private sectors were required by law to follow the National Preschool Curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), (2007).

Besides MOE, KEMAS and PERPADUAN preschools, there were other providers of preschool education which include the State Religious Department, Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri (JAIN) and the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM). There are also politically-affiliated preschools, e.g. PASTI by the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), and Chinese pre-schools by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA).

2.4 Kindergartens Run by Private Sectors and Non-Government Organisations

There is another alternative for parents who could afford in the form of preschools set by private sectors. These private preschools are welcomed by the government as they are able to provide quality education to children whose parents could afford to pay fees that can range up to RM1, 000. These preschools are required to use the National Preschool Curriculum as stipulated in the National Education Act 1996. Medium of instruction can be Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, Tamil or English. The present study was carried out in a private kindergarten that was situated in a semi-urban residential area in Selangor and the curriculum of this selected kindergarten was also guided by the NSPC (2017).

Many parents who worry about their children‟s readiness for formal schooling tend to prefer private preschools as they are confident that these private preschools may fulfil their expectation regarding their children‟s performance in academic and discipline. Many parents choose branded preschools (Dahari & Ya, 2011) such as Qdees, Montessori, Smart Reader, Cosmotos, Krista Kindergarten or many others that are available because brand image perception directly affect customer loyalty (Allen &

Rao, 2000). Apart from these there are also hybrid preschools, e.g. those using a combined curriculum of Islamic studies, English and Mathematics and holistic preschools, e.g. those using a combined curriculum of Tahfiz Qur'an, English, Computer studies and Mathematics.

Private preschools allow parents to choose the medium of instruction they want such as Bahasa Malaysia, Tamil, Chinese or English. There are many parents who choose English as English is the global language and research medium (Dahari & Ya, 2011). Private preschools also give parents the option to choose the suitable approach that will be appropriate for their children and moreover, the private preschools are enriched with a variety of educational program (Dahari & Ya, 2011).

According to Jensen & Hannibal (2000), high quality preschool programs are associated with well-trained and qualified teachers and since teacher quality is a powerful predictor of student achievement, parents naturally place high importance on teacher quality and quality of teaching (Dahari & Ya, 2011). Parents should be reminded that the first five years of a child's life has long been acknowledged by psychologists as important for their formative years (Allen & Rao, 2000). Therefore, it is of utmost importance for the parents to seek for quality preschools institutions to ensure the proper upbringing of their children in their early years.

The following section will discuss the English syllabus of the Kurrikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan (KSPK) or National Preschool Standard Curriculum, NSPC (2017).

2.5 National Standard Preschool Curriculum (NSPC, 2017)

According to the Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Dan Pentaksiran, DSKP (2017), the thrust of the Kurrikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan (KSPK) or National Preschool Standard Curriculum, NSPC (2017) consists of six strands which aim to develop a balance human that is innovative and possesses creative and critical thinking. The strands are as follows:

1. Communication – to master oral skills through oral activities and not through interaction

2. Spiritual, Attitude & Value – instil religious practice, belief, attitude and value

3. Humanity – mastering knowledge on community, environment, country and global practice and instil patriotism and unity

4. Physical & Aesthetic – health and physical development, develop creativity, talents and appreciation

5. Self Potray – develop leadership and personality through curriculum and co-curricular activities

6. Science and Technology – mastering science knowledge and skills, mastering mathematics knowledge and skills and mastering technology knowledge and skills.

(NPSC, 2017).

Since the focus of this study is on exploring the environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in the English Language, the Communication strand will be discussed further. The Communication strand consists of Bahasa Malaysia, English Language, Chinese and Tamil. Acquiring skills in these languages is the core of the

communication strand. The four skills emphasised are listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four skills are collectively referred to as the English Language Arts (ELA), (Morrow, et. al., 2006). A strong foundation in ELA allows children to express and appreciate learning through creative and fun-filled activities in the form of songs, stories, plays and rhymes. Each domain of the ELA will be discussed below while emphasising the content provided by NSPC (2007) (Refer to Appendix I).

2.5.1 Listening and Speaking

The two components that make up oral language are expressive language (speaking) and receptive language (listening). Expressive language involves the use of words and non-verbal processes to share meaning with others. On the other hand, receptive language is the process of understanding what has been expressed.There need not be any sound for listening to occur as it can happen by taking note of pitch, tone, stress and the use of gestures to understand a speaker''s meaning.

Oral language plays a key role in the future development of reading, writing and academic excellence as it is considered to be the foundation for the advancement of literary skills (Bradfield et al., 2013; Communication Trust, 2013; Gross, 2013; Hill, 2012; Hougen & Smartt, 2012; Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; Resnick & Snow, 2009; Winch et al., 2010). Babayigit (2012, p. 2) states [it is] "…a complex and mutually facilitating relationship." Allied to this relationship is the importance of motivation and "high quality classroom talk is a key factor in improving pupil engagement and outcomes" (Communication Trust, 2013, p.16).

According to the English Language syllabus in KSPK (DSKP, 2017 p. 37), there is a gradual increase in the standard content of BI 1.0 on speaking and listening. It has

provided a comprehensive set of early literacy skills "in preparation for the teaching of the English Language. Content Standard BI 1.1 requires children to listen to identify sounds, BI 1.2 states listen to and respond appropriately and BI 1.3 states listen to, understand and respond in a variety of contents. Similarly the corresponding Learning Standard that is provided for BI 1.1, BI 1.2 and BI 1.3. BI 1. and BI 1.1.2 begins with children being able to listen and respond to environmental sounds, voice sounds and alliteration. This is followed by BI 1.1.3 whereby children will be able to listen to and identify rimes in nursery rhymes and sounds. Next, in BI 1.2.6, the children will be able to listen to and recite poems and rhymes and in BI 1.2.7 the children will able to listen to and respond to stories. Finally, from Learning Standard BI 1.3.2 – BI 1.3.6 the children will be able to listen and respond to oral text, talk about favourite things, familiar experiences and activities, stories heard and role play familiar daily situations. The listening and speaking Content Standard is well equipped and comprehensive enough to fulfil all the areas needed to develop the speaking and listening skills of the kindergarten children when kindergarten teachers apply the right approach in building these skills.

"Speaking and listening are academic, social, and life skills that are valued in school and the world…[and] academically, children are judged in part, by what they say and how they say it" (Resnick & Snow, 2009, p. 2). When children develop listening and speaking skills they are able to use it to have their needs met and are able to interact with others as well as adjust their language according to the situation. The oral language that children acquire through interaction is further built on by teachers who use explicit instruction in listening and speaking and vocabulary through talk.

Subsequently, delayed oral language will have a significant impact on learning to read and write. As Babayigit (2012, p. 1) says "Any weakness or developmental

delay at core oral language skills may act as a bottleneck and constrain the ability to engage in higher-level comprehension processes, such as inference making and integration."

2.5.2 Reading

According to Leipzig (2001), Reading is making meaning from print. It requires that we: 1) identify the words in print – a process called word recognition, 2) Construct an understanding from – a process called comprehension and 3) Coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate – an achievement called fluency. Therefore the process of reading involves multiple processes such as fluency, comprehension, word recognition and most of all motivation to make meaning from print.

In order for children to acquire the reading skills in the English Language syllabus in KSPK (DSKP, 2017), (Refer to Appendix I) has provided a comprehensive set of early literacy skills to be acquired in preparation for reading. Content Standard for reading BI 2.2, (p5) states, apply sounds of letters to recognise words and the corresponding Learning Standard BI 2.2.5 requires children to recognise and sound out letters of the alphabet while BI 2.2.6 requires children to recognise and sound out initial, medial and ending sounds in a word. Next BI 2.2.7 requires children to blend phonemes (sounds) to form single syllable words.

The Content Standard BI 2.3 states demonstrate understanding of a variety of texts in the form of print and non-print materials. The correspond Learning Standard 2.3.3, 2.3.4, 2.3.5 requires children to recognise high frequency words, read simple phrases and read simple sentences respectively. Finally, Content Standard BI 2.4 states

develop interest in reading independently for information and enjoyment and the corresponding Learning Standard BI 2.4.2 and BI 2.4.3 requires children to read text independently and read and respond to text read respectively. In short the Learning Standard progresses from recognition and sounding of the letters of the alphabet to reading text independently and responding to the text read. When children are able to respond to a text they have read, it means they are able to comprehend what is read. The language skills of children are strengthened through reading comprehension which will lead children to make exceptional progress in their reading and writing skills (Islam & Park, 2016).

Kindergarten teachers can use various reading methods to help their children to acquire the reading skill. It is important for teachers to be creative to enhance the child's attentiveness and excitement in the activities provided at all times and teachers can experiment with a few reading methods first before selecting one to suit the children's needs. The most popular reading method is the phonics method. This method requires the children to know the names and sounds of the letters of the alphabet first. When this process is completed, the children will combine two letters to form simple words which will be followed by joining two letters to form words, and then this will progress to three letters, four letters and so on.

Another method is the „look and say" method, this method enables children to recognise whole words or sentences rather than individual sounds. For this method, teachers used individual picture cards and word cards. It is further recommended to teach children short sentences rather than only individual words. By making flash cards, many different sentences can be created again and again and this will enable children to read whole sentences that are meaningful instead of individual words.

Language development in the area of both vocabulary and syntax is fundamental for children‛s school success and acquisition. When importance is given to language and vocabulary, it has serious implication for later communication skills and literacy outcomes throughout a child‛s school years (Harris, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2011).

2.5.3 Writing

Reading and writing go hand-in-hand. Salvat (2012) puts it like this, "It is imperative to foster children‛s desire to explore writing at the same time that they are exploring reading to enhance their understanding of concepts of print" (p. 48). Students, who write well, read well and vice versa. Bissex (1980), Clay (2002), Durkin (1966), and Hansen (1987) as cited in D‛On Jones, Reutzel, and Fargo (2010) state that, "For emergent literacy learners, writing is the foundation of reading" (p. 327). D‛On Jones, Reutzel, and Fargo (2010) also cite Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson (1985) and Boscolo (2008) as saying "Research concerning the relationship between emergent and formal literacy has shown that helping a young child learn to write has positive effects on future literacy learning" (p. 327). The writing skill is also taught in all Malaysian kindergartens.

The English Language syllabus in KSPK (DSKP, 2017), (Refer to Appendix I), has provided a set of early literacy skills for acquiring the writing skills. Content Standard BI 3.1 (p6), states, develop prewriting skills, this content is meant for children aged 4+ and the Learning Standard requires children to display fine motor control of hands and fingers by using writing apparatus correctly, demonstrate correct pen hold grip and engage in hand-eye co-ordination through scribbling, drawing lines and patterns. As they progress they should be able to write recognisable letters and be able

to copy and write small letters, capital letters as well as copy words in legible print, this is to prepare children aged 5+ to be able to write in legible print.

As for the age 5+ Content Standard BI 3.2 states, develop writing skills and the corresponding Learning Standard BI 3.2.5 and BI 3.2.6 requires children to copy simple phrases and simple sentences in legible print. Content Standard BI 3.2.7 requires children to communicate ideas and information by using drawing, marks, symbols and writing invented spelling and Content Standard BI 3.2.8 requires children to write word and phrases in legible print.

According to Calkin (2013), when reading and writing are taught together students are able to expand their literacy skills at a faster pace which will enable them to become stronger in both the content areas hence, it really makes sense when these two skills are taught together. Since the area of research for this study is on exploring a conducive environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in English, h, the following section will discuss the history of the English Language in Malaysia and the various policies implemented to restore the quality of the teaching of this language.

2.6 The history of the English Language in Malaysia

Since the English Language is recognised as the global lingua franca, it is the most commonly utilised language among foreign language speakers. When people from all over the world come together, the English Language is used to communicate with one another. Therefore, learning the English language has become a necessity in Malaysia as it meant opening doors to a large number of opportunities such as job prospects and employability, both within and outside of the country (Chan & Abdullah, 2015).

English has been in Malaysia for more than a century because of the British colonial rule in the country. However, due to the inconsistencies in the country's education policies, the English Language has deteriorated over the past several decades (Abdul Rahman, 2005 & Ismail, 2008) and this has caused dissatisfaction among students, educators, policy makers and the public at large. Regrettably, Malaysian students have failed to attain reasonable English literacy skills even after going through 11 years of learning English in schools (Kaur 2006; Jalaludin, Mat Awal & Abu Bakar, 2008).

The country experienced a major backwash effect when the colonial era ended in 1957 and during the time when Bahasa Malaysia replaced English as the medium of instructions in schools and also in other government organisation. It was found to be a necessity at this time for Malaysia being a multiracial and multicultural nation to establish an official language to manifest its sovereignty (Ma'arof, 2014).

As a result of this move, a "lost generation" of young adults was created whose command of the English Language was far weaker compared to the previous generation. As a move to upgrade the English proficiency, the medium of instruction for the subjects of science and mathematics was shifted from Bahasa Malaysia to English in the belief that students will learn English while gaining content knowledge in mathematics and science as it will provide greater exposure to the language rather than learning it as a subject with limited class time.

This policy was unsuccessful and had to be withdrawn due to the result of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) that revealed that Malaysian students were unprepared to learn mathematical and scientific content knowledge in English due to their low proficiency level. The PISA and TIMSS international assessments directly

compares the quality of educational outcomes across different school and educational systems while assessing a variety of cognitive skills such as application and reasoning.

In 1999, when Malaysia first participated in TIMMS, its average student score was higher than the international average in both mathematics and science. By 2007, the Malaysian Education systems's performance had slipped tremendously as 18% and 20% of students failed to meet the minimum proficiency levels in mathematics and science which was an increase from 7% and 5% respectively in 2003 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012).

Subsequently, the results from PISA 2009 (the first time Malaysian participated in this assessment) was also disappointing as Malaysia was ranked in the bottom third of 74 participating countries, below the international and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). The results showed that 60% of the 15-year old Malaysian students who participated failed to meet the proficiency level in mathematics while 44% and 43% did not meet the minimum proficiency levels in reading and science respectively. The score shows that, 15-year-olds in Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong and Shanghai have 3 more years of schooling compared to Malaysian 15-year-olds. As a result of this a new act called To Uphold Bahasa Malaysia, To Strengthen the English Language (MBMMBI, 2010) as mentioned in chapter 1, was endorsed.

Alternatively, teachers too had a significant role in the failure of the English-mediated instruction as it was found that only 25% of teachers who taught the mathematics and science subjects had decent command of English. As a result of the students" limited oral proficiency and inadequate English literacy skills, very few teachers used English fully in the teaching these two subjects which adds up to between

53% and 56% of the entire time allocated for the subjects (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2010).

Although there was a policy shift, English continued to remain as the official medium of instruction at tertiary level institutions. This in turn caused confusion among students who were not taught in English medium schools and had produced fresh graduates who have rather poor oral and communicative English proficiency. Ultimately, ever since 2006, this issue has been ranked as one of the top five issues facing Malaysian employers and the policy change continued to demonstrate weakness in the overall academic performance of Malaysian students.

The result of the latest published cycle of the 2012 PISA study (2014) revealed that Malaysia ranked 52nd out of 65 participating countries which was lower than the OECD average scores in all the three main subject areas and the score points for reading and science were negative. This weak performance of the students led to the formation of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (2012) after much surveys, interviews, analyses as well as research that were carried out with the support of national and educational experts, teachers, principals, officials and parents throughout Malaysia.

