A Proposed Conceptual Framework: Unlocking a Potential Approach to Evaluating In-Service Teacher Training Programme

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Abstract
The conceptual paper generally elucidates a potential approach to evaluating in-service teacher training programmes in Malaysia. Undeniably, Malaysia has continuously invested in the field of teacher professional development, particularly aimed at enhancing the standards of English but of little fruition. Therefore, with the inception of the Professional Up-skilling of English Language Teachers (Programme), this galvanizes the undertaking study to bring to the forefront the efficacy of the programme. To this end, the Kirkpatrick's evaluation model is utilised but restricted to the first two levels of the model only so that it is aligned with the primary purpose of the Pro-ELT Programme. The Kirkpatrick's evaluation model is then underpinned by tenets drawn from 3 flagship theories/hypothesis- Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky, Adult Learning Theory by Knowles and Affective Filter Hypothesis by Krashen, thus conceptualizing the framework of the study. Guided by the conceptual framework, this directly engenders a refined understanding of ideal evaluation practice and at the same time sheds light on possible factors affecting the success of the designed programme.

Introduction
Till to date, English has played a very significant role in the development of a nation and therefore it is not surprising that efforts to improve the quality of English have ceaselessly been pursued and intensified including those of English-speaking countries, i.e, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Lee, 2011). However, despite the concerted attempts to strengthen the command of English, the standard of English is declining in many parts of the world which in return would mar the country's economic outlook in the global milieu. Amongst the primary reasons for the ill-state of English proficiency is inextricably linked with ill-proficient teachers of English and the fact that the shortage of professionally trained English teachers is acutely critical might have adversely affected the quality of English taught at school, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of English education afflicting both the teachers and students (Sukri, 2018).

In the Malaysian context, the deterioration in English needs no introduction and as reported by the English Language Standards and Quality Council (2015), the quality of English in the country is utterly disappointing. Evidently, scores of Malaysian university graduates have been unemployed due to their incompetence in the English language (Yunus & Sukri, 2017). If such matter fails to be addressed promptly, it would certainly bring dire consequences for the country's futuristic prospects where the mastery of English is indispensable especially in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Nevertheless, more worryingly, the sheer number of Malaysian English teachers at both primary and secondary levels have been identified as ill-proficient users of English based on their appalling performance in the Cambridge Placement Test, aimed at measuring the level of English proficiency on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) scale. Specifically, two-thirds of the 70, 000 English teachers across the country are at the CEFR level of B2 and below, hence failing to meet the required proficiency level set at C1 and above (Jalleh, 2012). Even though the level of English proficiency that Malaysian teachers possess is not as critical as their counterparts in Thailand (Franz & Teo, 2017) and Vietnam (Luong, 2016), it inevitably still poses a serious threat to the English education reform that the Government of Malaysia has been committed to making it a success as articulated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint. Aware of the magnitude of the matter, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia in collaboration with the British council initiated a blended in-service teacher training programme or more popularly known as Pro-ELT (Professional Up-skilling of English Language Teachers) in 2012 (Eshtehardi, 2014) and as of now, it has been running for more than 6 years. As the name of the programme suggests, it comprises 240 hours of in-class training and another 240 hours of online learning sessions under the facilitation and guidance of the British council trainers who are mostly native speakers of English and the whole programme is expected to run for one whole year. Teachers enrolled in Pro-ELT are expected to obtain C1 and above by the end of the programme. Even though the programme has been in existence for quite a number of years, very little research has been conducted to highlight the efficacy of the Pro-ELT Programme in improving English teachers' proficiency level. Thus far, research conducted has offered a micro view of the programme and mostly centred on mere perceptions (Eshtehardi, 2014; Kaur, 2015; Nor et al., 2018; Sukri & Yunus, 2018a; Sukri & Yunus, 2018b) without highlighting measurable outcomes or tangible results with the exception of the study by Sukri and Yunus (2018c). In fact, most evaluative studies have long been focused on distal measures (perceptions) without much emphasis on proximal measures (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007). Moreover, even though the programme participants' views are gathered, the fact that the studies are mostly initiated by the programme trainers (English Language Teaching Centre, 2015) might have increased the researcher's effects or Hawthorne effects, hence leading to mixed results (Nor et al., 2018).

Taking cognizance of these arising matters, this gives an impetus for the present study to not just systematically evaluate the Pro-ELT Programme by addressing both distal and proximal measures but also acknowledge the contextual factors rarely highlighted in previous studies such as the environment they were situated in during the programme, their emotions and their identity as adult learners which might influence the attainment of the desired goal of the programme. Indeed, the endeavour to highlight these underlying factors is very much in tandem with the aspiration of the second wave (2016-2020) articulated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint which is to evaluate the

effectiveness of the initiatives being implemented (English Language Standards & Quality Council, 2015).

