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CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework: Rural National Primary School English Language Teachers' Attitudes and Slants

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to explore attitudes and slants of Rural National Primary School English Language Teachers in Sarawak, Malaysia towards the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework. This study used quantitative analysis to interpret data gathered through the questionnaire. A set of a questionnaire in the form of Google Form was prepared. The link to this questionnaire was shared with English language teachers from rural area national primary schools of 12 divisions in Sarawak, a state in Borneo Malaysia to serve the aim of this study. 749 English language teachers had responded to the questionnaire. Specifically, the analysis and discussion are organised in terms of teachers' attitudes and slants. Besides, the demographic profiles of English language teachers were taken into account in doing the analysis and discussion. The findings have shown that the teachers' attitudes and slants towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework for Primary School's English Language Education are positive. The chief findings of this study can be a source of references to the researchers, policymakers, teachers, academicians, or others who have intention on the similar focus of study to further improve English language education in Malaysia especially in teaching and learning, and assessments.

KEYWORDS: CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework, Attitudes, Slants, English Language Teachers, Sarawak Rural National Primary Schools

INTRODUCTION

The current position of English language in Malaysia is quite firm due to its wide usage as the main language of knowledge as in the great majority of books in the bookstores (Colluzi, 2017), various educational fields, government and education documents, communication (Thirusanku

& Yunus, 2014), mass and social media, business, conferences, talks, researches, and etc. With its position as second official language in Malaysian educational context (Sidhu et al., 2018; Thirusanku & Yunus, 2014), English is therefore an absolutely necessary language for Malaysian students to be proficient in. English itself, obviously has become the resident language used in Information and Communication Technology or ICT as highlighted in English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Furthermore, studies have shown that the inclusion of ICT in the teaching and learning has enhanced, improved and supported learners' language learning (Hew & Brush, 2007; Mullamaa, 2010; Bayuong et al., 2018; Bayuong et al., 2019; Yunus et al., 2010; Yunus et al., 2013; Yunus & Suliman, 2014). Realising the great importance of English language in many aspects not only in education, The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE) takes a significant mechanism by assigning the English Language Standard and Quality Council (ELSQC) chaired by Prof. Dr Zuraidah Mohd Don to develop the Roadmap 2015-2025 for Malaysia's English Language Education System. The Roadmap produced by this council proposed the adoption of CEFR in the current curriculum framework for the betterment in English language curriculum and assessment. This Roadmap comes with a very clear message that it continues improving English language education's outcomes in Malaysia. The CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework for English Language, intentionally, prudently and with a good proposition to allow learners in schools to equip themselves with knowledge and necessary skills of this language, and the ability to use this language proficiently and autonomously. The development of this CEFR-aligned curriculum is in line with the government's policy which is to strengthen English language amongst teachers and learners in Malaysia. The government upholds this policy very seriously in order for the pupils to be proficient in this language, independently and for them to prepare as well as to keep themselves as school-leavers in pace with the rapidly emergence global economy (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013) and globalised job market (Mardziah & Mohamed, 2017). In addition, all children regardless their family and social background should be provided with an education that will enable them to develop English language skills which will contribute to their future employability (Piccardo et al., 2011).

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to: 1) identify the attitudes of rural national primary school English language teachers in Sarawak towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework; and 2) identify the slants of rural national primary school English language teachers in Sarawak towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework. The study is to answer the research questions which are: 1) What are the attitudes of rural national primary school English language teachers in Sarawak towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework?; and 2) What are the slants of rural national primary school English language teachers in Sarawak towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Implementation of CEFR: Focus on language teaching, learning, assessment, challenges, opportunities, and teachers' attitudes and slants

Originated in Europe and functions as a flexible and efficient tool, and a tool that is rich in ideas (Piccardo et al., 2011), CEFR has been recognised by and used in many countries on the globe for language instruction (North, 2007), self-directed learning and communicative language use (Mardziah & Mohamed, 2017), and standardization of the various levels of language competence (Pastor & Guillot, 2015). The framework provides information about language syllabuses' descriptions, guidelines for curriculum, tests, textbooks, etc. across Europe (Council of Europe, 2001). It is therefore being used in teacher education, the build-out and design of materials for teaching purposes, the improvement process of curricula for foreign language in terms of teaching, learning and assessment quality, and facilitating

transparency in testing (Council of Europe, 2001). Intentionally, the framework is to bridge the communication gaps arisen from the different educational systems in Europe among professionals who are working in the modern language sector (Council of Europe, 2001).