There were many strategies and initiatives that were outlined for the enhancement of the National Education System and one of significant importance was the call for an improved bilingual proficiency – that aspires every Malaysian child will be at minimum operationally proficient in Bahasa Malaysia as the national language and also competent in English as the international language of communication so that upon leaving school, they will be able to work in both the Bahasa Malaysia and English language environment.

The other issue highlighted was the extension of the LINUS2 screening test to include English literacy attainment. This test was originally intended for the screening

of all Grades 1-3 students for timely attainment of Bahasa Malaysia literacy skills. It also called for "greater exposure to the English language" as more experiences of spoken English is needed for students in order to achieve operational oral proficiency. At present the exposure rate is only 15-20% of the daily school time (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Based on the discussion above, it is crucial to explore and identify the weak areas in the teaching of the English Language and improved them in order for the students to obtain maximum benefit which could further enhance the usage of the language. As such this study is carried out using the qualitative exploratory research to explore the conducive environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy of a private kindergarten in a sub-urban area in Gombak, Malaysia. Through this study the researcher believes that the authorities and policy makers involved in the early childhood education and heads of kindergartens would be given an insight of the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers and this in turn will assist them in finding the appropriate solutions. The following section will discuss the importance of learning English in a globalised world.

2.7 The Importance of Learning English in a Globalised World

This section will discuss the importance of learning English in a globalised world as English is considered as the lingua franca in a wide range of domains such as international politics, entertainment, air traffic, academic, trade diplomacy and social media. It is noticeable that in all these areas the non-native speakers not only outnumber the native speakers but they are also able to blend the language to their own purposes (Mauranen, 2010).

According to Cheng (2011, p. 134), the people in China use English to gain technical knowledge as well as access to scientific periodicals and journals. Learning English in China has not only made China globally effective, its economic status has improved tremendously. A 12-year old Chinese boy‟s comment that states "If you can‟t speak English, it‟s like you‟re deaf and dumb" clearly shows the importance of learning English in China (Nihalani, 2010, p. 24)

The importance of learning English in South Korea is clearly shown by the statement made by the former South Korean President Kim Dae Yung "we will not win in world competition unless South Korea masters the lingua franca of the Internet Age. Learn English or face being left behind (Nihalani 2010, p. 24), he further asserts that for the Japanese, learning English is to ensure a bright future. According to Yano (2001, p. 24), it was mentioned that English is vital for Japanese as it enables them to communicate with non-Japanese people when they are in international situation.

In Vietnam, knowledge of the English Language provides one with opportunity to be employed inside and outside of Vietnam and it is the government‟s condition that good English users are sent for overseas employment (Hang, 2009).English is an essential part of the school curriculum in Hong Kong as it is taught in kindergartens and preschools together with the other subjects (Lee, 2005). It is also a requirement to get good employment in the job market (Young, 2011).

English is regarded highly in Pakistan as it is seen as a sign of education and children are encouraged by their families to use it in school as well as at home (Shamim, 2007). According to (Kirkgoz, 2005), English plays an important role in all aspects of life in Turkey as the Turkish government uses it in business, politics as well as education. In Turkish public schools and universities, English is used as the medium of instructions and in most Turkish schools it is the only foreign language that is

learned. Only a small number of Turkish school offer French and German as elective foreign languages.

In Kenya, there are more than forty different indigenous languages and among them Kiswahili is the national language in Kenya (Laws of Kenya, 2010). Kiswahili as well as English is the official language in Kenya (Laws of Kenya, 2010) and these languages have a legal status and they serve as the language of administration (OECD, 2003). Just as in many African countries, in Kenya too English is used at the institutional level (Jessner, 2006) and English is taught in preschool and primary school from three to seven years of age (Hartley & Kramer, 2013).

Needless to say in Europe too, English occupies a high position just as in Asia and the Europeans use English as an avenue to obtain good jobs as well as to improve their social and economic status (Cenoz, 2011). Although each European country has its own language, there will be limited communication if each uses their own language. Hence, the European Union came to an agreement to use only English in all meetings (Nortier, 2011).

Since English is used as the lingua franca in Europe, Asia and many countries in the world, Malaysia should be no exception. Malaysians need to communicate with others through an international language. Through the use of English, people are engaged in the globalised world (Kohn, 2011). The following section will highlight the challenges of teaching English as a second language in kindergartens.

2.8 Past Studies on the Teaching of English in Kindergartens

This section will discuss studies done in countries such as China, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Kuwait and later compare with studies in Malaysia

2.8.1 Bilingual Education and English

According to Wei Na (2016), many parts of China have adopted an English Chinese bilingual instruction program in schools due to the fact that most people have become more knowledgeable of the role of English in the globalised world and the importance of this language in the field of education. An analysis featuring the main difficulties in Chinese kindergarten bilingual education showed that in big cities bilingual education is welcomed as students are living in an environment in which English is often used in daily life. However, in smaller towns, bilingual education is not very successful because there is no use for the English Language as a means of communication (Wei Na, 2016).

Besides, Chinese teachers concentrate more on test scores rather than to strengthen students" English Language acquisition. Furthermore most teachers would use their mother tongue to explain instead of English as they would want their students to understand their instructions immediately (Wei Na, 2016).

Apart from this, some teachers are weak in pronunciation as they did not receive normal education prior to their college education and this has brought about a term called "Chinglish" (a mixture of Chinese and English) which is not a good model for students to imitate (Wei Na, 2016).

Among the suggestions given by the author to improve this situation were; the government should be given more emphasis on bilingual education by providing the

necessary financial support for regular training for all the teachers in China to prepare them to face the fluctuating challenges of bilingual teaching. Other than this, teachers should be willing to work with foreign teachers in selecting interesting teaching materials in the form of vivid pictures and lively activities while creating an enjoyable language environment (Wei Na, 2016).

2.8.2 Teachers Lack of Training

Cambodia or Kampuchea is one of the Asian countries which shares its borders with Thailand, Vietnam and Laos and has been classified in Gender Responsive Budgeting in the Asia Pacific Region (VasDev, Sharp & Costa, 2010) as a low income country. In Cambodia, their education system begins with preschool, primary school, secondary school and higher education. The early childhood education has received much support from the Cambodian government even though early childhood education is not compulsory in Cambodia just as in Malaysia for children to begin formal schooling.

According to the World Data on Education (2010), as of 1999, the Cambodian government had built 874 preschools in the public schools for 50,000 and the private sectors had provided early education for 10,000 children in community centres and private kindergartens. However, kindergarten teachers" professionalism is ignored as early childhood education is not a requirement for admission to Grade 1 in Cambodia (UNESCO-IBE in World Data on Education, 2010). Thus, most of the kindergarten teachers in the rural areas are mostly youngsters who are untrained living in the villages where the kindergartens are located. Therefore, the main challenge of the kindergarten teachers teaching the English Language is their lack of confidence in teaching the language as they lack proficiency in the language as their basic need which is teacher education has not been met (Masnan, Hamira, & Ngajib, 2016).

2.8.3 Instructional Time versus Financial Consideration

The teaching of the English Language to very young learners has become very popular in Hong Kong just like in other Asia Pacific regions. A survey on the teaching of English in Hong Kong kindergartens which was participated by 38% of the local kindergartens in Hong Kong revealed various challenges in the areas such as diverse allocation of English instruction time, teachers" professional qualifications and curriculum practices (Ng & Rao, 2013).

On the issue of diverse English instruction time, there is no specific official guidelines to specify what, who, how long and how much to teach in the early years. Hence, individual kindergartens tend to make their own decisions on this matter. Incidentally, this decision in most cases was related to financial consideration. It is likely that schools charging higher fees could afford to hire more specialist English teachers and pay them to teach more regularly as oppose to those school charging lower fees has to employ less qualified teachers and allocate less time for English instruction.

Another setback in time allocation is the need to divide the time between three languages that are taught in Hong Kong kindergartens, which are Chinese, Putonghua and English (Ng. & Rao, 2013). When there is time constrain, teachers are unable to manage their time to provide opportunity for children to practice their English Language competence through play (Elizabeth, et. al., 2013).

The other issue highlighted through the survey was the lack of English teacher training. As one of the essential conditions of effective language learning in kindergartens is to employ teachers who have training in both Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Teaching English as a Second Language (Lu, 2002). However, the findings of the survey revealed that only 15% of the schools had teachers with qualifications in both ECE and TESL and that 13.5% of them had totally untrained English teachers. To train these teachers will only be feasible if kindergartens are

removed from the private sector and included in the formal education system and this may require huge resource allocations from policy makers (Ng.& Rao, 2013).

In addition to the diversity found in instruction times and professional qualifications, there is also diversity in how the English curriculum was chosen. The survey reported that the curriculum was decided by the curriculum teachers of the schools, the individual class teachers or the principals of the schools. This is due to the fact that the existing Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum (CDC, 2006) contains only one page and it did not clearly explain the rationale, content a and learning outcomes of the curriculum (Ng. & Rao, 2013).

About 72.4% of the survey respondents said that formal exercises such as copying words and sentences were more dominant than activities such as singing, reading stories or playing games. The copying practice stems from the deep-rooted belief that a formal approach to learning English prepares children for primary school (Pearson and Rao, 2005). The Chinese way of learning could also account for such practices as noted by Tan et al, (2005) that the prevalent strategy of the Chinese to teach children to learn to read is by repeatedly copy samples of single characters. Teachers who lack knowledge in English Language teaching have transferred this familiar strategy to teach English to young children. This learning strategy does not provide desirable learning experiences for young children who do not have much English exposure outside the classroom (Ng. & Rao, 2013).

Teachers have to encounter various challenges when delivering lessons to their kindergarteners. These challenges include the physical environment of the classroom, teaching strategies, children‟s willingness to learn, evaluating their progress as well as teaching aids which can make learning fun, interesting and captivating to these young children. Romiszowski (1968) defined teaching aids as instruments which facilitate the process of teaching learning and Spencer (1988) and Jacobs (1996) stated that it is the

responsibility of the teacher to organise and present the task to be learned in a manner that can be understood as efficiently and effortlessly as possible. Therefore teachers should provide a wide variety of teaching aids to suit the diverse needs of their children (Maduna, 2002).

2.8.4 Teaching Aids in the Teaching Process

A study was carried out in the Colombo regional centre, Sri Lanka with 40 English medium teachers and 60 Singhala medium preschool teachers by employing the survey research design to investigate the problems faced by kindergarten teachers when using teaching aids in the teaching and learning process (Rajapaksha & Chathrika, 2015). This study revealed various problems that were encountered by these teachers.

Preschool teachers in the current Sri Lankan Preschool Education context are burdened with a heavy syllabus especially those preschools that are govern by the private sector. The emphasis is more on desk work as children are provided with workbooks and work sheets which have prevented the teachers from using creative and effective teaching aids in the teaching learning process. This is a worrying factor as it could lead to reducing the productivity of preschool education for children and their learning (Rajapaksha & Chathrika, 2015).

Besides, another main problem faced by the preschool teachers in making teaching aids is finding the time to make teaching aids for each lesson as they are not allocated the time to make them. Making appropriate teaching aids can also be costly and transporting them and storing them to be reuse at some other time is also another problem. Apart from these audio visual aids were rarely used by these teachers as they lack training in this area (Rajapaksham & Chathrika, 2015).

To overcome the above problems, some practical suggestions were given by the participants such as making teaching aids that can be shared among other teachers; make teaching aids only for selected lessons and using waste materials. Other than this, seminars and workshops could be arranged to provide special training on using teaching aids effectively and allocating a proper place to store these teaching aids (Rajapaksha & Chathrika, 2015).

2.8.5 Teachers' Insufficient Knowledge of Theories

In Kuwait, the compulsory school systems have introduced English to students as early as first grade since 1993. In the 2009-2010 school year, an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) was introduced for the first time in 12 kindergartens in six districts in Kuwait which later increased to include 30 kindergartens and it is expected to cover all kindergartens across the country the following year. The objectives of the Kuwait government to include the English Language in their kindergarten curriculum were to increase English literacy and competence to enable students to increase English literacy and competence to enable children to better listen and articulate themselves in English communication and to help children develop a broader worldview by expanding their knowledge and experience (Al-Qahtani, 2011).

The English Language was implemented quickly with little consideration for how teachers and stakeholders would respond to it. Hence, the study by Habeeb (2013) was undertaken with teachers from the 30 kindergartens to explore the English programme in the context of the perceptions and views of teachers affected by it. The result of the study showed that the teachers had the view that the training they received was insufficient as they lack knowledge on theories clarifying how children learn language. The teachers also feel that the teacher preparation program has failed to instil confidence and positive perception in the majority of the teachers as they were unable to

develop the students" skills at reading, writing, listening, speaking or understanding the English Language.

Apart from this, the curriculum has failed to appeal to some students as they have appeared uninterested in learning the subject. Teachers have also failed to receive the needed co-operation from parents to improve their children"s English Language abilities. One of the recommendations from a teacher is to create a special hall for the teaching of kindergarten-level English, complete with resources to carry out English lessons effectively. Another recommendation was to reduce the number of children in existing classes, so teachers can provide individual instruction and better monitor the progress of each child. If these perceptions of kindergarten teachers are justified, the authorities have the responsibility to review the teacher preparation programme as well as the English Language curriculum for the success of the learning of the English Language.

2.9 Comparing Studies from China, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Kuwait to Studies Done in Malaysia

The above studies from China (Wei Na, 2016), Cambodia (Masnan, Hamira & Ngajib, 2016), Hong Kong (Ng, & Rao, 2013), Sri Lanka (Rajapaksha & Chathrika, 2015) and Kuwait (Al-Qahtani, 2011) revealed the main challenges in teaching the English Language as the lack of professional teacher training in developing the students" skills at reading, writing, listening, speaking or understanding the English Language. This challenging factor is also common in the Malaysian preschool sectors as according to Pemandu (2013) 93% of preschool teachers have not undergone any formal training which has become a hindrance in teaching the English Language.

The study in Hong Kong by Ng, & Rao (2013) showed that 73% of survey respondents agreed that formal exercises such as copying words and sentences were more dominant than singing, reading stories or playing games which were more fun and interesting for children. The study in Sri Lanka (Rajapaksha & Chathrika, 2015) also disclosed that children were given more desk work as they were provided with plenty of workbooks and work sheets which have prevented teachers from using creative and effective teaching aids in the teaching and learning process of the English Language.

Meanwhile, the study, „Exploring Issues on Teaching and Learning in Malaysian Private Preschool" by Malaysians, Tee and Nor (2018) also revealed that preschools children were burdened with lots of work sheets and workbooks which have pointed to a formal and structured approach in the preschool setting as opposed to the play based approach stipulated by the NPSC (2017) in providing meaningful learning experiences.

In kindergartens, English is taught through both verbal and non-verbal means such as body language, facial expression and eye contact in order to ensure that the children understand the language. All these elements are important in interaction strategy used by the teachers in exposing their children with English. When children are able to understand teacher"s utterances they will be able to respond during the learning process as Sibley (1990) stated that the effectiveness of a teaching and learning process relies on the students" involvement and positive interaction with their teachers. According to Rohaty (2013), one of the popular findings in the study of English Language teaching is the teacher"s lack of competence in interacting in English which has led to the low proficiency of English among the students.