A Review of Literature

Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model

It is with a clear understanding that no matter how carefully a new programme is planned, there would always be hiccups and setbacks (English Language Standards and Quality Council, 2015). Therefore, this requires a proper evaluation. Basically, the purpose of evaluation is to prescribe changes and make a programme better (Salehi, Davari & Yunus, 2015) and without it, there is no other viable way to assure investments on training are worth every single penny (Mohamed & Alias, 2014; Baker et al., 2017). Such practice runs parallel to the notion of efficiency as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 where it is geared towards enhancing the quality of education within the allocated budgets. In fact, evaluation process is an integral part of any professional development programme targeting at improving both teacher teaching and student learning so that the time and resources spent can be justified (Phillips & Stone, 2002; Wedell, 2017). Moreover, it is important to ensure there is a continuous evaluation to ensure the desired goals of the implemented programme or policy can be achieved as envisaged (Kepol, 2017). Equally important, evaluation should be focused on the end-users, in the context of the present study, English teachers attending Pro-ELT so as to depict the reality of training programme better (Alshuwairekh, 2016) and at the same time could contribute to the scarcity of studies on how practising teachers improve their target language proficiency upon pre-service training (Chambless, 2012).

The Kirkpatrick's evaluation of training model or also known as the Kirkpatrick training evaluation framework was created in the 1950s by Donald Kirkpatrick, the former president of the American Society for Training and Development and professor at the University of Wisconsin. It is to be noted that this model has long been a guiding principle in evaluating corporate businesses and institutions (Philip & Stone, 2002) and its ever-growing popularity and powerful influence needs no introduction as it has always been referred to for evaluating training programmes (Aryadoust, 2016). Nevertheless, it has seldom been used in the educational contexts despite its immense potential benefits (Aryadoust, 2016; Keogh, 2015; Praslova, 2010). The Kirkpatrick model, generally, consists of four stages represented by level one: reactions, level two: learning, level three: behaviour, level four: result as shown below.
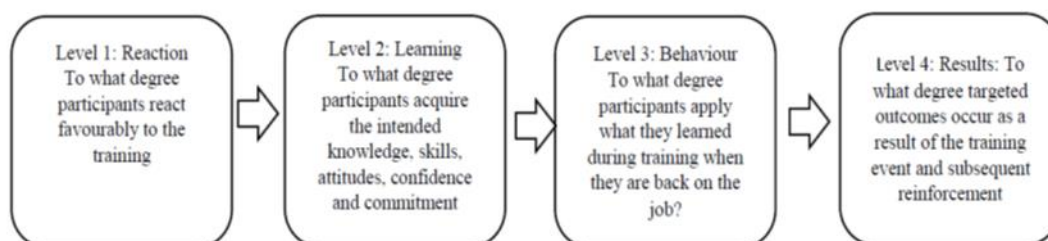

Figure 2.1 Kirkpatrick Four-Level Training Evaluation Model
Source: Kirkpatrick Partners

In detail, reaction level measures the participants' satisfaction and perceptions and it is typically conducted through questionnaires distributed at the end of the programme (Kirkpatrick, 1998). This level is concerned with the participants' reactions to content relevance, trainers' knowledge and delivery or online learning, in the case of blended language programme, as well as the overall satisfaction with the pogramme (Phillips Associates, 2015). To put it simply, reaction level describes how the participants feel and their personal reactions to the training or learning experience (Kirkpatrick, 1959). Learning level, on the other hand, is focused on the acquisition of knowledge or skills which can be measured through pre-and–post tests (Kirkpatrick, 1996). In other words, it is meant to demonstrate to what extent the participants have learned before and after the training programme or can be referred to as output indicator, shedding light on the measurable results or outcomes of the programme (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015).

Different from the first two levels which are straightforward and easy to quantify as well as interpret (Praslova, 2010), behavior level entails frequent observation and interview in determining to what extent the participants have demonstrated changes and integrated the skills acquired into their work routine. As the level increases, so does its degree of difficulty (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick 2006). Furthermore, the process becomes much more complicated and laborious. In consequence, a lot of organisations have not even managed to evaluate beyond level 2 (Mohamed & Alias, 2012). The last level seeks to show how much the programme has affected the whole system not only the targetted participants. This is the most intricate level as it is also involved with some unidentified factors (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2005) which lead to the unfair judgement of the programme performance on the whole. In fact, there is no framework ever reported in English as a second language (ESL) literature in assessing the comprehensive impact of the programme (Aryadoust, 2016) and the fact that training often aims for specific objectives rather than to yield results at all levels has to be duly acknowledged (Giangreco et al., 2010).