Studies have shown that language educators displayed various attitudes, reactions, and perceptions towards CEFR. Among popular issues that arose due to its implementation in many countries that have adopted it reported in studies were insufficient training on the CEFR familiarization to guide teachers adequately to take CEFR into their classroom practices, and limited knowledge and exposure to the CEFR among teachers (Ajop & Said, 2020; Alih et al., 2020; Díez-Bedmar & Byram, 2019; Foley, 2019; Kaur & Mah, 2018; Kok & Aziz, 2019; Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021; Tosun & Glover, 2020; Uri & Aziz, 2018). In regards with the insufficient training, thus, it is a fundamental need to be addressed that most English as Second Language (ESL) teachers expressed their concerns and they claimed that they need more in-service training on CEFR (Sülü & Kır, 2014; Singh et al., 2021), and a series of training and workshop on CEFR (Khair & Shah, 2021). Countries such as Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and China are no exception from having similar issues mentioned earlier. In addition, these countries also experience challenges such as the English proficiency level of teachers, and a standpoint that the target levels for language teachers and learners are ambitious (Foley, 2019). Studies by Zheng et al., (2016) and Nguyen (2017), respectively indicated that teachers in China and Vietnam faced challenges in the actual implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. In Thailand, the concerns were on the barriers of the success of CEFR classroom implication (Charttrakul & Damnet, 2021). The concerns include teachers' practice teaching at real schools, their English proficiency, making testing, and teaching methodology. In Japan, teachers' unfamiliarity with the framework made them find it difficult to connect reference levels and "can-do" descriptors to classroom activities (Markel, 2018). Furthermore, the case studies conducted in Japan reported that the implementation of CEFR-based holistic language curriculum reform emerged to be not easy (Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011). Malaysian language teachers, nonetheless refuse to accept or comply with the CEFR, are not ready to take CEFR into their classroom implementation although they have attended CEFR related workshops and in-house training, and they have a conception in which they pinpointed that it is not easy for them to incorporate CEFR in their teaching (Uri & Aziz, 2018). Limited knowledge, minimum exposures, and low level of awareness were found to be some of the issues among teachers (Uri & Aziz, 2018). Also, a high frequency of English language teachers in Malaysia was found to be "not proficient" to teach English (Aziz & Uri, 2017). A study on the impact of CER-aligned curriculum in the teaching of ESL by Jerald and Shah (2018) informed that teachers in Julau, Sarawak complained they had some issues on abilities to perform the curriculum so as to integrate CEFR-based lessons. Lee et al., (2022) reported several possible reasons on challenges the teachers are facing with when dealing with CEFR. They are the CEFR document's abstract nature, insufficiency of research into CEFR's school-based uses, and the teachers' philosophies and cultures. A study involved 55 English language teachers from five suburban area's public primary schools in Selangor, Malaysia came up with a result in which these teachers did not evidence their confidence which is much needed to possess a deep understanding of CEFR-aligned School-Based Assessment (SBA) (Sidhu et al., 2018). Additionally, these teachers are having lack knowledge on differentiated instructions; having limited understanding and knowledge of the assessment standards under CEFR-aligned KSSR curriculum and the types of assessments used in SBA. It is also worth to highlight teachers' acceptance towards the content of CEFR-aligned teaching and learning materials. For instance, the contents of the English language textbooks were found to be culturally irrelevant and inappropriate to Malaysian context (Bakir & Aziz, 2022; Din & Yamat, 2020; Hadi & Shah, 2020; Rahim & Daghigh, 2019; Shak et al., 2021; Takal et al., 2021). In addition, the

internationalization of the contents caused the low proficiency learners to have difficulties to comprehend the learning materials (Shak et al., 2021). Besides, the textbooks lack of supplementary materials too (Momand et al., 2019; Shak et al., 2021; Takal et al., 2021). The teachers also expressed their concerns on the language contents and elements of language skills in the textbooks (Momand et al., 2019), creativity in illustrations, challenging vocabulary, the use of difficult words in grammar explanations, and lack of sentence and paragraph structures in the writing part (Takal et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, the implementation of CEFR in the language education system of other countries has led to the betterment in terms of English language education. Teachers of French as a second language (FSL) in Canada: 1) revealed positive reactions towards the role and potential of communicative teaching in FSL classrooms' outcomes specifically concerning learners' confidence and ability to perform the tasks using CEFR-based activities (Faez et al., 2011a) and 2) highlighted that CEFR-informed instructions has successfully motivated learners to learn, built learners' self-confidence, and allowed learners to become autonomous learners (Faez et al., 2011b). A study that involved 62 female Japanese college students who enrolled in mixed-level EFL classes in a private college in Japan reported that the communication strategy (CS) usage presented in the CEFR had improved their proficiency in the communicative tasks (Nakatani, 2012). In Thailand, a study involved 200 preservice teachers by Phoolaikao and Sukying (2021) reported that these teachers have a high level of understanding of the CEFR, specifically in the assessment domain and development of reference level descriptions. In Slovakia, Jana Béréšová, in her research on exploring the impact of the CEFR on teaching and testing English in the local context suggested that it is fundamental to understand CEFR descriptor and illustrative samples in-depth and to ensure the effective implementation of CEFR on improving the communicative language teaching and testing of English (Béréšová, 2017). In Malaysia's context, the revised curriculum which aligned with the CEFR was cited as a more action-oriented approach as it is the core to the changes for betterment in the curriculum and assessment, and with the inclusion of SBA which is being integrated into the revised curriculum (Sidhu et al., 2018). A study by Kok and Aziz (2019) has revealed that primary school language teachers were optimistic about the idea of the CEFR-aligned curriculum and they believed that this curriculum is essential to lead to the betterment of learners' English language proficiency in Malaysia. Mukundan & Kalajahi (2013) reported that the Malaysia primary school English language teachers agreed that the textbooks are very useful for primary school language learners in terms of their general attributes and learning-teaching content. Meanwhile, the finding in a study by Shukor and Sulaiman (2022) reported that there was a strong positive relationship between ESL teachers' attitudes and their motivation level towards CEFR implementation. This implied that teachers' positive attitude and acceptance to CEFR implementation improved their motivation level, thus resulted in positive upshots of the implementation. The findings from a study by Singh et al., (2021) communicated that local TESL in-service teachers have rather a good level of familiarization with CEFR-aligned SBA, and a moderate level of awareness and comprehension of the CEFR-aligned SBA. Reviews of past documents conducted by Zaki and Darmi (2021) showed that the implementation CEFR in classroom assessments gives several benefits to the teachers such as to track learners' learning progress, and identify learners' strengths and weaknesses in learning, so as they can plan and modify teaching methods, and take immediate follow-up actions.

