

Article



<https://doi.org/10.52696/TGCT6849>

Reprints and permission:

The Malaysian English Language Teaching Association

✉ Noor Azli Affendy Lee noor.azli@uitm.edu.my

The CEFR-Aligned Curriculum Execution in Malaysia and Other Countries: A Conceptual Paper

Noor Azli Affendy Lee

Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang
Malaysia

Aini Akmar Mohd Kassim

Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam
Malaysia

Rofiza Aboo Bakar

Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang
Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) impacts language education, learning and evaluation in the European nations as well as in different nations around the world. The recently presented CEFR-aligned educational plan through the Malaysian English Language Roadmap (2013-2025) could set up a fundamental and reliable arrangement of learning guidance and evaluation in Malaysia. As the CEFR has been broadly embraced by numerous nations before its selection in Malaysia, there is a need to look at the issues faced by different nations to guarantee a superior arrangement of the CEFR in the Malaysian educational program. This paper aims to examine the executions of the CEFR in a few nations to satisfy their respective education policies in order to compare with the development and execution of the CEFR in Malaysian schools and universities. In this investigation, a review of 25 research papers published in journals from the year 2010 to 2019 related to the CEFR transformation and execution issues for English language from different nations all around the world, including Malaysia, was conducted. Utilising Google Scholar, these papers were selected with important keywords such as “CEFR” and the name of the chosen country. In view of the current writing, a few differences just as qualities and constraints of the CEFR-aligned executions were underscored, which propose required data to rethink the execution of the CEFR in the Malaysian education curriculum in order to accomplish the significant goal of refining English instructing, learning and assessment. The

paper ends with proposals on the need to normalise academic practice to improve the CEFR-aligned educational program change endeavours.

KEYWORDS: CEFR, Curriculum, Execution, Review

INTRODUCTION

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was set up in 2001 to offer a practicable system that assigns the learning entailments of language students to utilise a language adequately in practice (Council of Europe, 2018). Initially, its expectation was to offer evaluation and showing approaches for all languages in Europe. Notwithstanding, because of its straightforwardness of strategy in various regions, the CEFR has also been endorsed in nations outside Europe. It has been embraced and adjusted to suit different necessities and demands mostly in numerous nations' instructive strategies, homeroom education, language testing and assessment, language educational plan improvement and other significant territories in language education. Various nations are handling the CEFR in their own respective ways. Some decide to directly embrace its structure, particularly when a nation's background has recognizable affiliations and likenesses to local English-speaking nations, while others choose to adjust the CEFR to be in tandem with their distinct cultures and local language acquisition approaches. In any case, the parallel differentiation among nations is that the CEFR is chiefly utilised by instructors to check how well their pupils are performing with respect to the CEFR scale levels against international standards.

The vital markers of the success of the educational plan and schedule made from an instructive strategy lie on how instructors utilise assessments. This involves measuring students' achievements using the required benchmark of the learning curriculum or the course outcome at the completion of a fixed timeline (Bharati & Lestari, 2018). Malaysian students have been acquainted with the English language starting from preschool (5 or 6 years old), and the language keeps on being instructed all through their schooling stages from elementary to tertiary level. The English language is a mandatory subject in the Malaysian schooling educational program and it is generally perceived as a significant second language in Malaysia. Despite having been educated under the English curriculum for a long time, a majority of Malaysian ESL pupils have not been able to accomplish a healthy degree of competency in the language (Azman, 2017) remarkably in communication and composition abilities (Hamzah et al., 2018). In the wake of the development of the CEFR in some nations' educational policies, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia has joined the trend to use the CEFR in its essential execution for English language teaching and learning in the country. The establishment of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 that filled in as the all-inclusive strategy that guides forward for the Malaysian schooling framework (Kaur & Shapii, 2018) has made an educational programme reform in the Malaysian English as a Second Language (ESL) syllabus, instruction and evaluation. This adjustment of the educational programme is expected to fill in as a way for a foundational change of English language instruction in Malaysia.

The execution of the CEFR in Malaysia is being done in three methodically essential stages (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The primary wave in 2013 to 2015 had zeroed in on strengthening the current instruction educational plans by raising the English language capability of teachers (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Then, the second wave in 2016 to 2020 introduced key movements which incorporate CEFR-aligned educational programmes, instruction and learning as well as evaluation development for teachers (Ministry of Education Malaysia,

2013). This would set and approve the fitting CEFR levels against every instruction level in Malaysian primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Beginning from 2017, the new CEFR-aligned educational programmes have begun to be carried out in standard one and form one English language syllabi respectively and the execution of the newly introduced syllabi proceeds to the following grade level every year. Simultaneously, ESL instructors actually go for professional development training and workshops to further adapt to the CEFR-align educational programmes (Zuraidah Mohd Don & Mardziah Hayati Abdullah, 2019). Ultimately, the third wave in 2021 onwards will focus on assessing, reviewing and modifying the CEFR-aligned English language curricula (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013) for the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC).

