

Original Article

Investigating Teachers' Perceptions of the CEFR-Aligned Curriculum in Primary Education: Bridging Policy and Practice

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Abstract

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has gained widespread international recognition as a global framework for language education, extending far beyond its original European context. As part of this global trend, Malaysia has implemented a CEFR-aligned English language curriculum, requiring teachers to adapt their pedagogical practices to internationally benchmarked standards. The success of such large-scale curriculum reforms depends heavily on teachers' knowledge, acceptance, and interpretations of the framework. While previous studies have examined CEFR implementation across various contexts, empirical research integrating teachers' knowledge and perceptions through mixed-methods approaches remains limited, particularly in non-European settings. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, this study investigates Malaysian primary school English teachers' understanding of key CEFR components and their perceptions of their influence on classroom practice. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with quantitative data analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data examined through thematic analysis. The findings reveal a notable discrepancy between teachers' generally positive perceptions of the CEFR-aligned curriculum and their insufficient understanding of core CEFR concepts, including proficiency levels, descriptors, and underlying principles, despite having received formal training. This gap poses significant challenges for meaningful classroom implementation. By highlighting disconnect between policy intentions and teachers' CEFR literacy, this study contributes to international discussions on CEFR adoption, teacher cognition, and curriculum reform. The findings underscore the need for sustained, conceptually oriented professional development and offer transferable insights for policymakers and educators in other contexts adopting CEFR-based frameworks.

Keywords: CEFR; ESL Teachers; Knowledge; Perceptions; Primary Education;

Introduction

English has attracted considerable attention in many non-English-speaking countries due to its essential role across diverse sectors, including business, politics, and education.¹ In the education sector, English language curricula have been reformed to improve learners' proficiency, including non-native English speakers. For example, reforms have emphasized the development of students' core competencies, including language proficiency, cultural awareness, critical thinking, and learning capacity, moving beyond traditional language skills to prepare students for the 21st century. These programs primarily aim to enhance academic achievement and promote learning advancement



¹ Raof A H A \& Yusof M A M Alih N. A. C., 'Policy Change Implementation: The Case of the CEFR in Malaysian ESL Classrooms', *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)*, 6.2 (2021), 296–317 <<https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol6iss2pp296-317>>.

among learners.² The acquisition of English language skills is still widely considered an important goal in educational settings in nations where English is not the primary language. Multiple publications from international organizations highlight the growing recognition of English and communicative proficiency as essential tools for global interaction (British Council, 2024). As a result, many countries have amended their educational policies and curricula to enhance English-language instruction, underscoring the worldwide significance of English competence. In 2015, the United Nations (UN) declared that improving the quality of education would be one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030. Quality Education is the UN's fourth goal, emphasizing inclusive education as a potent tool for sustainable development. Consequently, education was emphasized as a component of international initiatives that advocate continuous learning opportunities.³

In light of this, a concerted effort by all educational stakeholders is necessary to establish effective English-language education in today's world.⁴ Numerous stakeholders within the educational system need to collaborate across national, state, and local levels (e.g., at the district level). These actors bear significant responsibility for ensuring the success of educational reforms. Fullan (1993) underscored that teachers are pivotal agents in educational reform, as they are the most impacted by any change initiative. In accordance with the Ministry of Education (MOE) instruction, teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) should be prepared to implement the new English curricula in their classrooms.⁵ It is imperative to note that the success of any curriculum implementation is dependent on teachers' acceptance, as they are the primary agents in the classroom. This is consistent with Borg's (2006) assertion that teachers' comprehension, opinions, and practices of a new policy may influence the desired national language educational outcome. These aspects should be investigated further, as they pertain to how teachers respond to reform initiatives and to the strategies they use to implement change in the classroom, considering how their perspectives and knowledge might affect classroom practice. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that teachers face numerous challenges during the educational reform process. Difficulties in transitioning from the previous curriculum to the current one are especially evident during the implementation of a new educational framework, as teachers often struggle to adapt to the changes.⁶

The aforementioned situation has been evident since the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into Malaysia's education system. The CEFR was formally introduced into the national English language curriculum in 2017, marking a significant step in the Ministry of Education's broader reform efforts outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (MEB). Eleven adjustments are required to achieve the transformative change in outcomes that all Malaysians anticipate. The statement states that Shift 2 aims to ensure all children are proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Subsequently, in 2015, the Ministry of Education initiated the current language policy reform, The English Language Education Roadmap for Malaysia, 2015–2025, to strengthen the English language education policy. The Roadmap emphasizes the need for Malaysian students to improve their English language abilities to meet the demands of globalization, and this has been achieved by integrating the CEFR into the English language curriculum from preschool to tertiary and teacher education levels.⁷

² N Figueras, 'The Impact of the CEFR', *ELT Journal*, 66.4 (2012), 477–85 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccs037>>.