CEFR-aligned Curriculum Framework for Malaysia's English Language Education

Since its implementation in 2013, The Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 has witnessed several reforms in English language education in Malaysia. The existing curriculum

document called Standard Curriculum for Primary School or Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) which was implemented in stages since 2011 undergone revision process to fulfill the needs of the new language policy, Memartabatkan Bahasa Melayu Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI) which appeared in 2010 and was stated in the Blueprint which is to meet the national and global needs, and standards on the English language. MBMMBI defines the respective roles of Malay and English in Malaysia Education system and offers Dual Language Programmes (DLP) for school learners (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The current state of English language education, specifically on teaching and learning of English in Malaysia had been investigated and benchmarked by Cambridge English and was reported in The Cambridge Baseline Results Report in 2013. This report provided strong evidence of our current state existing state for teaching and learning English in the Malaysia education system (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). It was therefore acted as the crux to what the Ministry of Education Malaysia has got to do with the existing English language education system to meet up the standards indicated in the MEB.

The MEB was called for a revision to review what it needs for language learning, teaching, and assessment. The English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025 appeared later as the result of the revision. This Roadmap or the reform plan is in accordance with the new language policy, MBMMBI which appeared in the MEB. This Roadmap concerned the English part of the MBMMBI (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The Roadmap gets the best available ideas about teaching and learning of English language from the CEFR, a framework of reference which provides a platform for educational administrators, the developers of courses, teachers, and examining bodies to reflect on their current language practices and what should be revised to meet the real needs of language learners (Council of Europe, 2001); provides language teachers, developers of assessments and the language learners themselves a more detailed explanation of what an individual or a language learner is capable of doing or can do in term of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Zuraidah & Mardziah, 2019) at a given level namely the CEFR global scale. A survey on 111 responses from 39 countries has confirmed that the summary version of CEFR common reference levels of language proficiency- the “global scale” is one part of the CEFR that is commonly used and is recognised (Little, 2006). The CEFR's scales, as referred to Westhoff (2007) display language learners' proficiency concentric build out.

The CEFR has been recognised internationally for its suitability as an established framework of reference to describe language teaching, learning, and assessment; and about best practice. Besides, it also aims on producing language learners who are able to use English proficiently in both communication and interaction (Aziz, 2016). Its global scale gives a much clearer description on three broad levels (Basic, Independent, and Proficient) of language proficiency (Zuraidah & Mardziah, 2019) thus it allows progress of language learners to be measured at every stage of their language learning (Council of Europe, 2001). Having the CEFR aligns with Malaysia's English Language Education System is a great decision made by the MoE as stated in MEB (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015) and this is also a key behind the Roadmap (Aziz, 2016). As discussed by Jerald and Shah (2018), the CEFR-aligned curriculum is to meet the international standards of the English language and it has become more relevant to Malaysia's English Language Curriculum. The CEFR itself was meant to deal with issues regarding both curricular and assessment (Westhoff, 2007) which MoE of Malaysia is working on with, and it did not change Malaysia's current curriculum for language teaching, learning, and assessment (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015) which is in line with the CEFR's principle – remains the basic document (North, 2007) but the adoption made into the current curriculum benefited it with lots of advantages because CEFR serves as a guiding framework for language curriculum development and therefore prepares Malaysians schools pupils to face

the challenge of international standard (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Kok and Aziz (2019) asserted that this CEFR-aligned curriculum benefits English language teachers in Malaysia in their teaching as it covers significant language functions which are necessary to be learned by the learners.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study employed a quantitative research design through survey. A close-ended questionnaire was used as the main instrument in collecting data.

Instrument

The questionnaire consists of three parts namely Part A, Part B, and Part C. Part A (Demographic profiles of teachers) which with 7 items is meant to gather information on the demographic profiles of the teachers. Part B (Teachers' attitudes towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework) consists of 16 close-ended items. This part was designed to obtain information on primary school teachers' attitudes towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework. Meanwhile, Part C (Teachers' slants towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework) consists of 14 close-ended items. This part was designed to obtain information on primary school teachers' slants towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework. Part B and Part C used ordinal level of measurement. The ordinal variable for the questionnaires is level of agreement through Likert scale. Part B adopted three-point Likert scale (1: The statement isn't like me, 2: The statement is somewhat like me, 3: The statement really describes me). Meanwhile, Part C adopted four-point Likert scale (1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Agree and 4: Strongly Agree). The items in the questionnaire were constructed by the researchers themselves with close reference to CEFR related documents for Malaysian English language education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, 2015, 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021).

