


Teachers' Implementation of CEFR-aligned Curriculum: A Preliminary Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper acted as a preliminary study to discover the degree of Malaysian teachers' readiness in CEFR implementation and the CEFR implementation practices in the English as the second language (ESL) classroom. This study implies a survey research design. An online google form survey questionnaire was disseminated to in-service teachers through convenient random sampling. The respondents are twenty Malaysian primary school ESL teachers from different school settings. The respondents answer a closed-ended questionnaire that elicits their readiness in the CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation and their frequency in using the CEFR-aligned curriculum's resources and assessment. The online data gathered were tabulated and further analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. This study concludes that the CEFR-aligned curriculum is moving in a positive direction. However, the overall readiness for the implementation needs more improvements, and the resources given should be into full use.

1. Introduction

Realising the importance of the English Language, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE) has made several efforts to boost young generations' English standards to meet international standards. MoE aims to achieve the nations' aspirations to ensure that Malaysian young generations and the workforce are globally competitive. The implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is a global language education issue.

Chin (2018) mentioned that the European countries use the CEFR as a benchmark for communication competency for many different languages. In 2013, the implementation of the CEFR started in Malaysia with the establishment of the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC). The council has assisted the English Language Teaching Center (ELTC) in improving students' English language proficiency. The ELSQC introduced the CEFR framework onto the education system along with the English Language Roadmap 2015-2025. The roadmap is a systematic reform of Malaysia English language education. In 2016, the adaptation and implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum began with the Primary One and the Secondary One in Malaysian schools. According to Noor Azli and Aini Akmar (2020), this action-oriented approach warranted essential changes in the teaching, learning and assessment in English classrooms.

Without a doubt, as the implementers, teachers play the most significant role in the process of curriculum implementation. Despite the worldwide influence, researches on the implementation and practices of the CEFR were carried out. However, those studies did not portray in-depth the in-service teachers' knowledge of the CEFR-aligned curriculum and did not provide a clear insight of to which extent the teachers' readiness in CEFR implementation. María Belén Díez-Bedmar and Michael Byram (2018) mentioned that the studies on the impact of the CEFR-aligned curriculum on teachers' teaching practices are limited to the extent that few researchers cited no previous empirical work in their studies. To bridge this research gap, this paper acted as a preliminary study to discover the degree of Malaysian teachers' readiness in CEFR implementation and the CEFR implementation practices in the English as the second language (ESL) classroom. This small-scale preliminary study further intended to inform

policymakers of teachers' readiness so that actions could be taken to warrant that the revised CEFR-aligned curriculum is thoroughly used in Malaysian ESL classroom.

This preliminary study proposed to address the level of teachers' readiness in the implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. This study also aims to discover teachers' frequency in using the CEFR-aligned curriculum's resources and assessment tool during the CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation practices. This study sought to answer the research questions as follow:

- (1) What is the level of teachers' readiness in the implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum?
- (2) How frequent teachers use the CEFR-aligned curriculum's resources and assess their pupils' learning using CEFR proficiency levels?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teachers as implementers

In the curriculum organisation, the teachers hold many roles and responsibilities. The curriculum is the best means of learners' overall development, and teachers are the mediator between curriculum and learners. Alsubaie (2016) stated that for curriculum development to be effective, the teachers and educators' involvement in the development process is necessary. The teachers as the implementers are vital in bonding learners, materials, teaching practice, and assessment. Since the teachers' duties are to implement the curriculum to meet their learners' needs, teachers need to produce lesson plans and syllabi within the framework of the given CEFR-aligned curriculum (Carl, 2009; Alsubaie, 2016). Teachers work collaboratively and efficaciously with curriculum development teams and education experts in material composition, textbooks and contents. The teacher explores innovative methods for assessments and language learning strategies to ensure effective, meaningful learning occurs in the learners. Hence, teachers being implementers is essential for successful and meaningful curriculum development.

2.2 Teachers' Readiness

Although the CEFR-aligned curriculum is introduced in the Malaysian school context only recently, several studies in Malaysia on its implementation and teachers' perceptions have been carried out by several researchers. Based on the research of María Belén Díez-Bedmar and Michael Byram (2018), teachers' level of understanding and awareness of the CEFR was superficial even though there was a substantial impact of the CEFR on syllabi, curricula and teaching methods. A finding in recent research by Noor Azli and Aini Akmar (2020) revealed that the implementation of CEFR-aligned syllabus and assessments are still divisive among Malaysian ESL school teachers. Their study found that after two years of revised CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation, English teachers still find that scheming CEFR-aligned assessments based on the proficiency levels' descriptors is challenging. Based on the paper written by Mohd Sallehudin and Nurul Farehah (2017), our country still lacks qualified English teachers who are competent in employing the MoE's revised CEFR-aligned curriculum and its assessment system. They further claimed that most Malaysian teachers are still not aware of the framework. After introducing the new or revised curriculum, the teachers must be trained and equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills that aids in effective curriculum development operation. Thus, a series of curriculum capacity building and workshops geared toward teachers' proficient development are needed.

