

POLICY CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION: THE CASE OF THE CEFR IN MALAYSIAN ESL CLASSROOMS

Nur Ashiquin C. Alih, Abdul Halim Abdul Raof & Masdinah Alauyah Md. Yusof

Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81300 Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: m-halim@utm.my

Received: 29.03.2021

Accepted: 01.06.2021

ABSTRACT

Background and purpose: With rapid global development happening in the world today, the field of education has been awash with various change forces. In an effort to ensure its system is globally competitive, Malaysia has taken a step to align its English language education system to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). However, any change in policy is not without problems and challenges as studies have shown that challenges were inevitable and stakeholders' buy-in on the new change is necessary. Hence, this study was undertaken to investigate the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the CEFR in Malaysian ESL classrooms, their belief on this new reform and their readiness to implement the CEFR.

Methodology: A mixed-method design was utilized with the use of questionnaire and semi structured interview as means for data collection. 365 English language teachers responded to the questionnaire while 15 English language teachers participated in interview sessions.

Findings: The data revealed five challenges namely teachers' motivation, materials, time, students' proficiency level and facilities. Despite facing multiple challenges, all teachers exhibited positive belief towards the adoption of the CEFR. The study also showed that although teachers were emotionally ready to accept the change, their cognitive readiness for change however is dependent upon three important facets namely time, collective effort and adequate materials.

Contributions: The study provides insights into the change in policy involving the CEFR implementation in the Malaysian English language education system which contributes to the scarce literature on the implementation of CEFR.

Keywords: Policy implementation, challenges in policy change, teachers' belief, Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), readiness for change.

Cite as: C. Alih, N. A., Abdul Raof, A. H., & Md. Yusof, M. A. (2021). Policy change implementation: The case of the CEFR in Malaysian ESL classrooms. *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, 6(2), 296-317. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol6iss2pp296-317>

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rapid global development has made it almost impossible for many organizations including the educational sector not to change the way they operate (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Changes in the structural-functional of the educational system have to be made to keep up with various change forces (Kondakci, Beycioglu, Sincar, & Ugurlu, 2016). Malaysia, like any other countries in the world has undertaken numerous efforts to reform its education system for better outcome. In the span of 30 years, Malaysia has undergone at least three major reforms in its English education system (Azman, 2016) with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as stated in the Roadmap 2015-2025 being one of the initiatives taken by the Malaysian Ministry of Education as a stepping stone to ensure that the English language education system is globally competitive (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was developed by the Council of Europe in 2001 to assist language practitioners including language learners in identifying the direction of language learning and provides a means for reflection of what learners have to achieve in terms of language outcome and how they intend to achieve it (Council of Europe, 2001). Additionally, the CEFR also provides a basis for language certification and assists in planning and executing language program as well as eases language learners in self-directed learning in terms of raising the learners' awareness on their present knowledge of the language, self-setting objectives, self-assessment and selection of materials for their individual learning purpose. The framework is well-known for its six-level descriptors which provide users with detailed statements of what learners can do at each level which are known as the CEFR "can do" statements for listening, speaking, reading and writing. The descriptors categorizes language learners into three main groups based on their language ability

with each group comprising two levels: Proficient users (levels C1 & C2), Independent users (levels B1 & B2) and Basic users (levels A1 & A2).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Policy Changes in Malaysia

English language has long been a salient facet in the education system in our country. Since its inclusion in Malaysian education, English language education has had three major reforms (Azman, 2016). After the National Education Policy was reviewed by the Ministry of Education, the first initiative was introduced in 1982 with the introduction of the Integrated English Language Syllabus for Primary Schools (KBSR) and the Integrated English Language Syllabus for Secondary Schools (KBSM) with the integration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as opposed to the focus on grammatical knowledge. However, the impact of this reform was found to taper off when differing results were received in terms of teaching in communicative way, mismatch between the objectives of the syllabus and CLT principles with the actual classroom practices as well as language assessment (Che Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012). The second initiative was introduced in 2002, the Standard English Language Curriculum for Primary School (KSSR), aiming to enhance the CLT through School-based Assessment (SBA). The teaching of Mathematics and Science in English language (PPSMI) also happened during this time. However, this reform also faded out due to similar rejection as the previous reform. The recent move introduced was the English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025 with the major notion to bring the English language in Malaysian education on par with the international level, benchmarked against a standard used by many different countries around the world -the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