Because of the above, the present study will be guided by the first two levels, namely, reaction and learning. Not only are they practical and convenient, but they also suit the primary objective of the Pro-ELT Programme which is driven to enhance English teachers' language proficiency. In other words, as the main focus of Pro-ELT is neither the students nor the administrators, the selection of the first two levels is justified. Most importantly, incorporating the Kirkpatrick evaluation model would allow the study to place the programme participants at the forefront of the whole evaluative process in which they have the privilege to make suggestions on how the programme can be improved. This matter is of grave concern whereby they, in many cases, are denied the opportunity to do as such (Yunus & Arshad, 2015). In doing so, this woul capture one of the ultimate goals in professional development which is the betterment of language parogramme (Goodall et al., 2005; Kiely, 2009; Patton, 2008; Wedell, 2017). Only then, can ones truly understand what is transpiring owing to the interventions (Wedell, 2017) and crucially important, determine whether or not they are worth pursuing (Guskey, 2002).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory
The selection of Vygotsky's Sociocultural (SCT) theory to be embedded in this study is because of its applicability in gaining insights into teacher professional development (Chew, Jones & Turner,

2008) which can also be extended to blended learning environment (Shabani, 2016) akin to the Pro-ELT Programme. The main contention espoused in this theory is the role that social interaction plays is very imperative in language acquisition. This is because interaction is an opportunity which gives an impetus for a learner to learn. Through interaction, it gives learners chances to regulate and restructure their knowledge before it is internalized (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, this accounts for Vygotskian thinking which stresses that knowledge construction should be sought in the social instruction rather than in the mind.

First and foremost, SCT acknowledges that the construction of knowledge occurs between an expert or known as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and a novice. The MKO could be trainers, parents, colleagues, friends and family members. Also, they establish connections or relationships with significant objects such as computer, online learning and cultural practices that they engage at their workplace, homes or in the community. All of these can be associated with physical and psychological tools and artifacts that mediate the knowledge construction (Lantolf, 2004) and control the relationship between subjects and objects or goals (Kengwe & Kang, 2013). In detail, Walqui (2006) enumerates 5 assumptions concerning Vygotsky's SCT; development happens after learning, words and language mediate the social and cultural construction of knowledge, mediation is integral to learning, social interaction is the foundation of learning and development and lastly, learning could translate into development if it takes place within the primary activity space, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Of all the key tenets in Vygotsky's SCT, the ZPD often receives much attention due to its significance in second language acquisition (Mahn, 2014). In greater detail, the ZPD is a space where trainers, coaches or more-skilled colleagues render assistance and provide guidance for learners to master or solve taxing tasks. When learning is facilitated within the learner's ZPD, it is believed that his thinking and performance will be much better and of more refined quality. Furthermore, this coincides with the Interaction Hypothesis propounded by Long (1996) in which the more opportunities learners have to interact with the guru, the better chances they stand to acquire the language. In other words, unless the learner is assisted by a more skillful and knowledgeable trainer, the skills that are beyond his ZPD might fail to be mastered. In this regard, the role of MKO is more to facilitate the learning among learners and encourage them to make progress which surpasses their present level. In essence, Vygotsky's SCT augments that learners' ZPD significantly relies on the expertise of the trainers or more capable peers in addition to the language and culture of their whole learning environment as well as the social interaction.

Situating Vygotsky's SCT in the context of teacher professional development, for instance, could be seen in the mentoring model. In this respect, the concept of ZPD is materialised when a novice teacher is involved in an interaction, aiming to support his professional growth, with an experienced mentor. Subsequently, the experienced mentor would guide and carefully push the novice into the most proximal level of development so that the novice could realise his full potential. This is possible when the novice, instead of being passive and working in isolation, contributes his or her knowledge or make use of the feedback given and together with the mentor, jointly construct a ZPD. Basically, both the novice and experienced teach and learn from one another as learning does not take place in a continuum and to emphasise, it is a never ending process. This is even more so in

language learning when it embodies a socio-cultural learning process (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005) which is in turn central to professional education (Durning & Artino, 2011).

In a nutshell, the supremacy of Vygotsky's SCT cannot be contested as it is anchored in both theoretical and practical aspects (Shabani, 2016) and possesses a predictive and explanatory power concerning teacher development in multifarious diverse settings (DiPardo & Potter 2003).

