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DESIGNING A CEFR ALIGNED BILINGUAL
READING MODULE INTEGRATING TAMIL AND
ENGLISH FOR YEAR FOUR TAMIL SCHOOL
STUDENTS



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SHARMILA A/P RAJANDRAN

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITI

2025



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RECOGNITION

I am humbled and grateful for the opportunity to pursue my master's degree while working as a teacher. Looking back, I couldn't have accomplished this without the unwavering support of my family. My brother's financial support and my mother's and sister's constant encouragement have been instrumental in my success. My obligation is to reveal their identity. My family consists of my sibling Gangatharan, our mom Sumady Paran and my sibling Subasyiny. I am also deeply appreciative of my boss, Associate Professor Dr. Siti Rahaimah Binti Ali, who provided invaluable guidance and support during the writing of my dissertation. Her insights and ideas have been instrumental in shaping my research and I am grateful for her unwavering support. My two best friends, Durga Devi and Ratneshwary Rajendran, have been a constant source of inspiration and motivation throughout my academic journey. Their unwavering support and encouragement have been invaluable and I am grateful for their presence in my life. As a teacher, I now have the privilege of using my knowledge to help students succeed academically. I am eager to learn and grow as an educator and I am committed to using mixed-methods research to better understand the needs of my students and create effective learning strategies. Lastly, I dedicate this research to all primary school students who have struggled with reading comprehension. I have experienced first-hand the resilience and determination of these students and I am committed to helping them achieve academic success. As researchers, let us continue to work towards creating a better future for all, using our knowledge and expertise to make a positive impact in the world. With dedication and hard work, we can achieve great things and make a lasting difference in the lives of others.

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing." Albert Einstein.





ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mereka bentuk modul bacaan dwibahasa yang sejajar dengan *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* yang mengintegrasikan bahasa Tamil dan bahasa Inggeris bagi murid Tahun Empat di sekolah vernakular Tamil untuk meningkatkan kecekapan membaca dalam bahasa Inggeris. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti cabaran membaca yang dihadapi oleh murid, meneroka pandangan guru bagi membimbing reka bentuk modul dan menilai kerelevanan kandungan, penjajaran *CEFR* serta kesesuaian penggunaan modul dalam bilik darjah. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif asas berpandukan paradigma interpretivisme. Modul ini dibangunkan menggunakan model reka bentuk pengajaran *ADDIE* yang merangkumi lima fasa iaitu analisis, reka bentuk, pembangunan, pelaksanaan dan penilaian. Dua instrumen digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Instrumen pertama ialah protokol temu bual separa berstruktur yang dijalankan bersama lima guru Bahasa Inggeris dari sekolah rendah vernakular Tamil di Johor Bahru yang dipilih melalui persampelan kriteria bertujuan. Instrumen kedua ialah borang penilaian pakar yang diisi oleh dua pakar bidang, seorang pakar literasi bahasa Tamil dan seorang lagi pakar pendidikan dwibahasa bahasa Inggeris. Data kualitatif yang diperolehi dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan perisian *MAXQDA* untuk memastikan ketepatan dan kebolehpercayaan dapatan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan murid Tahun Empat menghadapi kesukaran dalam penguasaan kosa kata dan kefahaman akibat pendedahan yang terhad kepada bahasa Inggeris. Guru menekankan kepentingan sokongan bahasa Tamil, bahan sejajar *CEFR*, bantuan visual serta teks yang bersesuaian dengan latar budaya murid. Modul akhir merangkumi glosari dwibahasa, teks dua bahasa, sokongan visual, aktiviti interaktif dan cerita rakyat tempatan. Penilaian pakar mengesahkan bahawa modul ini relevan, jelas dan praktikal digunakan dalam bilik darjah. Kajian ini mencadangkan pengintegrasian bahasa Tamil sebagai sokongan boleh meningkatkan kemahiran membaca bahasa Inggeris murid tanpa menjejaskan penjajaran kepada piawaian *CEFR*. Modul ini disarankan untuk digunakan dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bagi menyokong pembangunan literasi dwibahasa dalam pendidikan rendah Malaysia.