2.2 The Utilization of the CEFR Around the World

There is a growing trend in using the CEFR in the world for various purposes (Van Huy & Hamid, 2015; Figueras, 2012). Because of this, researchers in different countries around the world have devoted much effort to examine the use of this framework. For instance, a study which investigated the use of the CEFR in the European education system in examination, curriculum development, school books and teacher training was carried out by Broek and Ende (2013). The study pointed out evidence of close reference between the CEFR and elements in the education system namely the general approach to language learning, materials used as well as teacher training. Despite this, it was revealed that the links between the framework and language assessment however appeared weak as compared to the other elements. In using the

CEFR for benchmarking purposes, a study by Buckland (2010) in the Wall Street Institute (WSI) of Spain pointed a close match between the WSI levels and the CEFR can-do statements with a recorded correlation value of 80% and concluded that alignment between the WSI and CEFR was permissible.

The CEFR has also been used for teaching and learning purposes. Maldina (2015) who investigated the CEFR role and Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics (SP) in foreign language teaching in a high school in Italy found that the CEFR had somehow indirectly shaped teachers' curriculum development and instructional practices. However, this was highly dependent on two elements namely the external language examinations and textbooks used in schools. The study also indicated a weak relationship between the CEFR and teachers' practice in school which is believed due to the lack of understanding about the CEFR.

In a study in Japan, the CEFR was used as a means to develop EFL learners' communicative competence through task completion (Nakatani, 2012). The findings indicated that there was a significant improvement in the learners' post-conversation result. Although Nakatani believed that this improvement might be the result of the strategy training that the learners had undertaken and were aware of, the CEFR could still be viewed as a significant medium in improving learners' communication, nonetheless.

Although the CEFR was developed to serve as a means for synchronizing the language teaching, learning and assessment (Fulcher, 2004), in a later study Fulcher (2010) revealed that using the CEFR merely for standard-based assessment had become a popular trend in the world English education system which has out shadowed the initial purpose of the CEFR. For instance, in using the CEFR for standardization purpose, Lowie, Hainesa, and Jansmaa (2010) undertook a study where a standardized procedure was embedded in writing assessment in the academic context. Their project has demonstrated a general agreement of the different components of writing and the CEFR which implies the feasibility of standardization procedures within the CEFR. Additionally, for the purpose of using the CEFR for validation of local rating scales, Harsch and Martin (2012) did a study aimed at examining whether alignment of a local rating scale to the CEFR was possible. The study indicated that although the approach was not economical in terms of time and resources it demanded, the adaptation of the CEFR descriptors for local context rating purpose was permissible. In another study, Běrešová (2011) investigated the possibility of linking the national examination in English to the CEFR in Slovakia and found that the linking helped initiate strategic actions in developing three major areas in education namely the standard, evaluation and professional. The CEFR is also used as a benchmark in the development of a local framework in Japan (Masashi, 2012) which

eventually led to the birth of the CEFR-J. In China, the use of the CEFR for standard-based assessment is somewhat still in the discovery phase. Zheng, Zhang, and Yan (2016) studied the possibility of application of the CEFR on the College English Test (CET) writing assessment in China and revealed that the use of the CEFR was permissible through proper execution which could be achieved when adequate training on familiarization of the CEFR is provided to teachers.

Previous studies have shown that the enthusiasm on implementing the CEFR to the English education system has spread worldwide. The Malaysian Ministry of Education too has undertaken similar initiative of adopting the CEFR into the country's English language education system to improve the English language proficiency of its students (Mohd Don, 2015). This effort is also a stepping stone to align its system with the international standards as well as to ensure that it is globally competitive (The Roadmap, 2015- 2025). Therefore, to gain a better insight into the CEFR implementation that takes place in the current English language education system, getting acquainted with the status of the CEFR in Malaysia is deemed necessary.

2.3 CEFR in Malaysia

The decision to embark on a project to implement the CEFR in Malaysia has been preceded by careful and thorough studies on other countries which have used the CEFR to learn from their experiences (Roadmap 2015-2025). From the studies done upfront, there are two rationales for adopting the CEFR. Firstly, it is to keep Malaysia in touch with the international standard. As English is the global language, transforming our English language education will grant us support to be on the international network. Hence, it is clear that moving towards international standard in language education is definitely an appropriate step to take now. Secondly, it is more economical to use a readily available framework than to develop a new local framework. Moreover, a locally produced framework has the risk of being irrelevant outside the home country. Therefore, the decision to adopt the CEFR is a wise choice to avoid the risk of being obsolete in the world that has steered towards the international standard.