To help in understanding the CEFR Malaysia Roadmap 2025, it is also essential for those involved to be closely monitored and guided both in formulation and direction. It is likewise fundamental for them to be included all the more intently to permit their voices to be heard. It is inadequate to just depend on official proclamations of how assessment should be outlined and comprehended. Hence, literature should also be enhanced with a comprehension of how the CEFR is actually adopted and adapted throughout various nations.

This paper intends to look at the executions of the CEFR in a few nations in order to realise their particular education policies. The findings can then be compared with the progress and execution of the CEFR in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the distressing concern in deciding standardised guidelines for English language teaching and assessment corresponding to worldwide benchmarks, for the last 15 years, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been heartily utilised and embraced by European countries in the area of language assessment and evaluation and has gradually affected the design of educational programmes as a whole (Read, 2019) and on the assessment of language learning results specifically (Holzknecht et al., 2018). The CEFR has been extensively famous past Europe because of its evident thoroughness and experimentally created and approved six-level marks (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) which impact the items in language learning programmes in various settings for various utilisations and purposes (Idris & Raof, 2017). The clear-cut six-level scale suggests a progressive advancement in language learning from novice, intermediate to higher proficiency level (Read, 2019). There have been various CEFR-related studies conducted by researchers in order to explore the efficiency of the scales in differing national education curricula. A few investigations included a search for insights on the acknowledgment and responses on the utilisation of CEFR. Others were more attracted to investigating educators' understanding of the CEFR and its practical uses in classrooms. There were also studies relating to textbooks, educational plans, and instructional techniques.

The CEFR was first given in two draft reports in 1996. In 2001, it was further revised to be made accessible in French and English languages. Since its distribution, the CEFR has immediately accomplished a powerful capacity in language instruction all through Europe (Read, 2019). It was found that the most consistently used segment of the CEFR was the common reference levels of the 6-level rating scales. Subsequently, these rating scales have ended up being the 'common currency' in numerous nations in Europe and have started to get recognised in other countries across the globe. The establishment of the CEFR rating scales is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1*The development process of the CEFR scales (Council of Europe, 2018)*

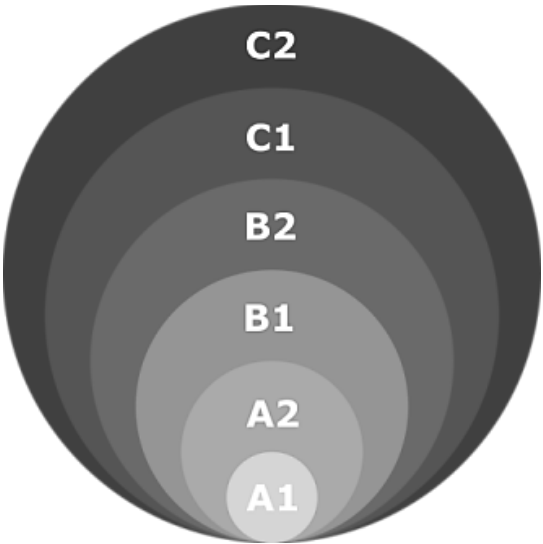
<p><u>Phase 1</u></p> <p>Step 1: Collection of 2000 descriptors from over 30 scales in use around the world.</p> <p>Step 2: Classification of each descriptor according to categories of communicative language ability and writing additional descriptors to fill perceived gaps.</p>
<p><u>Phase 2</u></p> <p>Step 3: Pairs of teachers are given sets of descriptors typed onto confetti like strips of paper and asked to sort them into categories.</p> <p>Step 4: The same pairs are asked to comment on the “usefulness” and “relevance” of each descriptor for their students.</p> <p>Step 5: Teachers are given the same sets of descriptors and asked to separate them into three levels: ‘low’, ‘middle’ and ‘high’, and then divide each of these into two categories to create the familiar six level scale.</p> <p>Step 6: The descriptors most consistently placed in the same level of the scale are used to create overlapping ‘questionnaires’ of descriptors, with the overlap items operating as anchors.</p>
<p><u>Phase 3</u></p> <p>Step 7: A rating scale is attached to each descriptor on the questionnaire.</p> <p>Step 8: A group of teachers is asked to rate a small number of their learners from their classes on the rating scale for each of the descriptors on the questionnaire.</p> <p>Step 9: This data is used to construct scales of unidimensional items using Rasch analysis, rejecting any items that misfit the Rasch model.</p> <p>Step 10: Items that behave statistically differently across languages or sectors are identified and removed.</p> <p>Step 11: Cut scores are established using difficulty estimates in order to achieve equidistant bands.</p>
<p><u>Phase 4</u></p> <p>Step 12: Conduct the study again using a different group of teachers.</p>