A study entitled „Effective Interaction Strategies in Teaching and Learning of English for Preschool Children" was carried out by Mazlina Che Mustafa and Maznah Ahmad (2017) with five preschool teachers in Perak who had attended a series of

English Language proficiency courses in 2014. This study was to identify teachers'' pedagogical skills in teaching and learning of English and the use of reinforcement and encouragement as a motivation for children to interact in English.

The study revealed that in order for effective interaction to take place between teachers and students, teachers have to provide ample opportunities for students to give their ideas and opinions individually as well as in a group. Abdul Rashid, Samsudin and Sufiza (2013) also suggested that teachers questions based on topics that the children are familiar with may attract children to respond and to interact with the teachers and friends. By employing appropriate pedagogy teachers can encourage interaction between teachers and children. Some teachers used strategies such as repetition, translation and parallel talk to encourage children to talk. Teachers can motivate children extrinsically by praising and encouraging them to take part in conversation and children can also be motivated intrinsically by providing them with a variety of teaching aids. The children will be excited to participate in the lesson as they will be able to use the teaching aids. This study has provided preschool teachers with an insight on how to overcome the challenges of communicating in the English Language among preschool children.

In order to bring about a more effective preschool education and overcome all the challenges of teaching the English Language that would greatly benefit all preschoolers, it is imperative for the relevant authorities to seriously look into and tackle each of these issues identified appropriately. By doing so they would be able to provide a conducive environment for the the teaching and learning of early literacy in kindergartens.

The following section will explore the three importance factors in the three research questions which are an environment that is conducive for the teaching of the

English Language, the various resources that are available to teach the English Language and the factors in the English teacher that are necessary for the teaching of the English Language.

2.10 Physical Environment that is Conducive for Teaching and Learning of early literacy in English

The classroom environment is a teaching resource that should be given importance as students and teachers spend the majority of their day in it. Hence, it‟s the responsibility of the teacher to create an environment and atmosphere that enhance learning. It is important to note that a child‟s learning and developmental processes involve a lot of play activities as children have a natural inclination to play, and it serves as an essential mechanism for learning and development (Loebach, 2005). Since play is a significant factor in the development of a child, preschool should be designed with appropriate physical environments that stimulate and support play activities and also keeping in mind that learning should be fun and accidental, not forced upon (Badzis, 2006).

According to Joshi (2008), research into the design process of preschools found that design elements are typically overlooked in discussions regarding the physical learning environment. Spatial arrangements are as important as lesson planning where preschools education is concern as stated by Morrow (2007). The physical as well as the social settings affect the children‟s behaviour, academic performance and development (Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2008).

Preschool children are developing physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally at a rapid speed. Hence, it is important that they have pleasant experience with their physical environment as they can have long-lasting effects on their development (Martin, 2004, Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Teachers too feel valued and

motivated when they have access to good infrastructure which will significantly improve their working performance (Uline & Moran 2008).

A conducive environment for kindergarten children suggested by (Leinonen and Venninen, 2012; Abas et al, 2012) is one that has a variety of texture (carpet, couch, pillow etc) that can be placed in cosy quiet places for withdrawal and security for children which can be used as a reading corner or a place for children to nap, a more open place for group activities and outdoor space for freedom of movement and physical activities.

According to Abbas, Othman & Rahman (2012), an environment that is conducive for teaching and learning is determined by factors such as good spatial and esthetical qualities, safety features, and appropriate use of material, finishing, and furniture. Other than that human comfort which comprises of thermal, visual and acoustic is shown to affect a child''s play behaviour which influences learning (Abbas, Othman & Rahman, 2012).

An important acoustic element for the teachers to be mindful is sound. Given that sound plays a very important factor in the attention and success of children, teacher should find ways to counter these distractions. According to Chan et al. (2015), the noise in the classroom may arise from several factors such as traffic noise, students running in corridors, and from adjoining classrooms. Studies have shown that noise have negative effects very especially on children learning of language and reading.

Beside sound, light also plays a major role in determining whether or not a child is engaged in the lesson. In classrooms that do not have the ability to utilise natural lighting, the use of lamps with softer lighting can create a warmer environment for students to focus.

The thermal element of the classroom; the temperature which is a difficult aspect to control also plays an important role in keeping students engaged in the lessons. A

classroom that is too cold or too warm can make students sluggish or inattentive. A classroom with fresh, cool air can create an atmosphere conducive to learning. No matter how trivial it may seem, children will look for anything to distract them from the lesson. Therefore, removing problems created by things such as light, sound and temperature may remove potential distractions for children (Hannah, 2013).

The standard arrangement in many classrooms is to have desks aligned in rows within the classroom. This type of arrangement does not encourage interaction between children and it focuses more on the children completing their own work. Since humans are social creatures that seek attention, if they fail to get attention from their classmates they will act out to get attention from their teacher (Hannah, 2013). When the classroom is organised in a way where students are able to interact with others while staying focused on the content at the same time then there will less likely be disruptive behaviour. Organising desks into groups will allow children to do individual work if they are required or they can work with partners or in groups when they work in bigger projects (Hannah, 2013).

2.11 The Importance of Teaching Resources in the Early Literacy English Classroom

It is the responsibility of the teacher to organise and present the lesson to be learned in such a way that learners can absorb it as efficiently and quickly as possible (Spencer, 1988 & Jacobs, 1996). Therefore teachers must put learners in an appropriate sensory contact with the concepts that are to be learnt (Maduna, 2002). When teachers have access to a wide range of teaching aids, it will help them to find different ways to modify their lessons to fit the diversified needs of their learners (Maduna, 2002).

According to Mathew and Alidmat (2013), teaching aids are often seen as an inspiration and they provide motivation during classroom instruction and when it is

used effectively it replaces monotonous learning environments. Thus, it is generally agreed that visual learning aids assist in the learning process and students find it easy to grasp the lessons in classroom when visual learning aids are used.

It is important for teachers to keep in mind the exceptional qualities of visual learning aids while preparing them for a particular lesson. Visual learning aids such as pictures and real objects should be attractive as well as portable as this will encourage learners to participate fully in the learning process. A visual learning aid is effective if it is able to attract the attention of the learners and at the same time be able to assist them to acquire knowledge and skill while providing quality education (Nacino et al, 1982). On the other hand, Shabiralyani et al, (2015) asserted that visual aids must be visible to the whole class and they should be large enough to be seen easily by the students fathest from the aids.

Harris and Caviglioli (2003) define visual tools as powerful retention aids which increase understanding. Some of the visual tools are pictures, posters, charts, photos, illustrations, word cards, icons, symbols, sketches, figures, presentations and mind maps. These visual tools can be used for a variety of activities from speaking and writing to enhancing students" vocabulary and grammar skills. They can also be used as warm ups to get the students to start thinking about the lesson that will be introduced or to even initiate classroom activities or discussions which can sometimes be difficult to achieve.

When conducting an English Language lesson, teachers have to make sure the children fully understand the lesson while trying to maximise the usage of the L2 language that is being taught as much as possible, with minimal usage of mother tongue especially in giving explanations. The visual materials which are being used come in handy as they serve in providing stronger understanding of the lessons that are presented to the children (Carney and Levin, 2002) and assist teachers "to compare and

coordinate precise concepts making the learning more concrete and meaningful" (Mannan, 2005, p. 108).

When teachers use visual aids in the form of pictures and videos, long explanation which may seem complicating to L2 learners could be avoided as these visual aids can be easily understood and therefore they help to save time. In today"s world, technology is able to provide a proactive, easy access and comprehensive teaching and learning environment. Many have been upgraded with internet connection, computer labs, smart white boards, LCD and other ICT tools and equipment and these have become invaluable source of teaching resources in the teaching and learning processes.

However, many teachers are still not maximising the usage of the technology provided (Albirini, 2006) even though many previous researches have proven the usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning process could improve students" achievement (Nakayima, 2011, Jamieson-Proctor et al, 2013).

Since teaching resources such as visual aids in the form of charts, posters, word cards and ICT plays an important role in second language acquisition, language teachers should maximise the use of these aids to enhance language teaching as well as to enable students" comprehension of the new input. Language teacher should also keep in mind that visual aids can also clarify the meaning of words and messages and help in memorising new vocabulary and in gaining students" attention.

2.12 Teachers' Contribution towards the Teaching and Learning of early literacy in English Language

It will be an advantage for a Malaysian kindergarten teacher to have knowledge of the NPSC which gives importance to the "learning through play" approach for meaningful learning experiences (Ministry of Education, 2017). The theory that influences this approach is the constructivist learning theories in which learners construct meaning based on first hand interaction through play as they learn and develop in a holistic manner.

Through the Cognitive Constructivism, Jean Piaget suggests that from the processes of accommodation and assimilation, individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences. Therefore, it is the teacher"s role to place children in situations where learning is able to take place. On the other hand, in the social constructivist approach which is influenced by Vygotsky, it is believed that children learn with the help of adults or other children who are more advanced within the Zone of Proximal Development to master concepts or ideas which they cannot understand on their own. They can be referred to as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The teacher can act as the More Knowledgeable Other in assisting children get to the next level with ease and confidence.

As young children may not understand the need to learn a second language, they can be easily motivated to learn the new language when they have a positive relationship with their language teacher who is able to provide them with attractive learning activities. (Moon 2005 & Clair 1988, p.2) proposes that motivation of young children can be achieved when they are exposed to real-life experiences in a friendly environment and with interesting teaching materials that are attractive and activities that use the L2 that is being taught.

An important factor for teachers to consider when preparing activities for children is the different level of psychological development of each child so lessons designed should allow children to experience success from the very beginning as this will enable children to want to continue willingly to acquire the second language. Therefore the task designed must be suitable for the children otherwise the learning anxiety present in them would prohibit the child from acquiring the desired result.

Another significant aspect to consider when planning activities is the short attention span of young children. Lessons should be ideally around five minutes not exceeding ten minutes (Harmer, 2007 & Reily, 1997). However, some activities that are engaging will enable children to stay on the task for a longer period of time (Zelinkova, 1997). Teachers should take note of such activities and consequently create a list of activities that are able to engage students for a longer period of time (Reily, 1997).

Since play is a natural way to explore the world, teachers should be willing to incorporate it to the lessons to provide a natural way for second language acquisition. Besides being fun, games can provide an exceptional opportunity to practice all language skills and sub skills in a relaxed and enjoyable way. Teachers should also keep in mind that the instructions for the games should be simple, clear and divided into logical steps and it must be accompanied by a demonstration (Harmer, 2007).

Last but not least, it can be useful for language teachers to be aware of all the various benefits and types of rhymes and songs and take advantage of their potential and use them for different purposes in various stages of the lesson. Songs and rhymes can also be used at creating phonological awareness of the language.

2.13 Summary

The literature of this study began with the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework discussed the theories and the teaching model that influenced this study. The NSPC aims to develop preschoolers holistically; therefore the Bronfenbrener Bioecological Theory of Human Development is selected as the framework of this study. Besides, the Constructivist Theory which states that children construct meaning based on first hand interaction through play as they learn and develop in a holistic manner has also influenced this study. Furthermore the Total Physical Response Method that claims that children learn a second language in the similar way as they learn the first language is also selected for this study. Next it discussed the history of Early Childhood Education in Malaysia from the British colonial era in the early 1900s until the implementation of the KSPK, 2017. Then it went on to discuss the private preschools run by private sectors and non-governmental organisation since this study is carried out in a private kindergarten. This is followed by examining the preschool curriculum especially the four skills that are contained in the English Language Arts (ELA) which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Next, it traced the history of the English Language in Malaysia followed by the importance of learning English in a globalised world. Past studies related to this study from countries such as China, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Kuwait were discussed and they were compared to the Malaysian kindergarten scenario. It was revealed that the main challenge in teaching English is the lack of professional teacher training in developing students" skills at reading, writing, listening, speaking or understanding the English Language. Finally, it concluded with literature based on the three elements of this study which are the physical setting, teaching resources and teacher factors involved in the teaching and learning of early literacy.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative research is to explore the conducive environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in a private Malaysian kindergarten. The objectives of this study are as follows:-

4. To investigate if the physical classroom environment is conducive for play-based activities.

5. To explore the various resources available in the teaching and learning of early literacy.

6. To find out how the English Language teacher can contribute towards the children's early literacy teaching and learning environment.

In this chapter, the necessary groundwork and the detailed preparations made and executed for conducting an empirical study in a private kindergarten are described.

3.2 Research Design

The research purpose and problem of this study are more exploratory in nature; as such it is more appropriately situated within the qualitative research paradigm.

Qualitative research seeks understanding of phenomena within their natural context (Patton, 2002). It is interpretive as the researcher attempts to explicate the phenomena and the personal rendering endeared to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research seeks to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes and emotions that are difficult to extract through more conventional research methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

A qualitative approach is thus suited for this research as the purpose is to unearth the conceptions (which may include their feelings, emotions and thought processes) that the preschoolers have in learning the English Language and the teacher has in teaching the language. Edwards (2002) maintains that all qualitative research will involve the researcher in "getting to grips with the complexities of the social world of early childhood" (p. 117).

In offering a definition of qualitative research, Creswell (2013) focuses more on the process as opposed to doctrine. The researcher must begin with philosophical assumptions, then progress to worldviews and through a theoretical lens then to implement procedures from which a framework for the inquiry approach can be developed. The qualitative researcher thus seeks to report different perspectives as themes develop in the findings (Creswell, 2013). Apart from the exploratory nature of the research questions, the philosophical assumption is another justification for situating this research within the paradigm of qualitative research.

Within the qualitative research paradigm, many research designs have been established over the years with different foci and different "products" of research, including case study (description of a case or cases), ethnography (a portrait of a culture-sharing group), grounded theory (a theory), phenomenology (a phenomenon) (Creswell, 2013).

3.3 Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, researchers are considered the instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This means that data are gleaned through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines. Creswell (2013) insists that qualitative researchers need to have „reflexivity" which he explains has two parts, the first being the researcher's need to reveal his or her experience with the phenomenon being explored including past experiences through work, school, and family dynamics. The second part cautioned by Creswell and which is most often overlooked is to discuss how these past experiences shape the researcher's interpretation of the phenomenon. This part is of utmost importance to Creswell because it is considered the heart of reflexivity as the researcher should be self-conscious about how these experiences may potentially shape the findings, conclusions and the interpretations drawn in the study.

Keeping this in mind, as a qualitative researcher it is necessary for me to describe relevant aspects of myself, including biases, assumptions, expectations and experiences that may affect aspects of this study. I have nearly two decades of working experience as an early childhood educator in an elite kindergarten located on 3.7 acres of flat land with huge surrounding grounds for children to explore and with large airy classrooms and each opening up to a green patch or field. The physical aspect of the school was one of the many factors that kept me in the same school for years and I consider this as an important factor towards the overall development of children not only in terms of physical development but cognitive and social emotional development as well.

Incidentally the first research question for this study is to investigate if the physical classroom environment is conducive for teaching and learning of early literacy in English Language. Since this research is carried out in a private kindergarten that is

housed in a premise measuring 770 sq, with limited indoor and outdoor space for children to move around freely, this condition may affect aspects of this research. Nevertheless, since this exploratory qualitative study is to conduct an in-depth investigation on a single situation which is to explore the environment for teaching and learning of early literacy in English in a private Malaysian kindergarten, the researcher should not focus on her own perception and feelings but rather the perception and thoughts of the subjects or participants (Orgill, 2012). This is called „bracketing" where the researcher suspends his or her own assumptions.