³ \& Hashim H Bayuon P. D., 'CEFR-Aligned Primary Curriculum Framework: Rural National Primary School English Language Teachers' Attitudes and Slants', *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 20.1 (2023) <<https://doi.org/10.52696/ttaz3243>>.

⁴ M Díez-Bedmar M. B. \& Byram, 'The Current Influence of the CEFR in Secondary Education: Teachers' Perceptions', *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 32.1 (2019), 1–15 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2018.1493492>>.

⁵ \& Said N E M Nawai R., 'Implementation Challenges of Common European Framework Reference (CEFR) in a Malaysian Setting: Insights on English Teachers' Attitude', *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10.7 (2020), 28–41 <<https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v10-i7/7394>>.

⁶ J Foley, 'CLT Using CEFR and EIL in Southeast Asia and East Asia in the English Language Classroom', *RELC Journal*, 53.1 (2022), 240–52 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688221998079>>.

⁷ A J Ong J. W. \& Ahmad Tajuddin, 'Investigating Cascade Training of CEFR-Aligned Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) in Rural Malaysia', *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 20.7 (2021), 100–117 <<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.7.6>>.



The CEFR is a globally recognized framework in language instruction. It was founded in 2001 to provide "a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc., across Europe" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1). The framework is currently globally utilized and has been included in several language curricula owing to its outstanding objectives and unique characteristics. It is widely regarded as a framework for delineating competence levels, with students assessed based on language proficiency descriptors. The CEFR consists of six specific proficiency levels, which are A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2, that systematically delineate a learner's progression from fundamental language use for daily communication to an advanced, fluent, and nuanced mastery of the language in academic and professional settings (Council of Europe, 2001). These scales have emerged as the most recognized element of the CEFR, garnering considerable attention from experts. Additionally, the CEFR uses detailed "can-do" descriptors at each proficiency level to specify what learners can do in the four language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, offering a practical and performance-based framework that guides teaching, learning, and assessment by clearly articulating language competencies in real-world contexts. In an effort to standardize English proficiency, the framework has become an internationally recognized document in both Europe and other countries. It has been translated into over 40 languages, including sign language. Although it was originally intended to foster the integration of the educational and cultural components of European countries, it has now spread to many other countries, including Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Finland, Poland, Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia.⁸

The CEFR has garnered international recognition, and numerous Asian countries have either adopted or modified the framework as part of their language education policies. In line with this trend, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia has adopted the CEFR to improve the quality of English-language instruction and align it with international benchmarks. Nevertheless, the CEFR's practical implementation and effectiveness in classroom settings have been impeded by the difficulty many teachers have in understanding it, despite its widespread acceptance in educational policy. For example, Foley (2021) investigated the relationship between the CEFR and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in four plurilingual and pluricultural societies across Southeast and East Asia, namely Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, and China. His research shed light on issues prevalent in these settings, including inadequate awareness and familiarity among instructors with the framework, disapproval of pedagogical change among teachers and stakeholders, and centralized decision-making procedures. Similar barriers have been identified in Malaysia, including limited teacher awareness and exposure to the CEFR, negative attitudes, insufficient preparedness, insufficient training provided by educational authorities, practical classroom constraints, curriculum misalignment, and a lack of appropriate teaching materials. Additionally, research indicates that a significant number of teachers are strongly opposed to incorporating the CEFR into national language education programs. Studies in the Malaysian educational context have explored various aspects of the CEFR-aligned curriculum, including the use of CEFR-based textbooks, teachers' perceptions and attitudes, and classroom assessment practices. These studies consistently emphasize the importance of equipping educators with adequate knowledge and pedagogical skills to effectively integrate the CEFR into their teaching methods. However, a significant gap remains in research, particularly a lack of comprehensive mixed-method studies that focus specifically on ESL primary school teachers' perspectives and knowledge regarding the CEFR. This research gap is critical, as understanding how teachers interpret and apply the CEFR is essential to its successful implementation. To address this, the present study aims to fill this gap by examining ESL teachers' understanding of the CEFR-aligned curriculum and their views on its introduction and application within Malaysia's English language education system. The study is guided by two key research questions: first, what is the level of teachers' knowledge and understanding regarding the CEFR-aligned curriculum? And second, how do teachers perceive the effectiveness and relevance of the CEFR in improving language teaching and learning outcomes within their educational settings?