The CEFR addresses an exertion by language teachers and testing experts in Europe to build up a typical system to help relate language courses and evaluations to one another (Cox et al., 2017). The fundamental standards of the CEFR incorporate viewing language learning as a long-lasting experience and recognising the capability of the students’ language proficiency in a given coursework. The widespread utilisation of the CEFR has made its rating scales a truly agreeable instrument as it proposes a more exact and steady method of procuring the stage at which the students’ proficiency in the language is, rather than using general characterizations of language

learners (refer to Figure 2, Council of Europe, 2018). It is a way to build global arrangement, advance deep rooted learning and boost the quality and practicality of language learning and development in educational institutions. Despite all the materials that have been produced, the Council of Europe has been working in effort to keep on creating parts of the CEFR, especially the illustrative descriptors for L2 and FL proficiency. Subsequently, the importance of studies that examined the CEFR scales for scoring L2 or FL learners’ proficiencies need to be further explored to compare the CEFR scales in various locales. However, the CEFR must also be utilised rationally to augment the quality of the assessments of learners on a scale that is more visible than other methods employed to identify their proficiency (Holzknecht et al., 2018). By doing this, it reflects the expanding awareness of the need for an incorporated method to language education across the curriculum.

Figure 2

The six common reference levels (Council of Europe, 2018: 34)



The widespread use of the CEFR has made its proficiency scale a very likeable tool as it proposes a more accurate and consistent way of acquiring the phase at which the students of interest are than using broad classifications of learners such as ‘beginners’, ‘intermediate’ or ‘advanced’ (Holzknecht et al., 2018). Thus, the emphasis of analyses that have exploited CEFR scales for scoring second (L2) or foreign (FL) language learners’ proficiencies has not been to explore the comparability of the CEFR scale in diverse settings, but to use it as a rational tool to enhance the quality of the assignments of learners or their performances on a scale that is more apparent than other systems used to define learners’ proficiency (Holzknecht et al., 2018).

Much work done by the other institutions and professional bodies since the publication of CEFR has confirmed the validity of the initial research conducted. To build on the widespread adoption and use of the CEFR, the Council of Europe has published an extended version of the illustrative descriptors that complements the original ones in 2018 (Council of Europe, 2018). This extension takes the CEFR descriptors beyond the area of modern language learning to encompass aspects

relevant to language education across the curriculum in the extensive consultation process undertaken in 2016 to 2017. The summary of the major changes is captured in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Summary of the major changes in CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors 2018 (Foley, 2019: 32)

Summary of the major modifications/additions in CEFR 2001-2018
1. Developing the illustrative descriptors of second/foreign language proficiency
2. To produce versions of CEFR for young learners (7-10\11-15) and for sign language
3. To develop more detailed coverage in the descriptors for A1 and the C levels
4. Complement the original illustrative scales with descriptors for mediating a text, mediating concepts, and mediating communication
5. The provision of descriptors for plurilingual/pluricultural competence
6. The removal of any reference to 'native speaker' and it is being replaced with speakers of the target language
7. The proficiency level of speakers of the target language is not specified and uses the term 'partial' competence, arguing that language users are fundamentally uneven in different contexts

As elsewhere around the world, English language teaching, learning and assessment are undergoing substantive change towards the establishment of a common framework of English language ability scales. Challenges faced with regards to the implementation of CEFR have been studied extensively to reimagine language pedagogy and to improve the utilisation of CEFR in various domains in different countries. Due to the alarming concern in determining standards for English language instruction in relations to global benchmarks, since its establishment, the CEFR has been vigorously utilised and received to the region of language evaluation and testing in numerous nations and has impacted the plan of language educational programs when all is said in done (Read, 2019) and on the appraisal of language learning results specifically (Holzknecht et al., 2018). There have been numerous CEFR related studies done by scholars in many areas. Some studies involved looking for insights on the recognition and reactions on the use of the CEFR. Others were more attracted to investigating educators' arrangement and there were additionally contemplates identifying with CEFR-adjusted course books, educational programs and instructing strategies.

Holzknecht et al., (2018) in their study in comparing CEFR-based ratings of writing performances between raters of different national and educational contexts stated that writing-related CEFR descriptors for rating purposes may indeed produce equivalent results among raters in different European countries if those raters are trained and greatly knowledgeable in using systematically established CEFR-based rating scales. Hence, it should be said that the straightforward use of CEFR descriptors for rating purposes needs extensive training and experience and cannot be anticipated from classroom teachers. At the same time, the CEFR has come to serve as an administration means for government officers to exert control over language education by stipulating learning outcomes in general terms and a way of outlining minimum levels of language

aptitude in contexts such as higher learning, occupation and migration (Read, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This study reviews 25 journal articles published between 2010 and 2019 which identify with the execution of the CEFR in selected countries and the issues each nation faced with regard to its implementation. Utilising Google Scholar, these papers were selected with important keywords such as “CEFR” and the name of the chosen country. The countries were chosen as they provide extensive literature with regard to the development and implementation of the CEFR. As the finding for the investigation, the paper will focus on the executions and alignment of the CEFR in European countries Canada, the Netherlands, and Sweden; Asian countries Taiwan, Japan, and China; and Southeast Asian countries Vietnam and Malaysia.