DESIGNING A CEFR ALIGNED BILINGUAL READING MODULE INTEGRATING TAMIL AND ENGLISH FOR YEAR FOUR TAMIL SCHOOL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

This study aims to design a bilingual reading module aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) that integrates Tamil and English for Year Four students in Tamil vernacular schools to improve their English reading proficiency. The objectives of the study are to identify the reading challenges faced by pupils, explore teacher insights to inform the design of the module and evaluate the module's content relevance, CEFR alignment and suitability for classroom use. A basic qualitative research design was employed, guided by the interpretivist paradigm. The module was developed using the ADDIE instructional design model, which includes five systematic phases: analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. Two instruments were used to collect data. The first was a semi-structured interview protocol administered to five English language teachers from Tamil vernacular primary schools in Johor Bahru, selected through purposive criterion sampling. The second was an expert evaluation form completed by two subject-matter experts, one specialising in Tamil literacy and the other in bilingual English education. The qualitative data collected were analysed thematically using MAXQDA software to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of findings. The findings revealed that Year Four pupils struggle with vocabulary and reading comprehension due to limited exposure to English. Teachers highlighted the importance of Tamil-language support, CEFR-aligned materials, visual aids and culturally relevant texts. The final module includes bilingual glossaries, dual-language reading texts, visual scaffolding, interactive tasks and stories based on local folklore. Expert evaluations confirmed the module's relevance, clarity and practical use in the classroom. This study suggests that integrating Tamil as a supportive language can effectively enhance pupils' English reading skills while maintaining alignment with CEFR standards. It is recommended that the developed module be implemented in classrooms to support bilingual literacy in Malaysian primary education.



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ABBREVIATION / SYMBOLS LIST PAGE

ADDIE	Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CUP	Common Underlying Proficiency
DSKP	Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran
ESL	English as a Second Language
IPG	Institut Pendidikan Guru
KPM	Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia
KSSR	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah
L1 /L2	First Language/ Second Language
LPP	Language Policy and Planning
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation Development
PISA	Programme for Student Assessment) for reading literacy
PLaN	Primary School Literacy and Numeracy Programme
SJK(T)	Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Tamil) / Tamil Vernacular School
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
UPSI	Sultan Idris Education University



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

English proficiency stands as a national priority within Malaysia's diverse and multilingual education system. The comprehensive Roadmap for Malaysian English Language Reform 2015-2025 explicitly articulates the aim for every student to achieve "operational proficiency" in both Malay Language and English (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 1; Kamarulzaman & Hashim, 2013, p. 16). Within this national framework, Tamil vernacular (SJK(T)) schools play a vital role in serving the Malaysian Indian community, primarily by preserving the Tamil language and cultural heritage. Currently, there are approximately 527 Tamil primary schools nationwide (Narayanan, 2020), each operating with Tamil as the medium of instruction for most subjects, while English and Malay are taught as compulsory subjects (Effendi et al., 2020, p. 993). Despite this foundational support, students in Tamil vernacular schools frequently lag behind in English literacy. For instance, recent studies consistently indicate that Malaysian primary students generally exhibit weak mastery of English (Jamain &





Jamaludin, 2023, p. 5077). Specifically, Year Four English as a Second Language (ESL) students often encounter significant difficulties with English reading comprehension, primarily due to limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, low motivation and underdeveloped reading strategies (Chua & Sulaiman, 2021, p. 802). This chapter introduces the contextual background and scope of the study, which focuses on designing a Tamil–English bilingual reading module specifically for Year Four students in Tamil vernacular schools. It reviews the national English-education framework, details the specific challenges Tamil students face in learning to read English and articulates the compelling rationale for a bilingual intervention.

1.2 Background Research



Reading has long been recognised as a fundamental component of the educational process, yet contemporary research defines it as an increasingly complex and multifaceted cognitive skill (Coiro, 2021, p. 2). The ultimate goal of reading is comprehension: an active process of meaning construction that requires the seamless integration of various cognitive and linguistic abilities (Duke & Cartwright, 2021, p. 7). This constructive view posits that readers actively build understanding by drawing on their vocabulary, background knowledge and grasp of language structures to interpret an author's words (Tong et al., 2024, p. 5). This constructive view, which moves beyond earlier models, posits that readers actively build understanding by drawing on their vocabulary, background knowledge and grasp of language structures to interpret an author's words (Coiro, 2021, p. 48). Consequently, effective reading comprehension is critically dependent on a learner's conceptual knowledge and lexical





richness, as a limited vocabulary can severely impede the ability to make sense of new information (Liu & Saad, 2025, p. 89).

In Malaysia, English is a second language and is taught as a core subject across all primary schools (Sahib & Stapa, 2021, p. 1). Despite national efforts to promote literacy, recent studies indicate that reading performance among students in Tamil vernacular primary schools has shown signs of stagnation and, in some cases, decline (Mohamed & Safeek, 2022, p. 26). This trend is especially concerning given the foundational role of reading in language development and academic achievement. Research has revealed that many Tamil school students face difficulties in decoding, comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, particularly when engaging with English reading materials (Kaur & Nambiar, 2020). One key contributing factor is the limited exposure to English outside the classroom, as the home and community environments are predominantly Tamil-speaking (Duke, Cartwright, p. 95). This creates a gap between the linguistic realities of the students and the expectations of the national English curriculum.

