

The Impact of CEFR-Aligned Curriculum in the Teaching of ESL in Julau District: English Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract— To date, English language in Malaysia is seen as a fundamental aspect to go in line with the current technology-equipped world. A paradigm shift in transforming previous curriculum, Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary School (KSSR) into a newly introduced CEFR-aligned curriculum, the English Curriculum Framework (ECF) has proven that there is a need to revamp English language command in all levels of education. However, this sudden shift had made some teachers somewhat prepared to implement the curriculum. Some teachers complained that they had some issues of competencies in integrating CEFR-based lesson planning, teaching, accessing available materials and assessment practices into their current trend of teaching. Hence, this study aims to get insights from English teachers on the impact of CEFR-aligned Curriculum in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL). A total of 48 samples who teach English using the ECF across Julau district in Sarawak had responded to the survey study mainly to get their perceptions of how lesson planning, teaching and materials had been implemented so far. A set of 20 questionnaire items was adapted and distributed to every school. A descriptive statistics was used in analysing the data. The findings showed a remarkable feedback from the samples with regards to ECF. Yet, the perceptions could become a springboard for the relevant authorities and stakeholders to review the CEFR-aligned curriculum as a valid and reliable platform to meet the School Transformation 2025 (TS25) programme together with the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025

Keywords— CEFR-aligned curriculum, English language, English Curriculum Framework (ECF), lesson planning, teaching, assessment practices, impact, English as Second Language (ESL), perceptions

I. INTRODUCTION

In realising the aspiration of producing highly qualified generations in the future, and the one who ensures the successful delivery of the quality education, is none other than the teachers themselves. They bear the great responsibility to shape the future generations of leaders, entrepreneurs, economists, and other professional professions to develop the country. The other stakeholders also play their roles but not as much as the teachers do because the teachers are the stakeholders that directly in contact with the learners most of the time. Teachers, if they fail to provide them with the suitable and intended forms of education, it will only jeopardize the reputation of the education that contributes majorly to the nation development. Therefore, sometimes the teachers should

be given more authority in deciding what is best for themselves and clients.

Teachers, which are also human beings, nevertheless, some of them cannot embrace changes easily in education policy. This might due to the workloads of unnecessary clerical works in their organisations without paying more focus on their core business – teaching. In the end, the outcome would be not as expected. As compared to the traditional way of teaching in many years back, teachers are more focused on the teaching and learning rather than doing the clerical work. But now, due to the rapid advancement of technologies, the delivery of the knowledge and skills also change to go in line with the advancement of technologies. The use of technologies however can be a burden to some teachers, especially who cannot utilise it properly and competently. Hence, the teachers have to keep themselves updated and skilled to adopt and adapt changes in teaching and learning pedagogy from time to time.

Therefore, in general, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Julau English teachers on the impact of CEFR-aligned curriculum in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. Specifically, the research question sought was;

- 1) 1. To what extent does the English Curriculum Framework (ECF) affect teachers' lesson planning practices?
- 2) 2. To what extent does English Curriculum Framework (ECF) contribute to action-orientation?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

The introduction of CEFR by the Council of Europe (2001) has brought a new era for the language teaching and testing worldwide. It is seen as a potential indicator adopted into many education systems around the globe due to its harmonisation and transparency in language testing (Cephe & Toprak, 2014). They further added that it provides the stakeholders with a reference document that could be utilised not only for developing language curriculum and syllabus, preparing course books but also for evaluating the learning outcomes. CEFR itself is a framework designed as an international reference of one's competencies and proficiencies in using English as purported by Parmenter Bryan (2013, as cited in O'Dwyer, 2014) that CEFR is seen as a 'common language' that can be

shared by language teachers internationally. They also added that CEFR provides clear goals and measurable achievement by reference to the levels. Taylor & Chan (2015) have it defined as a widely recognised standard of ability or performance in language education and assessment while (López, n.d.) stated that it becomes widely applied to language tests and language programmes around Europe and beyond. In CEFR, it has six different levels of grading – A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2, in ascending order from low to high competence.

