

ISSUES WITH IMPLEMENTING TEACHING MATERIALS FROM A STANDARDISED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME: PERSPECTIVES AMONG ESL TEACHERS

¹*WENDY HIEW

²JILL MURRAY

*¹Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning,
Universiti Malaysia Sabah,*

Jalan UMS, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

**Corresponding author: wenhiew@ums.edu.my*

²Faculty of Medicine, Health and Human Sciences, Macquarie University,

New South Wales 2109, Australia

Received: 25 May 2023 | Revised: 24 June 2023

Accepted: 5 July 2023 | Published: 11 July 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51200/manu.v34i1.3337>

Abstract This study investigates the issues experienced by ESL teacher participants in implementing materials and activities from the Professional Up-skilling of English Language Teachers (ProELT) programme in their language classrooms. A review of past studies indicated limited research on large-scale, standardised professional development programmes involving English language teachers from primary and secondary schools (heterogeneous teaching levels) and urban and rural areas (heterogeneous districts) participating in the same programme. Hence, this study aims to fill this research gap by adopting a mixed methods explanatory sequential design utilising interviews, focus groups, a questionnaire survey and the ProELT coursebook. The findings reveal more than half of the modules in each section of the coursebook do not complement the Malaysia curriculum specifications for primary and secondary schools; this triangulates with the interview findings that most of the teachers found it challenging to adopt the ProELT teaching materials and activities in their lessons due to the lack of relevance of the course materials with their teaching curriculum and target students. In addition, findings from the questionnaire further substantiate the teachers' suggestions that the ProELT content should complement the English language curriculum syllabus. The findings of this study have implications for the programme providers and the programme designers in designing future development programmes that cater to the teachers' needs, personalising separate primary and secondary-level programme contents, and focusing on pedagogical content knowledge and subject matter vis-a-vis generic learning.

Keywords: Coursebook, ESL teachers, standardised professional development programme, teacher professional development, teaching materials.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional development programmes are organised by programme providers such as the Education Ministry and the education departments to assist teachers in developing their instructional skills and knowledge. Programme providers highly favour programmes with approaches that centre on skill- and knowledge development because they are “clearly focused, easily organised and packaged, and relatively self-contained” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992: 3). However, these approaches are criticised for disregarding teachers’ instructional needs, and current knowledge and experience in the development of their classroom skills. According to Dyer et al. (2004), the reason for this lack of significance between teachers’ needs and professional development programmes can be traced to centralised, top-down decision-making and planning from top bureaucrats.

An example of the negative impact of centralised development projects can be seen in a one-week, in-service training in Turkey for primary English language teachers. The training aimed to assist teachers in familiarising with the new teaching syllabus and instructional techniques for primary school learners (Uysal, 2012). The teacher participants’ feedback indicated a lack of compatibility of the training between the course contents and teachers’ needs. In addition, the teachers lamented a lack of opportunity to discuss instructional problems, components in material development and course assessment. Another example relates to the Operation Blackboard project in India that cost an astounding £250 million. The project aimed to train teachers in adopting a learner-centred instructional approach via cascade training “with little attention to how the gap between teachers’ current practice and the desired behaviour was to be narrowed” (Dyer, 1996: 33). The findings of the study revealed some teachers rejected the teaching and learning aids due to a lack of relevance of the aids to their learning needs, poor quality materials and a lack of support from the programme provider in demonstrating effective strategies to implement the teaching and learning aids. These studies echo Kennedy’s (1988) argument that top-down

professional development programmes seldom garner teachers' feedback; if so, the feedback rarely reaches the programme providers. In addition, these studies also revealed the important role of potential teacher participants being included in the planning and decision-making of a proposed new programme. By taking these matters into consideration, programme providers could better ensure that financial resources are optimally used, and the programme objectives fulfil teacher's professional needs and are effectively delivered.

The Malaysia Ministry of Education, in collaboration with British Council Malaysia, funded the large-scale *Professional Up-skilling of English Language Teachers* (ProELT) programme. It was a national-level professional development programme that gathered primary and secondary school teachers together at designated training centres including schools, education departments and teacher training centres. Questions arise as to whether the ProELT — a *standardised* professional development programme — could fulfil the teachers' professional needs in teaching the English language to their students with varied language proficiency levels and whether the teachers would implement the ProELT course contents in their lessons given that they are required to adhere to the Malaysia curriculum specifications in preparing their lessons.

This paper is part of a study by Hiew and Murray (2021) on the ProELT programme in Sabah (Borneo), Malaysia. This paper focuses on the issues that the ProELT teacher participants encountered to incorporate materials from the programme into their language instructional lessons. The major findings showed that more than half of the ProELT coursebook modules were unrelated to the curriculum specifications; this resulted in a majority of the teachers in the interview and focus group not adopting the ProELT teaching materials and activities in their lessons. This paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the study on the programme providers and the programme designers.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROFESSIONAL UP-SKILLING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER PROGRAMME

The Malaysia Ministry of Education introduced the ProELT via the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 to enhance the language proficiency and instructional skills of English as a second language (ESL) teachers (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The ProELT was designed and undertaken by The British Council involving 14,000 primary and secondary school teachers (British Council, n.d.). The trainers were native speakers from America, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, among others. The ProELT participants were required to complete 480 hours of face-to-face (240 hours) and online learning (240 hours). Teacher participants from urban and rural school were assigned to the *cluster* mode while teachers from interior and remote schools were assigned to the *centralised* mode. The cluster mode training was conducted at teacher training centres once a week for six hours. The centralised mode training was conducted four phases: Phase 1 and 3 (face-to-face and online), Phase 2 and 4 (online). The ProELT participants were selected via the Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) and Aptis. Both tests measured the teachers' four language skills. Teachers who scored B1 and B2 (independent level) were required to participate in the programme. The participants were a combination of primary and secondary school teachers within the same training group. This was rather unusual as teachers from different levels do not usually attend the same professional development programme, especially if it pertains to instructional development. This is because primary and secondary-level teachers deal with different groups of learners and apply different pedagogical approaches.