Reliability and Validity

The reliability test, Cronbach Alpha by Lee Cronbach (1951) was conducted and the result indicated a high level of internal consistency. The items in the questionnaire used in this study are closely related as an instrument to collect reliable data. A pilot study was conducted to 10 English teachers from different rural primary schools in Sarawak. They were also requested to leave comments or questions on aspects such as unclear items, ambiguous items, irrelevant items, and inappropriate terms used in the items in the questionnaire, and suggest recommendations. Their comments and recommendations were considered and taken into the questionnaire improvement. Three Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) were carefully selected to validate the items in the questionnaire through the use of 4-point Likert scale in content validity. The questionnaire validity values (percentage, %) for Part 2 and Part 3 of the questionnaire were 93.75% and 92.86%, respectively. Values more than 70% indicate high validity (Tarmizi & Janan, 2022; Tuckman & Waheed, 1981). The items were restructured, eliminated, and replaced by following the comments from the SMEs.

Data collection procedure

The questionnaire was prepared in the form of Google Form. The link to this Google Form was shared with English language teachers from rural area national primary schools of 12 divisions in Sarawak through District Education Offices. The form was set open to be filled out by the teachers for a month.

Sampling

This study employed probability sampling method through simple random sampling. By employing random sampling, each individual in the sampling frame has an equivalent chance of being selected for the survey (Fife-Schaw, 2000). This sampling method is an entirely random method of selecting the sample from a large population for a study without any bias. An application to conduct this study was made in Education Research Application System 2.0 (eRAS 2.0), Ministry of Education (MoE) Malaysia. The approval letter, attached with a notice about this study was then sent out to District Education Offices in 12 divisions in Sarawak, Malaysia. A brief explanation was included to ensure only the teachers who fulfill the study requirement profiles can fill out the form. The profiles include sex, option (optionist or non-optionist), age, experience in teaching CEFR class(es), CEFR class(es) the teachers are teaching, and CEFR training (have or have not attended CEFR training). The study received responses from 749 teachers (221 males and 528 females).

Data Analysis Method

Data collected from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively through descriptive statistics. The data were used to describe the participants' responses in order to answer the research questions. The descriptive statistics involved the frequency distribution in numbers and percentages, and central tendency (mean). The data were presented in table form.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic profiles

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of respondents

No.	Items	Frequency (Percentage, %)	
1	Sex	Male	221 (29.5)
		Female	528 (70.5)
2	Option	Optionist teacher	535 (71.4)
		Non-optionist teacher	214 (28.6)
3	Age	21-30 years old	209 (27.9)
		31-40 years old	225 (30)
		41-50 years old	172 (23)
		51-60 years old	143 (19.1)
4	Experience in teaching CEFR class	1 st year	215 (28.7)
		2 nd year	199 (26.6)
		3 rd year	161 (21.5)
		4 th year	174 (23.2)
5	CEFR class	Year 1	281 (37.5)
		Year 2	276 (36.8)
		Year 3	273 (36.4)
		Year 4	332 (44.3)
6	CEFR Training	Yes	526 (70.2)
		No	223 (29.8)

Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of the respondents. A total of 749 teachers (221 males and 528 females) have answered the questionnaire. 535 respondents were optionist teachers while the others were not. Teachers of age between 31-40 years old made up the highest frequency, n=225 from the total number of respondents while teachers of age between 51-60 years old made up the lowest frequency, n=143. 209 respondents of age between 21-30 years old signified that there are novice English teachers teaching CEFR class (es) in their first year or early years of teaching at school. On a side of positive thought, these teachers are more creative, excited to teach, having lots of new ideas regarding teaching and learning, and materials for teaching and learning. 315 respondents of age between 41-60 years old informed the researcher that there are experienced English teachers imparting knowledge in CEFR class

(es) at primary schools. They could make use of their years of teaching experience and skills to impart knowledge to pupils in CEFR classes.

As shown in Table 1, the highest frequency, n=215 for experience in teaching CEFR class came from teachers who are in their first year of teaching CEFR class in 2020 while the lowest frequency, n=161 came from teachers whose 2020 is their third year of teaching CEFR class. Teachers whose 2020 is their fourth year of teaching CEFR class are probably teaching CEFR for Year 4 pupils and they have been teaching these pupils since they were in Year 1 class which was in 2017.

Item 6 is meant to allow the respondents to tick more than one option available. Based on Table 1, teachers who are teaching Year 4 class in 2020 made up the highest frequency, n=332. Year 3 class came up with the lowest number of teachers (n=273) teaching this class. Year 1 and Year 2 appeared to be the third (n=281) and the second lowest (n=276) number of teaching these classes, respectively.

Data collected for item 2 and 7 have provided the researcher with an interesting assumption. There were 9 (1.68%) optionist teachers who are teaching CEFR class (es) in 2020 have not attended CEFR Training. Meanwhile, the number of teachers who have not attended CEFR Training (n=223) was almost half of the number of teachers who have attended the training (n=526). This could have involved both optionist and non-optionist teachers. The possible reasons to this situation are 1: The teachers refused to attend the training; 2: The same teachers attending the training throughout the year; 3: Teachers who were asked to take over the CEFR class at sudden due to some situations; 4: Non-optionist teachers were appointed to teach CEFR class due to lack of English teachers in schools; 5: Cost and geographical factors; and 6: Little opportunity for teachers in high enrolment schools to attend the trainings.

Findings on teachers' attitudes towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework are presented in Table 2.

This section discusses the findings of the study to answer the first research question: What are the attitudes of rural national primary school English language teachers in Sarawak towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework? The findings were discussed by describing teachers' attitudes towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework based on their responses towards items in the questionnaire.