⁸ Singh H K J Mulyadi D Ong E T Singh T S M Mostafa N A \& Md M Singh C. K. S., 'In-Service Teachers' Familiarisation of the CEFR-Aligned School-Based Assessment in the Malaysian Secondary ESL Classroom', *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. \& Hum*, 29.S3 (2021), 179–201 <<https://doi.org/10.47836/pjs.29.S3.10>>.



These questions are central to gaining deeper insights into the practical impact of the CEFR on ESL education in Malaysia.⁹

Method

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to explore Malaysian primary school English teachers' understanding and perceptions of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. In the first phase, quantitative data were gathered through a structured survey targeting teachers to assess their knowledge of key CEFR components, such as proficiency levels, descriptors, and principles, as well as their perceptions of the curriculum's impact on classroom practice.¹⁰ The second phase involved qualitative data collection via semi-structured interviews with a purposive subsample of survey respondents to further explore and clarify the quantitative findings. This phase focused on teachers' interpretations of CEFR concepts, implementation challenges, and perceived instructional implications. Data integration occurred during the interpretation stage, where the interview data contextualized and expanded on the survey results. For sampling, purposive selection was used in both phases. In the quantitative phase, 144 primary school English teachers were chosen based on their involvement with the CEFR-aligned curriculum. In the qualitative phase, six teachers were selected for follow-up interviews to ensure a comprehensive understanding of their classroom experiences. The interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached, after which no new insights emerged.¹¹ Two research instruments were employed: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol. The questionnaire collected demographic information, assessed teachers' knowledge of CEFR components, and examined their perceptions of the curriculum's impact. The interview protocol, conducted post-survey, explored teachers' backgrounds, experiences with CEFR training, and challenges encountered in classroom implementation. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics summarizing the data, such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. For the qualitative analysis, thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was applied to the interview transcripts. This process involved familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, grouping codes into themes, refining those themes, and reporting findings with supporting excerpts to enhance analytic rigor. This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase was conducted first, followed by a qualitative phase to explain the survey findings. The overall research procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

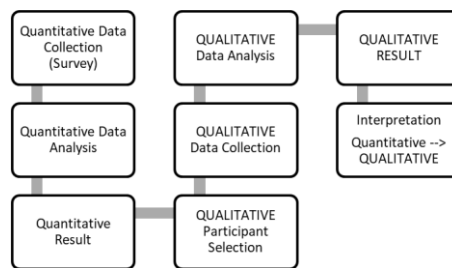


Figure 1. Explanatory sequential design (adapted from Creswell and Plano Clarke, 2018).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phases of the thematic analysis used in this study are presented in Figure 2.

⁹ Ahmad Tajuddin A J \& Shamsudin C M Haruna H. H., 'Unlocking Academic Vocabulary: Corpus Insights from Open and Distance English Language Learning Coursebooks', *3L: Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 30.4 (2024), 291–303 <<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/3L-2024-3004-20>>.

¹⁰ Denchai Prabandee and Kristof Savski, 'Mediating across the Sustainable Ecology: Researchers and Practitioners as Collaborating Epistemic Arbiters in Developing a Global Englishes-Informed Coursebook', *System*, 131 (2025), 103639 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103639>>.

¹¹ Eva Thue Vold, 'Qualifying Foreign Language Teachers: Is Teacher Training Enough?', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 82 (2017), 40–53 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2016.12.002>>.



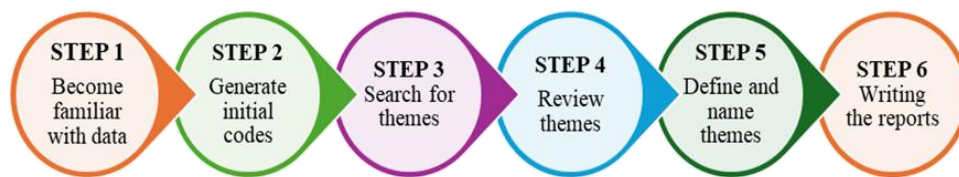


Figure 2. The six-phases process of thematic analysis (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Results and Discussions

Teachers' Knowledge and Interpretation of the CEFR-Aligned Curriculum

This section examines the initial research question regarding teachers' comprehension of the CEFR-aligned curriculum.¹² The question is, "What is the level of teachers' knowledge and understanding regarding the CEFR-aligned curriculum?" Before exploring teachers' understanding of the framework, it is crucial to investigate the sources from which they obtain information about the CEFR. Analysing these sources elucidates the mechanisms by which teachers acquire and deepen their understanding of the CEFR, thereby influencing the implementation of the framework in instructional practices. Table 1 below delineates the diverse sources of information that teachers utilise to enhance their comprehension of the CEFR.¹³

Table 1. Sources through which teachers acquire information about the CEFR.