The design of the ProELT as a standardised professional development programme raised concerns regarding the relevance of its course content to the teachers' instructional needs and the curriculum specifications. This is because it was rather unusual for primary and secondary school teachers to attend the same instructional training programme, and both teaching levels involve young language learners and young adult learners, respectively, that requires different pedagogical approaches. Many state-of-the-art teacher professional development programmes were personalised according to a specific teaching group and the teaching needs of the participants. For

example, Diamond et al. (2014) designed a professional development intervention programme for Grade 5 Science teachers in order to enhance teachers' content knowledge and student achievement outcomes. In addition to conducting workshops and providing school site support, a unique feature of this intervention programme was the comprehensive stand-alone science curriculum, which was specifically aligned with the benchmark tested by the state science assessment by consulting the state science content standards. Results from the intervention showed a significant effect on teachers' content knowledge but not on the student's learning outcomes. This was probably due to the timing of the study, which was conducted in the first year of the three-year intervention programme (Diamond et al., 2014).

Another similar example of a state-of-the-art programme was a study by Lee et al. (2004), who designed an inquiry-based science professional development programme for Grades 3, 4 and 5 teachers who taught diverse student groups. The programme aimed to enhance the teachers' knowledge of science content and develop their instructional skills in teaching science to diverse student groups. The intervention programme was carried out for three years. Statistical analysis indicated overall positive performance by the students at the end of each school year. Hence, content-focused professional programmes have been shown to be beneficial for teachers' and students' learning outcomes, and worthwhile especially if they involve long-term time investment by the teachers and trainers. In the case of the ProELT, the content of the programme consisted of language input and skills development as well as the enhancement of teaching knowledge and skills.

Hence, the justifications for undertaking the present study on the ProELT are as follows:

- (i) to compare the compatibility of the ProELT coursebook content with the Malaysian curriculum specifications for primary and secondary levels.
- (ii) to explore the impact the ProELT on ESL teachers' adoption of the programme materials in their lessons.

Based on the above justifications, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

- (i) To what extent are the components in the ProELT coursebook content compatible with the Malaysian curriculum specifications for primary and secondary levels?
- (ii) What are the impacts of the ProELT on ESL teachers' adoption of the programme materials in their lessons?

This study fills the literature gap by examining the impact of implementing standardised teaching materials among ESL teachers from primary and secondary schools within the same programme. This study is significant because teachers need to apply different instructional approaches to teach young learners (primary school) and young adult learners (secondary school), therefore, customised course materials would be necessary. This ensures the teacher participants will fully benefit from the programme and are able to implement the materials in their classroom. The findings from this study would also benefit programme designers and programme providers in designing and offering programmes that fulfil the professional needs of the teachers.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROELT COURSEBOOK CONTENT

The ProELT coursebook contains 18 modules including three review modules (Modules 6, 12 and 18) and a glossary. Each module is assigned to eight sections with a specific theme, and cover instructional practices and language activities as follows:

1. **Language (including Language Analysis):** The language activities include speaking, listening, reading, writing, and vocabulary tasks. The **language analysis section** covers grammatical items such as tense. It includes practice activities and most of the sections end with a writing activity that requires teachers to identify and rectify mistakes in sentences or an article.
2. **Methodology:** This section introduces a variety of teaching activities such as poems, project works, listening and reading; lesson planning; teaching approaches according to learner styles (using Multiple Intelligence); monitoring techniques for reading,

speaking and grammar lessons; getting/giving feedback; designing supplementary teaching materials; and developing a valid and authentic progress test.

3. **In the Classroom:** Teachers apply the theory and practice from the methodology section and design an activity for their students. The teachers later present their ideas to their groups, which is similar to micro-teaching.
4. **Pronunciation:** This section introduces teachers to the importance of and variations in word stress and intonation.
5. **Magazine:** This section includes a brief, magazine-like article to reinforce teachers' knowledge of the module topic, which also includes additional individual, pair, or group activities. Some of the articles were adapted from the 'Teaching English' website at www.teachingenglish.org.uk.
6. **Vocabulary:** In order to expand teachers' vocabulary bank, teachers are introduced to words, phrases, phrasal verbs, and collocations, some of which are related to the module topic.
7. **Activity Page:** It provides additional classroom activities pertaining to one or more of the sections in the module for teachers to practice.
8. **Reflection:** Teachers review and reflect on the module they have learnt using posters, poems, or diagrams; reflect on new ideas they have gathered from the module; or review changes that they might adapt in their instructional practice, among others.

In this study, each section was analysed by comparing the compatibility of its content with the primary and secondary school curriculum specifications that serve as references for the teachers in preparing their lessons (see Tables 2 to 8).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed methods explanatory sequential design utilising a questionnaire survey, interviews, and focus groups with the teachers. The first phase of the study involved distributing paper questionnaires to the teachers

followed by the second phase that involved conducting interview and focus groups with the teachers and analysing the coursebook content. The strength of a mixed methods design lies in its triangulation approach that compares both quantitative and qualitative data from a study to present a more robust finding. What lacks in a qualitative design (e.g., statistical figures) is compensated by the adoption of a quantitative design and vice versa.