B. Definition and Concept of Perceptions

The term ‘perception’ can be defined as the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.) In other words, it is meant by something that people experience and feel based on what they see and hear from their surroundings. These experiences can be interpreted into various conclusions that are different with others that may oppose to individual’s opinion. This claim is further supported by Nelson and Quick (1997: 83-84, as cited in Unumeri, 2009), social perception is the process of interpreting information about another person. Moreover, Rao and Narayana (1998: 329-330, as cited in Unumeri, 2009) has perception defined as the process whereby people select, organise, and interpret sensory stimulations into meaningful information about their work environment. The interpretation will become meaningful when the people are required to comment, discuss or describe about something that have already experienced by the person before. They further argued that the perception is the single most important determinant of human behaviour, stating further that there can be no behaviour without perception. In short, people learn new behaviours by observing people that already perceived by the people earlier. Michener, Delamater and Myres (2004: 106, as cited in Unumeri, 2009) defined perception is referred to the process by which we form impressions of other people’s traits and personalities. However, impressions observed or heard cannot necessarily right or wrong.

III. METHODOLOGY

As the purpose of this study was to get English teachers’ perceptions on the impact of CEFR-aligned curriculum in the teaching of ESL classroom, hence the study employed a survey method design as a quantitative study.

A. Equations

The instrument exploited in this study was a questionnaire to obtain general perceptions of the teachers had on the impact of CEFR-aligned curriculum in ESL classroom. As for the questionnaire, it was adapted from Hosseinifar (2017) in his study of CEFR impact in UAE public schools to retain its validity and reliability of the instrument. There were four sections in the questionnaire, starting with Section A, asking about the demographic data of the respondents, then Section B and C, asking about the perceptions on the impact of ECF before and after respectively and the last was Section D, asking for more clarification or comments on ECF. It was consisted of 20 questions guided with a 5-point Likert Scale: 1 “Never/Not familiar”, 2 “Sometimes/Rather familiar”, 3 “Often/Familiar”, 4 “Usually/Well familiar” and 5 “Always/Very well familiar”. 3 of them were open-ended questions.

B. Sampling

This study utilized purposive sampling technique that the selection of samples shared the same characteristics and objectives of the study as to provide an information-rich study. Hence, only English teachers who were directly in contact with the CEFR-aligned curriculum were recruited for this study. This included TESL and non-TESL optionist teachers regardless of geographical setting of schools, years of teaching, and academic qualifications. The questionnaire was given to all English teachers in 37 schools, both Primary and Secondary schools around Julau district and monitored through Google Form platform for convenience.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Table 1, it was found that the frequent (often, usually and always) had shown that, before the implementation of ECF, about 79.20% of teachers had often (29.20%), usually (22.90%), or always (27.10%) used the coursebook to set their objectives in the lesson planning. Nonetheless, after the implementation of ECF, a total of 83.30% of teachers had often (22.90%), usually (33.30%), or always (27.10%) used the coursebook in setting objectives. It signified that there was a slight increase (+4.00%) in the percentages of teachers using coursebook to set objectives after the implementation of ECF with increased mean (M) from M=3.54 to M=3.69, median from 3.50 to 4.00 and standard deviation from 1.15 to 1.10. Also, it was observed that the identified changes were not statistically significant. With a confidence level of 95%, the paired-sample T-test proved that for pre- and post- ECF period returned value was 0.44, larger than $\alpha = 0.05$ or $p > 0.05$, suggesting no significant difference between pre- and post-ECF proportions of the practices. In a nutshell, there was no significant impact of ECF had on the use of coursebook to set objectives.

Then, a similar result showed in addressing the students’ needs and interests for pre- and post- ECF that was about 91.60% for both pre- and post- ECF but varied in the frequencies. For instance, for pre-ECF, the setting of objectives based on students’ needs and interests showed that, for frequent (often, usually, and always), the teachers had often (25.00%), usually (39.60%), or always (27.10%) while for post-ECF, teachers had often (25.00%), usually (33.30%), or always (33.30%) set objectives based on the factor mentioned earlier, where the slight difference in mean, from M=3.85 to M=3.92, same median for 4.00, and SD from 0.92 to 1.08. This stated that there was no significant difference before and after the implementation for objectives setting based on the students’ needs and interests. This was also shown through the paired-sample T-test, with a confidence level of 95%, the returned value showed 0.68, where $p > 0.05$, proving that there was no significant changes between before and after the implementation of ECF with regard to objectives setting based on the students’ needs and interests.