Source of Information	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Formal training sessions	105	72.9
Discussions with colleagues	25	17.4
Independent reading (books, articles, newspapers)	11	7.6
No exposure to any of the above	3	2.1

Source: Questionnaire data from the present study.

Table 1 indicates that a substantial proportion of teachers gained considerable knowledge of the CEFR through engagement in CEFR-related training, as demonstrated by the percentage scores. In particular, 72.9% of teachers reported that they obtained information from training courses, 17.4% sought guidance from colleagues, and 7.6% relied on reading materials such as books, articles, or newspapers. The findings indicate that formal training significantly contributed to teachers' comprehension of the CEFR.¹⁴ Furthermore, many teachers enhanced their understanding by collaborating with peers and reading relevant sources. Seeking guidance from colleagues appears to be more common among teachers who have not had formal training, as they may rely on trained peers for immediate support. Additionally, certain teachers chose to engage with CEFR-related materials to enhance their comprehension. To evaluate teachers' understanding of the CEFR, participants were requested to respond to a question concerning its key elements. Table 2 illustrates the teachers' comprehension of these CEFR elements, with data represented through frequency counts and percentages. The findings indicate teachers' understanding of the CEFR components as specified by the Council of Europe (2001).

Table 2. Teachers' perceptions of CEFR elements as components of the curriculum.

Perceived CEFR Component	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Defined levels to indicate learners' language proficiency	103	71.5%
A framework outlining language teaching competencies and strategies	95	66.0%
A structured syllabus guiding instructional methodology	94	65.3%

¹² Mingliang Wang and others, 'Voice as Pedagogy: Enhancing EMI Teachers', Self-Efficacy, Instructional Clarity, and Vocal Health Literacy Through Integrated Voice Training Workshops', *Journal of Voice*, 2025 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2025.08.030>>.

¹³ Lu-Chun Lin and Wenli Tsou, 'Technology-Mediated Online EMI Professional Development: Developing Faculty Self-Efficacy and Teaching Practice through the Community of Inquiry Framework', *System*, 133 (2025), 103727 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103727>>.

¹⁴ Bridget Goodman, Kymbat Yessenbekova and Samantha Curle, 'English-Medium Education in Kazakhstan: A Multifaceted Exploration of Student and Alumni Perceptions on Language Proficiency, Academic Performance, and Career Prospects', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 128 (2024), 102451 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102451>>.



Assessment-related recommendations	90	62.5%
Pedagogical suggestions for classroom practice	88	61.1%
Curriculum design tailored for specific languages	85	59.0%
An explanation of language acquisition processes	83	57.6%

Source: Questionnaire data from the present study.

The results showed that many teachers correctly identified several key CEFR elements, including defined levels to indicate learners' language proficiency (71.5%), a framework outlining language teaching competencies and strategies (66%), assessment-related recommendations (62.5%), and pedagogical suggestions for classroom practice (61.1%). Despite these correct responses, a significant number of teachers selected incorrect answers, particularly regarding a structured syllabus guiding instructional methodology (65.3%), curriculum design tailored for specific languages (59%), and an explanation of language acquisition processes (57.6%).¹⁵ It is crucial to acknowledge that the Council of Europe did not explicitly define these three items during the framework's establishment. Teachers tended to assume that the CEFR provided a curriculum for specific language teaching approaches as well as a description of how people acquire languages. Nevertheless, the CEFR framework is not language-specific and disavows the notion that it is designed for a specific language. Figueras (2012) indicates that the CEFR has been translated into numerous European languages and is accessible in more than 40 languages, including sign language.¹⁶ The framework's description of language learning contrasts with Little's (2006) assertions that the CEFR serves as a descriptive rather than a prescriptive framework. The CEFR does not dictate specific teaching methods or rules for language acquisition; instead, it provides a flexible and non-prescriptive framework. Teachers must understand that the CEFR "is not set out to tell practitioners what to do or how to do" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 26), as it lacks detailed guidelines. This understanding is essential to avoid misinterpretation and improper application of the framework in language classrooms.¹⁷

Teachers' comprehension of the CEFR was additionally evaluated in relation to its assimilation into the Malaysian English language curriculum. This study aimed to assess teachers' awareness of the CEFR levels recommended by the MOE across different educational stages in Malaysia. Respondents were requested to align the CEFR levels suggested by the government with designated educational phases. The MOE aspires for all Malaysians, regardless of social status, to meet the CEFR standards for each stage of education by 2025. As outlined in *The Roadmap* (2015), the CEFR targets for each educational stage in Malaysia are as follows: Preschool (A1), Primary school (A2), Secondary school (B1/B2), Post-secondary (B2), University (B2/C1), and Teacher Education (C1). This categorization was adapted from Valax (2011). Table 3 presents the results of respondents' knowledge of these CEFR levels.¹⁸

Table 3. Teachers' knowledge of CEFR levels assigned to educational stages according to MOE guidelines.