Participants

1,182 teachers in Sabah participated in the ProELT. Out of this total, 350 teachers were sampled using cluster sampling for the first phase of this study, in which they completed a questionnaire survey. Ten teachers volunteered to participate in the focus group (i.e., volunteer sampling) by filling in their details in a section of the questionnaire that invited survey respondents to participate in the focus group. The interview and focus group participants were all female senior teachers aged between 30 to 51 years old. They held degrees and master's degrees in B.Ed. TESL, BA. Hons and M. Ed. TESL. The teachers have been teaching between six to 28 years in primary and secondary schools located in the urban and rural districts. Pseudonyms are used to ensure the participants' anonymity. This paper will present selected parts of the survey, individual interviews, and focus group data.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to 350 teacher participants in seven districts namely Keningau, Kota Belud, Kota Kinabalu, Papar, Sandakan, Tawau and Tuaran via their trainers when they gathered for their weekly training. Three hundred-three questionnaires were returned to the researcher, with a return rate of 91.2 per cent.

This study utilised a semi-structured interview. The researcher explains or rephrases the questions if the respondents are unclear about the semi-structured questions in order to ensure more validity in the respondents' answers as it adheres to the meaning of the questions (David & Sutton, 2004). Each interview lasted on average an hour. The individual interviews with the teachers were conducted at two venues, namely Universiti Malaysia

Sabah (UMS), and a discussion room at the Sabah State Library, due to the proximity between the teachers' homes and the venues. The focus group interview with a group of teachers was conducted at one of the Teacher Activity Centres on the outskirts of Kota Kinabalu. The initial plan was to conduct only focus groups with the teachers, but five participants could not agree on a date and time to gather for the focus groups due to the timing. Hence, they requested an individual interview, and the researcher gladly obliged. The interview and focus group were conducted for one hour. The present researchers examined the ProELT coursebook at the final stage of the data collection. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected for triangulation purpose.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires were analysed using descriptive analysis (namely frequency, mean and standard deviation) and inferential analysis specifically the Mann-Whitney U test. For this paper, only the descriptive data (specifically the frequency data) will be presented to triangulate the interview participants' responses (qualitative data) with the questionnaire participants' responses to suggestion on changes to the ProELT contents.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word and uploaded to NVivo. The interview texts were analysed using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008).

McDonough et al. (2013) suggests adopting internal evaluation for programme materials. In the case of the ProELT, the coursebook was evaluated by utilising a three-column table divided into *Primary*, *Secondary*, and *Instructional Practice and Knowledge*. Eleven primary and secondary level curriculum specifications namely six from Year 1 to Year 6, and five from Form 1 to Form 5, respectively, were crossed-checked against each item in the coursebook module. A tick (/) was marked under the *Primary* and/or *Secondary* column if an item from the coursebook module was taught in the primary and/or secondary curriculum specification. Similarly, an (X) was marked if an item was not taught in either one of the curriculum specifications. Certain items in the coursebook module may pertain to

teachers’ instructional knowledge and skills and knowledge despite not being part of the curriculum specification. In this case, a tick (/) is inserted under the *Instructional Practice and Knowledge* column. In total the researchers reviewed sixteen modules.

FINDINGS

Teachers’ Feedback on the Programme Content Survey

Out of the 303 questionnaire respondents, there were 136 responses (44.9 per cent) pertaining to the ProELT content. From this figure, only 75 (55.6 per cent) responses contained actual *suggestions* for changes to the programme content. The remaining 47 responses pertained to positive feedback, and 14 responses were critiques of the programme content. Table 1 presents the twelve suggestions as proposed by the respondents.

Table 1 Teachers’ Suggested Changes to the ProELT Contents

No.	Suggestions	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Based on the English language curriculum syllabus	26	34.7
2.	More language skills and grammar exercises	10	13.3
3.	Focus on teaching methodology	10	13.3
4.	Based on teachers’ needs	6	8.0
5.	Based on students’ needs	6	8.0
6.	Based on the Malaysian context	5	6.7
7.	Simplified contents	4	5.3
8.	Separate content for primary and secondary school teachers	3	4.0
9.	More Aptis test practices	2	2.7
10.	Based on participants’ previous knowledge and experience	1	1.3
11.	Varied reading texts	1	1.3
12.	Exclude online assignments	1	1.3
	Total	75	100

In Table 1, 26 respondents (34.7 per cent) proposed that the content should be based on their teaching syllabus to incorporate the ProELT activities into their lessons. This finding supports the analysis of the ProELT coursebook, which revealed that more than half of the modules were irrelevant to the curriculum specifications. Ten respondents (13.3 per cent) wanted the content to focus more on teaching methodology. Respondents TU6 and KKA14 wrote (all of the extracts from herewith are taken verbatim from the questionnaire respondents and interview participants):

More on micro and macro teaching. Assessing feedback. Link between methodology and pedagogy. (TU6)
I hope to have more teaching and learning skills/activities which suit to the young pupils to be taught. (KKA14)

Meanwhile, six respondents (8.0 per cent) suggested that the content should be based on teachers' and students' needs. Five respondents (6.7 per cent) proposed that it should be based on the Malaysian context. The following are two suggestions from respondents KG14 and KG45:

[The content] needs to be improved and if possible, to use the local context. The contents used now are mostly [based on] foreign context. (KG14)

The content should be more towards Malaysian context and should be more towards topic highlighted in the English textbook such as environment, famous person, health, and social issues. (KG45)

Three respondents (4.0 per cent) wanted the programme content to be separated between primary and secondary school teachers. Respondents KK(B)4 and TU1, who are primary school teachers, wrote that most of the contents did not suit their teaching level:

The content should be divided into two categories for secondary and primary. Most of the materials used is for secondary level. (KK(B)4)

The content is more individual benefitted. As a primary school teacher, most of the content does not suit my teaching. But the content did help me to improvise my English proficiency. (TU1)

KK(B)10 also commented about the drawback of the standardised course content:

We have participating teachers from primary to pre-university teachers. Contents may not be applicable for all, and the high level of difficulty may be a challenge for primary school teachers and vice versa. The content is also not ‘Malaysian-based syllabus’ so it’s a challenge to all teachers. (KKB10)

The aforementioned responses from KK(B)4, TU1, and KK(B)10 were consistent with the findings from the teacher interviews in the following section, which indicated the majority of the teachers, except one, found the programme content did not suit their curriculum specifications, and they were unable to relate the contents to their teaching.