Additionally, reading materials used in Tamil schools often lack cultural and linguistic relevance, leading to disengagement and poor reading motivation (Kanapathy, Jamal & Venkatachalapathy, 2024, p 2-3). Teachers, too, have reported challenges in catering to diverse reading levels within the classroom due to a lack of differentiated bilingual resources and structured support (Qazi, 2023, p. 1). In many Tamil vernacular schools, especially those in under-resourced districts like parts of Johor, library access is limited and sustained reading programmes are often not implemented consistently. These systemic barriers contribute to a widening literacy gap





that places Tamil school students at a disadvantage, especially in mastering reading skills in English, which is crucial for future academic and socio-economic opportunities.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 results showed a significant decline in Malaysia's reading performance, with the national score dropping from 415 points in 2018 to 388, a score considerably below the OECD average (OECD, 2023). This drop, equivalent to an estimated 1.4 years of lost learning, places Malaysia among the countries with the largest declines. Critically, only 42% of Malaysian students achieved the minimum proficiency level (Level 2) in reading, meaning a majority struggle with fundamental skills such as identifying the main idea in a text or distinguishing between fact and opinion. The ultimate impact of this decline is a national concern, with direct implications for future human capital development, economic productivity and the cultivation of higher-order thinking skills required for tertiary education and the modern workforce.

Tamil vernacular schools are an integral part of Malaysia's national-type school system. They primarily utilise Tamil as the medium of instruction for most subjects, thereby upholding the language rights and cultural identity of the Malaysian Indian community. Historically, these schools have received support from organisations like the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) to ensure the maintenance of Tamil heritage. As of 2020, there are 527 such schools across the nation (Narayanan, 2020). These institutions primarily enroll students from Malaysian Indian families, many of whom reside in rural or semi-urban areas where access to educational resources can be limited. Researchers frequently observe that Tamil vernacular schools often contend with a





scarcity of adequate English-language teaching materials and insufficient teacher training. This inadequacy of resources, particularly in rural vernacular schools, has been directly linked to challenges in effective English language instruction (Maniam, 2024, p. 1). In summary, while Tamil vernacular schools fulfil a crucial cultural role in Malaysia, they simultaneously face structural constraints that significantly impact English language learning outcomes.

Year Four marks a pivotal and critical transition point in a student's literacy development, where the learning focus shifts from basic decoding skills to more advanced reading comprehension. Although English is taught as a second language in Tamil vernacular schools from Year Four onwards, many students enter this stage with notably limited prior exposure to English (Wentzel, 2021, p. 4). For most Malaysian Indian students, English is often a *third language*, following their native Tamil (L1) and Bahasa Malaysia (L2), which further compounds their initial exposure challenges. Studies focusing on Malaysian Year Four ESL classes consistently report pervasive reading comprehension problems. For instance, Chua and Sulaiman (2021) discovered that a large majority of Year Four students exhibited "strong" difficulties in English reading comprehension. These difficulties were primarily attributed to a lack of word knowledge, insufficient content background, low motivation, underdeveloped reading strategies and struggles with fluent reading processes (Chua & Sulaiman, 2021, p. 798). In practical classroom settings, many Tamil vernacular school students are often low-motivated or "disengaged" readers when confronted with English texts; they frequently halt at unknown words and struggle to grasp the author's overarching message. Teachers consistently note that without substantial scaffolding, these children find it challenging to infer meaning and sustain their reading efforts. Consequently, Year Four





Tamil vernacular school students typically commence their English reading journey with weak vocabulary and minimal contextual understanding, underscoring their urgent need for targeted support to build fundamental comprehension skills (Chua & Sulaiman, 2021, p. 801).

This study specifically focuses on Johor, a Malaysian state that has demonstrated notable recent advancements in its educational landscape. Historically, Johor had lagged in primary examination results. However, a concerted and strategic school-improvement program successfully transformed its performance, enabling Johor to ascend from the bottom five to the top third of states in national Year Six test scores within a span of five years (Kamarulzaman & Hashim, 2013, p. 7). In alignment with this progressive trajectory, the Johor Education Department has actively organized various English proficiency initiatives. These include workshops for hundreds of primary English teachers, focusing on innovative applications and effective reading techniques such as role-play, designed to enhance engagement among young learners (Thong, 2024). Nonetheless, despite this overarching state-level focus on educational improvement and English proficiency, Tamil vernacular primary schools in Johor (mirroring the situation elsewhere in Malaysia) likely continue to face the same persistent reading challenges outlined previously. By situating this study within Johor, it acknowledges a state with active educational support and a commitment to English language development, even as it highlights that Tamil vernacular school students remain a priority subgroup requiring tailored interventions.