Educational Stage	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Preschool	69.9%	11.1%	7.3%	4.4%	2.8%	0.2%
Primary	16.8%	43.7%	9.9%	10.2%	5.6%	6.9%
Secondary	0.0%	21.5%	37.0%	14.6%	4.6%	6.9%
Post-secondary	1.8%	14.3%	20.5%	32.0%	14.8%	3.4%

¹⁵ Mohamad Almashour and others, 'Translanguaging in Jordanian EFL Assessment: Cognitive Scaffolding, Identity Expression, and Institutional Friction', *System*, 137 (2026), 103917 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103917>>.

¹⁶ Abdul Malik Abbasi and Imtiaz Husain, 'Cross-Linguistic Analysis of Prosodic Features Based on Wavelet Prominence: A Study of L2 English and L1 Sindhi Lexical Stress Using Large Language & Deep Learning Models', *Computer Speech & Language*, 2026, 101953 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csl.2026.101953>>.

¹⁷ Kay Gallagher and Sarah Hopkyns, 'From "Lip Service" to "More Language Support Needed": Perspectives from Academic Leaders of English in Global English-Medium Higher Education Contexts', *System*, 133 (2025), 103729 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103729>>.

¹⁸ Marte Nordanger and Birgitta Ljung Egeland, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Introduction Program Teachers' Narrated Experiences of Residency and Citizenship Language Requirements in Scandinavia', *Linguistics and Education*, 83 (2024), 101332 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2024.101332>>.



University	6.2%	5.2%	14.5%	24.0%	34.3%	19.0%
Teacher Education	5.3%	3.9%	10.6%	14.6%	37.9%	55.1%

Source: Questionnaire data from the present study.

Table 3 displays the findings related to teachers' understanding of the CEFR levels as recommended by the MOE for different educational stages in Malaysia. The results reveal a notable divergence between the teacher's responses and the Ministry of Education's suggested CEFR levels. Many respondents inaccurately identified CEFR levels, resulting in a generally low percentage of correct answers across all educational stages, except for Preschool, where 69.9% of respondents answered correctly.¹⁹ It is noteworthy that less than 50% of respondents accurately identified the CEFR level for each stage, indicating a potential lack of clarity or understanding regarding the CEFR levels. Some respondents incorrectly categorised Teacher Education (5.3%), University (6.2%), and Post-secondary (1.8%) stages as A1 level, despite A1 being the most basic level and unsuitable for adult learners in formal education settings in Malaysia. The findings suggest that teachers have a restricted and somewhat inaccurate comprehension of the CEFR framework.²⁰

The interviews with teachers provided further insights into their responses to the CEFR, adding context to the data gathered from the questionnaire. Upon inquiry regarding specific components of the CEFR, such as its aims, objectives, purposes, global scales, levels, and illustrative descriptors, numerous teachers openly acknowledged their unfamiliarity with these elements. Although they have studied the framework, they remain unclear about its fundamental principles and components. Phrases like "I am not sure," "I could not remember," "I don't remember," and "I can't tell you," as illustrated in excerpt below, indicate that the teachers encountered difficulties in recalling or comprehending the fundamental concepts of the CEFR. This uncertainty likely arises from their insufficient comprehension of the framework. The teachers' responses in the interview underscored this deficiency in their knowledge.²¹

Teacher 1: I don't remember... I am sorry. I think I am the one who could not catch up. I'm only vaguely aware of it.

Teacher 2: The goals and objectives...erm. Well, if you ask me now, I can't tell you. But I read about the goals and objectives, which were quite interesting.

Teacher 3: I am not sure. I have read it a couple of times, but I cannot remember exactly. What I can remember is that it's to increase English skills.

Teacher 4: It was so long ago that I could not remember. And what are the characteristics? I don't know.

Teacher 5: I am sorry, I cannot remember at all.

Teacher 6: I can only give you answers regarding the differences between KSSR and CEFR.