TEACHER INTERVIEWS

What do you think of the coursebook and materials?

Responses from the teachers to this question indicated a lack of relevance between the coursebook and the curriculum specification. This lack of relevance led the teachers to view that the coursebooks to be unsuitable for their students’ level and time-consuming to adapt to their student’s learning needs. For example, Manjit, who teaches primary level, explained that most of the materials did not relate to her textbook syllabus:

Most of them I find are more applicable to the secondary level. Not much for the primary... some of the activities can apply with the primary teachers but most of them you can say is more to the secondary level. I find it’s more like 20 per cent for the primary and the rest 80 per cent more to the secondary school.

Manjit also opined that the programme content did not suit her students’ level:

I find most of the activities and materials are more applicable to secondary level. Not much for the primary. For example, we were taught a listening game by my trainer, but it did not suit my students’ language proficiency. So, I asked him, “Michael (pseudonym), what

about my weak students who don't know how to read? I got 12 of them. So, what do I do with them?"

Betty, who teaches Form 6 explained that the grammar components of the ProELT did not complement the Form 6 MUET syllabus. One of those irrelevant components was 'if' conditionals. She said:

I've been taught [in the ProELT] recently there are four 'if' conditionals. I don't know will that help my students by knowing the four 'if' conditionals.

She elaborated:

You know MUET is a proficiency test. We are concentrating on the skills, how to answer questions on reading comprehension, how do you get contextual clues, find contextual clues, doing anaphoric references to get your answers and all these things.

Betty also described the challenge of adapting the ProELT materials and planning them into her lessons:

It takes time to adapt and plan. You can't use the same activities again. You want to adapt and change the module to suit your classes and even to suit your students. Of course, I cannot teach the way I teach Form 6 to my Form 1 students. I already take up, sometimes, more than one hour to think what I am going to teach, and I'll be typing, you know, putting in my record book and all these. I already used up one hour. If I want to [adapt the materials], how many hours will I need?

Justina echoed Betty's view about adapting the materials:

I think the material is general. It's up for the teacher to really...they have to know how to use it later.

In addition, the rural teachers in the teacher interviews stated that the ProELT coursebook contained general topics. Similar to Betty and Manjit, they also claimed that the coursebook was not designed according to their curriculum specifications:

Justina: I'm from the secondary school. The other [ProELT] teachers are from primary school. This course does not teach using the school syllabus. It's general.

Jacqueline: No. I don't think they even touch on our syllabus. We are not using our teaching syllabus [in the ProELT].

Farah: I have a slightly better understanding of my subject but not much because the training module does not fully follow our primary school syllabus.

Danielle: I agree with Farah. I am teaching in secondary school, and I have only managed to gain just a bit of knowledge on my subject.

How much of the materials have you implemented in your lessons?

Responses from the majority of the teachers to the above question revealed that they did not implement the programme resources in their lessons, which indicated a discouraging outcome and a deficiency in the programme. Some of the reasons given included the teachers' emphasis on preparing their students for the national examinations and the unsuitability of the materials for their weak students.

However, only two teachers have tried some of the materials:

Justina: Just some [of the materials] that are suitable for my lessons. Not all of them.

Tan: Actually, I'm still experimenting, because in school the [teaching and learning] situation is different [from the training centre]. First thing is the facility and then is the time consume. But I try to use whatever that suits to my classroom.

These responses led to further investigation of the ProELT coursebook in order to substantiate and triangulate the survey and interview data. The findings are presented in the following section.

Comparing the Coursebook Content and the Malaysian Curriculum Specifications

Tables 2 to 8 below summarise the comparison between seven sections in the **coursebook (except for the *Reflection* section (module 12))** in each module and the primary and secondary curriculum specifications. The tables also summarise the coursebook contribution to teachers' instructional practice and knowledge enhancement.

Table 2 Compatibility between the Coursebook and Grammar Components in the School Curriculum

Section: Language Analysis				
Module	Content (n = 18)	Primary	Secondary	Instructional practice and knowledge
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present perfect tense • Present continuous tense 	X X	✓ ✓	
2	Narrative tenses – past and continuous tense	✓	✓	
3	'ing'; infinitive	X	✓ (F4, F5)	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future perfect tense • Time expressions e.g. 'By the time...' 	X X	✓ X	✓
5	Passive voice	X	✓	
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auxiliary verb 'will' • Past habit: 'would' and 'used to' 	X X	✓ X	✓
8	Conditional sentences	X	✓ (F1)	
9	Third conditional – 'Wish' and 'If only'	X	X	✓
10	Articles	✓	✓	
11	Question tags	✓	X	
12	<i>Reflection (Excluded from review)</i>			
13	Defining and non-defining relative clauses	X	X	
14	Direct and reported speech	✓	✓ (F5)	
15	Modals for deduction and speculation	X	X	
16	Expression of certainty, possibility, and probability	X	X	
17	Modifier and intensifier	X	X	

F (Form)

Table 2 above shows that, out of a total of 18 grammar items, only four (22 per cent) of the items were relevant to the primary curriculum and 10 (55.6 per cent) of the items were relevant to the secondary curriculum. Three of the items (16.7 per cent) pertained to instructional practice and knowledge.