1.3 Problem Statement

The English language education landscape in Malaysian Tamil vernacular primary schools faces a critical and persistent literacy gap, particularly in reading. This challenge has been publicly acknowledged by Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek (The Star, 2024, para. 1) and documented in recent academic research (Renganathan, 2023, p. 1). Despite national initiatives aimed at improving English proficiency, this disparity remains especially pronounced among Year Four students is a key developmental stage emphasized by Malaysia's Program Literasi dan Numerasi Sekolah Rendah (PLaN) as foundational for literacy consolidation (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2023).

Compounding the issue is the limited English exposure experienced by Tamil vernacular school students. In these settings, English is typically taught as a third language after Tamil (L1) and Bahasa Malaysia (L2), receiving only about three hours of weekly instruction compared to five hours in national schools (Raman et al., 2022, p. 66). Studies conducted in Johor's Tamil schools consistently show poor basic English literacy (Nair & Krish, 2021, p. 119). Supporting this, an NGO report warns of widespread vocabulary and reading comprehension deficits among Tamil primary students, many of whom cannot read simple English sentences by Year Four, significantly hindering their academic trajectory (Educational Welfare & Research Foundation Malaysia, 2023, p. 26).

In addition to inadequate instructional time, the chronic shortage of qualified English subject teachers further exacerbates the problem. Tamil vernacular schools often rely on non-specialist educators to teach English, many of whom lack formal training or proficiency in frameworks such as the Common European Framework of





Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Uri & Aziz, 2018, p. 168; Pillai, 2020, p. 3). This mismatch between curriculum goals and teacher capacity undermines the acquisition of key linguistic skills. Teachers themselves may convey a sense of difficulty, inadvertently affecting students' motivation and confidence in learning English.

Although national policy mandates CEFR alignment, teachers frequently report "limited knowledge, minimum exposure and low level of awareness" of its principles (Uri & Aziz, 2018, p. 168). This results in traditional teaching methods and misaligned assessments, weakening the intended student-centred learning model. The situation is further constrained by insufficient teaching resources and limited professional development, particularly in rural Tamil schools (Maniam, 2024, p. 1).

Moreover, current classroom policies discourage code-switching into Tamil during English lessons, despite evidence that strategic use of the mother tongue can support comprehension (Raman et al., 2022, p. 66; Too, 2023, p. 2). This restriction prevents the use of students' strongest language as a scaffold for English learning, creating cognitive overload and discouraging engagement (Sweller, 2023, p. 2).

Beyond the classroom, the implications of poor English literacy are profound. English proficiency is increasingly essential for academic mobility, employment and participation in global knowledge economies. The persistent literacy gap in Tamil vernacular schools jeopardizes equitable access to these opportunities and risks deepening socio-economic divides (Jamain & Jamaludin, 2023, p. 5077).





Policy reforms such as the Roadmap for English Language Education Reform (2015–2025) and *Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris* (MBMMBI) aim to raise English standards (Ministry of Education, 2013; Pillai, 2020, p. 1). However, Tamil schools have yet to receive tailored interventions designed to close this literacy gap. The evidence signals a crucial omission in reform strategies, particularly for Johor Bahru, a state demonstrating educational advancement yet grappling with persistent English reading difficulties in its vernacular subgroups (Kamarulzaman & Hashim, 2013, p. 7).

To address this, the present study proposes a CEFR-aligned Tamil–English bilingual reading module for Year Four students in Tamil vernacular schools. Such a module would strategically incorporate Tamil scaffolding to reinforce vocabulary and comprehension, helping students navigate orthographic and phonological contrasts between the two languages (Winkel, 2025, p. 2). By validating the mother tongue as a pedagogical asset, the module supports Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 86–87; Cummins, 2021, p. 292) and aligns with Self-Determination Theory to boost engagement and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2024, p. 4).

While national-level bilingual initiatives such as the Dual Language Programme (DLP) focus on Science and Mathematics instruction in English and Malay, no documented standalone Tamil–English reading programme currently exists that systematically supports English literacy development among Tamil vernacular school students. This lack of targeted intervention is especially evident in the context of





reading comprehension, where bilingual scaffolding via Tamil translation remains absent despite its pedagogical relevance” (Winskel, 2020, p. 2).