Table 2: Teachers' attitudes towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework

No	Items	Response (Frequency and Percentage, %)			Mean
		The statement isn't like me.	The statement is somewhat like me.	The statement really describes me.	
1	I have read CEFR related documents and articles.	39 (5.2)	430 (57.4)	280 (37.4)	2.32
2	I am fully prepared and familiar with, and to embrace the framework.	63 (8.4)	452 (60.3)	234 (31.2)	2.23
3	I think the CEFR-aligned curriculum suits Malaysian Primary School learners' needs on language learning.	92 (12.3)	404 (53.9)	253 (33.8)	2.21
4	I am able to plan lesson plans with reference to curriculum document.	38 (5.1)	374 (49.9)	337 (45)	2.4
5	I can write lesson's objectives (MLO and CLO) that are measurable and achievable, and are related to the Learning Standards.	46 (6.1)	395 (52.7)	308 (41.1)	2.35

6	I can adapt the suggested pre- and post-lesson activities to serve the teaching and learning's objective(s).	32 (4.3)	416 (55.5)	301 (40.2)	2.36
7	I am confident to teach using this CEFR-aligned primary curriculum.	59 (7.9)	421 (56.2)	269 (35.9)	2.28
8	I understand the Curriculum Standards for every language skill which are aligned with CEFR for languages.	51 (6.8)	418 (55.8)	280 (37.4)	2.31
9	I can design and administer a sequence of formative assessments to assess my pupils' performance and record the results with reference to the Curriculum Standards.	64 (8.5)	436 (58.2)	249 (33.2)	2.25
10	I am able to apply differentiation strategies in the lessons to meet learner's individual learning needs.	61 (8.1)	440 (58.7)	248 (33.1)	2.25
11	I want to know in depth about this CEFR-aligned curriculum by attending series of courses, trainings or workshops.	50 (6.7)	339 (45.3)	360 (48.1)	2.41
12	I do not see myself as a challenge to teach English language with reference to this CEFR-aligned curriculum.	107 (14.3)	441 (58.9)	201 (26.8)	2.13
13	I have positive thought that CEFR-aligned curriculum helps developing learners' language learning development.	45 (6)	338 (45.1)	366 (48.9)	2.43
14	I have a perception that the target levels for teachers and learners are relevant.	57 (7.6)	419 (55.9)	273 (36.4)	2.29
15	I talk in English with my pupils most of the time during English lesson.	81 (10.8)	424 (56.6)	244 (32.6)	2.22
16	I can incorporate the content in CEFR-related documents, materials and books into teaching, learning and assessment.	49 (6.5)	414 (55.3)	286 (38.2)	2.32

All 16 items in Part B (Teachers' attitudes towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework) of the questionnaire have mean score above 2.00. This finding denoted that the items or statements are somewhat like and really describe the respondents. Item 12 appeared to have the lowest mean score (2.13). 107 (14.3%) respondents see themselves as a challenge to teach English language with reference to this CEFR-aligned curriculum while 642 (85.7%) do not. This high percentage provided a key message that most teachers take teaching with reference to CEFR-aligned curriculum positively. This could explain that most teachers are able to teach using this curriculum. Similarly, a finding from a study conducted by Kaur and Mah (2018) on 500 primary school teachers from all the states around Malaysia, and Nii and Yunus (2022) on 105 English teachers in Sibul, Sarawak using questionnaires indicated that the teachers showed positive perceptions towards the introduction of the CEFR in the Malaysian school curriculum despite the possibility that they may not be able to implement the curriculum successfully due to certain challenges.

The frequency (n=107) probably can be the best justification for two digits frequency of teachers who responded "The statement isn't like me" for the other 15 items. Interestingly, only 29.9% (n=32) of the respondents (n=107) cannot adapt the suggested pre- and post-lesson activities to serve the teaching and learning's objective(s). It signified that 70.1% (n=75) of the respondents who see themselves as a challenge to teach English language with reference to this CEFR-aligned curriculum have the effort to do the adaptation for a better teaching and learning. Data collected for item 1 showed that 710 respondents (94.8%) have the effort to do their readings on CEFR related documents and articles to increase their understanding. In addition, 56 (52.3%) out of 107 respondents (51 respondents claimed they did not) understand the

Curriculum Standards for every language skill which are aligned with CEFR for languages as shown for item 8. The high mean score of item 4 evidenced that the teachers (n=711) are able to plan lesson plans with reference to curriculum document in spite of seeing themselves as described in item 12. In fact, 64.5% (n=69) from 107 respondents claimed that they are able to plan their lesson plans although they see themselves as a challenge to teach English language with reference to this CEFR-aligned curriculum. Response from the teachers for item 2, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 16 also signified the similar assumption.