TABLE I. TEACHERS’ PRIORITIES WHEN SETTING LESSON OBJECTIVES

Variable	Coursebook (%)		Students’ needs and interests (%)		Curriculum framework (%)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Never	2.10	2.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sometimes	18.80	14.60	8.30	8.30	12.50	10.40

Often	29.20	22.90	25.00	25.00	20.80	22.90
Usually	22.90	33.30	39.60	33.30	22.90	31.20
Always	27.10	27.10	27.10	33.30	43.80	35.40
M	3.54	3.69	3.85	3.92	3.98	3.92
Mdn	3.50	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
SD	1.15	1.10	0.92	0.96	1.08	1.01
p value	0.44		0.68		0.66	

As for the curriculum framework, however, the findings showed a slight increase in frequencies before and after the implementation of ECF. The teachers who used learning outcomes taken from curriculum framework before the implementation of ECF, as for frequent (often, usually, and always), 20.80% was for often, 22.90% was for usually, and 43.80% was for always. On the other hand, as for post-ECF, often (22.90%), usually (31.20%), and always (35.40%) were recorded. In short, the pre-ECF had made up of about 87.50% while post-ECF was 89.50% (+2.00%, in frequency) with M=3.98 to M=3.92, median 4.00, and SD from 1.08 to 1.01. Therefore, similar to other factors in setting objectives, the use of coursebook and having to consider students' needs and interests, it showed there was no significant change before and after the implementation of ECF. It was also proved through the paired-sample T-test, the data showed the returned value of 0.66, where $p > 0.05$ with confidence level of 95% that indicated that the changes were not statistically different before and after the ECF implementation. In summary, all these factors, such as the use of coursebook to set objectives, the objectives setting based on the students' needs and interests and the use of learning outcomes taken from a curriculum framework showed slight increases or not statistically different before and after the implementation of ECF. Not so much had impacted the objectives setting when the ECF was implemented among the teachers.

Based on Table 2, there were 4 language skills that were going to be evaluated with close reference to the ECF, both pre- and post-ECF. As for the listening skill, the finding showed there was a significant change before and after the implementation of the ECF in ESL classroom. The data showed that there were improvements of the frequency (in frequent) in listening (+20.9%), reading (+12.5%), speaking (+22.9%) and writing (6.3%). In details, for listening skill, the data obtained before the ECF showed that often (37.50%), usually (22.90%), and always (8.30%) as opposed to after the ECF often (35.40%), usually (25.00%), and always (29.20%). As for the reading skill, the data obtained that before the ECF, often (18.80%), usually (31.20%), and always (14.60%) as opposed to after the ECF, often (37.50%), usually (20.80%), and always (35.40%). Apart from that, the speaking skill data showed that often (37.50%), usually (22.90%) and always (6.20%) before the ECF while after the ECF, it showed that often (33.30%), usually (31.20%) and always (25.00%). The writing skill data also showed that often (3.40%), usually (25.00%), and always (22.90%) before the ECF while often (33.30%), usually (18.80%), and always (37.50%) after the ECF.

Similarly, the listening skill improved from 68.70% to 89.60%, reading skill from 81.20% to 93.70%, speaking skill from 66.60% to 89.50%, and writing skill from 83.30% to 89.60%. Therefore, it could be concluded that the speaking skill was the most improved after the implementation of ECF in frequency. Instead of that, before the ECF, listening skill

(M=3.08, Mdn=3.00, SD=0.94), reading skill (M=3.42, Mdn=3.00, SD=0.96), speaking skill (M=3.02, Mdn=3.00, SD=0.91) and writing skill (M=3.54, Mdn=3.00, SD=1.03) and then after the ECF, it improved, where listening skill (M=3.73, Mdn=4.00, SD=1.01), reading skill (M=3.85, Mdn=4.00, SD=0.99), speaking skill (M=3.71, Mdn=4.00, SD=0.97), and writing skill (M=3.83, Mdn=4.00, SD=1.06) respectively.

TABLE II. TASK FREQUENCIES FOR CURRICULUM STRANDS

Variable	L (%)		R (%)		S (%)		W (%)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Never	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sometimes	31.20	10.40	18.80	6.20	33.30	10.40	16.70	10.40
Often	37.50	35.40	35.40	37.50	37.50	33.30	35.40	33.30
Usually	22.90	25.00	31.20	20.80	22.90	31.20	25.00	18.80
Always	8.30	29.20	14.60	35.40	6.20	25.00	22.90	37.50
M	3.08	3.73	3.42	3.85	3.02	3.71	3.54	3.83
Mdn	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00
SD	0.94	1.01	0.96	0.99	0.91	0.97	1.03	1.06
p value	0.00		0.02		0.00		0.08	