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's theory of second language acquisition altogether has 5 interrelated hypotheses that mirror an understanding of linguistics and psychology (Krashen, 1981). These hypotheses consist of the Input Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. All of these hypotheses are significant in throwing light on how second language can be acquired but this study hinges upon the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which is best suited to the context of the study where teachers are confronted with a new experience which utilizes the expertise of foreign trainers and the integration of ICT into their learning.

First and foremost, the Affective Filter Hypothesis is first proposed by Dulay and Burt (1977). However, it was Krashen who brought the hypothesis to the fore by making connections between the affective delimiters and second language acquisition and was later to be included in his five input hypotheses in 1985. Low affective filters can be related to a learner who has high motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety level whereas an individual who exhibit opposing traits is said to have high affective filters. Theoretically, Krashen postulated that L2 acquisition comes about when learner obtains comprehensible input and has low affective filters. In contrast, having high affective filters could prevent comprehensible input from reaching the part of brain accountable for language acquisition. In other words, an affective filter can either optimize or decrease the intake of comprehensible input.

In relation to non-native language teachers, it is found that they do experience language anxiety (Rossi, 2015) and this complication can have dire consequences for language teaching. As a matter of fact, there is an emotional experience intrinsic to any learning circumstance (Somers & Sikorova, 2002). Realising that, it is more important than ever to lower down the affective filters by creating a supportive environment. Such learning condition can later positively affect their motivation and self-esteem. In reference to Keller (1979), in an attempt to significantly influence the learners' desire to and willingness to learn, it is best if the topic taught could stimulate their interest. Besides, it is also important to enable them to see the relevance of the topic to their lives, especially when it is involved with working adults. Another measure could also include giving clearly defined tasks yet interesting and mentally rewarding. It is also indispensable to shape their beliefs about the nature of second language learning which could be a tool to cultural awareness and friendship. This could again be aligned to a common scenario in the Pro-ELT Programme whereby a European trainer coaches Malaysian English teachers which might result in a unique learning experience.

To put it laconically, it is undeniable that the affective filter can greatly influence language learning and thereby, it is paramount to create a conducive setting where both psychological needs are fulfilled and language anxiety is minimised to the greatest extent possible.

Knowles' Adult Learning Theory

Knowles' adult learning theory is embedded in the framework of this study because the Pro-ELT Programme is concerned with working adults or specifically Malaysian primary and secondary school English teachers who have yet to achieve the required level of English proficiency, C1 and above. Moreover, Borko (2004) emphasised that teachers who are also learners in the system are part of key elements that constitute any professional development system. In return, this would engender more sustainable teacher professional development (Trotter, 2006)

This adult learning theory was developed by Malcom Knowles in the 1970s and he is famous for the use of the term 'Andragogy' which is inextricably linked to adult education. Further, the theory rests upon 5 assumptions including the last one that was added in 1984. First, Knowles (1984a) claimed that adults are assumed to be self-directed learners who are responsible for their own learning and want to be in control. Second, they have a rich source of experience that can be developed as a basis for their learning. Next, their readiness to learn is dependent upon the relevance of knowledge in their lives. Moreover, they learn best when the knowledge intended is of immediate value to them. Then, their orientation towards learning changes from subject-centredness to problem-centredness. In other words, they would find task-oriented learning valuable if it is in alignment with real situation at workplace. In return, not only does it enhance their problem-solving ability but also instill a greater sense of confidence that they can surmount the challenges posed with their newly acquired knowledge.

In light of the assumptions made above, Knowles (1984b) put forth 4 principles to be applied to adult learning. First of all, adults should be involved in the instructional planning and evaluation given that they are self-directed learners. It is also important to take note of their experiences, both success and failures as this could be used as a resource for their learning. In fact, it has always been known that adults who have undergone so many phases of life are more inclined to connect their previous experience with newly received input and afterwards, validate and rationalize it based on their prior knowledge and learning. This brings to the third principle which claims that adults are more intrigued in subjects that are of immediate relevance to their working or personal lives. This should be kept in mind as they might not be motivated to learn something that is not significant and offer least benefits to them. Furthermore, adults tend to learn something effectively if they voluntarily and personally commit themselves to it. Therefore, it is highly recommended for adult learning to be problem-centred rather than content-oriented.

To put it in a nutshell, the inclusion of the Knowles' adult learning theory in the framework of the study could not have been more perfect as it virtually considers all key aspects of learning that are worth to be explored. Unarguably, Knowles' strength is "creating opportunities for helping individuals become proficient practitioners" (Knowles, 1989: 146) which very much upholds the aesthetic of the Pro-ELT Programme and as a matter of fact, having aplenty opportunities is indeed an important entity in language learning (Saad, Yunus & Embi, 2014).