The response given by the respondents for item 3 and 14 indicated that there are teachers who still think that the CEFR-aligned curriculum doesn't suit Malaysian Primary School learners' needs on language learning, and the target level for teachers and learners are not relevant. In an almost similar point of view, [Foley \(2019\)](#) stated that these target levels are ambitious. Kaur and Mah (2018) pinpointed that the level-based scale is confusing for the teachers as resulted in the finding of their study. Meanwhile, item 13 which has the highest mean score (2.43), came up with the 4th lowest frequency of respondents (n=45) who felt these items isn't like them, and the highest frequency of respondents (n=366) who felt that this item really describes them. In short, there were 704 (94%) respondents having positive thought that CEFR-aligned curriculum helps developing learners' language learning development. The findings from a study by Zaki and Darmi (2021) demonstrated that CEFR aids English language teachers to monitor learners' development in ESL classrooms. According to [Sabudin \(2019\)](#), the language activities suggested in the CEFR-aligned document are grounded on using language naturally by learners by integrating all four language skills. Item 11 which came up with the second highest mean score (2.41) illuminated that almost half of the total number of respondents, n=360 (48.1%) have strong interest to know more about CEFR-aligned curriculum and they are ready to attend series of courses, trainings or workshops in order to equip themselves with related information. Overall, 93.3% (n=699) of the respondents responded to this item positively including 45.3% (n=339) of the respondents who are partially want to know in depth about this CEFR-aligned curriculum. This is supported by the data shown in item 2 in which 686 respondents (91.6%) claimed that they are fully prepared and familiar with, and to embrace the framework. Also, the total number of respondents (n=686) and (n=657) responded to "The statement is somewhat like me" and "The statement really describes me" for item 2 and item 3, respectively indicated that these teachers are ready and capable to embrace the change or reform in English language education system with a belief that it suits learners' language learning, thus uplifts it. A study carried out by Alih et al., (2020) communicated the similar belief. The Malaysian teachers they interviewed exhibited positive beliefs towards the reform in the curriculum because they believe that this new reform is an initiative to elevate the quality of Malaysian English language education.

Regardless of the number of respondents responded to "The statement isn't like me" on other items, the number of teachers who claimed that they are confident and partially confident to teach using this CEFR-aligned primary curriculum is high (n=690) with only 7.9% (n=59) claimed they did not. This is probably due to the high number of respondents, n=717 (95.7%) who claimed that they can adapt the suggested pre- and post-lesson activities to serve the teaching and learning's objective(s); n=703 (93.9%) can write lesson's objectives (MLO and CLO) that are measurable and achievable, and are related to the Learning Standards; and n=700 (93.5%) can incorporate the content in CEFR-related documents, materials and books into teaching, learning and assessment. Item 15 came up with 81 respondents (10.8%) and 424 respondents (56.6%) who did not and partially talk in English with their pupils most of the time during English lesson, respectively. One possible reason that contributed to these findings is the interference of learners' mother tongue especially of those who are from the very interior

part of Sarawak and those who have very little exposure to English language. The gap issue that takes place between rural school learners and their familiarisation to English language should be given essential concerns.

Item 9 and 10 share the same mean score (2.25). These two items represent two main elements in CEFR-aligned curriculum which are the assessment and differentiation strategies. Data showed that more than half of the respondents, n=436 (58.6%) are partially able to design and administer a sequence of formative assessments to assess their pupils' performance and record the results with reference to the Curriculum Standards, and n=440 (58.7%) apply differentiation strategies in the lessons to meet learner's individual learning needs. These findings possibly explained the high number of respondents, n=107 (14.3%) who see themselves as a challenge to teach English language with reference to this CEFR-aligned curriculum. A study conducted by Uri and Aziz (2020) revealed that teachers have a thought that they themselves are actually the barriers in administrating this CEFR-aligned curriculum. Although there were 441 respondents (58.9%) who partially do not see themselves as a challenge, there is a huge possibility that they would really see themselves as a challenge - to certain extent. These teachers are not having sufficient confidence in themselves with regards to the elements mentioned in item 9 and 10. Uri and Aziz (2020) came up with almost similar point that is the teachers lack of self-esteem.

Findings on teachers' slants towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework are presented in Table 3.

This section discusses the findings of the study to answer the second research question: What are the slants of rural national primary school English language teachers in Sarawak towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework? The findings were discussed by describing teachers' slants towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework based on their responses towards items in the questionnaire. Based on Table 3, item 3 appeared to have the highest mean score (3.30) with a total of 721 respondents (96.3%) agreed and strongly agreed that trainings, workshops and courses on teaching and learning should be conducted for English language teachers so that they are properly prepared to implement the curriculum. This data is corresponding with the data for item 11 in Table 2 in which 93.3% (n=699) of the respondents claimed that they wanted to know in depth about this CEFR-aligned curriculum by attending series of courses, trainings or workshops. A study by Sülü and Kır (2014) showed most teachers (82.2%) said that they need in-service training on CEFR. Another similar study by Khair and Shah (2021) indicated that 39% and 54.4% ESL teachers out of the 136 respondents respectively agreed and strongly agreed that it is necessary to have a series of training and workshop on CEFR. This is due to the case that most of these respondents admitted that they have limited knowledge and minimum exposure on the implementation of CEFR-aligned curriculum in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms. Uri and Aziz (2018) asserted that the familiarisation workshops are inadequate and insufficient for the teachers to implement CEFR-aligned curriculum in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms. Insufficient information received regarding this CEFR-aligned curriculum is worth to emphasize (Kaur & Mah, 2022) and this can be one of the best justifications of why teachers need more trainings, workshops and courses.