FINDINGS

Although initiated from a project of the Council of Europe, the CEFR soon demonstrated reasonable context-independence and was initiated in countries around the world. In 2006, the Canadian Council of Ministries of Education decided to found an operational team to deliberate the strengths and weaknesses of the CEFR in detail (Mison & Jang, 2011). In 2010, the council publicly proposed that provinces and territories of Canada utilise the CEFR for teaching, learning and assessment purposes. Going along with the government, educators from several other areas in education have adopted the CEFR in Canada. Prominently, the insertion of the CEFR in the Canadian context placed a positive progression in motion at the level of reconceptualisation of tools and frameworks connected to assessment, curriculum and pedagogy (Arnott et al., 2017). Findings by Mison and Jang (2011) suggested that assessment transparency, consistency and plurilingualism in the classroom are noticeable and current concerns of FL and L2 teachers should be reflected in order to boost teacher’s support and partaking in the implementation of CEFR in Canadian classrooms.

In the Netherlands, since its introduction, CEFR is gradually recognised and utilised in Dutch secondary education. Findings from Moonen et al., (2013) stated that the use of CEFR is most prevalent in the use of CEFR-related textbooks. However, the fraction of teachers who use CEFR more comprehensively is rather small even though commonly Dutch FL teachers have the essential grasp of CEFR and welcome its function as an instrument to evaluate target language proficiency on a universal level. This is because the Dutch government does not officially impose the usage of CEFR and the schools can choose to implement CEFR however they prefer.

The forthcoming interpretation of language learning following the CEFR has prompted a shift in teacher education for EFL teachers in Sweden and how foreign languages are taught in Swedish schools (Baldwin, 2018). However, the choice to establish learning outcomes linked to the CEFR as a preliminary point for managing teaching and learning was considered outside of the teaching cluster and subsequently, there were diverse viewpoints within the group about employing CEFR and its descriptors. It was stated in Baldwin’s (2018) study that the teachers deemed it problematic to utilise the CEFR descriptors when measuring examples of pupil product and pupils would have difficulties comprehending the CEFR descriptors as they were unclear.

As previously stated, the effect of the CEFR has circulated well outside Europe and it is remarkable to compare how various countries in Asia have reacted to it. Many non-speaking English countries such as China, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and many more have embraced English as a language of communication to partake and contend in the globalised economy (Uri & Aziz, 2018b) to the extent of implementing and aligning CEFR into their own national education policies.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan was determined to adopt CEFR as a common benchmark of English language proficiency in the country and all national tests were progressively standardised against the CEFR so that its marks could be interpreted in terms of the levels on the framework (Read, 2019). The Language Training and Testing Centre at National Taiwan University commenced a project to plot the test levels on to the 6 levels of CEFR and were capable of displaying a very satisfactory level of alignment. However, a number of problems arose as the Ministry of Education in Taiwan did not have the technical capability to assess the validity of the assertions attained by test producers that their tests have been aligned with the CEFR and there is a lack of transparency on the grading standards employed by universities to measure their students' attainment in English through their course work.

Since the late 1900s, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan has tried to foster the English communication proficiencies of Japanese students (Kimura et al., 2017) and to offer consistency and transparency in language learning (Fergus, 2015). An 8-year project called CEFR-J was established by a team of language scholars at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and its goal was to adapt the CEFR to the Japanese context using in-depth evaluation of a set of 647 descriptors so that they would better mirror the level of complexity that Japanese learners faced in doing diverse communicative tasks in English and the chances to apply English in the Japanese context (Read, 2019). This project also examined bodies of texts and of Japanese learner language corpus to recognize grammatical and lexical traits and followed the effect of the CEFR-J through inventive usage of "big data analysis" (Read, 2019). However, Japanese teachers of English met with difficulties in the lack of clarity on what English language use should be like in the classroom (Kimura et al., 2017). This concurs with Fennelly's (2016) statement that Japanese practitioners are not prepared, not taught and not eager to accept and use the CEFR curriculum as teachers and students are equally inclined to look into excelling in exams compared to concentrating on communication skills. This leads to Kimura et al., (2017) examining the ideal assessor situations to recommend appropriate standard measurements to utilise in continuing teacher professional development.

Meanwhile, China proposed the development of a Common Chinese Framework of Reference for Languages (CCFR) with a precise emphasis on the teaching of English to offer the chance to scrutinise some essential questions about language education in the country such as what motivates Chinese learners to study foreign languages, at what age level, what target language should be taught and what proficiency levels to aim (Read, 2019). However, the exceedingly segmented Chinese education structure gave rise to lack of transparency and management among stakeholders and many of them are refusing the new CCFR system. Liu and Jia (2017) reported there is a discrepancy between the learner "can do" and what they "do" in testing conditions as they may focus on their own performance rather than focusing on reacting to their peers' actions and feedback dynamically, overlooking the collaborative quality of the assessment. Despite that, the experience acquired from developing and integrating CEFR into Chinese education has given rise to the development of Test for English Majors (TEM) that was designed to assess English language

proficiency of their undergraduate English majors. TEM is likely to aid the implementation of the teaching syllabus and to enhance the quality of language teaching and learning for English majors across China (Zou & Zhang, 2017). In another study by Zheng et al., (2016), they stated there is a possibility of positive effects on teachers' teaching and evaluation habits if teachers are more acquainted with the CEFR scale via appropriate instruction.