The CEFR is implemented in Malaysia in three phases. The first phase happened in 2013 to 2015. This two-year span is accentuated on elevating the English language proficiency of school teachers. To realize this, teachers were sent out for training including Professional Up-Skilling of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT), the Native Speaker programme, the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant programme and the Expanded Specialist Coach (SISC) role for English (Sani, 2016). Preparation for the development of the CEFR descriptors as well as target setting for each educational level also happened in this phase.

Following this is the second phase of the CEFR implementation (2016-2020) which is further broken down into two parts. The initial stage of this phase was dedicated to setting the appropriate CEFR levels against each educational level ranging from pre-school to teacher education. Additionally, alignment of School Based Assessment (SBA) syllabus and curricula with the CEFR descriptors as well as determining the CEFR-aligned textbook and materials that will be utilized also happened in this stage of the implementation. The second stage of this phase continued with the validation process of the CEFR levels set for each level of education as indicated earlier. Parallel to this is the implementation of the new CEFR aligned curricula which started in 2017 and continued to 2020. Synchronously, teachers were also sent out to attend trainings related to the CEFR to equip them with the necessities to implement it in schools.

Finally, the roadmap ends with the third phase where evaluation, review and revision will be done by the council on the implementation that has taken place in schools. The results obtained from the processes mentioned will provide a basis for the development of the CEFR-M, which is the focal point for this phase of the roadmap. In this early stage of the implementation, the success or failure of the integration of the CEFR into the country's English language education system is hardly predictable. Nevertheless, experiences of other countries implementing the CEFR into their education system have shown that issues and challenges are almost inevitable and mixed feedback from teachers as implementer is to be expected (Goullier, 2012; Komorowska, 2012; Zou, 2012). Hence, this study attempts to discover the current situation regarding the implementation of the CEFR in schools with focus on the challenges teachers faced as well as their belief of this change. Because teachers' readiness in accepting a new change has always been the number one concern in any reform implementation (Chin, Thien, & Chew, 2019; Kondakci et al., 2016) this study also aims to examine teachers' state of readiness in accepting the new change.

2.3 Research Questions

1. What are the challenges faced by English language teachers in implementing the CEFR in schools?
2. What are the belief of teachers regarding the CEFR implementation in the Malaysian English language education system?
3. What is the state of readiness of English language teachers in accepting the policy change?

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

The study utilized a mixed-method design which entails the use of questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was adapted from Bouckennooghe and Devos (2009) with a few alterations made to the original OCQ-C, P, R to suit the educational setting in which this study was undertaken. The questionnaire consists of three sections with each section dedicated for different dimension of readiness for change (RFC). Section A is on Emotional RFC, Section B accentuated on Cognitive RFC while Section C is devoted for the Intentional RFC. For the interview, a self-constructed interview protocol was used as it allowed the researcher to use probes to elicit more information from the interviewees' responses in which structured and non-structured interview do not entail (Creswell, 2012). The interview protocol comprised a total of six main questions which would require participants to share their views pertaining to the challenges they faced throughout the implementation process of the CEFR in schools as well as their belief regarding the implementation of the CEFR.

3.2 Participants

To elicit data for the questionnaire, 365 English language teachers who were determined through the use of sampling table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) were selected. The questionnaires were distributed in person during a two-day seminar attended by over 300 English teachers all over the state of Johor. From here, 164 questionnaires were completed and returned. The remaining responses were collected online through the use of various social media tools (*whatsapp*, *facebook messenger* and emails). The data collection for the questionnaires took about three months to complete.

For the interview, 15 English language teachers were chosen through purposive sampling strategy, as suggested by Creswell (2012), with consideration of three main attributes. Firstly, the participants must be English language teachers. Secondly, they must be those who have undergone a CEFR training. Thirdly, taking into account time and travelling factors, participants were only selected among teachers from schools in Johor Bahru district. The 15 participants for this study were 2 males and 13 females ranging from 26 years old to 45 years old who were teaching in either primary or secondary schools. Prior to the interview sessions, the researcher approached individual teachers through emails and personal telephone calls to request for their consent to be participants of the interview. After permission has been granted from each participant, a face-to-face interview session was scheduled outside school time and setting, as requested by the participants. All interview sessions were audio taped with the

consent of the participants with each session lasting between 35 and 50 minutes.

3.3 Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 25 where descriptive statistics was performed. Because the questionnaire employed Likert scale, frequency for each response was recorded and data were presented in percentage form. On the other hand, the interview recordings were transcribed using the Microsoft Word and were analyzed using thematic analysis. Although there are many ways to approach a thematic analysis, the present study used the 6-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) as it offers a clear and usable approach to thematic analysis as shown in Figure 1 below.