In this study, bracketing requires me to approach both the interview and the data to be analysed with an open mind without any input from my perspective. This would be of utmost importance because of my own strong convictions that the physical environment of the classroom plays an important role in the overall development of a child may jeopardize bracketing, as assumptions may creep in unnoticed. In fact, bracketing came into play even in the initial process of framing the research problem and objectives.

3.4 Sampling Method

The following are some key features of qualitative samples summarized by Curtis, Gesler, Smith and Washburn (2000):-

- Sampling is based on purposive or theoretical sampling criteria rather than statistical probability of selection.
- Samples are small but are studied in depth and are therefore capable of generating a large amount of information.

- Qualitative research should be reflexive and explicit about the rationale for case selection, as there are ethical and theoretical implications arising from the choices made to include particular cases and exclude others.

(Curtis, Gesler, Smith and Washburn, 2000)

Heeding that last advice, the rationale for the selection of research site and research participants will now be addressed.

3.5 Location of Research Site

In Malaysia, there are two types of kindergarten buildings; They are a) single building design that has the building to itself and has a generous amount of surrounding area that is conducive for a kindergarten and b) shophouse design that has its building attached to other buildings with very little or no compound at all (refer to Figure 3.1). The single building design is further categorised into a dwelling type whereby kindergartens are transformed from a basic house and the second subtype is a single complex type that is purposely built on a stand-alone concept to fit this purpose. Incidentally, this study was carried out in a single building design which is an endlot in a residential area located in the state of Selangor, Malaysia.

In Malaysia, there are two types of kindergarten that can be observed. They are – a) single building design that has the building to itself and has ample compound that fits the purpose of a kindergarten and b) shophouse design that has its building attached to other buildings with little or no compound. The single design complex kindergarten can be further categorized into a dwelling type where kindergartens are transformed from a basic house and the second sub-type is a single complex type that was purposely built on a stand-alone concept to fit this purpose (Bava, Ismail & Ramli, 2015).

This study was carried out in a single building design, which was situated at the end lot of a suburban residential area in Selangor. The kindergarten which has a 100% Malay population occupies a double storey terrace house and consists of two classrooms for students aged four to six years old.

The following selection criteria were used for the kindergarten:

1. The kindergarten is a legally registered private kindergarten with the MOE; therefore their curriculum is guided by the NPSC (2017).
2. English is taught as a second language in this school.
3. The English teacher has worked in the selected kindergarten for two years.

Initially, two other potential kindergarten were considered for this research, however, there were restrictions made in the taking of photographs of the kindergartens and the children in one of the kindergartens and the other one only allowed researcher to occupy one part of the classroom and movement was restricted. Finally, the present site was selected as the headmistress of this kindergarten often allowed postgraduate and undergraduate students to conduct their studies here and she had already obtained the parents" permission in the beginning of the year to allow the children to be photographed for the studies that are being carried out in the kindergarten. She also gave her full cooperation throughout the duration of this study.

3.6 Research Participants

The participants of this study are:-

1. Fifteen children aged four plus to five year olds of the selected private kindergarten. The NSPC is prepared for students aged four plus to six and this will enable children to have two years of English Language instruction before they begin formal schooling which will prepare them sufficiently for Year 1. These five year olds are preferred because according to Lenneberg, the critical period for language acquisition begins around the age of two and young children develop language and other cognitive skills at a very rapid pace and moreover these children are also less self-conscious than older children (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006; Ellis, 1994). This age is also appropriate to prepare them with early literacy skills in preparation for the teaching of the English Language.

2. The English teacher of the selected private kindergarten. The teacher has been teaching English in this school for the past two years and she is employed only to teach the English Language in this class and she comes in twice a week which is on Wednesdays and Fridays from 10.00am to 11.00am. The English lessons are scheduled for the duration of 20-30 minutes per lesson. The proposed teacher is a part time Master in professional English communication student at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and she has also a Bachelor degree in English for Business Communication. However, her teaching experience is only limited to the teaching experience she had gained in this present kindergarten. She has also no training in early childhood education except the knowledge she had gained through her interaction with the students of this kindergarten and her experience as a mother of two young boys, one aged four and another aged 15 months old. This teacher has also good knowledge of the National Preschool Curriculum and the English syllabus provided by it as her area of research for

her master degree is on language development of young learners. Hence, she will be the right participant for this research as her contribution for this study through the interview and observation of her English lessons will be very valuable towards the success of this research.

3.7 Instruments of the study

The following instruments were drafted in preparation for data collection.

3.7.1 Observation Protocol

An observation protocol (Appendix D) was prepared based on the three research questions which were approved by a retired English specialist of a higher learning institute. A preliminary study (refer to 3.15) was carried out to find out how best the observation could be conducted without disruption to the class schedule, the teacher and the children.

3.7.2 Interview Protocol

Appendix E, which is a semi-structured interview guide for the teacher was tested through a preliminary study after which some of the questions were rephrased and restructured (refer to 3.13) before seeking the approval from a retired English Language expert at the Faculty of Education in a local university.

3.7.3 Document Analysis

The documents for this study consist of resources such as lesson plan, storybooks, worksheets and workbooks. An observation protocol (Appendix D) was prepared and approved by a retired English specialist of a higher learning institute. A preliminary study (refer to 3.13) was carried out to find out how best the observation could be conducted without disruption to the class schedule, the teacher and the children.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

An observation protocol and an interview protocol were prepared based on the three research questions and were approved by a retired English expert from higher learning institute. A preliminary study (refer to 3.13) was conducted to determine the flaws, limitations or other weaknessness and revisions were made based on the study. Once permission was obtained from the expert the study was conducted after the necessary permission was granted by the kindergarten.

3.9 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection for this research was carried out for a period of three months during the English lessons which took place twice a week on Wednesdays and Fridays from 10.00am to 11.00am.

The following techniques were used to collect data:-

i. **Observation** – An observation protocol was prepared based on the three research questions and this was approved by an English expert. At the

preliminary study it was found that photographs of the classroom physical setting and teaching resources could only be taken after school hours so that there will be minimal distraction from the researcher. Observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a second hand account of the world obtained in an interview. The researcher jotted down notes during the observation and as soon as possible recorded down all details when it was still fresh in the memory. These notes include descriptions, direct quotations, and observer comments. The clarity presented in this part of the data analysis was able to give an insight on the ideal environment that is required for the teaching and learning of the English Language.

ii.   **Interview** - Interviewing is the primary data that was collected from the teacher in the form of open ended and semi structured questions. A big portion of the interview session followed the interview questions that were already set by the researcher, however, it did not follow the order of the questions that had been prepared and the words used were according to the answers that were given by the teacher who was being interviewed. This format enabled the researcher to respond to the situation at hand.

The interview was conducted after school hours at a quiet corner of a restaurant. Before the interview, the teacher went through the questions to make sure that she understood all the questions as this will enable the procedure to be smooth without any disruptions. A Samsung mobile phone was used to record the interview session. The first research question which is "Is the physical classroom environment conducive for play-based activities?" was answered through three open ended questions. The second research question which is "What are the resources available in the teaching and learning of

early literacy?" was answered through four open ended questions. Finally, the third research question which is "How can the English Language teacher contribute towards the children"s early literacy teaching and learning environment?" was answered through five open ended questions.

The questions were mainly focused on the teacher"s experiences in the present school as well as her prior experiences. These questions also investigated the strategies and resources used by the teacher and her strength and weaknesses in teaching the English Language. Since this was a semi-structured interview, other questions also emerged based on the observation of the students during the English lessons. The recording was listened to multiple times and transcribed to be analysed.

The important factors to consider while writing the reflection are verbal and non verbal behaviour of respondent and parenthetical thoughts of the researcher. These notes will enable the researcher to monitor the process of data collection as well as begin to analyse the information itself. When the data collected through the process of this interview is accurately analysed, it will be able to reveal the suitable environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy.

iii.   **Document analysis** - Finally, data was also collected through document analysis which according to Merrian S.B. (1998), "are, in fact, a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator," and a researcher is in the position whereby he/she "can create documents for the purpose of the investigation." Furthermore Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested that a qualitative study of classroom instruction would lead to documents in the form of instructors" lesson plans, student assignments, objects in the classroom, official grade report as well as the

setting itself. For this proposed study photographs of the resources available in the classroom, story books, lesson plan, work sheets as well as the workbooks used were captured as evidence and explained to answer the three research questions. An observation protocol (Appendix D) is prepared based on the three research questions so that the relevant documents needed for this study will be captured through photographs which will be explained according to the observation of the researcher.

3.10 Research Procedure

The procedure for implementing this research was as follows:

1. Obtain the approval from the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya to carry out this research (after the Proposal Defence Seminar).

2. Select private kindergarten (research site) and obtain permission from gatekeepers of the kindergarten.

3. Obtain permission from English language teacher to carry out interview session (Appendix B).

4. Visit the selected kindergarten a few days before the research to create rapport with the children.

5. Prepare observation protocol before collecting data through the observation process.

6. Carry out interview session with the English Language teacher

7. Take photographs as evidence for the three research questions.

8. Analyze data collected to answer research questions qualitatively and explore the environment for the teaching and learning of the English Language in a private Malaysian kindergarten.

9. Present findings, discussion and recommendations in Chapters 4 and 5 of
    the dissertation.

The following section will discuss the trustworthiness of the data.

3.11 Trustworthiness of the Data

Reliability and validity are illustrations of whether the researcher"s information has value. Reliability and internal validity of the study are associated to trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). From the perspective of Fireston (1987) on the issue of reliability and internal validity, the qualitative researcher has the responsibility of convincing the reader that procedures have been faithfully followed as there is very little concrete description of what anyone does is indicated. Alternatively, the qualitative researcher should provide the reader with depiction in enough detail to show that the author"s conclusion „make sense" (p.19).

Internal validity deals with the question of how research finding match reality. It questions if researcher is able to capture the reality of the situation being observed or through interviews. The research will adopt some of Merriam (1998) strategies to enhance internal validity

1. Triangulation – using multiple sources of data such as interviews, observations and document analysis to establish validity.

2. Member check – taking data and tentative interpretations back to the respondent and verifying the accurate details of the data. This will be a continuous process throughout the study.

3. Peer examination – asking a reliable course mate to comment on the findings as they emerge.

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. This can be overcome by the strategy suggested by Merriam (1998), which is to provide rich, thick description which will enable readers how closely their situations match the research situation and whether findings can be transferred. The following section will discuss the preliminary study for the observation and interview protocol.

3.12 Preliminary Study

A preliminary study was conducted to determine if there are flaws, limitations, or other weaknesses within the data collection protocols and allows necessary revisions before actual implementation of the research (Kvale, 2007). Permission was obtained from the Principal of the kindergarten before the study to ensure there is least disruption in the classroom for the children as well as the teachers of the kindergarten.

It was found that in this study photographs will be an importance souce of evidence; therefore the researcher had to ensure that photographs are taken without any disturbance to the class schedule, therefore the mobile phone was used instead of the camera as the camera will be a distraction to the children. Since there was very little space available in the class for an extra adult to move around in the class, some of the photographs such as the physical setting of the classroom and the teaching resources were decided to be taken after the school operating hours. Incidentally due to space constraint, the researcher decided to also stand in one corner of the classroom instead of sitting to observe the lessons to cause less distraction for the children.

The interview protocol was tested on two teachers. The first teacher (FT) was a kindergarten teacher for many years and she is now running her own kindergarten and the second teacher (ST) was also a kindergarten teacher for many years but is now

retired. The interview was conducted one at a time in a quiet restaurant and when the questions were not clearly understood it was revised to enable them to answer the questions. It was found that both the teachers were from totally different environment from the other. FT was teaching in a kindergarten that was in a bungalow, therefore there was sufficient space for her to conduct play based activities in and outside the classroom. However, ST taught in a kindergarten situated in a corner lot of a residential area, hence space was limited but there was a common room available for the teachers to take turns to carry out activities with their class children. Since this was a semi-structured interview many questions arised from the answers that was given and the researcher was well prepared to revise the questions accordingly.

The second research question was based on teaching resources. FT said teaching resources was not an issue in her class because all the resources made or bought by the teachers goes into a common pool and teachers can source for their resources from this pool which are kept in cabinets. However, many of the teaching resources have worn out and needed to be replaced. When asked about funds for the teaching resources, FT said that they can claim for whatever purchases they had made. However, according to FT since there is audio visual equipment available in her kindergarten there is not much need to make them using cardboards or other materials.

On the other hand, ST found it difficult to get funds to make teaching resources and storage was also a problem in her school. Audio visual equipments were also not available and teachers were often dependant on whiteboards and workbooks as teaching resources.

The third research question was related to matters related to the teachers. FT only decided to do her Diploma in Early Childhood education after teaching in a kindergarten for five years. FT feels that Early Childhood Education has given her a

good understanding of the child's different stages of development and she wished she had done it much earlier. She said she did not encounter much problem in teaching the English Language because the medium of instruction in her kindergarten was English. However, ST who also has a diploma in Early Childhood Education but teaches in kindergarten with Mandarin as the medium of instruction finds it challenging to teach the English Language to her children. She thinks that the lessons had to be fun for the children to be interested to learn new language besides their mother tongue.

This preliminary study brought about revision to the interview protocol based on the background of the respondent and the physical setting of the kindergarten of this study. The revision was approved by an English expert from the Education Faculty of a local university.

3.13 Data Analysis

The aim of this study is to explore the environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in a private Malaysian kindergarten. Data for this study was collected through the observation, interview and document analysis process accompanied by photographs which are also one of the main sources of evidence for this research. The researcher has undertaken to analyse the data collected for this study using thematic analysis.

According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Another advantage according to Braun & Carke, (2013), from the perspective of learning and teaching, thematic analysis is a method rather than a methodology. Unlike other qualitative methodologies it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective which makes it a very flexible method.

This study applied the Braun & Clarke (2006) six-phase guide which is a very useful framework for conducting this kind of analysis. There are six phases involved in this process, however, the phases does not have to be in order and the researcher may choose any step which may be convenient and according to the need of the study to avoid any form of complexity in the data.

The following are the steps involved in the framework of the thematic analysis suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006).

Step 1: Become familiar with the data – just like in any other qualitative analysis the first step is reading and re-reading the transcripts and becoming familiar with the entire body of data (interviews, observation and any other data that are being used)

Step 2: Generate initial codes – Organise data in a meaningful and systematic way by coding as it reduces lots of data into small chunks of meaning. Segment of data that are relevant or something interesting that is related to the research question are coded. Open coding is used which means that codes or not pre-set but developed and modified while working through the coding process.

Step 3: Search for themes – a theme captures something significant or interesting about the data or research question. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), there are no hard and fast rules about what makes a theme. Upon examining some codes may fit together into a theme which seemed to say something specific about the research question.

Step 4: Review themes – at this phase themes that were identified in Step 3 should be reviewed, modified and developed into themes. The researcher should ensure that the themes are able to work in the context of the entire set. A few important points to consider are; if the themes make sense, whether the data support the themes, do the

themes overlap or are they really separate themes and if the researcher is trying to fit too much into a theme.