Vietnam is the first country in South East Asia to adopt CEFR in 2008 (Uri & Aziz, 2018b). In Vietnam, English was first introduced and taught during the French times but it was not as significant as studying French. Nevertheless, English has developed to be an exceptionally significant foreign language for economic reforms in later years especially during the 90s Asian financial crisis (Uri & Aziz, 2018b). Understanding the significance of English to Vietnam's economic development, English has become a staple and obligatory course to both undergraduate and postgraduate students in Vietnam. Numerous efforts have been made to restructure the foreign (especially English) language teaching system, among which is the adoption of CEFR into the Vietnamese local context of language teaching and learning as a quick-fix solution to reorganise the national foreign language education system (Le, 2018). Six years after the adoption of CEFR, in 2014, a Vietnamese version of CEFR was approved to all levels of education in Vietnam from kindergarten to higher education (Khang, 2018). This reformed framework for foreign language proficiency was established to fit the native contexts and lessen Eurocentric elements of CEFR. This framework is employed to measure the standard and quality of English learning as well as to encourage educational institutions to dynamically improve and execute bilingual programmes. However, the framework caused the opposite intended reaction among the Vietnamese teachers who were not accustomed to its rubrics and were uninterested in using the CEFR descriptors in their classroom activities. Even after nearly 10 years of its first introduction in Vietnam, the adoption of CEFR still meets challenges and difficulties from restricted human resources to complications in teacher professionalism (Le, 2018) such as teachers have not been assessed or been trained thoroughly and systematically on CEFR-based materials and assessment (Khang, 2018). Khang (2018) also found that the Vietnamese government has some official standards for EFL teachers but they usually differ from the descriptors in the CEFR.

English has been utilised and taught in proper educational instructions for years in Malaysia. Despite all the efforts put forth by the government to enhance English proficiency levels of Malaysians, the standard is still inadequate compared to other developed countries and Malaysia has yet to deliver highly-skilled graduates who have solid control of the language (Uri & Aziz, 2018b). Therefore, the CEFR has been systematically adopted by Malaysia, aligning the framework with the syllabus, curricula and assessments in the Malaysian education system. The implementation of CEFR in Malaysia is planned to take place in 3 waves starting from 2013 to 2025 with the first wave in 2013 to 2015 to focus on consolidating the existing education system and curricula which includes tackling minimal English competence among English teachers. The second wave (2016 to 2020) would present a fundamental shift which includes CEFR-aligned curricula, teaching and learning as well as assessment development. After 4 years of implementation, the outcomes of CEFR-aligned English language curricula will be evaluated and revised in the third wave from 2021 to 2025.

The Malaysian cascade training on CEFR was documented by Aziz et al., (2018). The reported CEFR cascade training model can be referred to in Figure 4. The first cohort of teachers who underwent training consisted of those who would be teaching English for primary 1, primary 2,

form 1, and form 2 in 2017. The familiarisation stage lasted from October to November 2016 (exposing participants to language learning pedagogy perspectives in the CEFR and interpreting action-oriented perspectives on curriculum, teaching methodology and assessment, reflection on how CEFR could impact areas of education), learning material evaluation, adaptation and design (understanding principles of materials evaluation, differentiation strategies, adaptation and design, integrated learning skills) was combined with the curriculum induction stage (understanding content and learning standards, scheme of work, lesson outlines and procedures resources including new textbooks and non-textbook materials, differentiation strategies and teachers;’ feedback) which was held from July to September 2017. The item writing and formative assessment stage was conducted from January to March 2018. However, at the time of the report, the fourth stage was still ongoing, hence, it was not reported. Aziz et al., (2018) reported the third-tier course suffered greatly in terms of content delivery as there was insufficient training due to time constraint and lack of organisation and funding.

Figure 4

The Malaysian CEFR Cascade Training Model (Aziz et.al. 2018)

Tiers	Trainers	Familiarisation (Stage 1)	Learning Material Evaluation, Adaptation and Design (Stage 2)	Curriculum Induction (Stage 3)
First Tier	Cambridge English Super Trainers (CEST)	5 days 5 to 7 CEST 25 NMT each	5 days 5 to 7 CEST 25 NMT each	5 days 5 to 7 CEST 25 NMT each
Second Tier	National Master Trainers (NMT)	5 days 200 NMT 100 DT each	5 days 200 NMT 25 DT each	5 days 200 NMT 25 DT each
Third Tier	District Trainers (DT)	Not stated 6000 DT Not stated	1 day Concurrent with Stage 3 100 teachers each	2 days Concurrent with Stage 2 100 teachers each
Fourth Tier	ESL teachers			

In its preliminary stage in which policymakers and stakeholders are yet to get used to the framework, Malaysia has chosen to adopt CEFR into its language curriculum development and gradually examine its expansion and adapt to its outcomes. Noteworthy alterations have been put together in lesson plans and the ESL syllabus and the stakeholders have begun adopting particular benchmarks and content to match the needs of Malaysian teachers and learners. While the CEFR framework and notions establish an affinity to Malaysian education instruction, voices from language teachers in classrooms are critical and need to be given consideration (Mison & Jang, 2011).