Table 3 Compatibility between the Coursebook and Teaching Activities in the School Curriculum

Section: Methodology				
Module	Content (n = 15)	Primary	Secondary	Instructional practice and knowledge
1	Lexical chunk	X	X	✓
2	Using a poem in class	✓	✓	
3	Project work	✓	✓	
4	Post-text discussion lesson			✓
5	Ways with text (activities to make reading lessons more interesting)			✓
7	Defining learner styles (multiple intelligence)			✓
8	Individual learner differences and differentiation			✓
9	Monitoring techniques (for reading, speaking & grammar lesson)			✓
10	Getting learner feedback			✓
11	Lesson planning			X (More suitable for trainee teachers)
12	<i>Reflection (Excluded from review)</i>			
13	Designing supplementary material			✓
14	Progress test (validity and reliability)			✓
15	Giving feedback to learners			✓
16	Planning for teaching new language			X (English is taught as a second language instead of a foreign language)
17	Checklist for fluency-based speaking task			✓

Based on Table 3, only two (13.3 per cent) out of 15 items pertaining to teaching activities were relevant to the primary and secondary curricula. In contrast, 11 (73.3 per cent) of the items were beneficial for the teachers' instructional practice and knowledge.

Table 4 Compatibility between the Coursebook and Student Activities and Tasks in the School Curriculum

Section: In the Classroom				
Module	Content (n = 18)	Primary	Secondary	Instructional practice and knowledge
1	Lexical approach	X	X	✓
2	Micro-teaching: create an activity for a poem	✓	✓	✓
3	Planning a project	✓	✓	✓
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree or disagree • Agree to differ • Argument & counter-argument 	X	✓ F4 (Text)	
		X	✓ F2, F3 (Class discussion)	
		X	X	
5	Micro-teaching: reading activities & activity assessment			✓
7	Learner strategy (multiple intelligence)			✓
8	Conditional activities	X	X	
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different learner interaction • Pair vs group work 			✓ ✓
10	Learner feedback questionnaire			✓
11	Reading a teachers' plan – learning outcome			✓
12	<i>Reflection (Excluded from review)</i>			
13	Teacher-created supplementary activities			✓
14	Creating a progress test			✓
15	Giving feedback to learners			✓
16	Teaching a grammar point			✓
17	Designing a group activity: Questionnaire/survey, role play, find someone who..., discussion.			✓

F (Form)

Table 4 also indicates that very little of the coursebook content was relevant to the student activities and tasks in the curriculum: two (11.1 per cent) items were suitable for the primary curriculum and four (22.2 per cent) items were for the secondary curriculum. In contrast, the majority of the coursebook contents (14 (77.8 per cent) items) could be used as activities for instructional practice and knowledge.

Table 5 Compatibility between the Coursebook and Speaking Goals and Competencies in the School Curriculum

Section: Pronunciation				
Module	Content (n = 15)	Primary	Secondary	Instructional practice and knowledge
1	Word stress	✓ (Y3-6)	✓	
2	Word stress & linking	✓	✓	
3	Stress for emphasis	✓ (Stressing a word in a sentence) (Correct word stress) (Y3-6)	✓ (Sentence stress and intonation)	
4	Reduction & contraction	X	✓ (F1, F2, F4)	
5	Intonation	✓ (Y2-6)	✓ (F1-F5)	
7	Changing meaning through word stress	X	X	
8	Sentence stress in conditional sentences	X	X	
9	Intonation with 'wish' and 'if only' conditional	X	X	
10	Stressed and unstressed articles	X	X	
11	Question tag	✓	✓	
12	<i>Reflection (Excluded from review)</i>			
13	Commas in relative clauses	X	X	
14	Believing and not believing	X	X	
15	Modals and connected speech	X	X	
16	Integrated pronunciation practice into grammar lessons			✓
17	Intensifiers	X	X	

Y (Year); F (Form)

The findings of the analysis in Table 5 show that five (33.3 per cent) items in the coursebook matched the speaking goals and competencies in the primary curriculum, and six (40 per cent) items in the secondary curriculum. In addition, one (6.7 per cent) item pertained to the development of teachers’ instructional practice and knowledge.

Table 6 Compatibility between Theory Represented in the Coursebook and Activities in the School Curriculum

Section: Magazine				
Module	Content (n = 16)	Primary	Secondary	Instructional practice and knowledge
1	Lexical thread	X	X	
2	Poetry and productive skills	✓	✓	✓
3	Project work for teenagers	X	✓	
4	Language and culture	X	X	
5	Ideas for helping elementary-level learners to read for pleasure	X	✓	
7	Does good teaching equal good learning?			✓
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping learners motivated • Creating a poster on top ten motivational tips 			✓ ✓
9	Managing the classroom			✓
10	Learner-centred feedback			✓
11	Intonation issues	✓	✓	✓
12	<i>Reflection (Excluded from review)</i>			
13	Why use games in the classroom			✓
14	Use language portfolios for assessment			✓
15	Building learner confidence - Getting teenagers to speak English in class			✓
16	Speaking aids			✓
17	The constraints of textbook			✓

The content in the *Magazine* section of every module of the coursebook was mostly theoretical (12 [75 per cent] items) and pertained to instructional practice and knowledge, as shown in Table 6. Only two (12.5 per cent) out of the 15 items could be transferred into the primary curriculum and four (25 per cent) items into the secondary curriculum.