In conclusion, the English literacy challenge in Johor Bahru’s Tamil vernacular schools is severe, multifaceted and under-addressed. This research aims to fill that gap by designing a pedagogically sound, culturally relevant bilingual reading module that empowers teachers and students, aligns with national standards and contributes meaningfully to Malaysia’s bilingual education goals.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Malaysia’s multilingual education system features Malay as the national language while Tamil (along with Mandarin) serves as a vernacular medium of instruction and English is taught as a compulsory subject across all primary schools (Nii & Yunus, 2022, p. 1; Pillai, 2018, p. 2). In recent years the national curriculum has been reformed to align with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages, as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025) and the English Language Roadmap (2015–2025) (Lee et al., 2022, p. 1). These reforms set ambitious CEFR proficiency targets for learners, but implementation challenges have been widely reported, including limited teacher preparation and resources for CEFR-aligned instruction (Pillai, 2018, p. 3). These challenges are especially acute in Tamil vernacular schools, where Year Four students – though typically fluent in Tamil – often receive minimal exposure to English (Lee et al., 2022, p. 1). For example, one study found that a large majority of Malaysian Year Four students experienced strong reading comprehension difficulties due to limited English vocabulary, motivation and reading





strategies (Maniam, 2024, p. 1). In addition, the linguistic distance between Tamil and English exacerbates the problem: English has a famously irregular alphabetic system that often takes years for children to master, whereas Tamil employs a relatively transparent alpha syllabary (Winskel, 2025, p. 1). Without targeted support, Tamil-speaking students are unlikely to transfer their strong Tamil literacy directly into English proficiency, creating a persistent gap in learning outcomes.

To address this gap, the present study proposes to design a standalone Tamil–English bilingual reading module specifically for Year Four Tamil primary school students in Johor Bahru. This module is intended to scaffold English reading skills by leveraging students’ existing Tamil language strength (Shan & Aziz, 2025, p. 575). A qualitative approach will be used: interviews with experienced Tamil school English teachers will elicit insights into students’ specific reading needs and challenges and thematic analysis of the interview data will inform the selection of content and structure for the module. The draft module will then be reviewed by two content experts to ensure its validity and alignment with CEFR-based curriculum standards. By creating this culturally and linguistically sensitive instructional resource, the study fills a critical need in the Malaysian vernacular school context. The research thereby supports national language education goals by offering an equitable strategy to improve English literacy among Tamil-medium students, acknowledging the important role of the mother tongue in second-language learning (Shan & Aziz, 2025, p. 575).





1.5 Objective of the Study

1. To explore English language teachers' perceptions and recommendations for developing a CEFR-aligned bilingual Tamil–English reading module for Year Four pupils in Tamil vernacular primary schools.
2. To design and develop a CEFR-aligned Tamil–English bilingual reading module based on the identified needs and insights gathered from teachers.
3. To evaluate the content validity, linguistic appropriateness and classroom usability of the bilingual reading module through expert review.

1.6 Research Question

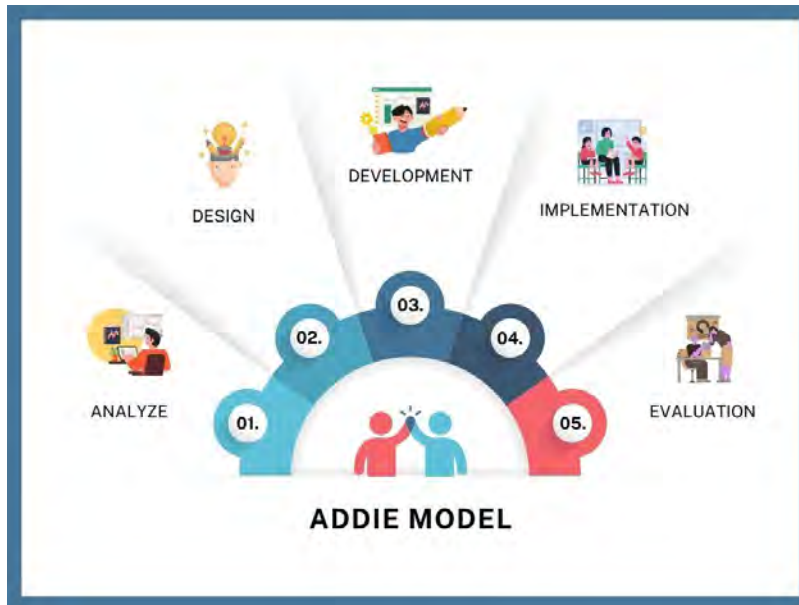
1. What are English language teachers' perceptions and suggestions for designing a CEFR-aligned Tamil–English bilingual reading module for Year Four pupils in Tamil vernacular primary schools?
2. How can the insights from teachers inform the design and development of a CEFR-aligned Tamil–English bilingual reading module?
3. How do subject-matter experts evaluate the bilingual reading module in terms of content relevance, CEFR alignment and classroom applicability?



