

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Out with the old, in with the new

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THE New Year season is over, and now is a good time to reflect on what has been achieved in the last year, and what we expect to do in the coming months to take our national English language programme forward. A fresh year is a time for optimism, and we have good reason to be optimistic.

Last year saw the launch of the Roadmap, and the beginning of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) familiarisation training programme. Much of what we plan to do this year involves creating new opportunities for English language teachers.

By now, we hope that all English teachers will at least have heard of the CEFR, even if they are not quite sure what it is. As the Roadmap is implemented this year, teachers will be able to extend their knowledge and understanding of the CEFR, and incorporate its methods and ideals into their own work in the classroom.

Plans for English Language Education in 2017 include collaboration with Cambridge English to train Master Trainers, who will in turn pass on their expertise and knowledge of the CEFR to classroom teachers. In April and May, 200 Master Trainers will be trained to adapt and adopt teaching and learning materials in accordance with the CEFR. In July, 275 Master Trainers will be given training with regard to the CEFR-aligned curriculum for pre-school, Years One and Two, and Forms One and Two. Some 150 Master Item Writers will be trained to use the CEFR as the framework to guide assessment in relation to the said curriculum. Cambridge English will also be carrying out a study to follow up the Baseline Study done in 2013 to measure the impact of initiatives so far on teachers and students in our English classrooms.

The English Language Teaching Centre at the Education Ministry will continue to play its part. The Highly Immersive Programme, as its name implies, aims to create a highly immersive English-rich environment in schools.

Program Peningkatan Kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris Sekolah puts the focus on Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia student outcomes.

Professional Up-skilling of English Language Teachers provides option teachers with training to improve their English proficiency to CEFR C1, and increase their professional competence.

The Dual Language Programme is designed to enable selected Mathematics and Science teachers to teach the respective subjects effectively in English.

Each of these initiatives will be covered in more detail in future articles written by members of the Panel of Experts associated with the English Language Standards and Quality Council.

The Education Ministry is playing its part to make opportunities available to English teachers. However, to make the national plan work, our English language teachers themselves have an important complementary part to play. The challenge that faces our English language teachers is to make their own jobs more interesting and more rewarding. Ploughing through grammar exercises and trying to finish the textbook can be a soul-destroying experience for anyone.

If you are an English teacher, and that is your experience, you need to know that it does not have to be that way, and that you have an

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alternative. Do not think of the CEFR as just another time-consuming chore, as yet another burden you have to carry, or as something you have to read about before putting it on one side. It is not. The CEFR gives you an opportunity to improve the job you are doing and to raise your professional standing as a teacher.

Just about everybody in Malaysia now realises that the success in life of our nation's children depends in part on their success in English. If you are an English teacher, that means that the children in your class depend on you. It is also true for all of us that job satisfaction depends on the feeling that what we do makes a difference, and we know that what we get out of a job depends in part on what we put into it.

English teachers know the satisfaction that comes from seeing students make good progress, and from knowing that they have played their part in making their progress possible. English teachers are in a win-win situation, because they benefit in job satisfaction from the efforts they put in for the benefit of their students.

Those of us who have been involved in English teaching and learning for a long time

know all the tales of woe about teachers and students, and falling standards of English. The sad old game Ain't It Awful has never done anything to solve problems in the real world; and in our new situation it has become irrelevant, and can be safely left behind in the year that has just passed.

Our task for the year ahead is a positive one, and it involves making our English language teachers aware of how they can improve the life chances for their students, contribute to the country and make their own jobs more fulfilling and rewarding, all at the same time. As we move on with the implementation of the Roadmap in the coming years, we have to ensure that no English teacher feels left behind.

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