Even though the CEFR-aligned curriculum and syllabus have just been formally started to be implemented in all Malaysian primary and secondary schools in 2017, there were several studies done to investigate how the CEFR would affect teaching and assessment practices in the Malaysian classroom contexts. These studies ranged from views and effects of curriculum reforms, curriculum alignment, CEFR impact or influence (Uri & Aziz, 2018a), and many more. However, most studies done in relation to CEFR and the Malaysian education curriculum are quantitative studies on tertiary educators and teachers' views or beliefs and other viewpoints from stakeholders such as government officials (Uri & Aziz, 2018a), parents (Iber, 2014) and CEFR trainers (Aziz et al., 2018a). Most of these studies reported that teachers' beliefs on the implementation of CEFR do not correspond with their classroom practices. However, almost all of these studies have reported the CEFR implementation in the early stages by teachers due to the implementation (second wave) only started in 2017 or gathered perceptions from educators that have yet to fully utilise the CEFR in their respective institutions. Connecting to Aziz et al.'s (2018) reflective report as national master trainer for the CEFR cascade training, the insufficient practice by teachers may be due to the ineffective training done during the third-tier stages in which the District Trainers had to train the ESL teachers. It will be interesting to see whether these perceptions and practices have changed or have gained prominence after a few years of implementation by the teachers, coupled with recently reported ongoing professional development training by the trainers.

Sidhu et al., (2018) in their study on CEFR-aligned school-based assessment in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms stated that the implementation of CEFR in schools is still insufficient. Even though teachers are positive and generally receptive of the CEFR framework and its advantages (Lo, 2018; Uri & Aziz, 2018a), most teachers indicated lack of understanding and awareness of the incorporation of CEFR into classroom assessment as teachers needed more guidance and training for them to fully understand and utilise more innovative CEFR-aligned assessments in their classrooms (Aziz et al., 2018). Aziz et al. (2018) indicated that despite several efforts made in training Malaysian teachers to apply and practice CEFR-aligned teaching and assessment in the past two years, there are still various aspects that need improvement.

In Sidhu et al. (2018) and Moonen et al.'s (2013) studies, it was found that many teachers are still falling back to the conventional textbook exercises as their standard practice and guide in developing students' ESL proficiency. The conventional methods used by teachers from the findings indicate that the teaching and learning in standard classrooms are still teacher-based where teachers act as instructors. Many are still primarily focused on task outcomes rather than developing their students' proficiency (Lo, 2018) due to time constraint in finishing the syllabus

DISCUSSION

From the review of relevant literature, it can be summarised that there are several similarities and differences between the implementation of the CEFR in various countries around the world. Both European and Asian countries use the CEFR to gauge their own English language learners' proficiency and many studies focused on rater and inter-rater professional development. It can also be seen that there is ongoing development in all countries to improve the CEFR implementation such as the inclusion of alternative assessments, peer and self-evaluation in classrooms and more CEFR-aligned tools that educators can use in their English language classrooms. In European countries, the CEFR is mostly not a compulsory element for schools and teachers are not being forced to adopt the CEFR into their classrooms. It serves as an alternative benchmark; hence, there is a lack of willingness to adopt the CEFR. However, in most Asian countries, the CEFR is being

forcibly implemented by each country's government and educational bodies. Most of these rapid implementations in which the government expected its citizens to improve their English language proficiency and communication skills have led to several drawbacks which were discussed in the literature review. Even though the CEFR has been introduced as early as 2001, Malaysia and several other Asian countries have started to adopt the framework only recently as early as 2011. Malaysia adopted the CEFR in 2013 and it is still in the first cycle of its implementation and evaluation phases.

There is a common theme or problem which appears in almost each of the countries mentioned in the review of literature of this paper. Even though CEFR has been positively accepted by stakeholders across each country, especially teachers and policymakers, there exists a lack of transparency of the purpose of implementing CEFR between the ministry or policymakers (top level) and teachers who will be the ones implementing CEFR at the bottom level. The echoing common problem faced by the countries is insufficient teacher training and professional development.

The CEFR has been so prominent worldwide and its benefits to policymakers and educational administrators are difficult to overlook (Read, 2019). This shows that it is simple to believe that the framework can be utilised comprehensively to second language learning situations. However, many language educationists have come to recognize that the CEFR must be adapted if it is to play a prominent part in outlining language objectives and curricula in their own education systems. The epitome of universal benchmarking of learner attainments in developing second languages has been balanced against the variety of social and educational contexts in specific countries (Read, 2019). As noticed in various countries, the means to align and implement CEFR requires a long time and governments are currently improving it based on several drawbacks. Nevertheless, countries could have a better implementation of CEFR by looking into each other's development and evading the mistakes made.