1.7 The Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1.

ADDIE Model



This study is guided by the ADDIE instructional design model as the central conceptual framework. ADDIE, which stands for Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation, provides a systematic and iterative approach to instructional design (Branson et al., 1975; Sarkodie, 2023, p. 3). For the purposes of this research, the model is adapted to include only four phases: Analysis, Design, Development and Evaluation, excluding Implementation as classroom testing is not within the study's current scope.

The study aims to develop a CEFR-aligned Tamil–English bilingual reading module for Year Four pupils in Tamil vernacular schools. This framework not only guides the instructional product development process but also aligns with the research activities at each stage of the ADDIE cycle. The qualitative research design complements this framework by focusing on understanding teacher experiences, identifying contextual learning needs and co-constructing the module with expert input.



The Analysis phase is an important phase that identifies the problem of limited English reading proficiency among Year Four Tamil primary school students and gathers teacher perspectives through semi-structured interviews. The aim is to understand the students' struggles with English reading, particularly in Tamil-medium contexts and to identify gaps in current materials. Thematic analysis is used to interpret the interview data, producing categories that inform the next stage. This phase also implicitly draws on Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2023, p. 2) by identifying that the lack of L1 support in existing materials likely imposes an excessive extraneous cognitive load, hindering comprehension. The findings from this analysis thus provided the empirical foundation for a responsive educational intervention.

Based on the themes identified during the analysis, the Design phase determines specific learning objectives, content features and bilingual strategies. The CEFR A1 descriptors serve as benchmarks to ensure that the reading module is internationally aligned while remaining accessible to Tamil-speaking learners. Bilingual support using Tamil is incorporated intentionally to scaffold reading comprehension, grounded in Vygotsky's (1978, pp. 86-87) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where the L1 (Tamil) support acts as the 'scaffold' that enables a learner to achieve a level of L2 (English) comprehension they could not manage alone (Kivinen, 2025, p. 9; Cummins, 2021, p. 292; Masyitha, 2021, p. 1607).

The Development phase transforms the design blueprint into tangible resources, guided by principles of materials development for language learning (Tomlinson, 2023, p. 322). This phase entailed crafting the bilingual reading module using CEFR-aligned texts and tasks, supplemented with Tamil glossaries and explanations. This





development stage involves the actual creation of the bilingual reading module, consisting of reading texts, vocabulary items, picture-word pairs, sentence activities and simple reading tasks in both English and Tamil. The materials included categorized vocabulary lists, picture-word matching tasks, sentence construction, glossaries, bilingual reading texts and story passages. The content was structured across 50 pages to be visually engaging, linguistically accessible and culturally relevant to Tamil learners. The content draws directly from the linguistic and cognitive needs of the learners, as identified in the analysis phase. The use of visuals, word glossaries and Tamil translations ensures that the module supports comprehension while gradually building English proficiency. This strategy is theoretically linked to both increasing intrinsic motivation, as described in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2024, p. 4) and lowering the 'affective filter,' as proposed in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (Gidman, 2025, p. 27). By making the content relatable and reducing anxiety, the module aims to create a more effective learning environment.

The Implementation phase involves the delivery of the instructional solution. While a full implementation is outside the scope of this particular study, its theoretical consideration is crucial for the module's ecological validity. This phase is theoretically informed by concepts like diffusion of innovation by Rogers (Menzli et al., 2022, p. 2). The module was therefore designed with usability in mind, considering how teachers could realistically integrate it into their classrooms. This study deliberately focuses on the development and validation stages, positioning classroom implementation and testing as a vital next step for future research.





Finally, in the Evaluation phase, expert review is used to assess the content validity, cultural relevance, CEFR alignment and pedagogical usability of the developed module. Two Master Teachers, one a PhD-holder and *Guru Cemerlang* in Tamil and the other a *Guru Cemerlang* in English with over 30 years of teaching experience, serve as evaluators. Their feedback is used to revise and refine the module before finalization. This process serves as formative evaluation, ensuring the instructional material is relevant, credible and classroom-ready.

