

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

BRYAN LIM CHEN YANG

*Faculty of Education, Language and Communication  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia  
bryanlim1991@gmail.com*

JOSEPH RAMANAIR

*Faculty of Education, Language and Communication  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia*

SOO RUEY SHING

*Faculty of Education, Language and Communication  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia*

### ABSTRACT

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

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

### INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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