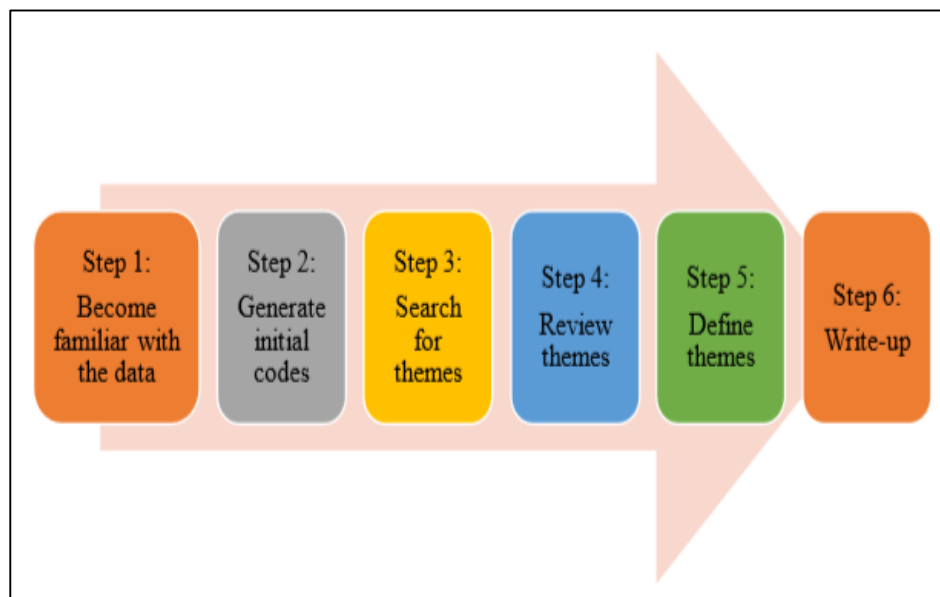


Figure 1: Braun & Clarke's Six-Step framework for doing Thematic Analysis

In step 1 of analysing the interview data, the transcribed data were read and re-read several times so as to be familiar with the data gathered. Significant parts of the interview were highlighted. This was followed by assigning initial codes to the identified parts in step 2. Some of the codes used were '*motivation*', '*materials*' and '*feel stress out*'. While coding the data, explicit mentions of factors related to the challenges were counted to identify factors that were frequently mentioned by the participants. In step 3, the codes that were identified in step 2 were reviewed and possible themes were identified. The themes that were identified in step 3 were reviewed in step 4 to ensure that all significant parts of the interview have been included. In step 5, the themes were defined. Concurrently, the interview transcriptions were broken down

into sections and grouped under their respective themes to ensure that related excerpts to support claims when presenting the findings are easily identifiable. The final step of the analysis was writing up the findings which is presented in the following section.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Challenges in CEFR Implementation

Salient findings obtained from the semi-structured interview and questionnaire are sectioned into three parts, addressing the three research questions of the study. The analysis of the interviews held with 15 teachers revealed five challenges in implementing the CEFR which are teachers' motivation, materials, time, students' proficiency level and facilities.

4.1.1 Teachers' Motivation

The most recurring response from the interviews in relation to the challenges is motivation where fourteen out of fifteen participants testified that the greatest challenge in the implementation of the new reform was within their own self. This is aptly stated by one of the participants in the interview *"for me is more on my motivation, it's within me like I don't feel excited with this CEFR"* (R7). The analysis shows that participants' lack of motivation in implementing the new change seems to be invoked by several factors. Firstly, the feeling of anxiety and stress in implementing the CEFR as mentioned by five of the participants. They felt anxious and stressed out because they thought the change would entail a series of change including the way they teach in the classroom and the manner in which assessment is done. *"It's a stressful thing when you have to face change because many things will change as well...when the system changed, the way you teach will have to change, how to do this and that, assessment and all will change as well. So many uncertainties"* (R1). This is supported by R4 *"even when they announced the change I was already stressed out...new change make me feel anxious because many things will change. So I am already demotivated from the start"*. R7, R13 and R14 had similar opinion with R1 and R4. Having these thoughts had made these participants feel demotivated to implement the change from the start. The undesirable feelings as mentioned by the participants above are warranted as there is a mounting evidence in the education system in the world nowadays that due to a change in the nature of teaching, there is a great deal of uncertainties and identity crisis confronting teachers (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005).