Top-down change, rather than unclear changes in educational aspirations, is the only sensible means to produce progressive change throughout the system (Fennelly, 2016; Zheng et al., 2016). When the CEFR is presented into individual educational contexts, teachers frequently face difficulties in comprehending and employing the theoretical principles without tangible examples (Mison & Jang, 2011). In response to this, teachers claimed that CEFR was still at its infancy, too general and too theoretical to be adapted to classrooms in both hypothetical and pragmatic senses. This is due to the lack of an organised administration or official group to control such an initiative at the state level; thus, it deterred its wider acceptance by teachers (Arnott et al., 2017). There also exists a group of teachers in the grey area, those still contemplating the CEFR's viability for their classroom. The alterations made by the implementation of CEFR may be viewed as a threat to current practices established from their experience (Baldwin, 2018). Professional development workshops for teachers can help to augment the implementation of CEFR and should take into account the level to which CEFR is carried out in order to present language teachers the support and emphasis that are most achievable for their professional context (Moonen et al., 2013). Currently, though the ministry is executing more training for teachers, the teachers are not appropriately prepared to authentically achieve the specified education targets or to adapt to the CEFR influence. Teacher training connecting to how to foster students' ability to achieve the CEFR grading levels is crucial (Fennelly, 2016). All in all, more devotion should be given to boost teachers' crucial capability to satisfy the requisites and benchmarks in the CEFR (Khang, 2018).

LIMITATION OF STUDY

As much as the study achieved the researchers intended for this study, there were several limitations to it, from the ability to generalise conclusion based on a mere 25 journal papers on the execution of the CEFR in various countries. Nevertheless, the papers selected generally show the similar issues faced by Malaysia and various countries that need to be taken into account and relevant to the implementation of the CEFR into a national curriculum and educational syllabus.

CONCLUSION

Taking into account the research and data reviewed by Arnott et al. (2017), it is proposed that certain significant areas should be focused on by future research such as ongoing macro- and micro- policy developments, CEFR-informed initial teacher education programmes, supervision of L2 teachers and language testing. Possible reasons for teachers' challenges with the CEFR include: the abstract nature of the CEFR document, lack of research into school-based uses of the CEFR, and the teachers' beliefs and cultures. In other words, it is not a document of policy, curriculum or assessment that obstruct the implementation of CEFR but the lack of support by its direct stakeholders that fail to comprehend the complexity of the theoretical framework and its application of principles which can lead to the failure of its successful implementation (Mison & Jang, 2011).

In conclusion, this paper has revealed that, generally, teachers have a rudimentary grasp of CEFR and value its usefulness as a means to measure target language competence on a universal level. However, transparency and consistency are required to further reinforce the usage of CEFR in schools and classrooms. This can be obtained in educational approaches and professional developments of teachers who serve as the groundwork to ensure the CEFR-aligned implementation in any country is a success. Hence, their voices need to be heard and their perspectives on the CEFR framework need to be shared in order to reach the high expectations and requirements of what is presently lacking in Malaysian ESL education. The CEFR-aligned syllabus and assessment can then be further standardised for clearer comprehension and implementation of CEFR in Malaysian classroom teaching and assessment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers would like to acknowledge Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang for supporting this paper.

REFERENCES

- Arnott, S., Brogden, L.M., Faez, F., Peguret, M., Piccardo, E., Rehner, K., Taylor, S.K. & Wernicke, M. (2017). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Canada: A research agenda. *The Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 31-54.
- Aziz, A. H. A. A., Ab Rashid, R., & Zainudin, W. Z. W. (2018). The enactment of the Malaysian Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR): National master trainer's reflection. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 409-417. doi:10.17509/ijal.v8i2.I3307.
- Azman, H. (2017). Implementation and challenges of English language education reform in Malaysian primary schools. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 22(3), 65-78.
- Baldwin, R. & Apelgren, B. M (2018). Can Do and Cannot Do – CEFR inspired examination and assessment in a Swedish higher education context. *Apples – Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 12(2), 19-35. <http://doi: dx.doi.org/10.17011/apples/urn.201809144127>.