The paired-sample T-test was also used to check the significance of data, if any. Thus, from the findings and calculation made by using SPSS (16th version), with a confidence level of 95%, the return value for listening skill was 0.00, where $p < 0.05$, indicating that there was a significant difference between pre- and post-ECF in the development of listening skills. Likewise, there was a significant difference before and after the ECF that could be seen through the reading skills, in which the p value was 0.00, similar to listening skill, where $p < 0.05$, showing that there was a significant difference. The speaking skill also possessed the same traits as listening skills, and reading skills. The return value was 0.00, where $p < 0.05$, indicating that there was a significant difference of the speaking skill before and after the implementation of ECF in the classroom. However, the writing skills did not show the same patterns such as there was no significant difference before and after the implementation of ECF. The data showed that the return value of it was 0.08, in which $p > 0.05$ or larger than $\alpha = 0.05$. This meant that the difference was not statistically significant and not so much impact of the ECF for the writing skills that increased only 6.3%, the least in frequency. Therefore, all skills except writing skills showed a significant difference between pre- and post-ECF that had impacted the students, as observed by the teachers.

Based on Table 3, the findings showed the action-orientation scope that correlated with the research questions. The oral interaction among with classmates showed overwhelming findings where the data range before and after the implementation of ECF was high. As seen from the findings, before the ECF, by observing the frequent (often, usually and always), it showed often (37.50%), usually (6.20%), and always (6.20%) that summed up to a total of 49.90% of teachers as opposed to 81.30%, after the ECF, where often (35.40%), usually (29.20%), always (16.70%). The difference was 31.90% that positively improved the oral interaction with classmates ever since the ECF was implemented. Besides, before the ECF, the data showed M=2.65, Mdn=2.50, and SD=0.91 while after the ECF, the data showed M=3.42, Mdn=3.00, and SD=1.03 which were

comparatively higher than before the ECF. Moreover, by observing the p value of the oral interaction, it could be interpreted as the data stated there was a significant difference between pre- and post-ECF, as shown in the frequency data (in percentage), 0.00, where $p < 0.05$. Therefore, the ECF had huge impact for oral interaction and it improved it among the students in particular where they had more chance to interact to one another in the ESL classroom.

Apart from oral interaction with classmates, the element of group discussion also showed significant improvements. The frequency of having a group discussion in the classroom was improved when the ECF was implemented based on project-based task for instance. Therefore, from the data in Table 4, by observing the frequent in the before ECF column, 37.50% was for often, 8.30% was for usually and 6.20% was for always ($M=2.71$, $Mdn=3.00$, $SD=0.90$) whereas after the ECF, often (31.20%), usually (33.30%), and always (14.60%) [$M=3.42$, $Mdn=3.00$, $SD=0.99$]. The total percentage of frequency for 'frequent' before the ECF was 52.00% and after the ECF, it increased to 79.10% and had a range of 27.10%. This proved that the group discussion was frequently applied when teaching using ECF. Furthermore, the distinct difference between pre- and post-ECF was also proven by testing it statistically using SPSS (16th version), through paired-sample T-test. From the findings, it showed that the returned value was 0.00, where $p < 0.05$ that signified there was a significant difference before

and after the implementation of ECF. Hence, the ECF had impacted so much on the approach to be used in the ESL teaching, particularly the application of group discussion.

The collaborative project work also showed improvements in terms of frequencies that were used by students did in English. Based on the data, the frequency of pupils carried out collaborative project work, after the implementation of ECF had increased ($M=3.33$, $Mdn=3.00$, $SD=0.98$) as opposed to before the implementation of the ECF ($M=2.62$, $Mdn=2.00$, $SD=0.87$). In details, before the ECF, data showed often (31.20%), usually (10.40%) and always (4.20%). In contrast, after the ECF, data showed often (33.30%), usually (31.20%) and always (12.50%). Hence, the difference in range between before and after the ECF was 31.20% and this meant that there was a significant improvement in the frequency of the application of collaborative project work in English lesson. This claim was also supported by testing the data with paired-sample T-test. The result showed that the returned value, or p value was 0.00, where p value was lower than $\alpha = 0.05$ or $p < 0.05$ and this signified that the significant difference between pre- and post-ECF was guaranteed. Therefore, the improvements in frequencies among the students to use collaborative project work when the ECF was being implemented. A lot of collaborative work to be used in the English learning session ever since the ECF was first introduced and implemented in the ESL classroom.