The responses above suggest that all teachers shared similar perspectives on the CEFR. They expressed limited recall or understanding of the CEFR-aligned curriculum's goals and characteristics. Teacher 1 acknowledged only a vague awareness of the framework, attributing the lack of understanding to difficulty in keeping up with the content. Similarly, Teacher 2 mentioned having read about the curriculum's goals and objectives but was unable to articulate them during the interview.²² Meanwhile, Teacher 3 recalled reading the document multiple times but retained only a general impression that its purpose was to enhance English proficiency. Teacher 4 stated that the information had been encountered a long time ago and could no longer recall any specific details or characteristics of the framework, while Teacher 5 admitted to having no recollection at all. After all, it was discovered that only Teacher 6 offered a partial response, indicating familiarity with the

¹⁹ Melissa Özlem Grab, 'Integrated AI Chatbot Practice: A Pathway to Improved ESL Speaking Skills', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 12 (2025), 101933 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101933>>.

²⁰ Wen-Li Chang and Jerry Chih-Yuan Sun, 'Empowering Bilingual Teachers with Dynamic GenAI: Adaptive Design and Implementation of Multimodal Instructional Strategies', *Computers & Education*, 241 (2026), 105490 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2025.105490>>.

²¹ Yachao Sun and Ge Lan, 'Enhancing Critical Language Awareness in EAL Writing Education amid the Rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence', *System*, 134 (2025), 103806 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103806>>.

²² Kumutha Raman, Wong Wei Lun and Harwati Hashim, 'Virtual Reality for Verbal Communication Development in English as Second Language Learning: Advantages and Optimisation Strategies', *Computers & Education: X Reality*, 8 (2026), 100145 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cexr.2026.100145>>.



differences between the previous curriculum (KSSR) and the CEFR, rather than a direct understanding of CEFR's core features. The interviews revealed that teachers were generally unable to provide clear or detailed explanations of the CEFR's content and underlying principles, suggesting a lack of sufficient conceptual knowledge. This qualitative finding aligns with the low levels of CEFR knowledge indicated in the questionnaire data (refer to Tables 2 and 3). Although teachers have engaged in training sessions on CEFR implementation, many teachers still exhibit a limited and superficial grasp of the framework, reflecting issues identified in earlier studies²³

Teachers' Perceptions of CEFR Implementation in Language Teaching Contexts

The second research question is "How do teachers perceive the effectiveness and relevance of the CEFR in enhancing language teaching and learning outcomes in their educational contexts?" This inquiry pertains to their opinions and perspectives regarding the adoption of the CEFR and its impact on English language instruction. Table 4 displays the average distribution of teachers' responses regarding the implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum.²⁴

Table 4. Teachers' perceptions of the CEFR-aligned curriculum.

Statements	Mean	SD
I have as much access as I need to the textbook and CDs.	3.160	.7541
The CEFR-aligned curriculum supports me to teach all four language skills equally (speaking, writing, listening, reading).	3.160	.6963
The CEFR is relevant to my teaching practice.	3.153	.6928
The CEFR-aligned curriculum covers topics that are interesting and engaging for my pupils.	3.139	.7057
The CEFR-aligned curriculum has shown positive implication towards my pupils' learning process.	3.139	.7057

Sources: SD=Standard Deviation; Questionnaire data from the present study.

The results of teachers' responses regarding their views of the CEFR-aligned curriculum in English classroom instruction are shown in Table 4. The table demonstrates that respondents exhibited favorable perceptions regarding the implementation of CEFR in the English classroom.²⁵ The average scores suggest that the teacher's perceptions of instructional approaches, student learning processes, and curriculum materials exceed 2.5. The respondents exhibit optimism about the curriculum materials, as indicated by the highest mean score, suggesting they believe they have adequate access to the textbook and CDs (M=3.160, SD=.7541). In addition, the participants displayed a positive disposition about the teaching practice, as evidenced by the fact that every positive statement was recorded with a score that was significantly higher than 2.5: *The CEFR-aligned curriculum supports me to teach all four language skills equally (speaking, writing, listening, reading)* (SD=0.6963); and *The CEFR is relevant to my teaching practice* (M=3.153, SD=0.6928). Furthermore, the participants conveyed constructive feedback about their students' learning experiences. For example, *The CEFR-aligned curriculum covers topics that are interesting and engaging for my pupil*; and *The CEFR-aligned curriculum has shown positive implication towards my pupils' learning process*, where both statements yielded identical mean and standard deviation scores (M = 3.139, SD = 0.7057). The mean values indicate a predominantly optimistic attitude among respondents about the incorporation of the CEFR into the Malaysian primary English language curriculum. Generally, the data indicate that teachers have positive perceptions regarding the curriculum's impact on teaching techniques, learning processes,

²³ Aidana Smagul, 'L1 and Translation Use in EFL Classrooms: A Quantitative Survey on Teachers' Attitudes in Kazakhstani Secondary Schools', *System*, 125 (2024), 103443 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103443>>.