Table 7 Compatibility between the Coursebook and Vocabulary in the School Curriculum

Section: Vocabulary				
Module	Content (n = 15)	Primary	Secondary	Instructional practice and knowledge
1	Classroom words and phrases	X	X	
2	Poetic collocation	X	X	
3	Project words	X	X	
4	Culture collocation	X	X	
5	Guessing an unknown meaning of a word	X	✓	
7	Classroom activities on multiple intelligence	X	X	✓
8	Motivational words	X	X	
9	Compound words	X	✓	
10	Phrases about reflection and feedback	X	X	
11	Intonation words	✓	✓	
12	<i>Reflection (Excluded from review)</i>			
13	Expressions	X	X	
14	Words connected with portfolio assessment			✓
15	Productive suffixes e.g. peer-centred, task-based	X	X	
16	Phrasal verbs with 'up'	X	X	
17	Group activity (no specific activity listed)			

Similarly, very few of the vocabulary activities and tasks in the coursebook matched the curriculum, as shown in Table 7. Only one (6.7 per cent) activity was relevant to the primary curriculum, and three (20 per cent) items could be implemented in the secondary curriculum. In addition, two (13.3 per cent) activities pertained to the development of instructional practice and knowledge.

Table 8 Compatibility between the Coursebook and Integrated Skills Activities in the Curriculum

Section: Activity Page				
Module	Content (n = 18)	Primary	Secondary	Instructional practice and knowledge
1	Collocation <i>Pelmanism</i>	X	X	
2	Classroom activity (no specific activity listed)			
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities for practicing '-ing' • Activities for practicing infinitives 	X X	✓ ✓ (F4-F5)	
4	Future achievements (predictions) about others	X	X	✓
5	Reading games	✓	✓	✓
7	Memories board game	X	X	✓
8	Getting feedback from older learners	X	X	✓
9	Secret board	X	X	✓
10	Phrases about reflection and feedback	✓	✓	✓
11	Let's have a chat (using natural intonation)	✓	✓	✓
12	<i>Reflection (Excluded from review)</i>			
13	Practicing non-defining & defining relative clauses	X	X	
14	Interviewing famous person; pretending to be a famous person being interviewed	X	✓ (F3-asking questions politely to get information)	
15	Lateral thinking puzzles; find the murderer			✓
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion game • Speculating about picture 			✓
17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone role play • Draw a landscape 			✓

F (Form)

Finally, Table 8 shows three (16.6 per cent) items from the coursebook that are relevant to the integrated skills activities in the primary curriculum, and six (33.3 per cent) items in the secondary curriculum. In contrast, most of the coursebook contents in the *Activity Page* section (10 [55.66 per cent] items) were related to enhancing teachers' instructional practice and knowledge.

Table 9 Review Summary of the ProELT Coursebook Content

Section	No. of relevant or suitable modules (out of 15 modules)		
	Primary	Secondary	Instructional practice and knowledge
Language Analysis	4	7	3
Methodology	2	2	11
In The Classroom	2	3	14
Pronunciation	5	6	1
Magazine	2	4	12
Vocabulary	1	3	2
Activity Page	3	6	10

Based on seven sections in the ProELT coursebook, Table 9 above shows the number of modules that are compatible to the primary and secondary curriculum specifications, and modules that enhance teachers' instructional skill and knowledge. It reveals that less than half of the 15 modules in each section is suitable for the primary and secondary level curriculum specifications. In addition to the low level of relevance, the modules seem to be more relevant to the secondary level based on the number of ticks under the *Secondary* column (see Table 2) and also two activities catering for teenagers in the *Magazine* section namely 'Project work for **teenagers**' (Module 3) and 'Building learner confidence - Getting **teenagers** to speak English in class' (Module 15).

However, the *Methodology* (11 modules), *Activity Page*, *Magazine* (10 modules), and *In the Classroom* (13 modules) sections contain activities that relate to knowledge enhancement and instructional skill, even though some are unrelated to the curriculum specifications. One example is in the *Language Analysis* section (Module 7), which focuses on the use of 'would' and 'used to' in reference to past habits. Even though this grammar component is excluded from the curriculum specifications, English teachers are expected to know the difference between both terms and be experts in a wide range of grammar aspects because they are linguistic reference sources for their students and colleagues.

This analysis shows that more than 50 per cent of the modules per section were unrelated to the curriculum specifications; this might cause reluctance among the teachers to adopt and transfer the ProELT teaching materials and activities into their lessons. This is consistent with and substantiates findings from the teacher interviews, which reveal that most of the teachers faced challenges in adopting standardised materials in their classrooms. On the other hand, the content offered substantial instructional guides and ideas that were suitable for teachers from both teaching levels. Based on this analysis, it can be summarised that the ProELT coursebook was not customised for the teacher participants. Otherwise, it would have catered to their teaching needs.

Triangulation

The survey revealed that 75 respondents proposed 12 changes to the programme content. 26 respondents (34.7 per cent) proposed that the programme should be based on the teachers' English teaching syllabus, which is the highest figure as indicated in Table 1. This is consistent with the analysis of the ProELT coursebook, which indicated that more than half of the modules did not match the primary and secondary curriculum specifications.

The teacher interviews showed that eight out of the 10 teachers did not adopt the programme materials into their lessons. They reasoned that the materials did not suit their syllabus, and it was time-consuming to adapt the materials.

Based on the findings of the survey, the teacher interviews, and the analysis of the coursebook content, it shows that the ProELT coursebook should be revised to cater to the participants' teaching syllabus and teaching needs.