In light of the discussed theories and model as well as hypothesis above, the following illustrates the proposed conceptual framework.
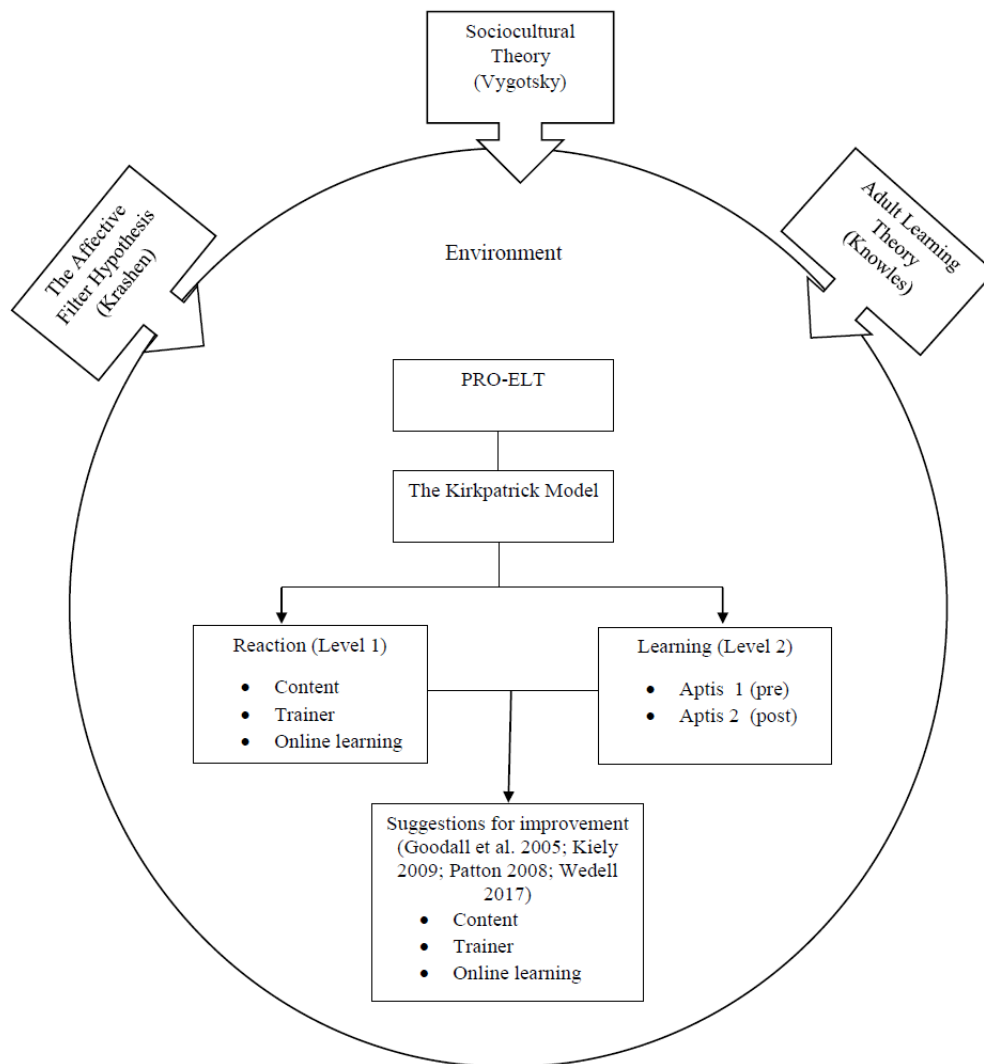
Conclusion

In encapsulation, it goes without saying that in-service language training programme should be continuously monitored and regularly evaluated so that any potential hazard to its effectiveness can be quickly diagnosed, thus ensuring the attainment of the ultimate goal as envisioned. As a matter of fact, evaluative practices are of paramount importance given that there would always be "problem(s) arising from imperfect integration and uncoordinated implementation" (English Language Standards and Quality Council, 2015: 28) no matter how carefully a programme is planned. As such, the paper proposes a conceptual framework chiefly derived from the levels 1 and 2 of the Kirkpatrick's evaluation model which is aimed at keeping the quality of the programme in check. Realising that language learning is interwoven with a multitude of other factors, this accounts for the integration of the Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Knowles' Adult Learning Theory into the conceptual framework alongside the Kirkpatrick's evaluation model.

In so doing, this would offer refined insights from different perspectives which are essential to leave a lasting imprint on teachers' professional growth. Needless to say, irrespective of area of interest, there must always be room for the system of checks and balances to yield optimal gains and fruitful end results which can only be realised through a well thought out evaluation framework.

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