²⁴ Andrea Stötzer, Márton Bagyura and Éva Farkas, 'Motivational Drivers and Barriers in Learning English for Medical Purposes: Perceptions of Hungarian Medical Students and EMP Teachers', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 12 (2025), 102024 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.102024>>.

²⁵ Suqing Liu, 'Beyond the Bot: Instructor Facilitation, Self-Efficacy, and Online English Motivation in an AI-Rich Era', *Acta Psychologica*, 264 (2026), 106534 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2026.106534>>.



and instructional resources. They recognized that the execution of the CEFR-aligned curriculum yields positive outcomes for teaching and learning at the primary level.²⁶

To further explore teachers' perceptions, the questionnaire findings were complemented with data obtained from semi-structured interviews. In particular, participants were invited to disclose their perspectives regarding the application of the CEFR to the teaching of the four language skills, reading, listening, speaking, and writing, and to provide an explanation of how they integrated the adapted framework into their instructional practices. This investigation was designed to ascertain the efficacy of the CEFR's implementation in classroom settings. When asked how they applied the CEFR in teaching these skills, most teachers stated that they adhered to the MOE directives, particularly by giving equal emphasis to the additional Language Arts component outlined in the official curriculum guide, the *Curriculum and Assessment Document (DSKP)*. The excerpts below illustrate the teachers' perspectives on this matter²⁷:

Teacher 1: We must teach all of them. Because we must use all five skills... The five skills are listening, speaking, language arts, reading, and writing.

Teacher 2: All four equally.

Teacher 3: All skills. Because the MOE has instructed that English subjects must use 100% CEFR in the teaching of all skills.

Teacher 4: We must cover everything. We cannot say that we use specific skills the most. We have to use all the skills: reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Because in one week, we need to cover all the skills. For instance, on Sunday, we have to do listening, on Monday, we have to do reading, then Tuesday should be writing, then language arts.

Teacher 5: I teach them equally because that is what we need to teach every week. I ensure equal treatment during online learning.

The excerpts indicate that teachers were predominantly content with the CEFR-aligned curriculum and deemed it beneficial for teaching the four language skills. The teachers recognized the necessity of complying with the Malaysian MOE's direction to equally focus on all language skills. In the educational setting, several affirmed that they presented each skill, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, on a weekly basis. Lessons were designed to address certain skills and tailored to accommodate students' linguistic needs.²⁸ For instance, Teacher 5 highlighted her efforts to integrate all four skills equally in her lessons, even in an online learning environment. The result suggests that, despite shifts in the mode of instruction, teachers continued to align their practices with the curriculum's expectations by incorporating CEFR principles in teaching English holistically. This qualitative finding aligns with the questionnaire results, where teachers demonstrated strong agreement in implementing the CEFR across all four language skills, with the highest mean score recorded at $M = 3.160$.

The findings indicate that teachers' knowledge of key CEFR elements remains limited, as reflected by the high proportion of incorrect responses, even among those who had attended CEFR-related training.²⁹ This suggests that exposure to policy documents and training sessions alone does not guarantee meaningful understanding. From a teacher cognition perspective (Borg, 2006), this gap may be attributed to the distinction between *received knowledge and internalised pedagogical knowledge*. While teachers may be introduced to CEFR concepts during formal training, these ideas may not be

²⁶ To-Ken Lee and Aaron Chia Yuan Hung, 'Implementing Differentiated Instruction through Lesson Study: Reflections from Taiwanese EFL Teachers', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 133 (2025), 102720 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2025.102720>>.

²⁷ Mahmoud Fereydoonfar, 'Constrained yet Strategic Linguistic Investment: Iranian English Learners Navigating Identities, Ideologies and Capital Forms amid Religious Nationalism', *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 24.4 (2025), 522–39 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-04-2025-0075>>.

²⁸ Nazmiye Gurel Cennetkusu, 'EFL Teachers' Attitudes toward Artificial Intelligence in Language Teaching: A Mixed-Methods Study in Türkiye', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 13 (2026), 102580 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2026.102580>>.