This conceptual framework of ADDIE provides the structural backbone for the study. It ensures that the research process remains systematic, theoretically grounded and educationally relevant, while also aligning with the goal of producing a validated instructional tool. Each phase of ADDIE is mapped directly to the research objectives and activities, ensuring consistency and rigor throughout the study.



1.8 Operational Definition

Although there are several definitions in the literature, the following ones are used to define the essential concepts in this study:

Bilingual. Refers to the ability of Year Four Tamil vernacular primary school students to use two or more languages, specifically Tamil (L1), Bahasa Malaysia (L2) and English (L3), with varying levels of proficiency. This definition acknowledges their existing linguistic repertoire and the context of learning English as a third language (Merriam-Webster, 2025).





Module. A self-contained instructional unit designed to teach English reading skills to Year Four Tamil vernacular primary school students. The bilingual reading module includes defined objectives, reading texts, vocabulary and scaffolded activities that leverage Tamil language support to enhance English literacy (Merriam-Webster, 2025).

CEFR. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe, is adopted in Malaysia through the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC). It provides structured descriptors for language proficiency levels (A1 to C2) and guides curriculum development, teaching and assessment. For Year Four pupils, the curriculum targets CEFR level A1 High, indicating basic reading comprehension and use of familiar expressions. According to the DSKP document, CEFR alignment ensures progressive development of communicative competence and cognitive skills in English through thematic instruction and differentiated strategies (KSSR Bahasa Inggeris SK Tahun 4, pp. 14–15; Council of Europe. (2020).).

1.9 Research limitation

This study is subject to several limitations, primarily due to its qualitative nature and targeted research scope. Firstly, the research is geographically limited to Tamil vernacular primary schools located in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. As a result, the findings and implications of the bilingual Tamil-English reading module may not be generalisable to all Tamil schools nationwide or to other types of vernacular and national primary schools. Differences in student demographics, teacher qualifications





and school resources across regions may influence the effectiveness and adaptability of the module.

Secondly, the sample size is intentionally small and purposive, consisting of only five English language teachers from Tamil primary schools. While this is suitable for in-depth thematic analysis, the limited number of participants may restrict the range of perspectives captured. The insights gained, though rich, may not reflect the full diversity of instructional challenges and student needs across all Tamil schools.

Thirdly, the data collection method relies solely on semi-structured interviews, which means findings are based on self-reported experiences and observations by teachers. There is a possibility of subjective bias from the participants, such as social desirability bias, where teachers might present their practices or students' abilities in a more favourable light. Furthermore, the researcher's own interpretive lens and background in bilingual education, while beneficial for contextual understanding, also introduce a potential for researcher bias in the analysis of qualitative data. No direct classroom observations or student assessments are incorporated into the data, which could have enhanced the depth of understanding.

Fourthly, the reading module designed in this study will undergo expert validation by only two content specialists. While expert review strengthens content reliability and pedagogical value, the absence of direct student input during the module's design phase is a limitation, as the module's content and activities are primarily informed by teacher perceptions rather than direct feedback from the target learners. Moreover, the absence of a full pilot implementation with students limits the





ability to measure the module's practical effectiveness and actual learning outcomes in real classroom settings. Future studies should include implementation trials and pre-post assessments to evaluate learning outcomes.

Finally, the study focuses exclusively on reading proficiency in English, without addressing other interconnected language skills such as listening, speaking and writing. This focus is deliberate to ensure clarity and manageability, but it also narrows the study's scope in understanding overall English language development.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into English reading challenges faced by Year Four Tamil school students and proposes a contextually grounded instructional solution that can serve as a foundation for further empirical testing and broader curriculum development.



1.10 Importance of Research

English literacy is recognised as critical in Malaysia's multilingual education system. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025) explicitly aims for all students to attain operational proficiency in both Bahasa Malaysia and English (p. 16). In fact, it sets the aspirational target that by the end of primary year three, every child should achieve 100% basic literacy in English (p. 23). About 52,647 students did not pass the national SPM English exam in 2022, indicating that present results are significantly below this target (p. 9) and employers consistently cite poor English skills among graduates as a major problem (p. 9). These data underscore that improving English reading proficiency remains a national priority for Malaysia's education policy.





The needs are especially acute for Tamil-medium students. In Tamil vernacular primary schools (SJK Tamil), Tamil is the medium of instruction and English is typically introduced only as a third language (Raman et al., 2022, p. 66). This arrangement is widely cited as a key factor in Tamil students' low English proficiency (p. 75). Moreover, Tamil-school students receive far fewer English lesson hours than their peers in national schools, about three versus five hours per week. Consequently, they have much less exposure to English in the classroom, which hinders language acquisition. Teachers in these schools generally forbid the use of Tamil during English instruction (p. 66), so children must grapple with English texts using only limited prior knowledge of the language. Under such conditions, acquiring fluent English reading skills is especially challenging for Year Four Tamil-background learners.