3. Methodology

3.1 Respondents

The respondents in this preliminary study are chosen via convenient random sampling. They are twenty Malaysian primary school ESL teachers from different school settings. Thirteen out of twenty teachers are from the suburban school setting; two teachers are from the urban school setting, and the rest are from the rural school setting. Eighteen teachers are from the National School (SK), and two teachers are from Chinese Vernacular schools (SJKC). All of them are in-service English teachers who are currently teaching CEFR-aligned curriculum classroom. The majority of the respondents are having three to five years of teaching experiences. Among the twenty teachers, sixteen of them had attended the CEFR-aligned curriculum training workshop.

3.2 Instruments

A quantitative survey research design was used in this study. An online google form survey questionnaire was disseminated to the twenty in-service English teachers in Malaysia. It was a closed-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A had six items on the teachers' demographic backgrounds. The remainders of the questionnaire contained twelve six-point Likert scale items. Item 7 to item 11 in Section B aimed to elicit teachers' readiness in the CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation; whereas, item 12 to item 18 in Section C aimed to discover the frequency in using CEFR-aligned curriculum's resources and assessment. The six-point scale is coded in line with the logical way of thinking that the bigger the number, the higher the agreement or frequency level. The six-point scale of teachers' readiness is ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 5 = Agree and 6 = Strongly Agree; whereas, the six-point scale of the frequency of teachers using CEFR-aligned resources and assessment range from 1 = Never, 2 = Very Rarely, 3 = Rarely, 4

= Occasionally, 5 = Very Frequently and 6 = Always. All respondents were requested to rate their level of agreement and their frequency of use.

3.3 Data Analysis

The online data gathered from the Google Form questionnaire were tabulated and further analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. To ensure reliability, data was run through Cronbach's Alpha test. The value of Cronbach Alpha's for section B with five items was .712, and .891 for section C. Based on Bond and Fox (2007), reliability analysis with 0.65 and above is acceptable and good. Therefore, the items in this questionnaire and the data collected were considered reliable. Through IBM SPSS Statistics version 22, a descriptive statistic analysing mean scores were employed. The mean score was classified into three levels. Low level denoted to the mean score of 1.00 – 2.66 while moderate level referred to the mean score of 2.67 – 4.33. On the other hand, the high standard was constituted by the mean score ranging from 4.34 – 6.00. These three levels are used to classify the degree of teachers' readiness to implement the CEFR-aligned curriculum and the frequency of teachers using the CEFR-aligned curriculum's resources and assessment tool.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Teachers' readiness in the implementation of CEFR-aligned curriculum

Using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22, the descriptive statistic test was carried to analyse the mean scores of teachers' readiness to implement the CEFR-aligned curriculum. The results are presented in Table 1 with the number of teachers (with percentages) rated in each point of the 6-point Likert scales.

Table 1: Percentages and mean scores of teachers' readiness questionnaire items

Items	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Slightly Disagree	4 Slightly Agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Mean score
I understand the content of the CEFR-aligned curriculum introduced by the English Language Standards and Quality Council and Ministry of Education.	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	6 (30%)	8 (40%)	3 (15%)	4.45
I understand the proficiency scale of CEFR and its descriptors as an assessment tool.	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	4 (20%)	6 (30%)	8 (40%)	1 (5%)	4.20
I am given expertise and professional support during the implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. (e.g. head of English panel, SISC+ mentor etc.)	2 (10%)	4 (20%)	1 (5%)	5 (25%)	6 (30%)	2 (10%)	3.75
I am provided with the CEFR-aligned curriculum resources for implementation. (textbooks, CDs, videos and audios)	0 (0%)	5 (25%)	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	8 (40%)	4 (20%)	4.30
I need capacity building for CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation (training workshop).	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (25%)	8 (40%)	7 (35%)	5.10