- Bharati, D.A.L. & Lestari, T. (2018). A need analysis in developing project-based writing assessment module to stimulate students' critical thinking and creativity. *KnE Social Sciences*, 130-138. Doi: 10.18502/kss.v3i18.4706
- Cox, T.L., Malone, M.E. & Winke, P. (2017). Future directions in assessment: Influences of standards and implications for language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 51(1), 104-115. doi: 10.1111/flan.12326
- Council of Europe (2018). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment: Companion Volume with New Descriptors*. Retrieved on 7 December 2020 from <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>
- Fennelly, M.G. (2016). The influence of CEFR on English language education in Japan. *Bull Shikoku University*, 46(A), 109-122.
- Fergus, O. (2015). Toward critical, constructive assessments of CEFR-based language teaching in Japan and beyond. *Osaka University Knowledge Archive: OUKA*, 41, 191-204. doi: 10.18910/51427.
- Foley, J.A. (2019). Issues on assessment using CEFR in the region. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network Journal*, 12(2), 28-48.
- Hamzah, M.S.G., Abdullah, M.Y., Hussin, A.R., Abdullah, S.K. Wong, K.T. & Ismail, S. (2018). Analisis pelaksanaan program memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia (BMB) Sekolah Rendah dan Menengah di Malaysia. *Journal of Kesidang*, 3(1), 40-61.
- Holzknicht, F., Huhta, A. & Lamprianou, I. (2018). Comparing the outcomes of two different approaches to CEFR-based rating of students' writing performances across two European countries. *Assessing Writing*, 37, 57-67. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2018.03.009>.
- Iber, G. (2014). English language teaching in Malaysia: The case for a dual-track English curriculum [Short communication]. *Advances in Language and Literacy Studies*, 5(4), 68-71. doi: 10.7575/aiac.all.v.5n.4p.68
- Idris, M. & Raof, A.H.A. (2017). The CEFR rating scale functioning: An empirical study on self- and peer assessments. *Sains Humanika*, 9(4-2), 11-17.
- Kaur, P. & Shapii, A. (2018). Language and nationalism in Malaysia: A language policy perspective. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 3(7), 1-10.
- Khang, N.D. (2018). Today's teachers' CEFR competence in the classroom – A view of critical pedagogy in Vietnam. *Theria et Historia Scientiarum*, 15, 121-138. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/ths.2018.008>.
- Kimura, Y., Nakat, Y., Ikeno, O., Naganuma, N. & Andrews, S. (2017). Developing classroom language assessment benchmarks for Japanese teachers of English as a foreign language. *Language Testing in Asia*, 7(3), 1-14. doi: 10.1186/s40468-017-0035-2.
- Le, H. T. T. (2018). Impacts of the CEFR-aligned learning outcomes implementation on assessment practice. *Hue University Journal of Science: Social Sciences and Humanities*, 127(6B), 87-99. doi:10.26459/hueuni-jssh.v127i6B.4899.
- Liu, L. & Jia, G. (2017). Looking beyond scores: validating a CEFR-based university speaking assessment in Mainland China. *Language Testing in Asia*, 7(2), 1-16. doi: 10.1186/s40468-017-0034-3.
- Lo, Y. Y. (2018). English teachers' concern on Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): An application of CBAM. *JuKu: Jurnal Kurikulum & Pengajaran Asia Pasifik*, 6(1), 46-58.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013). Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Preschool to Post-secondary Education). Retrieved on 7 December 2020 from <https://www.moe.gov.my/menimedia/media-cetak/penerbitan/dasar/1207-malaysia-education-blueprint-2013-2025/file>

- Mison, S., & Jang, I. C. (2011). Canadian FSL teachers' assessment practices and needs: Implications for the adoption of the CEFR in a Canadian context. *Synergies Europe*, 6, 99-108.
- Moonen, M., Stoutjesdijk, E., de Graaff, R., & Corda, A. (2013). Implementing CEFR in secondary education: impact on FL teachers' educational and assessment practice. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 23(2), 226-246.
- Read, J. (2019). The influence of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in the Asia-Pacific Region. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 12(1), 12-18.
- Sidhu, G.K., Kaur, S. & Lee, L.C. (2018). CEFR-aligned school-based assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 452-463. DOI: 10.17509/ijal.v8i2.13311
- Uri, N. F. M., & Aziz, M. S. A. (2018a). Implementation of CEFR in Malaysia: Teachers' awareness and the challenges. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 24(3), 168-183. doi:10.17576-2018-2403-13.
- Uri, N.F.M. & Aziz, M.S.A. (2018b). Neoliberalism and its impact on English as a medium of instruction in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. *Journal of Creative Practices in Language Learning and Teaching (CPLT)*, 6(1), 17-29.
- Zheng, Y., Zhang, Y. & Yan, Y. (2016). Investigating the practice of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) outside Europe: A case study on the assessment of writing in English in China. *ELT Research Papers*, 16(1), 3-20.
- Zou, S. & Zhang, W. (2017). Exploring the adaptability of the CEFR in the construction of a writing ability scale for test for English majors. *Language Testing in Asia*, 7(18). doi: 10.1186/s40468-017-0050-3.
- Zuraidah Mohd Don & Mardziah Hayati Abdullah (2019, May 23). *The reform of English language education in Malaysia*. Free Malaysia Today. Retrieved on 7 December 2020 from <https://www.moe.gov.my/en/menumedia/printed-media/newspaper-clippings/the-reform-of-english-language-education-in-malaysia-free-malaysia-today-22-mei-2019>