IMPLICATIONS ON PROGRAMME PROVIDERS AND PROGRAMME DESIGNERS

Teachers' Needs Assessment

The present study reported the experience of some senior teachers who opined that the ProELT did not fulfil their professional needs and were dissatisfied being selected to participate in the ProELT. This finding indicates the importance of programme designers conducting teachers' needs assessment in the preliminary process of designing a programme, to identify the specific needs of the teachers. It is also necessary for programme providers to conduct needs assessment throughout a programme to allow for necessary adjustments to ensure that the programme and learner goals are achieved. By conducting ongoing teachers' needs assessment, it could serve as an important reference for programme providers when planning future relevant PD programmes (Orlich, 1983; Weddel & Van Duzer, 1997). Programme providers need to be constantly aware that PD takes explicit account of the teachers' contexts of teaching and their diverse experiences (Little, 1993). For instance, Lee's (2004) *Teachers' Needs-Based PD Program* is an example that applied teachers' needs assessment at the beginning of and throughout their programmes, which reported successful learning outcomes among the learners.

Programme Content

A significant finding generated from the present study shows that most of the teacher interview participants did not implement the programme resources in their lessons due to the mismatch between the programme content and their curriculum specifications. This finding was substantiated by an analysis of the programme coursebook, which contained standardised materials and activities that did not take explicit account of the teachers' different teaching levels. Little (1993: 138) argues that standardised materials neglect to provide a 'fit between new ideas and old habits, or between new ideas and present circumstances'. Although Meister (2010) criticises top-down, mandated knowledge and skills-based approaches in teacher PD programmes, she argues that teachers could still benefit from

a programme if the methods are comprehensible and applicable in the classroom. However, this was not the case for the ProELT.

It is recommended that programme designers customise specific programme content for the primary and secondary levels focusing on pedagogical content knowledge and teachers' subject-matter comprehension vis-a-vis generic learning. A separate customised programme is necessary if the programme pertains to the development of teachers' teaching methodology because there is a distinction in teaching and learning approaches between young learners and young adults. According to Guskey and Yoon (2009), customised programme could help teachers better comprehend *what they teach* and *how students acquire specific content knowledge and skill*. Neale et al. (1990) work validates the above recommendation through their successful programme for Kindergarten to Grade 3 science educators to develop their subject matter and pedagogical knowledge in a unit on light and shadow. The Schools Attuned Programme included Kindergarten to Grade 12 educators with two separate curriculums for Kindergarten to Grade 8 teachers, and Grade 7 to Grade 12 teachers, respectively (Broad & Evans, 2006). The strengths of these curricula were their purpose to cater to the diverse learning needs of students, and the contents were based on focused study and school-based application of evidenced-based neurodevelopment constructs that affect student learning (Broad & Evans, 2006).

Participation of Teachers in Programme Planning and Decision Making

In the present study, the ProELT coursebook content could have been more relevant to the teachers if they had been included in ProELT programme planning and decision making. This validates Gray's (1989) report that teachers who have the power to implement decisions are usually excluded from programme planning and decision-making processes. As one of the main stakeholders, teachers should be involved in selecting the goals and activities, evaluating the programme, and offering feedback (Orlich, 1983). For example, the *Challenge 2000 Multimedia Project* was a student project-based learning that focused on students' use of technology (Broad & Evans, 2006). 150 classroom teacher participants in this programme were given the freedom to independently construct the content and skill focus for their

own projects in light of their pertinent environments, such as the software's learning objectives. They received coaching, assistance, and small funds to purchase specialised equipment.

Teachers who are involved in the development of a programme experienced increased specific knowledge and skills, able to work collaboratively, share efforts in making decisions, become more aware of the perspectives of others such as administrators, parents, and community members, and are more appreciative of individual differences (Guskey, 2000). This aligns with Barth's (1990) earlier claim that teachers who are not personally involved in a decision-making process are not always committed to the programme goals. This is evident in the present study, based on the comments by interview participants that the programme content was not aligned with the curriculum specifications, and by primary teachers who thought that the materials were more suitable for the secondary level, which resulted in some interview participants' failure to implement the materials in their classroom lessons. Teachers' involvement in the preliminary and ongoing planning phases of the programme could have revised the contents to suit the needs of the participants.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A major strength of this study is the mixed methods design to investigate teachers' perceptions of and experience with the ProELT. However, a number of limitations prevail. Firstly, this study was limited to a single state in, Malaysia, namely Sabah, which included 303 survey respondents (out of 1182 ProELT participants in the state), and 10 English Language teachers. This potentially limited the extent to which the findings could be generalised to different states in Malaysia. Thus, a larger sample size of teacher participants from different states is needed to examine whether the findings from this study are supported elsewhere. Nevertheless, the findings were obtained from a fairly equal number of participants who taught in the primary and secondary levels and in the urban and rural districts of Sabah. This balanced demography provided an equitable view of the ProELT.

Secondly, this study coincidentally involved only female teacher participants in the individual interviews and focus groups because the selection of participants was based on voluntary participation. Initially two male teachers had indicated their interest; the first respondent did not respond after initial and subsequent contacts from the researcher; and the second respondent did not provide his email address in the column of the Participant Content Form for the follow up interview. This limitation potentially presents a biased view of the ProELT, being from the perceptions of female teacher participants only. Thus, it is possible that a balanced number of male and female participants would be preferable, to represent an unbiased view of the ProELT. However, it is difficult to obtain balanced-gender samples through a voluntary participation sampling method, due to the researcher's lack of autonomy in the selection process, which could result in either a majority female or male sample.

In addition to individual interview and focus groups, this study also evaluated the teachers' perceptions of the ProELT's impact on their classroom practices and student learning outcomes using a questionnaire. The survey findings could have been substantiated with other robust methods of evaluation such as classroom observations for the teachers, and formative assessment for the students during the pre- and post-training. These forms of evaluation were not included in this study due to the timing of the ProELT which had commenced before the study was undertaken (i.e. pre-training evaluations), and due to time constraint to carry out multiple classroom observations and to assess the students' learning outcomes after the end of the program (i.e. post-training evaluations). Thus, in future research, multiple methods of evaluations could be incorporated to assess the impact of the program on both the teachers and students; and the evaluations should be conducted in a longitudinal study.