Meanwhile, item 7 came up with the lowest mean score (2.84) with 546 (72.9%) respondents approved that CEFR-aligned curriculum places too much focus on promoting communicative language learning thus emphasizes less on other language skills. This could be the best explanation for the high number of respondents who agreed (n=541) and strongly agreed (n=169) that CEFR-aligned curriculum boosts English language teachers' awareness on the

importance of English as a spoken language. Therefore, it wasn't a surprise when 707 respondents (94.4%) have a positive thought that CEFR-aligned curriculum is able to help develop learners' learning potential and language proficiency specifically at promoting communicative learning. This finding is line with Uri and Aziz (2018) in which the English teachers were optimistic about the implementation of CEFR in Malaysian English language education, and believed that the framework is absolutely necessary in order to improve English proficiency level of Malaysians. One possible reason that has convinced the respondents on this matter is the descriptors of "can do" in the CEFR Common Reference Levels' global scale. Besides, the CEFR's text emphasises communicative needs of learners including daily life routines, information and ideas exchange, and it also broadens learners' understanding on different cultures (Cambridge ESOL, 2011). The thought is however changeable when the teachers are aware of the opportunities for language learners to practice using English language which covers four language skills and grammar offered by CEFR-aligned curriculum. This is evidenced when 694 respondents (93.7%) concurred with item 8. Findings from a study by Zaki and Darmi (2021) illuminated that the CEFR makes learners' language skills greater by its implementation in four primary language skills. This finding, however, is contradicting with finding from a study by Momand et al., (2019) whereby the teachers addressed their concerns on the language contents and elements of language skills in the CEFR-aligned textbooks.

Table 3: Teachers' slants towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework

No	Items	Response (Frequency & Percentage, %)				Mean
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1	The description of CEFR-aligned curriculum is understandable.	5 (0.7)	56 (7.5)	597 (79.7)	91 (12.1)	3.03
2	The overall content in the CEFR-aligned curriculum suits Malaysian primary school pupils' language learning.	10 (1.3)	155 (20.7)	518 (69.2)	66 (8.8)	2.85
3	Trainings, workshops and courses on teaching and learning should be conducted for English language teachers so that they are properly prepared to implement the curriculum.	8 (1.1)	20 (2.7)	458 (61.1)	263 (35.1)	3.30
4	Test or assessment, and material design workshops should be conducted for English language teachers frequently.	18 (2.4)	76 (10.1)	473 (63.2)	182 (24.3)	3.09
5	CEFR-aligned curriculum is able to help develop learners' learning potential and language proficiency specifically at promoting communicative learning.	5 (0.7)	37 (4.9)	556 (74.2)	151 (20.2)	3.14
6	CEFR-aligned curriculum boosts English language teachers' awareness on the importance of English as a spoken language.	2 (0.3)	37 (4.9)	541 (72.2)	169 (22.6)	3.17
7	CEFR-aligned curriculum places too much focus on promoting communicative language learning thus emphasizes less on other language skills.	13 (1.7)	190 (25.4)	448 (59.8)	98 (13.1)	2.84
8	CEFR-aligned curriculum provides more opportunity for language learners to practice using English language which covers four language skills and grammar.	3 (0.4)	52 (6.9)	555 (74.1)	139 (18.6)	3.11
9	Implementing CEFR-aligned school-based assessment (SBA) whether it takes formative or summative form at assessing learners' performance or outcomes is useful thus it produces informative records that inform	3 (0.4)	40 (5.3)	603 (80.5)	103 (13.8)	3.07

	teachers, parents and learners about learners' language learning performance.					
10	The "can do" statement in the CEFR global scale provides detailed descriptions of what language learner is capable of doing or can do in term of listening, speaking, reading and writing.	2 (0.3)	53 (7.1)	592 (79)	102 (13.6)	3.06
11	Having CEFR aligns with the Malaysia's English Language Education System is indeed the best available action taken to enhance teaching, learning and assessment of English language at primary level of education.	6 (0.8)	97 (13)	548 (73.2)	98 (13.1)	2.99
12	CEFR-aligned curriculum is to prepare Malaysian pupils to be proficient in English language, independently and autonomously, and for them to prepare as well as to keep themselves as school-leavers in pace with the rapidly emergence global economy and globalised job market.	6 (0.8)	74 (9.9)	533 (71.2)	136 (18.2)	3.07
13	The descriptions of Curriculum Standards (Content Standards, Learning Standards and Performance Standards) which are aligned to CEFR for languages clearly describe the targeted learners' language learning outcomes.	3 (0.4)	71 (9.5)	568 (75.8)	107 (14.3)	3.04
14	The grammar content, vocabulary list, 21 st century learning, differentiation strategies, and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) elements included in the CEFR-aligned curriculum support primary year learners' language acquisition in both spoken and written form.	8 (1.1)	63 (8.4)	571 (76.2)	107 (14.3)	3.04