Step 5: Define themes – This is the final refinement of the themes which aims at identifying the ‚essence" of what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Points to consider here are to find out what the theme is saying, if there are subthemes and how the themes interact

Step 6: Write up – Since this is an exploratory qualitative study the analysis is written as thick, rich description of the phenomenon. All the different sources of data collected are presented under each theme for the sake of triangulation which will enable to validate this study.

3.14 Summary

This research is an exploratory qualitative study, which utilizes the research design of case study as it was best suited to answer the research question to explore the environment for the teaching and learning of the English Language in the private Malaysian kindergarten.

As the instrument of data collection and analyses, steps were taken to bracket the researcher's own conceptions. The utmost best was consciously done to approach both the interviews and the data to be analyzed with an open mind. The researcher has also revealed her personal experiences with the phenomenon of the conducive physical environment which is the first research question and discussed how these experiences shape her interpretation of the phenomenon.

Data for this study was collected in the form of observation, interview and document analysis with photographs as evidence for each of the research questions and data were analysed using the six phase thematic analysis framework created by Braun & Clarke (2006). Issues concerning validity and reliability were also addressed. The next chapter presents the findings of the data collected from this exploratory, qualitative study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the environment of teaching and learning of the English Language in a private Malaysian kindergarten. The three research questions in this study are:-

1. Is the physical classroom environment conducive for play-based activities?

2. What are the various resources available in the teaching and learning of early literacy?

3. How can the English Language teacher contribute towards the children's early literacy teaching and learning environment?

The data for this study were analysed using the six phase thematic analysis framework created by Braun & Clarke, (2006, p. 92). For clarity of the findings the observation notes attached on Appendix F are identified as follows:-Research Question 1 – PE 01 – PE 10, Research Question 2 – TR 01 – TR 08 and DA 01 – DA 04 and finally for Research Question 3 – TC 01 – TC 07. As for the interview transcription that is attached on Appendix G, Research Questions 1, 2 and 3 are identified as IT 01 – IT 48.

The terms PE, TR, DA, TC and IT are defined as follows: - PE stands for Physical Environment, TR stands for Teaching Resources, DA stands for Document Analysis, TC stands for Teacher Contribution and IT stands for Interview.

In this approach all the relevant data from various data streams (observation, document analysis, interview and photographs) are gathered to provide a collective answer to a research question. The following are the research findings.

4.2 Research Question 1:

Is the physical classroom environment conducive for play-based activities? The following themes were detected from the observation notes and interview transcription to answer this question.

4.2.1 Lack of Space

According to Abbas, Othman & Rahman (2012), an environment that is conducive for teaching and learning is determined by factors such as good spatial and esthetic qualities, safety features, and appropriate use of material, finishing, and furniture. Good spatial means a large amount of space which will necessitate in carrying out play-based activities and for other purposes. It was found in this research that space was a major setback in this kindergarten.

> Limited space to carry out activities in classroom. Not enough space for
>
> children to move around in the classroom. Teacher has to squeeze her way
>
> in between the tables and chairs to reach out to the children. No personal
>
> space for the children as they tend to knock into each other when they walk
>
> in the classroom (refer to Figure 4.1).

(Observation Notes: PE 01)

According to Leinonen and Venninen (2012), the four major stimuli that are needed within the kindergarten are movement, comfort, competence and control. This indicates that the space in the classroom should allow children to move within safe and tolerable limits; at the same time they should feel comfortable in their physical surroundings which will enable them to explore materials or events around them. On the other hand, childen display competent when they are able to carry out the given task while being able to manage their own materials in the given space. Finally children should have control over their immediate personal environment.

Figure 4.1 Crowded Classroom

When the teacher was asked how she uses the space available to carry out play-based activities, she said that for play-based activities she uses the porch as there is space for children to move about when she conducts activities such as hide and seek or exercises like gymnastic for the English lesson.

Researcher: "To what extent the space available allow for the carrying out of play-based activities during the English lessons?"

Teacher: "For play-based activity er that I use er I use pouch (porch) instead of the inside of the classroom so that outside the classroom we can actually conduct activities like hide and seek and then we can like er conduct activities or exercises like gym, gymnastics for English and then

we also have er role play outside the class, so we use outside the class for play-base activities not inside er not inside the classroom."

There is also limited space for storage which makes the class disorderly as the things are put wherever there is space available and the class teacher has to rummage through the stuff to locate the items that are needed. This takes up time and children tend to become restless while waiting for the teacher.

Children"s work is stored in their individual files and on top of the cabinets and on the teacher"s table. There"s no display of children"s work on the classroom walls. Some resources such as word cards and children"s workbooks and worksheets are placed on top of the cabinets. Disorderly and stacked one on top of another which makes it difficult to locate items that are needed. Teacher is often seen going through the drawers and cabinet tops to locate items as the storage areas are not labelled. Children"s stationeries in containers are also placed on the cabinet tops (refer to Figure 4.2)

Figure 4.2 Limited space for storage

An ideal classroom environment to carry out play-based activities is divided into various corners for the activities that are being carried out in the kindergarten such as a reading corner, dressing up corner for role play and art and craft corner. When the teacher was asked for her perception of the suitable environment for activities, the following was her response:-

Researcher: What do you think is a suitable environment to carry out activities in the classroom?

Teacher: "I think for different kind of activities we need to have er their own corners for example reading corner they have er they should have a corner where they have pillows especially like this then they can sit around the teacher and then for the play-based activities er the environment should be more wide so that they can run wider space so that they can run here and there freely and then for the reading activities or role play there should be like a small stage so that they can have the feeling of giving a public speaking, different corners."

Research: "That means you say that you need a bigger space".

Teacher: "Ya, bigger space and different corners for different activities that will be more interesting".

<div align="right">(Interview Excerpt: IT 16 – IT 19)</div>

The teacher concluded by confirming that a bigger space is needed to make lessons interesting, just as stated by Morrow (2007) spatial arrangements are as important as lesson planning where preschool education is concern. The physical as well as the social settings affect not only the children"s behaviour but their academic performance and development as well (Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2008).

4.2.2 Lighting

Proper lighting is an important element for effective classroom teaching and learning therefore lighting was one of the factors that were observed for this study. It was found that the classroom in which this study was carried out had sufficient lighting but the other two classrooms did not have light from the sunlight so they were rather dark.

The classroom that is in the living room has sufficient lighting as there is light coming from the porch into the classroom so it is bright and children can see the pictures and words on the whiteboard. The classroom in the dining and kitchen area is rather dark as it is separated by a partition.

<div align="right">(Observation Notes: PE 03)</div>

When the teacher was asked if she encountered any problems while carrying out play-based activities at the porch, the teacher said that because the porch is partly shaded, on hot days, there's direct sunlight therefore it becomes very hot for the children which make them rather uncomfortable and very challenging for the teacher (refer to Figure 4.3)

Researcher: "Do you encounter any problems when you carry out activities in the porch?"

Teacher: "....weather outside when if the sun is quite hot er so the kids tend to feel uncomfortable."

Researcher: "So that means the porch is not fully shaded?"

Teacher: "Yes, not fully shaded but is.."

Researcher: "partly shaded?"

Teacher: "partly shaded but the sun.. the sun er there is direct sunlight in some part of the porch..(text not clear).......................that's very challenging for the teacher "(laughs)

<div align="right">(Interview Excerpts: IT 10 – IT 15)</div>

Figure 4.3 Children working at the porch on a sunny day

According to Hannah (2013), children can get easily distracted by anything trivial and insignificant. Therefore, it is important to remove problems that are created by things such as light, sound and temperature to avoid children from getting distracted.

4.2.3 Classroom arrangement

The classroom arrangement is important because it facilitate in the teaching and learning process. Hence, care should be taken to make sure tables and chairs are arranged in such a way that allows children to have a good view of the teacher, the whiteboard as well as the teaching resources that are used during the lesson. The present study showed that the class arrangement was a drawback for the teaching and learning process (refer to Figure 4.4).

Children‟s view is blocked because of the way the tables and chairs are arranged so they keep standing up to get a better view of the teacher and the whiteboard. Teacher is not able to see the all the children‟s faces when she is conducting a lesson.

(Observation Notes: PE 07)

Hannah (2013) suggested that the way the classroom is organised should enable children to interact with one another while staying focused on the content. This will bring about less disruptive behaviour from children. When desks are arranged into groups, it will allow children to do individual work if required or work with partners or groups when it calls for it. However, in this study, there is not much choice to make with regards to class arrangement as space is limited.

Figure 4.4 Children facing different directions when teacher is conducting a lesson

4.2.4 Noise Factor

The study showed that there were various sources of noise that was detected in the classroom. The noise that affected the most was the occasional noise of vehicles that pass by the school. Apart from this there was also noise from the adjoining classroom which was separated only by some cabinets and children often run into each other's classrooms. Teachers often have to raise their voices to get their message across to the children. This according to Chan et al. (2015), is a hindrance to second language learning (refer to Figure 4.5).

Teacher: "How many tyres does a truck have?"

Teacher counts with the children while pointing at each of the wheel.

"One, two, three, four."

Teacher: "Four tyres."

Child: "Four tayar."

Another child: "Four tayar."

One of the children gets up from his seat and points outside the classroom at a passing lorry and shouts out "Ha, yang tu lori."

(Observation Notes: TF 01)

Figure 4.5 Noise of vehicle passing by can be heard in the classroom

4.2.5 Safety/Cleanliness

Safety is a very important factor in a preschool setting as parents have to be assured that the school authorities take full responsibility of their children's safety. This will give them peace of mind to leave their children in the care of the school. Teachers too are able to work well when they are given the assurance that the children are in a safe and secure environment.

Observation of safety measures showed that thorough care had been taken to ensure the safety of children and the criteria for safety such as a staircase outside the school, fire extinguisher and play equipment were well maintained.

> Children are safe within the school compound as the gate is always kept locked at all times. All the play equipments are in good condition. There is an emergency staircase and fire extinguisher. No sharp instruments or hot items within children's reach in the kitchen (Figure 4.6)

(Observation Notes: PE 04)

The cleanliness of the school was also well taken care of. Although the school had a built-up area of only 770sq ft, every part of the school such as the porch, the classrooms and the kitchen area was clean and well maintained. The toilet was also hygienic and free from any odour.

> Cleanliness of the school is well maintained. The kitchen area where the children's snacks are prepared is clean and well-maintained. The toilet is hygienic and odourless.

(Observation Notes: PE 05)

Figure 4.6 Children are safe in the school environment

4.3 Research Question 2:

What are the resources available for teaching and learning early literacy?

The above question was explored using the following themes.

4.3.1 Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan for the month of Sept. to Nov. 2018 was placed on the notice board and it revealed all the topics that will be carried out during these months. It showed that active learning is taking place in class at each lesson and various medium of instruction is used to carry out these lessons (refer to Figure 4.7).

Lesson plan for the months of Sept – Nov 2018 was displayed on the notice board. It revealed the lessons and the activities involved in teaching such as role play, demonstration using TPR chanting, video, pretend play, workbooks, and worksheets. Topics are from the workbook. There is also phonics and grammar. Assessment was also mentioned on the lesson plan.

(Observation Notes: DA 04)

Lesson plan- September and November 2018

4 years and 5 years

Date/ day	Topic	Activities	Notes
5/9/2018- Wednesday	Demonstrative pronouns (This and that) And food	Videos Role play How much?	Ex- Pg 7-8 Itrading
7/9/2018- Friday	Greetings and pronouns - Done	Sing a song Role play	Ex- pg 15-16 Pg 3-4 Ichatter
12/9/2018-Wednesday	Action Verbs and part of body	Demonstrate outside the class apply TPR chanting	Ex-Pg 13-14 Isuperstar What can you do with your mouth? I can eat! What can you do with your hands? I can write!
14/9/2018-Friday	My Family and living things (fruits and vegetables)	Introducing family members How much?	Ex pg 26-27 Ilookntell and Itrading
19/9/2018-Wednesday	Adjectives	Show differences about sizing	Ex pg 9 -11
21/9/2018-Friday	Occupations	Introducing occupation	Ex- Pg 53-Ex 54 Ichatter
26/9/2018-Wednesday	Occupations	Pretend play	Extra worksheets
28/9/2018-Friday	Occupations	School trip	Kidzania
3/10/2018-Wednesday		Revision	Worksheets
5/10/2018-Friday		Revision	Worksheets
10/10/2018-Wednesday			Assessment
12/10/2018-Friday			Assessment
17/10/2018-Wednesday	Living things (Flowers)		Pg 40-41
19/10/2018-Friday	Living things (Animals)		Pg 42-45
24/10/2018-Wednesday	Keeping cleans		Pg 48-49
26/10/2108-Friday			
31/10/2018-Wednesday	Prepositions		Sukaneka
2/11/2018-Friday	Vehicles		Pg 5-6
7/11/2018-Wednesday	Articles Festivals		Pg 50-52
9/11/2018-Friday	Phonics		Pg 1-2
14/11/2018-Wednesday	Phonics		
16/11/2018-Friday	Phonics		
21/11/2018-Wednesday	Phonics		

READING PROGRAMME- In between classes

Figure 4.7 Lesson Plan

The teacher in her interview stated that her children like to learn English because she uses various methods to conduct her lessons and this approach attract children to take an interest in the lessons.

Teacher: Ok, so far er I can see that my my children they are very happy to learn English because they think that English er is a very interesting subject to learn because of the activities that we make for them er can actually attract them to er to like English rather than er to making English as a boring language.

(Interview Excerpt: IT 40)

There was mention of various activities such as role play; demonstration using TPR chanting and pretend play on the lesson plan that was placed on the notice board (refer to Figure 4.7).

4.3.2 Charts

Charts play an important role in teaching and learning in kindergarten. However, teachers have to be creative and innovative in maximising the benefits of charts. Charts can be purchased to save time and it could also be done by teachers themselves according to their needs. When teachers make their own charts they can plan their charts especially the number of pictures they wanted in a chart and the spacing in between the pictures. However, when they are purchased, the teacher has no control on the pictures they want and the number of pictures on each charts and this does not serve the purpose of the charts. The following was observed in the selected research site.

Charts are used more to decorate the wall than for children to learn from them. Too high and not at children's eye-level. Charts are placed randomly. It should be placed in the appropriate section e.g. English corner, Bahasa Malaysia corner or Mathematic corner. These charts were sometimes taken down and used during lessons (refer to Figure 4.8).

(Observation Notes: TR 01)

The charts that are bought at the bookshops or supermarkets are colourful but had many pictures and many words on them. Some of the charts had as many as 24 pictures on each of them. The pictures were rather small and when used during the lesson may not be clearly visible for the children sitting at the back rows of the classroom.   (Observation Notes: TR 02)

Figure 4.8 Charts had too many pictures, placed randomly and not at eye-level of children

4.3.3 The use of workbooks

Workbooks are also considered teaching resources and they have multiple uses. Workbooks have to be carefully selected and should be used as revision or to reinforce what they have learnt. Teachers should avoid using workbooks just to occupy children with work so that there will be less movement in the classroom and children are under control. The following was observed in the private Malaysian kindergarten that was studied (refer to Figure 4. 8).

There were two workbooks that were used for the English lessons and they were based on the National Preschool Curriculum. The mid-year and year-

end assessments were based on these workbooks. The workbooks also enable children to practice their writing as there are many pages of writing that are guided by dots. There are also many pictures in the book that have to be coloured. The teacher also has the responsibility to complete the workbooks before the end of the school term and according to the teacher this takes up a lot of the class time as children also have workbooks for other subjects as well.