A total of 40% of respondents agreed that they understand both the CEFR-aligned curriculum content and the proficiency scale of CEFR and its descriptors as an assessment tool. In sum, the questionnaire results indicated that most of the respondents had ethical perceptions of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. A majority of 30% of the respondents agreed that their head of English panel

or SISC+ mentor gave them expertise and professional support during the CEFR implementation. Out of 20 respondents, 10% strongly disagreed, 20% disagreed, and 5% slightly disagreed that they were given expertise and professional support during the CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation. This result indicated that some English teachers were not given adequate guidance in implementing the CEFR-aligned curriculum. Even though most teachers had positive perceptions of the CEFR-aligned curriculum resources for implementation, 25% of remaining teachers disagreed that they were provided with CEFR-aligned textbooks, CDs, videos, and audios. 40% out of 20 teachers with the mean agreed that capacity building training workshop for CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation is necessary. In the meantime, 35% of them strongly agreed, and 25% slightly agreed that a series of training and workshops are required. This result proved that teachers' readiness is not high enough. They still need training to fully understand and familiarise themselves with the concept and usage of the CEFR framework. In sum, the overall result showed that the level of teachers' readiness in the implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum is just moderate, and the teachers still need capacity building for CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation.

4.2 The frequency of teachers in the use of CEFR-aligned curriculum's resources and assessment tool

A descriptive statistic test was carried to analyse the questionnaire items' mean scores in finding the frequency of teachers using CEFR-aligned curriculum's resources and assessment tool. The results are presented in Table 2, as showed below:

Table 2: Percentages and mean scores of the frequency of CEFR resources used questionnaire items

Items	1 Never	2 Very Rarely	3 Rarely	4 Occasionally	5 Very Frequently	6 Always	Mean score
I use the Supermind/ Get Smart plus 3/ Get Smart plus 4 textbook(s).	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	6 (30%)	10 (50%)	4.95
I use the Supermind' videos and audios / Get Smart plus' CD.	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	4 (20%)	3.85
I design my own materials based on the CEFR-aligned curriculum.	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	4 (20%)	9 (45%)	5 (25%)	1 (5%)	4.05
I assess pupils' listening skill based on CEFR proficiency levels and descriptors.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (30%)	4 (20%)	9 (45%)	1 (5%)	4.25
I assess pupils' speaking skill based on CEFR proficiency levels and descriptors.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (30%)	4 (20%)	9 (45%)	1 (5%)	4.25
I assess pupils' reading skill based on CEFR proficiency levels and descriptors.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (30%)	4 (20%)	9 (45%)	1 (5%)	4.25
I assess pupils' writing skill based on CEFR proficiency levels and descriptors.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (30%)	4 (20%)	9 (45%)	1 (5%)	4.25

Out of 20 respondents, 50% of the teachers stated that they always use imported CEFR-aligned textbooks. With a high mean score of 4.95, it is considered that the use of the textbooks such as Supermind, Get Smart plus 3 and Get Smart plus 4, are highly frequent in the ESL classroom. As for other CEFR-aligned resources, the majority of 35% of respondents only use them occasionally. A total of 45% out of 20 respondents designed their materials based on the CEFR-aligned curriculum occasionally. The four assessments questionnaire items are the same in terms of the points rated and the means. The mean score of 4.25

showed that teachers' frequency in assessing their pupils' learning skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) was moderate. This result links with Sidhu et al. (2018) 's findings, which proclaimed that the implementation of CEFR-aligned school-based assessment is left undesired and is far-off from the required formative assessment.

5. Conclusion

This paper aims to discover the Malaysian teachers' readiness in CEFR implementation and their CEFR implementation practices. Arising from this study's findings, one major conclusion that could be drawn is the CEFR-aligned curriculum is moving in a positive direction. This preliminary study has shown that Malaysian primary English teachers have a moderate understanding of the CEFR-aligned curriculum, but the overall level of their readiness to implement the curriculum is still not high. Furthermore, implementing the CEFR-aligned curriculum in daily teaching is merely limited to using imported CEFR textbooks. Other resources are not frequently used in the teaching and learning process.

However, the results obtained in this study should not be generalised, as this is a small-scale survey study. Another limitation of this preliminary study is that the teachers' low readiness and the challenges faced during the implementation of CEFR-aligned are not discovered. While we acknowledge this study's limitations, its exploratory nature nevertheless acts as a foundation for future research within this study area. The researches in consideration could be large-scale qualitative studies on teacher's perspective or even other relevant stakeholders - the learners. Furthermore, the findings raise the awareness of the prerequisite to train pre-service and in-service teachers to adapt and adopt their teaching and assessment of language to align with the revised curriculum.

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