Meanwhile for item 2, 165 (22%) respondents asserted that the overall content in the CEFR-aligned curriculum doesn't suit Malaysian primary school pupils' language learning. A study by Mukundan and Kalajahi (2013) conveyed the opposite finding in which the primary school English teachers agreed that the general attributes and learning-teaching content of the textbooks are 'highly useful' to the learners. A strong relationship between item 2 and 11 can be highlighted here. As for item 11, 13.8% (n=103) of the respondents felt that having CEFR aligns with the Malaysia's English Language Education System is not the best available action taken to enhance teaching, learning and assessment of English language at primary level of education. This proposed that the teachers have a thought that the ingredients of CEFR do fulfil the needs of learners at primary years, yet it is not the best available option to be aligned with Malaysia's curriculum due to context factor. This is in line with the data on teachers' attitude for item 3 as tabulated in Table 2 in which it showed that there was quite a big number of respondents, n=496 (66.2%) who claimed that they didn't and partially have a thought that CEFR-aligned curriculum suits Malaysian Primary School learners' needs on language learning. This is due to the reason that the learning materials are sourced directly from the country where this CEFR is developed. There were some arguments on the contents of the materials (e.g.: English language textbooks) in which they do not suit Malaysia's context in terms of culture which was said to be imbalanced and less relevant (Din & Yamat, 2020; Hadi & Shah, 2020; Rahim & Daghigh, 2019; Shak et al., 2021; Takal et al., 2021), and learners' language level but for Sabudin (2019) language teachers should have the ability and creativity to use (adapt) these materials as learning stimulus to complement learners' language essentials according to the SOW. Based on their systematic literature review (SLR), Bakir and Aziz (2022) reported that the current CEFR-aligned curriculum lack of local content, and the

excessive integration of foreign cultural content confused both teachers and learners thus cause difficulties among learners to adapt.

The data showed that 10 out of 14 items have more than 90% of the respondents concurred with each item (Item 2, 7, 11, and 12, respectively carries 78%, 72.9%, 86.3% and 89.4%). This signified that majority of the teachers have positive slants towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework. Findings presented for item 9 and 10 in Table 3 are having strong positive correlation with the findings presented for item 9 and 10 in Table 2. The implementation of SBA at assessing learners' learning performances is indeed one of the best available actions taken by the teachers. Implementing CEFR in classroom assessments gives several benefits especially to the teachers such as to track learners' progress as a whole, identify learners' strengths and weaknesses in learning, plan and modify teaching methods, and take immediate follow-up actions (Zaki & Darmi, 2021). Eventually, these benefits affect learners' language learning outcomes too. It is worth to highlight as pinpointed by Aziz et al., (2018) that there are various aspects that need improvement despite several efforts made in training Malaysian teachers to implement CEFR-aligned curriculum in teaching and assessment.

The process to get the desired end results is crucial in order for the teachers to know what their learners really can do or had achieved as the outcomes of their learning process. To this reason, the teachers need to have a proper sequence of assessments and differentiation strategies. A study by Faez et al., (2011b) has evidenced that teachers have found out that the "can do" descriptors provided a way for language learners to be aware of their potential and recognise their limitations in language learning. Additionally, the teachers have to make the teaching and learning process meaningful for the learners and fulfils their language learning needs because the process matters even more than the end results. The learners will only fit the "can do" statement in the CEFR global scale when they have unlimited learning experience, sufficient learning input, and all those language skills needed given by their teachers. The act of providing unlimited learning experience for the learners is a great action a language teacher should apply in their teaching in order to meet learners' individual differences' needs (Samat & Hashim, 2019). Jerald and Shah (2018) propounded that teachers should consider learners' preferences when planning their English language lessons.

Item 12, by its mean score (3.07) has clearly shown that there was a high number of respondents, n=669 (89.4%) who were really aware on the importance of CEFR-aligned curriculum in preparing Malaysian pupils to be proficient in English language, independently and autonomously, and for them to prepare as well as to keep themselves as school-leavers in pace with the rapidly emergence global economy and globalised job market. This finding reflects on teachers' understanding on the overall content especially the objectives underlined by the MoE in the curriculum. As Table 3 shows, the high mean score denoted by item 1 has revealed that most respondents, n=688 (91.8%) approved that the description of CEFR-aligned curriculum is understandable. In the context of this study, this finding, indirectly has shown that the teachers understood the curriculum in a way it is being organised and presented in the document. Teachers' understanding on this curriculum is a priority before they can implement it into teaching, learning, and assessment. In point of fact, it concerns on teachers' attitude in which their understanding must accompany their preparation and familiarisation to willingly take up this CEFR-aligned curriculum. The finding on teachers' attitudes as tabulated in Table 2 (item 2) has addressed the similar significance when 686 (91.5%) out of 749 respondents established a positive attitude towards this item.

CONCLUSION

The findings have shown that the teachers' acceptance towards CEFR-aligned Primary Curriculum Framework for Primary School's English Language Education is positive. Teacher's acceptance should go along with their motivation in order to ensure the implementation of this curriculum a success as according to Cheng et al., (2016), teacher's factor is one of the factors that influence learners' motivation to learn English. The Ministry of Education Malaysia should continue at planning and conducting workshops for English language teachers in order to get them becoming more familiar with the framework. Special attentions should be given to the aspects which have been addressed in this study: 1) The teachers who think the CEFR-aligned curriculum doesn't suit Malaysian Primary School learners' needs on language learning; 2) The teachers who see themselves as a challenge to teach English language with reference to CEFR-aligned curriculum; 3) The teachers who see the overall content in the CEFR-aligned curriculum doesn't suit Malaysian primary school pupils' language learning; and 4) The teachers who share a similar thought that CEFR-aligned curriculum places too much focus on promoting communicative language learning thus emphasizes less on other language skills.

STUDY FORWARD

A future study should be conducted by collecting data from senior and novice English language teachers from each division in Sarawak to answer the questionnaire to do comparison.

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