(Observation Notes: TR 01)

Figure 4.9 Children completing workbooks

The following is the interview excerpts regarding workbooks that are used in this kindergarten. The teacher regarded it as an important teaching resource which is used for vocabulary, assessments and for practising writing and colouring. The teacher also prepares worksheets based on the lessons in the workbooks to further reinforce what has been taught (refer to Figure 4.10)

Researcher: "Explain the role of workbooks in your English lessons".

Teacher: "Er, the workbook is actually following the KSPK that is from government so er we use the workbook as a reference, the vocabularies that we need to teach the children er the workbooks er can actually assist in the writing activities mainly in writing activities most of the time but not much in the reading activity so erm these workbooks can not only be become the reference but also for them to actually train their writing abilities and also for their evaluation whether they can write or not"

(Interview Excerpt: IT 28)

Figure 4.10 Workbook based on KSPK

There were two workbooks that were used for the English lessons and

they were based on the National Preschool Curriculum. The mid-year and

year-end assessments were based on these workbooks. The workbooks also enable children to practice their writing as there are many pages of writing that are guided by dots. There are also many pictures in the books that have to be coloured. The teacher also has the responsibility to complete the workbooks before the end of the school term and according to the teacher this takes up a lot of the class time as children also have workbooks for other subjects as well (refer to Figure 4.10).

<div style="text-align: right">(Observation Notes: DA 01)</div>

The workbook also has an important role to play as it serves as the source for the mid-term and final assessment (refer to Figure 4.11). To further reinforce the topics that have been learned the teacher prepares worksheets for them (refer to Figure 4.12 & Figure 4.19).

Researcher: "Your assessment is based on these books?"

Teacher: " Er, yes we also er assess from the workbooks because we have two workbooks so we can actually see the differences and improvements from the workbooks but we also supply them another worksheet er"

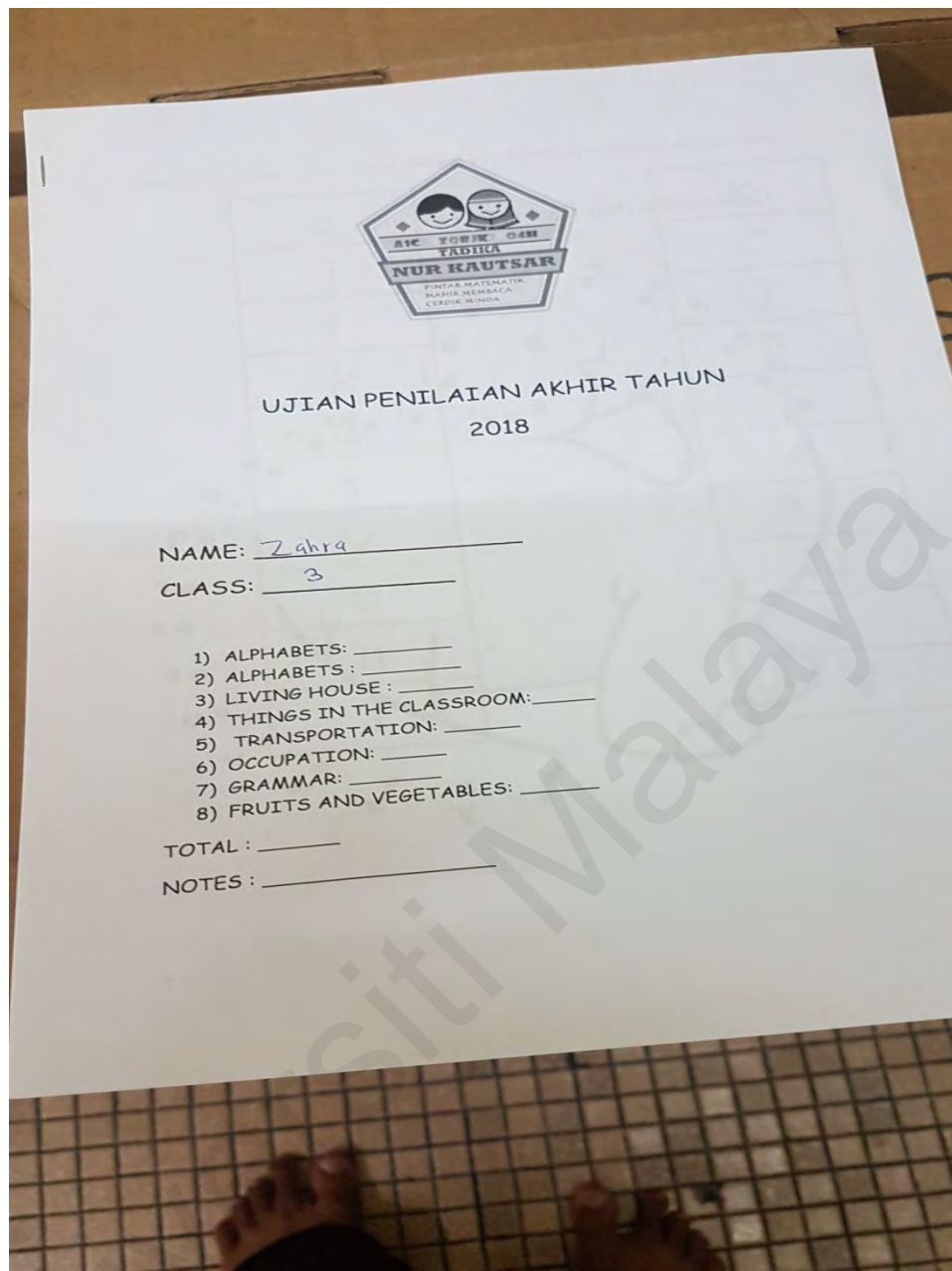<div style="text-align: right">(Observation Notes: IT30)</div>

Figure 4.11 Final year assessment based on topics in workbook

The mid-year and final assessments are prepared based on the topics of the

workbooks (refer to Figure 4.11).

(Observation Notes: DA 03)

According to the teacher, worksheets are specially prepared to give children more practice on the words learned as well as to reinforce what has been taught. The teacher is also able to find out if her lessons have been effective.

Researcher: "Is this also based on the workbook?"

Teacher: "Based on the lesson, yes, but we try to actually twist er the text or the way like for example if the workbooks I give photo and words but for the worksheet we try to find another kind of worksheet but with the same topic."

Researcher: "Er, er different form of activity?"

Teacher: "Yes, different form of activity because er just to make sure that they really understand what they have learned from the text er from the activities and also from the workbooks" (refer to Figure 4.12).

(Interview Excerpts: IT 27 – IT 34)

Figure 4.12 Worksheets are prepared based on the topics in the workbooks

Worksheets are prepared by the teacher based on the topics of the workbooks to further enhance the knowledge of the topic that is taught (refer to Figure 4.12 & Figure 4.19).

(Observation Notes: DA 02)

4.3.4 Resources with Multiple Uses

Teachers should consider buying and making teaching resources that will have multiple uses as it will save cost, time as well as space for storage. Picture cards can be used to teach both English and Bahasa Malaysia if they are not labelled. The labels can be in different word cards and they can be used as an activity for children to label the picture. Number cards that are not labelled can also be used to teach languages as well as to teach numbers. The following was observed in this study:-

> Some of the resources especially the individual picture cards can also be used to teach Bahasa Malaysia and English as well. However, most of the charts served only for the purpose of either teaching the English Language or the Bahasa Malaysia (refer to Figure 4.13). Although there were no displays of puppets, the teacher said that occasionally she uses puppets for storytelling. The teacher also said she uses toys for her lessons especially for lessons on fruits, vegetables, vehicles, animals and other topics that are available in toy forms. However, there were none on display and when asked she said she brings her children's toys and takes them home when the lesson is over.

(Observation Notes: TR 05)

A teacher who is creative and imaginative can make use of puppets almost for all the topics in the kindergarten curriculum. Puppets have multiple uses because they can be used with any language that the teacher want and they can be made easily with recycle materials which can save cost. On the other hand although real life items may allow children to learn texture, smell, taste and the actual form they may require a substantial amount of funds to get them.

Figure 4.13 Charts used for a single purpose

The following is the teacher's response when asked to explain the resources to teach the English Language.

> **Researcher:** "Explain the resources that are available to teach the English Language."

> **Teacher:** "The resources that we have right now er flash cards we have charts, charts er for the alphabet and also for the vocabularies er we also have toys and we have er finger and hand puppets er for speaking and reading activities and we also have big books and also another kind of story books for the children."

> (Interview Excerpts: IT 21 and IT 22)

However, there were no displays of finger or hand puppets as well as big story books in the library cupboard.

4.3.5 Age Appropriate Storybooks

Storybooks can be great teaching resources if they are age appropriate as they can motivate children to read. There can be a variety of books in the children's library. Books with large print and less words with short, simple sentences can be used for children to read on their own whereas books with complex sentences can be used for story telling which when used in a creative manner can motivate children to attempt to read on their own. It would be preferable to separate the story books according to the language used. The following was observed in this study (refer to Figure 4.14).

There is a small library cupboard with a mixture of English and Bahasa Malaysia books. There were only three English story books in their library cupboard and all the three were not appropriate for the children to read. However, the stories can be read to the children. Language used in these books was too difficult for children to read on their own.

(Observation Notes: TR 06)
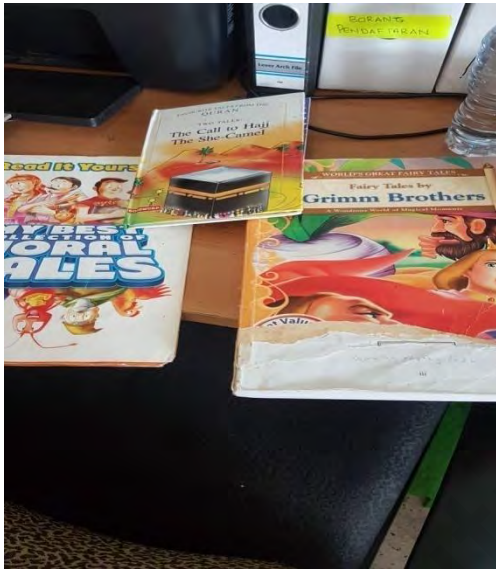
Figure 4.14 English storybooks in the library cupboard

4.3.6 Multi-Sensory Resources

Multi-sensory resources allow children to see, feel, touch and even taste the objects which will give them a meaningful learning experience. Where possible children should be provided with multi-sensory experience such as when children learn topics such as taste, texture and smell. Following is the interview excerpt on multi-sensory learning experience and role play.

Researcher: To what extent you create teaching aids according to your lessons? Often?

Teacher: "Er actually er when I am doing thematic based learning so I will have to create another teaching aid like for example I er er conduct lesson on fruits and vegetables so I need to bring the real fruits and vegetable but before that I will show them the show them the pictures from the charts and also from the flash cards so it will only depends on the photo, then after that I will make er activities like buy and sell so I will bring the real fruits and vegetable so they can actually feel and know the texture and colour so we can combine er buy and sell activity what do they have to do sometimes er I also give them a bubble, like speaking text so that it will actually assist them, some of them can actually read the words so I need to supply them as a supplement for them and then er I also er need to provide like a fake money and also counter because if I buy and sell. So it very on my theme er so I combine er various kinds of lessons in the thematic based learning."(Refer to Figure 4.15).

(Interview Excerpts: IT 23 and IT 24)

Figure 4.15 Role play

After the transcription, the teacher was shown Figure 4.15 and Figure 4.16 on role play and asked for clarification on the above activities. When asked how often they were able to carry out such activities, the teacher said that they could not do it often as there is a lot of preparation and funds that are involved and moreover it has to be carried out at the porch so the weather too plays an important role as such activities could be not carried out on rainy days as the porch is only partly shaded. The pictures below provided by the teacher of a past activity that was conducted a few months back.

Figure 4.16 Multi-sensory experience

4.3.7 Audio-Visual Aids

Teachers should understand the importance of audio visual aids in the teaching and learning process. Audio-visual aids include videos, music clips, flip charts, slideshow presentations and overhead transparencies. Audio-visual aids should not be used as the only teaching method but should be used to complement academic lessons. When teachers demonstrate a lesson through sight and sound, students are able to pick up more information through the audio-visual experience. However, the kindergarten that was studied was unable to provide this service due to limited funds.

There are no audio visual aids available in this school. The teacher uses her laptop to show images (refer to Figure 4.17)

(Observation Notes: PE 09)

The teacher however, is fully aware of the importance of audio-visual aids and the benefits that children could gain from it. The following is an interview excerpt regarding audio-visual aids.

Researcher: "What are the teaching aids you may need that may make your lessons interesting?"

Teacher: "Er, the teaching aids that I need right now is the LCD so er the sound system because er listening, listening can bring more impact to the students at this age because they actually are more influenced when they listen more to the language and then when they see, they can actually watch the real thing know the the movement and then they can actually ere like follow what the videos is all about for example songs, listening to songs more accurately because when we listen to the native speakers er they will actually can follow the correct pronunciation rather than my own pronunciation because I am not the native speaker, so it will be more interesting and very important to have the LCD."

(Interview Excerpts: IT 35 and IT 36)

Presently, most schools have internet connections and the usage of smart white boards, LCD and other ICT tools and equipment and these have become invaluable source of teaching resources in the teaching and learning processes. However, there are still many teachers who are not utilising the technology that is provided (Albirini, 2006). Incidentally, there are many previous researches that have proven that the usage of ICT in the teaching and learning process could improve students" achievement (Nakayima, 2011 & Jamieson-Proctor et. al., 2013).

Figure 4.17 Teacher uses laptop to show images

4.4 Research Question 3:

How can the English Language teacher contribute towards the children's early literacy teaching and learning environment?

The teacher who teaches English in a kindergarten should have knowledge on how to teach English as a second language to kindergarterners. Besides this, the teacher should also have background knowledge of Early Childhood Education to be familiar with the ways children develop during the various stages of their development from 0 – 6 years of age. Having both these criteria will enable the teacher to be successful as teacher of English as a second language.

The following themes were extracted through the observation notes and interview transcription to explore and answer the above question.

4.4.1 Language Used by Teacher

The children of this study consist of a hundred percent Malay population therefore their first language is the Malay language and English is taught as a second language. Since the children are learning English as a second language, the language that is used by the teacher should be simple and words should be repeated so that they could retain it in their memories. Following is an excerpt of a lesson that was observed.

Teacher introduces land, air and water by pointing at the picture and showing actions like waving her hands above her head to show air and moving her hands downwards to show water.

Teacher than shows a toy truck and ask the children.

Teacher: "What is this?"

Teacher: "What is this?"

One Child answers: "This is a truck."

Teacher: "This is a truck." (teacher says it slowly)

Teacher and Children: "This is a truck." (repeats twice)

Teacher: "A truck is big or small?"

Children: "big."

Teacher: "Ya, big."

Teacher: "Truck ini begerak ke mana?"

Teacher: "Where does the truck move?"

Teacher places the truck on each of the picture of the land, air and water

and ask, "Land, air or water?"

Children: Land

Teacher: Land

Teacher: "Kenapa begerak di land?"

Teacher: "Why does it move on land?"