TABLE III. CONTRIBUTIONS OF ECF TO ACTION-ORIENTATION

Variable	Oral interaction (%)		Group discussion (%)		Collaborative project work (%)		Presentation (%)		Storytelling (%)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Never	4.20	2.10	2.10	0.00	2.10	0.00	4.20	0.00	12.50	6.20
Sometimes	45.80	16.70	45.80	20.80	52.10	22.90	64.60	27.10	62.50	41.70
Often	37.50	35.40	37.50	31.20	31.20	33.30	12.50	35.40	16.70	27.10
Usually	6.20	29.20	8.30	33.30	10.40	31.20	12.50	25.00	6.20	16.70
Always	6.20	16.70	6.20	14.60	4.20	12.50	6.20	12.50	2.10	8.30
M	2.65	3.42	2.71	3.42	2.62	3.33	2.52	3.23	2.23	2.79
Mdn	2.50	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	3.00
SD	0.91	1.03	0.90	0.99	0.87	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.83	1.07
p value	0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	

Likewise, the presentation also showed an increase in frequency. As could be seen from the findings, the often increased from 12.50% to 35.40%, usually increased from 12.50% to 25.00%, and always increased from 6.20% to 12.50% respectively. Before the implementation of ECF, only 31.20% of teachers (for frequent – often, usually and always) observed students applied presentation in their classroom. Then after the ECF implementation, a promising increase could be observed where a total of 72.50% of teachers observed students using presentation in ESL classroom that constituted more than double the frequency before the ECF. In details, before the ECF, the data showed often (12.50%), usually (12.50%) and always (6.20%) with $M=2.52$, $Mdn=2.00$, $SD=0.99$ while after the ECF, showed improvement, often (35.40%), usually (25.00%) and always (12.50%) with $M=3.23$, $Mdn=3.00$, $SD=0.99$. This improvement was also confirmed though the paired-sample T-test from SPSS (16th version) output that the p value was 0.00, where $p < 0.05$. This indicated that there was a significant difference between pre- and post-ECF in terms of presentation. Therefore, the implementation of ECF had improved the frequency of using presentation in the ESL

classroom. In short, the lesson was carried in a more pupil-centred approach in which pupils were responsible to their own learning.

Apart from that, another element that the researcher wanted to find out was the frequency of using storytelling in English learning. Similarly, it showed an increase in frequency. From the obtained data, it was observed that, before the ECF, the often, usually and always constituted 16.70%, 6.20% and 2.10% ($M=2.23$, $Mdn=2.00$, $SD=0.83$) respectively. On the other hand, after the ECF, the often, usually, and always constituted 27.10%, 16.70% and 8.30% ($M=2.79$, $Mdn=3.00$, $SD=1.07$) respectively. Hence, the difference in range, for frequent, showed 27.10% increased from before the ECF. This signified that the ECF had given a remarkable impact to encourage the students to apply storytelling in the ESL learning. Moreover, the paired-sample T-test also proved that the difference between pre- and post-ECF was statistically significant too. As a result, the p value showed a value of 0.00, where $p < 0.05$. Therefore, the use of storytelling in ESL classroom was widely used among the students in ESL classroom as compared to the previous curriculum that might

lead towards a more balanced of centeredness (teachers and students) instead of emphasising more on the pupils-centeredness merely.

V. IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the study would have impacted mostly on the roles of educators. The educators, as well as the policy implementers, should review they way they adapt and deliver the new policy as proposed by the government for the betterment of the English command among Malaysians. As the CEFR-aligned curriculum was getting more relevant to the curriculum in Malaysia, and to meet the international standards of the English language through the framework, there were various considerations they had to take in ensuring the objectives of the newly introduced curriculum could be achieved. In lesson planning especially, one of the factors such as the course book, as suggested by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) and aligned with the CEFR, should be used as the main reference to teach English so that the main purpose of English education might not stray away so much from its objectives. The other course books, as in the previous curriculum, were categorised as the supplementary textbooks that aid to the knowledge of the students.

Apart from that, still, the learning should be based on the students' preferences and not the educators'. It relied mostly on what the students' had achieved and what they could achieve in the English lesson so as to avoid frustration and anxiety towards English learning as many students in Malaysia,

English subject was the weakest core subject in national assessment. It was discussed by Mohd Sallehuddin & Nurul Farehah (2017) in news report, stating that at least 23% of the Primary 6 students who sat for Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) failed the English language Writing paper. Ranjit Singh (2013, as cited in Mohd Sallehuddin & Nurul Farehah, 2017) reported that the failure rate was much higher in the 1119 English exam (an international paper taken by form 5 students) where more than 50% failed the English paper.

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