

Only imported English textbooks from next year

Move part of reform to ensure international proficiency levels

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PETALING JAYA: Starting next year, imported English textbooks will be used in schools instead of locally produced ones.

This is part of the Education Ministry's move to implement the new Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) aligned curriculum.

The CEFR is a guide developed by the Council of Europe to gauge foreign language proficiency.

From next year, preschoolers, Year One and Two pupils, and Form One and Two students will start off with the curriculum, Deputy Education Minister Datuk P. Kamalanathan told *The Star*.

"The ministry will buy off-the-shelf books to cater to schools because locally produced textbooks are not able meet the new CEFR levels," he said.

Primary school pupils will use *Super Minds* from Cambridge University Press, while secondary students will read MacMillan's *Pulse 2*.

According to the MacMillan website, *Pulse 2* provides an integrated approach to skills so that students can develop receptive and productive skills while perfecting their communication competence.

Super Minds comprises a seven-level course that enhances young learners' thinking skills, memory and language skills, as described on the Cambridge website.

A check online showed that the books are priced between RM78 and RM135.

Teachers, said Kamalanathan, were being trained and the books were already available in all schools.

"This is part of the ministry's English reform to ensure students achieve proficiency levels aligned to international standards," he said.

In August last year, the Education Ministry launched a roadmap to continue enhancing English proficiency among teachers and students.

Focused on the country's 40,000 English teachers, the English Language Roadmap 2015-2025 is part of the implementation of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 to reform English Language education in the country.

The roadmap to upskill teachers uses the CEFR and was produced by the English Language Standards and Quality Council.

The CEFR lists six grades, with C2 – or "specialist English Language teachers" – being the highest and A1 the lowest.

English teachers need to achieve a minimum C1 grade to teach lessons based on the CEFR, said Education Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid.

C1 and C2 grades mean that the person is a competent user of the language and is able to participate fully in both professional and academic life.

While welcoming any effort by the ministry to improve the teaching of English in schools, National Union of the Teaching Profession secretary-general Harry Tan said the "bigger issue" of non-optionists in schools must also be addressed.



Currently, many English teachers are not trained in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), but were chosen by school heads to teach because they know "a little more English" than their colleagues.

"It would be counterproductive to force these teachers to do the CEFR training because English is not their forte to begin with," said Tan.

However, he said using imported instead of locally produced textbooks was more current and cost-efficient.

"This means the schools can have new books every year or every few years, unlike the current practice where the textbooks are only replaced when there is a change in the syllabus.

"The textbooks are used for at least five years or more before being replaced, so current issues aren't dealt with," Tan added.



Tan: The use of imported textbooks is more current and cost-efficient.



Kamalanathan: Locally produced textbooks can't meet CEFR levels.