One child: "Ada tayar"

Teacher: "Yes, they have tyres."

<div align="right">(Observation Notes: TF01)</div>

It can be noticed from the above text that the teacher repeats the same phrases throughout the excerpts. The following phrases that were repeated throughout the lesson were:-

a) "What is this?"

b) "This is a ...."

c) "big or small"

d) "Where does it move?"

The name of the transportation such as car, aeroplane, ship, truck, air balloon, bicycle and boat and the places they move such as land, air and water were repeated throughout the lesson. This shows that the teacher repeats the words and phrases that she wants the children to remember.

4.4.2 Use of Mother Tongue

One of the challenging factors of a second language teacher is the constant need to code switch from second language to mother tongue. According to Mustafa et al, (2017), first language has to be used to translate as this will provide better understanding of what is being taught and could encourage children to interact in English. In reality, it is impractical to expect a child who has not been exposed to the English Language to understand the language without translating the English words to the mother tongue.

Instructions were given in Bahasa Malaysia which is the children's mother tongue and most of them were able to carry out the instruction well as the teacher used simple words to explain. While holding the worksheet in one hand, she points at the picture of the aeroplane and she waves her other hand above her head to signify "air" and she asks the children, "Aeroplane ke mana?"

Children: "Air"

Teacher: "Aeroplane ke mana?"

Children: "Air."

Teacher: "Aeroplane ke mana?"

Children: "Air."

Next, teacher points at the picture of the truck and while moving her other hand downwards and ask the children "truck ke mana?"

Children: "Land."

Teacher: "Truck ke mana?"

Children: "Land."

Teacher: "Truck ke mana?"

Children: "Land."

Then the teacher points at the ship and asks the children, "Ok, ship ke mana, ship?"

Children: "Water."

Teacher: "Ship ke mana?"

Children: "Water."

Next, teacher points at the pictures and says, "Ok, sekarang cikgu nak colour dulu air, water dengan land dengan gambar gambar ni, nanti cikgu nak suruh gunting" (Ok, now I want you to colour air, water and land at

this picture, then teacher will let you cut) As she is saying this the teacher sees a child moving away from his place and she asks him "Ini duduk ke mana?"(where are you sitting?) at another child "ini gambar air kan, nampak awan kan, ok, warna dulu."(this is air isn't it, see can see cloud, ok colour first).

The teacher then went around the class assisting the children one by one as she explained to them what they had to do. When they had finished colouring, most of the children were able to cut out the pictures of the vehicles on their own while some were assisted by the teacher. After this, some of the children were able to paste it correctly while a few needed assistance from the teacher to do so.

The children understood the instructions well because besides explaining the procedure to the whole class in Bahasa Malaysia at the beginning of the activity, the teacher still went round explaining it to every child as she moved around the class giving her assistance to whichever child that needed it.

(Observation Notes: TF02)

4.4.3 Teaching Resources Used During Lesson

The analysis of the teaching resources used during the English lesson is just based on the one lesson that was observed, therefore it is highly possible for it to vary from the other lessons that the teacher carries out during her lessons.

The lesson that was observed was carried out using individual picture cards and toys. The picture cards were small and not so visible for some of the children. The teacher also used a toy truck and a toy aeroplane which were also very small.

The three pictures of transportation (air, water and land) that were placed on the white board were rather dull and not so visible for the children who were sitting at the back row (refer to Figure 4.15)

According to Nacino et. al., (1982) a visual aid is effective only if it is able to attract the learners" attention and help them in acquiring knowledge and skill as well as provide quality education. On the other hand visual hands must be clearly seen by the whole class and should also be easily visible to the child who is farthest from the teaching aids.

Figure 4.18 Teaching aids on the whiteboard

The observed lesson was divided into three sections. In the first section, the teacher introduce the vehicles and the mode of transportation, next the children were called out one by one to come to the board for an activity whereby the child had to place the vehicle on the mode of transportation. Finally, they were given a worksheet each based on the topic (refer to Figure 4.19).

According to the lesson plan (refer to Figure 4.7) it is stated that the teacher uses Total Physical Response Method (TPR) in her teaching. It would have been interesting to use TPR to teach the topic on vehicle as the children can have a lot of fun imitating the sounds of the vehicle with movement. The teacher could have divided the fifteen children in five groups with each group consisting of three children can come forward and imitate a vehicle. Alternately, she could have introduced the names of the vehicles on word cards.
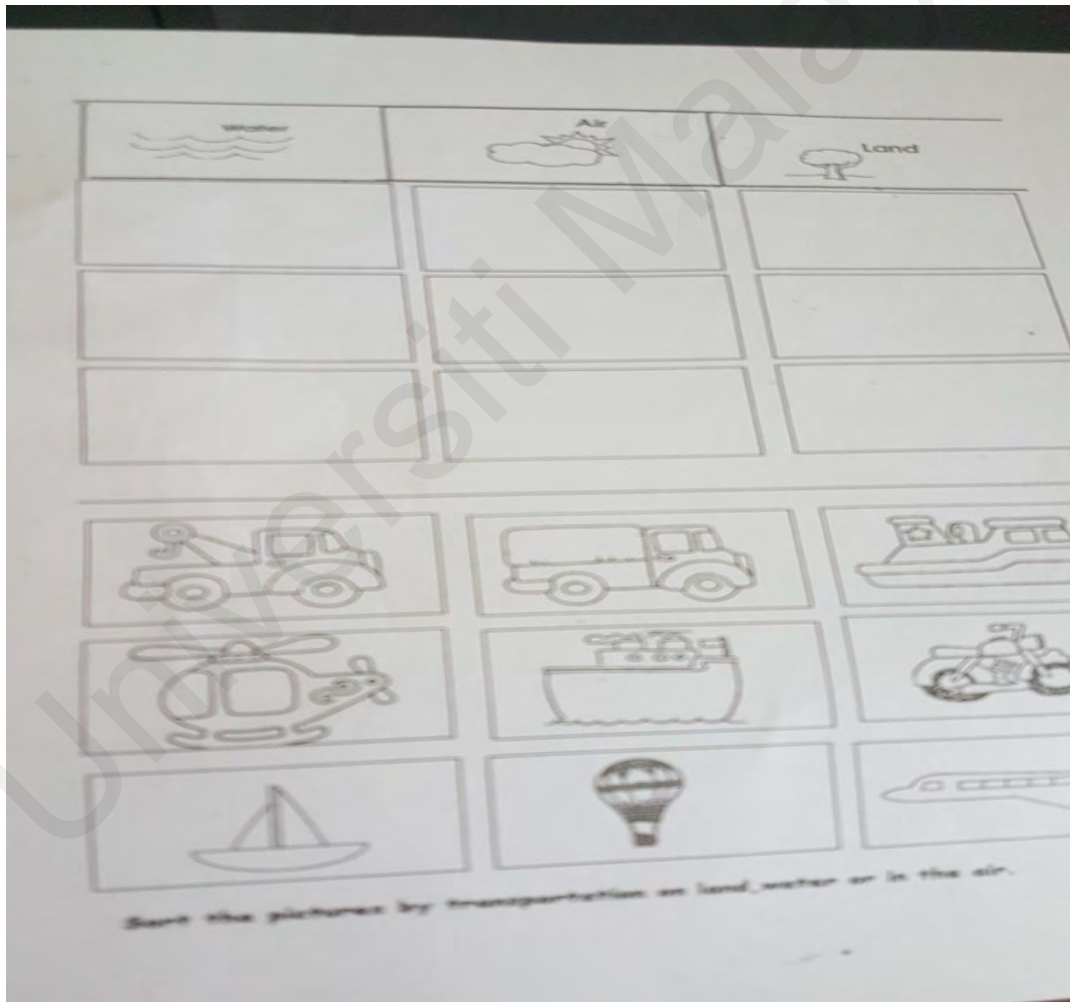

Figure 4.19 Worksheet on transportation

4.4.4 Children's Response Towards the Lesson

Children's positive response towards the lesson would depend on the way the lesson is conducted. A lesson that is well planned with colourful flash cards, interesting toys or games connected with the lesson would enable children to enjoy the lesson. The following reaction was observed in the present study:-

The children in the front rows seemed to enjoy the lesson at the beginning of the lesson but a few children at the back row did not show any interest throughout the lesson. The teacher failed to draw the attention of the children at the back row of the class. Response from the students was loud at the beginning. When one child shouts out the answer, the other children follow and when teacher repeats the answer the children also follow her. The children were happy to come to the front to paste the vehicle on the appropriate picture on the whiteboard and they were all able to do it correctly. The children at the back row seemed to be neglected by the teacher. It would be better if teacher occasionally draw the attention of the children at the back row.

(Observation Notes: TF 05 and TF 06)

After the lesson, the researcher gave her constructive feedback to the teacher in the hope of sharing her knowledge.

The duration of the lesson that was observed was more than an hour. This is too long for the children so halfway through the lesson; some of the children especially those seated at the back rows of the classroom became restless and fail to pay attention to the teacher.

After the lesson, the researcher gave her feedback to the teacher especially highlighting the duration of the lesson and suggested that it would have been more effective if the teacher had divided the one hour lesson into

three 20 minutes lessons and she would have been able to hold the children''s attention throughout the lessons. The teacher agreed but she said she had to rush through the syllabus to complete it before the school term ends.

<div align="right">(Observation Notes TF: 07)</div>

When teachers plan activities for children, they should give consideration to the short attention span of children and lessons should be around five minutes not exceeding ten minutes (Harmer, 2007 & Reily, 1997). There are some activities that are able to engage children to stay on the task for a longer period of time (Zelinkova, 1997). Teachers should note down activities that are able to keep children focused and engaged for longer period and create a list which they can use when needed (Reily, 1997).

4.4.5 Teacher's Perception of her Role as English Teacher in a Kindergarten

The lesson that was analysed in this section to find out how equipped is the teacher to teach the English Language was just one of the many lessons that are being conducted by the teacher; therefore the findings can vary according to the topics of the lessons as the topics will determine the type of resources and methodology that the teacher will apply to her teaching. For that reason the following interview excerpts are presented to explore the teacher''s perception of her role as an English Language teacher in a kindergarten.

Researcher: "Explain your children''s attitude towards the learning of the English Language."

Teacher: Emm, yes the activities that I conducted are the ones that attract them only depend on the one activity but I make various kinds of activities to actually attract them to learn English

<div align="right">(Interview Excerpt: IT 39 & IT 42)</div>

According to (Moon 2005 & Clair 1988, p.2), proposes that children can be motivated to learn a second language when they are exposed to a positive learning environment and their teacher is able to provide attractive learning activities.

4.4.6 Training for Teaching English

It will be an advantage for the English Language teacher in a kindergarten to be equipped with the necessary training to teach English as a second language as she will have knowledge on how to teach young learners in an interesting and fun-filled manner. She should also have knowledge of Early Childhood Education as this will provide the teacher with knowledge of a child‛s physical, emotional and cognitive development from age 0-6. The following interview excerpts will reveal the teacher‛s experience and qualification.

> **Researcher:** Explain the training you have received to teach the English Language?
>
> **Teacher:** Ok, er I don‛t have a official training but I because I join er my courses, there are some of the lessons that provide me information on how to teach er English as a second language so I use that lessons to er teach these children.
>
> **Researcher:** Do you think you have sufficient training to teach the English Language? Why?
>
> **Teacher:** Ok, er right now I don‛t think I have the sufficient training because I think I need to be er to more familiar on how to teach er these children at this generation because er to deal with them I need er more exposure or especially how to deal with kids.
>
> (Interview Excerpts: IT 37, IT 38, IT 45, IT 46)

4.4.7 Most Challenging Skill to Teach

The syllabus of the NPSC has emphasized the four skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing in the teaching of the English Language in preschool. Collectively these skills are referred to as the English Language Arts (ELA). A strong foundation in ELA allows children to express and appreciate learning through creative and fun-filled activities.

The following interview excerpt reveals the most challenging skill to teach according to the teacher and suggestions to improve the English Language.

Researcher: "Among the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing which is the most challenging skill to teach and why?"

Teacher: "Ok, the most challenging among four skills that er I found from my students is speaking skill because speaking skills er need more practice because they have lack of practice er from their own house so they only depend at their school

(Interview Excerpt: IT 44)

The teacher feels that the children need the English speaking environment to learn a new language that is not their mother tongue. Children have to listen to the words often to learn a language well. The teacher then provided the following explanation on how to improve the children's language.

Researcher: "What are your suggestions to improve your children's mastery of the English Language?"

Teacher: "My suggestions to improve the children's mastery of the English Language is er collaboration between teachers and parents because er when they collaborate together it is actually can support the children's development because er at school they only spend about half a day but they

spend most of the time at home so the teachers and er parents can collaborate on how to assist the students

(Interview Excerpts: IT 47 & IT 48)

The teacher then went on to explain how teachers can advice parents on how to help children daily and how they can use social media for example instagram by recording their children‟s progress and this can assist the children to make improvement in their English learning.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, the findings from the data analysis have been organised into themes through the six phase thematic analysis framework created by Braun & Clarke, (2006, p. 92) to answer the three research questions. Segment of data that were related to the research questions were coded. Codes were examined carefully before they were fit together into themes for each of the research questions.

For the sake of clarity the observation notes and interview transcription were named (refer to 4.1). The three elements of the three questions such as the physical environment, teaching resources and the teacher‟s contribution for a conducive environment for teaching and learning of early literacy were thoroughly explored accompanied by appropriate photographs where necessary.

The implications of these findings are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The NPSC (2017) consists of six strands which are meant to develop a balance human that is innovative and possesses creative and critical thinking. This study had undertaken to work on the communication strand which involves the English Language and it intended to explore a conducive environment for the teaching and learning of the early literacy in English in a private Malaysian kindergarten. The objectives of this research were as follows:

1. To investigate if the physical classroom environment is conducive for play-based activities.

2. To explore the various resources available in the teaching and learning of early literacy.

3. To find out how the English Language teacher can contribute towards the children"s English Language teaching and learning environment.

Following are the summary of the research findings:-

5.2 Summary of the Research Findings

Data for this study were analysed using the six phase thematic analysis framework created by Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 92). Segment of data that were related to the research questions were coded. Codes were examined carefully before they were fit together into themes for each of the research questions.

From the data the themes that were derived for question one were; lack of space, lighting, classroom arrangement, noise factor and safety/cleanliness. For question two, the themes that were established from the codes were; lesson plan, charts, the use of workbooks, resources with multiple uses, age appropriate storybooks and audio visual aids.

As for question three seven themes were selected from the codes. They were; language used by teacher, use of mother tongue, appropriateness of resources used, children‟s response towards the lesson, teacher‟s perception of her role as English teacher in a kindergarten, training for teaching English and most challenging skill to teach.

All the different sources of data collected were presented under each theme for the sake of triangulation which will enable to validate this study.

5.3 DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

The analysis of the three research question of this qualitative case study will be discussed in this section and it will be compared to the guidelines provided by the National Preschool Quality Standard (NPQS)/Standard Kualiti Prasekolah Kebangsaan (SKPK) which is attached as Appendix H.

5.4 The Physical Classroom Environment

From the findings related to the first research objective, the following observations were made:

Having a pleasant experience with their physical environment is important for preschool children as it can have a long-lasting effect on their development (Martin, 2004, (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). However, according to Joshi (2008), the designing of preschools in Malaysia does not give importance to the physical environment. Unfortunately, this was found to be true where the findings of this research were concern.