²⁹ Xiao Cui, Chong Wang and Ishamina Athirah Gardiner, 'Enhancing EMI Learning through L1 Use and ESP: A Mixed-Methods Study in a Chinese Transnational Education Context', *System*, 125 (2024), 103455 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103455>>.



sufficiently integrated into their existing belief systems or classroom routines, resulting in surface-level familiarity rather than deep conceptual understanding.³⁰

This interpretation aligns with Diez-Bedmar and Byram's (2018) findings among Spanish teachers, who demonstrated awareness of CEFR terminology but struggled to apply its underlying principles. Similarly, Ong and Ahmad Tajuddin (2021) reported that CEFR cascading in rural Sabah prioritised dissemination over conceptual engagement, limiting teachers' ability to translate policy into practice. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that this phenomenon persists even in contexts where multiple sources of CEFR information are available, suggesting that the issue lies not in access, but in the nature and depth of professional learning opportunities.³¹

The confusion surrounding CEFR proficiency levels targeted at different educational stages further illustrates this point. Although Malaysia's Roadmap (2015–2025) clearly outlines expected benchmarks, the findings suggest that teachers may not critically engage with policy documents or may interpret them instrumentally. This supports Borg's (2012) argument that top-down reforms often fail when teachers are positioned as implementers rather than active meaning-makers. Without opportunities to interrogate, contextualise, and reflect on CEFR principals, teachers may comply with reform rhetorically while remaining uncertain in practice.³²

Importantly, despite these knowledge gaps, teachers in this study expressed generally positive perceptions toward the CEFR-aligned curriculum. This apparent contradiction highlights the complex relationship between beliefs and knowledge. As Pajares (1992) notes, beliefs are often emotionally grounded and resistant to change, whereas conceptual knowledge requires sustained cognitive engagement. The positive attitudes observed may therefore reflect teachers' alignment with the reform's goals rather than their confidence in enacting its pedagogical demands. This finding echoes Bayuon and Hashim (2023) and Lo (2018), but the present study adds nuance by showing that positive perceptions can coexist with substantial conceptual uncertainty.³³

Taken together, these findings suggest that effective CEFR implementation requires more than favourable attitudes or isolated training sessions. Instead, sustained, theory-informed professional development is needed to support teachers in constructing coherent understandings of CEFR principles and integrating them into classroom practice. This insight contributes to international CEFR literature by reinforcing the central role of teacher cognition in mediating global curriculum reforms, particularly in non-European contexts where policy borrowing is prevalent.³⁴

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined primary school English teachers' knowledge and perceptions regarding the implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. The findings reveal a notable discrepancy between teachers' generally positive perceptions of the CEFR and their limited understanding of its core components, including proficiency levels, descriptors, objectives, and pedagogical principles. This misalignment suggests that favourable attitudes alone are insufficient to ensure effective curriculum implementation and highlights the central role of teacher cognition in mediating policy-driven educational reforms. Beyond its local context, this study contributes to international discussions on CEFR adoption by providing empirical evidence from a non-European, expanding-circle English education context. The findings extend existing literature on CEFR

³⁰ Johanna Fleckenstein and others, 'Linking TOEFL IBT® Writing Rubrics to CEFR Levels: Cut Scores and Validity Evidence from a Standard Setting Study', *Assessing Writing*, 43 (2020), 100420 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2019.100420>>.

³¹ Henry E Lemana II and others, 'Narratives of Taking Part: International Faculty in the Internationalization of Curriculum in Thai Higher Education', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 10 (2024), 101158 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101158>>.

³² Merylyn Meristo and Aigi Heero, 'One Size Doesn't Fit All: Exploring Student Expectations and Disciplinary Voices in ESP in Estonia', *English for Specific Purposes*, 81 (2026), 120–34 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2025.10.004>>.

³³ Isabel Tejada-Sánchez and Mario Molina-Naar, 'English Medium Instruction Practices in the Internationalized University: The Cases of Colombia and South Korea', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 133 (2025), 102654 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2025.102654>>.

³⁴ Lujain AlTwijri and Safaa M Abdelhalim, 'Enhancing Reading Engagement in Adult EFL Classrooms through AI-Supported Instruction: A Mixed-Methods Study', *System*, 136 (2026), 103906 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103906>>.



implementation by demonstrating that systematic training does not necessarily translate into conceptual understanding, thereby reinforcing the need to reconceptualise professional development as an ongoing, theory-informed process rather than a one-off intervention. This contribution is particularly relevant for countries worldwide that have adopted or are considering CEFR-based frameworks as part of broader language education reforms. While the study is limited by its focus on a specific group of primary school teachers, the insights generated offer transferable implications for international policymakers, teacher educators, and curriculum designers. Future research should involve more diverse and representative samples across educational levels and contexts, as well as longitudinal designs to track changes in teachers' knowledge and beliefs over time. Further investigation into the effectiveness of CEFR-focused professional development, the role of institutional support and leadership, and the impact of policy communication on teacher cognition would deepen global understanding of how international frameworks such as the CEFR are interpreted and enacted in local classrooms.

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