Lastly, the ProELT trainers were not included in this study, because the researchers were unable to gain approval from the British Council to conduct individual interviews with them. This was probably due to the organisation's privacy and confidentiality policies. As a result, the teachers' perceptions of the ProELT were neither substantiated nor disputed by the views of the trainers. The input from the trainers would have provided added value and richness to the findings of this study.

CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the justification of this study to compare the compatibility of the ProELT coursebook content with the Malaysian primary and secondary school curriculum specifications due to concern with the ProELT being a standardised professional development programme that included ESL primary and secondary school teachers who taught a different group of learners (young learners and young adult learners) with differing language ability. The comparison showed that more than half of the coursebook modules, except for the Language Analysis section, were not relevant to the primary and secondary school curriculum specifications, and most of the modules were more suitable for the secondary school level. This lack of compatibility supported the interview teachers' justifications for not adopting the ProELT materials in their language lessons. Despite the lack of compatibility, there were sections in the ProELT coursebook that included activities and ideas that were relevant to teachers' instructional skills and knowledge enhancement, namely the *Methodology* (11 modules), *Activity Page, Magazine* (10 modules), and *In the Classroom* (13 modules) sections. In conclusion, it is pertinent for programme providers to include teacher participants as part of a programme planning and decision-making team who would be able to provide first-hand views of the suitability of the content for their teaching context and needs. It is indeed a waste of financial aid and a waste of the participants' invested time if programmes and projects (particularly expensive ones) fail to deliver their intended objectives and fulfil the needs of the participants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supported by the Research Funds provided by the Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education and Macquarie University Research Enhancement Fund for Higher Degree Research.

REFERENCES

- Barth, R. S. (1990). *Improving schools from within: Teachers, parents, and principals can make a difference*. Jossey-Bass.
- British Council. (n.d.). *Malaysian Ministry of Education and Pro-ELT*. <https://www.britishcouncil.my/partnerships/success-stories/malaysian-ministry-education-pro-elt>
- Broad, K., & Evans, M. (2006). *A review of literature on professional development content and delivery modes for experienced teachers*. University of Toronto.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. SAGE.
- David, M., & Sutton, C. D. (2004). *Social research: The basics*. SAGE.
- Diamond, B. S., Maerten-Rivera, J., Rohrer, R. E., & Lee, O. (2014). Effectiveness of a curricular and professional development intervention at improving elementary teachers' science content knowledge and student achievement outcomes: Year 1 results. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 51(5), 635-658. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tea.21148>
- Dyer, C. (1996). Primary teachers and policy innovation in India: Some neglected issues. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 16(1), 27-40. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-0593\(94\)00046-5](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-0593(94)00046-5)
- Dyer, C., Choksi, A., Awasty, V., Iyer, U., Moyade, R., Nigam, N., Purohit, N., Shah, S., & Sheth, S. (2004). Knowledge for teacher development in India: The importance of 'local knowledge' for in-service education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 24(1), 39-52. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2003.09.003>
- Gray, B. (1989). *Collaborating: Finding common ground for multiparty problems*. Jossey-Bass.
- Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Corwin Press.
- Guskey, T. R., & Yoon, K. S. (2009). What works in professional development. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(7), 495-500. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170909000709>
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (1992). *Understanding teacher development*. Teacher College Press.
- Hiew, W., & Murray, J. (2021). Enhancing Huber's evaluation framework for teacher professional development programme. *Professional Development in Education*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2021.1901236>
- Kennedy, C. (1988). Evaluation of the management of change in ELT projects. *Applied Linguistics*, 9(4), 329-342. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/9.4.329>
- Lee, H. J. (2004). Developing a professional development program model based on teachers' needs. *Professional Educator*, 27(1), 39-49.

- Lee, O., Hart, J. E., Cuevas, P., & Enders, C. (2004). Professional development in inquiry-based science for elementary teachers of diverse student groups. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 41(10), 1021-1043. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.20037>
- Little, J. W. (1993). Teachers' professional development in a climate of educational reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 15(2), 129-151. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737015002129>
- McDonough, J., Shaw, C., & Masuhara, H. (2013). *Materials and methods in ELT* (3rd ed.). Wiley.
- Meister, D. (2010). Experienced secondary teachers' perceptions of engagement and effectiveness: A guide to professional development. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 880-898.
- Neale, D. C., Smith, D., & Johnson, V. G. (1990). Implementing conceptual change teaching in primary science. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91(2), 109-131. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/461641>
- Orlich, D. C. (1983). Some considerations for effective in-service education. *The Clearing House*, 56(5), 197-202. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1983.10113772>
- Uysal, H. H. (2012). Evaluation of an in-service training program for primary-school language teachers in Turkey. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(7), 14-19. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n7.4>
- Weddel, K. S., & Van Duzer, C. (1997). *Needs assessment for adult ESL learners*. Retrieved from <http://ericae.net/edo/ed407882.html>

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

WENDY HIEW (PhD.) is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). She is also Head of Translation and Editing Unit at UMS. Her areas of specialisation are Teaching English as a Second Language and Applied Linguistic.

JILL MURRAY (PhD.) is an Honorary Lecturer at Macquarie University. Her area of specialisation are teacher professional development and both the teaching and learning of pragmatics, and the assessment of pragmatic competence in a range of specialist contexts (such as overseas trained professionals seeking work in Australia).

MANU

Jurnal Pusat Penataran Ilmu & Bahasa

(*Journal of the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge & Language Learning*)