The guideline set by the *Garis Panduan Perancangan dan Penubuhan Tadika dan Taska* (2017), pg. 13, is to provide a minimum of 15sq.ft. floor area for each child as this will enable students to move around safely and with it ease without having to

knock into one another. Regrettably, the classroom that was studied had a floor area of 260sq.ft. and when divided between 15 children give each child an area of 17sq.ft. each. However, the class consists of 7 child-sized square tables, 15 child-sized chairs, a teacher's table and three cupboards for storage. Therefore this classroom layout leaves behind limited space for the children's movement.

Consequently, the lack of space in the kindergarten has caused hindrance to the teachers in carrying out their lessons effectively as the arrangement of tables and chairs in the classroom makes the class crowded and it restrict movement of the teacher and the children. The classroom was used mainly for written work and for lessons that do not require the children to move about. Children are expected to be seated at their desks and working on their own. Activities that involve group work or pair work is not possible to take place in this kind of setting. Nevertheless, the National Preschool Quality Standard (NPQS)/Standard Kualiti Prasekolah Kebangsaan (SKPK) has also provided the guidelines that state that layout of furniture and equipment should be appropriate for the activities that are implemented and they should be enough space for children to move about safely during activities (NPQS/SKPK, CPE1b & CPE1d).

According to (Leinonen and Vennine, 2012; Abbas et a., 2012), a cosy corner for children for withdrawal and security which can also be used to nap or read a book would be ideal in a kindergarten. However, due to space constraint children do not have space for this kind of activity. The teacher too believed that a classroom with different corners for different activities would be perfect for a kindergarten. Apparently, it is also stated in the NPQS/SKPK guidelines that it would be ideal to have at least two learning corners in the classroom (NPQS/SKPK, CPE 1f). However, due to lack of space in the classroom it did not have any learning corners.

To make up for the lack of space in the classroom, the teacher uses the porch when she conducts English lessons that require the children to move about. However,

the porch which is partly shaded is hot on sunny days and it causes discomfort for the teacher as well as the children.

Lack of space has also caused the class to be disorderly as there is no space for storage of children‟s work and teaching resources. Children‟s work, toys and teaching resources are placed on cabinet tops and on teacher‟s table.

It was also found that due to direct sunlight into the classroom as well as the porch, children and teachers feel uncomfortable which could affect teaching and learning in the classroom. Furthermore, there is noise factor caused by passing cars outside the classroom and also from the adjoining classroom. However, observation shows that the kindergarten is safe and clean and parents are assured of safety of their children.

5.5 Resources for Teaching English Language

Mathew and Alidmat (2013) expressed that the teaching materials that are used by teachers should create interest in the learners and bring about enthusiasm during classroom lessons and when it is used effectively it replaces monotonous learning environments.

According to the NPQS/SKPK (2017) it is stated that teaching resources used should be appropriate and stimulate the children‟s mind to think. Furthermore educational resources used should also create an interesting learning environment for students (NPQS/SKPK, CTR 1b).

Data collected through observation showed that most of the charts in the classroom did not serve any purpose and they were not displayed in a manner that will be beneficial for the children, although some of the charts were used as teaching aids, the pictures on the charts were too many and too small and could not be viewed clearly

by the children. However, some of the word cards that are made by the teachers themselves are big and clear.

Incidentally, the teacher has also stated that where possible she brings in real life items such as fruit and vegetables and she also provided pictures to show evidence of the activities that were carried out using real life items (refer to Figure 4.12 and Figure 4.13)

Workbooks based on the NPSC (2017) were also used as teaching resources which are used for the children to practice writing, colouring and the topics in the workbooks are used for assessment and also for vocabulary. Nevertheless, teachers have the obligation to complete all workbooks by the end of the school term which takes up the time set aside for oral work and other activities.

Story books are also interesting teaching resources very especially to improved children"s listening and reading skills. However, age appropriate books were not available in this school. As for multi-sensory resources, the teacher claimed that where possible she brings along real life items to make lessons interesting as well as to give children a multi-sensory experience for example, to be able to smell, touch, taste, feel and see the objects (refer to Figures 4.12 and 4.13).

Data from observation showed that the only audio visual aids that was available was a laptop which is not very proper to use as a teaching aid as only a few children can view the screen on the laptop at a time. The teacher too believes that an LCD projector with good sound system would make lessons interesting and appealing to children. Unfortunately, this is not possible due to the availability of space and funds.

5.6 Teacher's Contribution

The final element that was analysed for this research was on teacher factors involved in the teaching and learning of the English Language. It would be ideal for the Malaysian kindergarten teacher to be well-versed in the NPSC (2017) which gives importance to the "learning through play" approach for meaningful learning experiences (Ministry of Education, 2017). The teacher who was researched had knowledge of the NPSC (refer to Page 00). Nevertheless, the teacher admitted that she does not have any training to teach the English Language to young learners which is a disadvantage for the teacher.

Knowing a child's overall development will be an added advantage for a teacher as the teacher will have knowledge on the child's readiness for learning. Unfortunately, the teacher of this research did not possess an Early Childhood Education diploma or any other necessary certificate in this field which is also a challenging factor for her.

Some of the guidelines provided by the NPQS/SKPK (2017) on the area of delivery of lessons by teacher are; teacher to provide positive feedback to students in the form of praise and encouragement; explanation of lesson should be simple and clear and simple; students" should take an active participation in the learning activities and there should be active interaction between student to student, teacher with students and students with teaching materials (NPQS/SKPK, CTF 1g, 1j, 1k & 1l).

From the lesson that was observed by the researcher it was found that although the children responded well at the beginning of the lesson but due to the length of the lesson which went on for more than an hour including the activity and the written work, the momentum could not be maintained throughout the lesson. The teacher also failed to notice the children at the back row who were hardly participating in the lesson as in the opinion of the researcher the teaching resources used were too small and not so

visible for them. Nevertheless, any judgement of the teacher cannot be concluded from this one lesson that was observed as according to the teacher she uses different approaches for her lessons and her children like to learn English because of the activities that are provided from the lesson.

Another important factor that was observed was the children"s positive relationship towards their English Language teacher which was also a motivation factor for the children to learn a new language (Moon, 2005 & Clair 1988, p.2). This was observed throughout the duration of the research.

It was also noted that even though the physical environment was not conducive to carry out play-based activities extensively, efforts were made by the teachers to make use of the available space very especially at the porch to carry out fun-filled activities for the children where possible.

Teaching resources that were available in the school were in accordance to the space that was available in the classroom and since storage space was limited, new teaching resources were not added and the existing ones were recycled. Since the use of LCD projector may require extra space and funds, where possible the laptop was used to show images and for the purpose of music and movement. Though the lack of space is a hindrance for play based activities, it is overcomed by the teacher"s enthusiasm to make her lessons interesting and well understood and her dedication towards her work was seen by the activities sheets that she personally prepare to reinforce what has been taught. The following section will state the implication of this study.

5.7 Implication of the Study

This exploratory, qualitative study was conducted to explore the conducive environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in a kindergarten in Malaysia. The three areas that were explored were the physical setting of the kindergarten, the various resources available for the teaching and learning of early literacy and the teacher"s contribution tothe teaching and learning environment.

The NPSC (2017) has established the „learning through play" approach for meaningful learning experiences. Therefore the lack of space in the kindergarten that was studied is seen as a shortcoming as the children had to use the partly shaded porch to carry out activities that required children to move around. The porch becomes hot and uncomfortable on sunny days and on rainy days the children would have to stay indoors. However, the English teacher made the best out of this situation by carrying out activites when the weather permits.

Beside, although there were various resources available, due to the lack of space for storage new resources and the existing teaching aids were placed randomly around the classroom which makes the classroom to look congested.

Finally, the teacher herself admitted that although she has a degree in English but she does not possess any qualification for teaching English to kindergarten children and also knowledge about their development stages which has placed her in a disadvantaged position. Therefore the English teacher in a kindergarten who wishes to be successful in her field should be equipped with knowledge of teaching English as a second language and also knowledge of Early Childhood Education.

5.8 Theoretical Implications of this Study

This study is influenced by two theories and a teaching model. The main theory of this study is the Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development. An educator should have a sound knowledge of this theory because it is important for teachers to build a strong relationship with their students and create a communication rich classroom which will involve the parents as well. In the interview, the class teacher suggested that parents should collaborate with teachers to strengthen the children's English Language learning. According to Bronfenbrenner, the children's immediate associate as well as the community and culture greatly influenced their development.

According to this theory, Bronfenbrenner has created three separate systems (microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem). Every system is important for the child's development. The child's microsystem consists of events such as relationship between peers, parents and teachers. As for the exosystem, it consists of the events that take place in a child's community. As for the child's macrosystem, it is shaped by the expectations and norms of society.Thus, Bronfenbrenner's theory has provided a framework for teachers and parents to build effective relationships from and surround the child with a positive environment which will enable the child to achieve his fullest potential possible.

The next theory that influences this study is the Constructivist Theory. The NPSC has stipulated the "learning through play" approach as an effective teaching and learning approach for meaningful learning experiences (Ministry of Education, 2017). This is in accordance to constructivist learning theories whereby learners construct meaning based on first hand interaction through play as they learn and develop in a holistic manner.

However, the most important aspect for play is the availability of space which will enable the children to move around freely without any hindrance. Play activities

had to be limited in the school that was researched due to the lack of space. When the weather permits, the teacher was able to carry out activities at the porch of the school which was partly shaded. On days when it is sunny, there is too much heat at the porch which makes the teacher and the children to feel hot and uncomfortable. Despite this setback, the teacher tries her best to conduct activities as much as possible.

To carry out interesting activities, various teaching resources are needed. However, due to lack of storage space, the teacher is not able to store it in a proper manner so she cannot add on to her collection of resources which will cause her to use the same resources over and over again. This may not be proper for the children and lessons may not be as interesting as the teacher wishes it to be.

Finally, the teaching model that influences this study is the Total Physical Response (TPR) Method. This method attracts the attention of young learners as it does not involve text and teaching takes place in the form of songs, games and stories which is accompanied by actions. This is a fun way of learning a second language as learners have to listen and perform what the teacher says. The children are encouraged to speak only when they have internalised sufficient basis in the language. The school that was researched uses this method in their English Language teaching as it was stated in their lesson plan (refer to Figure 4.7).

5.9 Suggestions from this Study

The following are recommendation based on the three factors that were investigated in this study which are; a physical environment that is conducive, teaching resources for effective understanding of the lessons and teacher factor that affect the learning of early literacy in a private Malaysian kindergarten.

1. A learning environment that is conducive for kindergarten children includes spatial planning, esthetical qualities, appropriate use of furnishing and finishing,

safety features and favourable environment for human comfort. Therefore the standard guideline to setup preschool in Malaysia which is the "Garis Panduan Penubuhan Tadika dan Taska (Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Semananjung Malaysia, 2012) has to provide a comprehensive guideline on the design aspect that provides the infrastructures that will fulfil the children's unique demands and developmental needs. This will enable kindergarten teachers to implement a play based approach to teaching as stipulated by the National Preschool Curriculum.

2. English is taught as a second language in kindergartens and for almost all the children in Malaysia, it is a not their mother tongue and it is a new language that is introduced to them. Therefore to make lessons interesting and meaningful teachers have to make visual tools such as pictures, posters, charts, photos, illustrations, work cards, icons, symbols, sketches, figures, presentations, mind maps and even buy real life items. These visual tools can be used for a variety of activities from speaking and writing to enhancing students' vocabulary and grammar skills. However, these teaching aids requires a lot of time, funds as well as places to store them to be reused at another time. Stakeholders of kindergartens have to keep in mind when setting up kindergartens to allocate yearly funds to provide their kindergartens with the best teaching resources for the children's optimal language development.

3. The Ministry of Education should organise in-service courses and seminars for Early Childhood Educators on the usage of teaching resources in Early Childhood Education Centres.

4. ICT should be available in kindergartens as audio-visual materials can make lessons easy to understand as the images that a child seen being pictured is clearly understood and retained in the memory than through reading verbally

using descriptions. Audio-visual aids can motivate learners and help them to lower their anxiety levels and these make the classroom more interactive and lively as it brings the real world into the classroom.

5. There is an urgent need to improve the Malaysian Early Childhood sector and the focus must be on the quality of teachers staffing these sectors. Teacher education programmes should be reviewed, reformed and upgraded and tailored to meet the unique developmental and academic needs of children.

6. Early literacy skills that are age appropriate and according to the attention levels of the children should be incorporated as often as possible in preschool classrooms as it has a significant impact on the child‟s literacy performance in primary as well as secondary school level.

5.10 Suggestions for Future Research

English occupies a significant position in the Malaysian Education system even as early as in the kindergarten level. Hence, it would be beneficial for the authorities concerned to ascertain the ideal environment in a kindergarten for the teaching and learning of early literacy in the English Language. Consequently, research in this area is of utmost importance and future research of the above nature is recommended for other types of kindergarten setting such as the prasekolah or a comparative study between the suburban kindergarten and a prasekolah to see the differences and similarity in the environment and their effects on the teaching and learning of the English language.

5.11 CONCLUSION

This exploratory, qualitative study was conducted to investigate a conducive environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in the English Language in a private kindergarten in Malaysia. It was discovered that all the three factors such as the physical environment of the kindergarten, teaching resources and teacher factors contribute towards creating an ideal environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy.

The physical environment of the kindergarten is to enable play-based approach as stipulated by the NPSC (2017). However, due to the limited space that was available in the school that was researched, there had to be restrictions when carrying out play-based activities. The limited space in the kindergarten was also a hindrance where teaching resources were concerned because there was limited storage space even for the existing teaching aids. Hence, new teaching aids would cause a problem.

The findings of this study show that all the three areas that were researched had to be improved in order to provide an ideal environment for the teaching and learning of early literacy in English Language in kindergartens. This predicament could be true to many kindergartens that are operating in residential areas with similar set-up in suburban areas. Hence, this research could give an insight on the challenges faced by teachers and appropriate measures could be taken by the authorities concerned in overcoming at least part of the challenges encountered by teachers. Though this area of research has been researched at all levels of educational institution from primary, secondary to tertiary levels, it is still at an infant stage where kindergartens in Malaysia are concerned. Since one of the initiatives of the National Education system was the call for an improved bilingual proficiency – that every Malaysian child will be at minimum, operationally proficient in Bahasa Malaysia as the national language and also competent in English as the international language of communication so that when students leave

school, they will be able to work in both the Bahasa Malaysia and English language environment, the authorities concerned should work towards bringing remedies to improve the environment to promote language development among kindergarten learners. Subsequently more research in these areas has to be conducted to find a concrete solution to the teaching and learning of early literacy in English in a private Malaysian kindergarten.

Early childhood period has a critical importance for the development of emergent literacy skills. Emergent literacy skills have a significant impact on the child's literacy performance in primary school years as well as overall academic success. Thus, emergent literacy should be adopted by preschool teachers, and should be included frequently in in-class activities. In addition to this, the families should be informed about this topic and encouraged to demonstrate and support their children's emergent literacy activities at home. Also, studies that will increase attention, interest, and motivation should not be ignored. Emergent literacy practices appropriate to children's age and developmental attention levels should be included in the program.

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