Bilingual support can therefore play a vital role. Educational research shows that building literacy in the mother tongue significantly boosts overall reading development. When children learn to read first in a language, they fully understand they develop stronger comprehension and cognitive skills, which then transfer to learning a new language (UNESCO, 2025, para. 5). UNESCO notes that students in bilingual programs often achieve higher outcomes; for instance, one study found bilingual-education students outperformed their peers by roughly 15% on basic reading assessments (para. 9). A Tamil–English reading module leverages this principle: by providing English texts alongside Tamil support (such as translations or parallel stories), it uses students' home-language knowledge to scaffold English reading. This approach has the potential to accelerate Tamil students' English proficiency by making new concepts more comprehensible and less intimidating.





This research is designed to yield concrete benefits for multiple stakeholders. For classroom teachers, the module offers a model of scaffolded instruction that they can emulate. It shows how to structure lessons and create materials (such as bilingual texts and glossaries) that link Tamil and English in a systematic way. Students will benefit from reading content presented in both their first language and English: seeing Tamil explanations or cognates in context can improve understanding and boost confidence. By engaging learners in this way, the module can make English reading tasks more accessible and motivating for Tamil-speaking children. Curriculum developers and education planners also gain valuable insight. The study provides a proof-of-concept for integrating first-language support into the primary English curriculum. Curriculum specialists can draw on its framework to develop supplementary readers or lesson modules aligned with national standards but tailored for Tamil-medium schools. Finally, policymakers have a direct interest in the findings. The module design reinforces the Malaysia Education Blueprint's own mandates; for example, the Blueprint calls for piloting ways to increase English exposure and for "enhancing programs for groups with specific needs such as other minority groups" (p. 38). By exemplifying how Tamil-language scaffolding can be implemented, this work gives concrete shape to those policy goals. In other words, it shows one way to translate the Blueprint's vision of bilingual proficiency into classroom practice, which can guide future education initiatives and resource allocation.

It is important to emphasize that this study focuses on designing the bilingual reading module, not on implementing or evaluating it in classrooms. In this sense, the project establishes a pedagogical framework rather than reporting measured learning outcomes. Nonetheless, the design itself is an important foundational resource.





Researchers and teachers can use the module blueprint as a starting point for future trials, pilot studies and iterative refinement. Over the long term, the significance of this work lies in its capacity to catalyse further innovation. By documenting a Tamil–English teaching strategy grounded in theory and policy, it paves the way for empirical testing and curriculum improvement. This design-based contribution thus serves as a proof-of-concept: it provides a concrete stepping-stone for educators seeking to improve English reading among Tamil students. In line with global research showing that first-language literacy supports second-language learning (UNESCO, 2025, para. 5), the module has the potential to strengthen bilingual reading skills. Ultimately, by laying this groundwork, the study advances Malaysia’s aim of an inclusive, bilingual education that ensures that Tamil-heritage learners have the support they need to develop lasting English literacy.



1.11 Summary

Chapter One has laid the foundational groundwork for this study, which aims to address the persistent challenges in English reading proficiency among Year Four students in Tamil primary schools in Johor Bahru. Despite Malaysia’s ongoing efforts to enhance English language education through CEFR-aligned reforms, Tamil vernacular schools continue to face systemic issues such as limited instructional time, a shortage of qualified English teachers and a lack of culturally and linguistically relevant reading resources. These issues contribute to poor English literacy rates, especially in Year Four, where students are expected to begin demonstrating functional reading ability under the CEFR A1 level.





The problem statement highlights the critical need for a bilingual reading module that scaffolds English language learning through the students' first language, Tamil. Given the language gap and under-resourced classrooms, this module is positioned as a targeted, learner-centered solution that supports both students and teachers. The research draws upon qualitative methods, particularly semi-structured interviews with Tamil school English teachers, to identify key instructional challenges and reading barriers. These findings inform the structured development of the bilingual module using the ADDIE instructional design model.

The chapter also presented the research objectives, research questions and a well-aligned conceptual framework based on ADDIE, which outlines the systematic process of Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation. This model ensures that the module is theoretically grounded, pedagogically sound and contextually appropriate.

Overall, Chapter One has established the conceptual, educational and practical significance of this research. It underscores the urgent need for innovative instructional materials that bridge language gaps in vernacular education while also setting the stage for the design and development of a bilingual reading module that can support future interventions in similar contexts.