The second reason mentioned causing the participants to feel demotivated was the limited knowledge they had about the CEFR. Not knowing what to do and how to do it made

the participants felt the pressure to try to make sense of the CEFR. As R3 stated that *“I feel like a newbie in my own field, I don’t know very much about it”* and R13 who said that *“we teachers also can be demotivated especially when we don’t know what we are doing”*. Not knowing whether what they were doing in the classroom was right or wrong was the thing that had resorted to their lack of motivation. R7 also added by saying *“I’m still grasping the whole CEFR thing, I’m having one problem after another in trying to understand the whole thing, it kills your spirit to move forward”*. This situation is not only faced by the participants in this study but indeed has confronted majority of teachers alike to whom a new reform is being introduced. As Mohd Dzaquan (2020) revealed that teachers were constantly worrying about their inability to teach CEFR aligned syllabus to students. The situation was no difference in China where Zheng et al. (2016) exposed that the lack of knowledge has resorted in uncertainty and confusion among teachers and this has brought to the declining level of teachers’ motivation to implement the change in the classroom.

Another reason that contributed to the participants feeling demotivated is the many changes that happened in the English language education system over the years. This is apparent in the sentiments articulated by R9, R11 and R15. R9 stated that *“we get tired also...I still feel numerous changes is not healthy not only for us teachers, I’m feeling slightly demotivated with all these changes”*. R11 voiced out her disappointment by saying *“so we teachers we get fed up also, tired lah you change one then another one...I just don’t understand why they keep changing the system”*. While R15 remarked that the whole process of change was tiring and too much for teachers to bear *“when everything changes again, we also have to change. Tiring even to think about it. You get tired of the whole process of change, too much for us to bear”*. Teachers’ expressions in the excerpts above such as ‘we get tired’, ‘we get fed up’ and ‘too much for us to bear’ may signal that the change was pursued by teachers with much undesirable emotions. Such emotional instability in fact has been pointed out by a study by Vallax (2011) about change in school system being one of the important contributors of teachers feeling stressed out in schools. A great deal of pressure comes with a change as Lines (2005) pointed out that change implementation may bring with it many undesirable feelings of anxious, daunt and confusion.

4.1.2 Materials

Another challenge that was frequently mentioned by the participants was the limited available materials to support the implementation of the CEFR in the classroom. This challenge was articulated by thirteen out of the fifteen participants interviewed. The challenges related to the

lack of materials can be classified into two categories which are i) the lack of materials to support teaching and learning in the classroom and ii) the lack of materials in assisting teachers to try understand the CEFR as a whole.

In relation to the materials to support teaching and learning, thirteen participants testified that the materials provided by the ministry was only limited to the textbook where all teachings had to be based on the contents in the textbook. The opinion of the thirteen participants is highlighted by R2 and R6 as follows “...*the lack of supporting materials for students...like workbook, etc. that are interesting to supplement the use of textbook*” and “...*not having enough materials to teach students with, textbook alone is mmm not enough, but to find other supplementary materials that are CEFR-aligned, this is important, not many CEFR-aligned materials out there*”.

Another aspect of the scarcity of materials is in terms of the lack of materials to assist teachers in comprehending the whole concept of the CEFR. Ten participants argued that they needed extra materials that would enable them to have a comprehensive understanding of what the CEFR is all about and that would allow them to better implement the CEFR in the classroom. For instance, R3, R4, and R8 claimed that there were not many materials available for teachers to support the implementation of the CEFR. R3 testified by saying “*for me personally I try to understand the CEFR but problem is not many materials are available out there for us teachers*” and R4 said “*we were not given enough materials for ourselves*”. R8 echoed the above point when she mentioned that “*perhaps materials for me, for teachers such as reading or videos to demonstrate how the CEFR should be implemented*”. As far as this issue is concerned, R10 further testified that although there were materials given to them during the training they attended, it was far from sufficient to understand the new change “*they gave us during the training, in-house training, but it is not really all that we need to understand, not enough*”. This issue has been emphasized by Ghazali (2016), Kenayathulla and Ibrahim (2016) and Abdul Aziz, Abd. Rashid, and Zainudin (2018) where teachers were confronted with the lack of supporting materials in terms of handbook and module as well as curriculum documents to support them in the change implementation.

This issue of inadequacy of materials is somewhat universal in almost all change implementations in the field of education. For instance, Badugela (2012) has shown that in almost all change effort in South Africa, educators often face challenges such as inadequate sources to support the change implementation. This case is also true in Indonesia where a Winardi and Priyanto (2016) revealed that the inadequacies of materials was one of the issues that confronted teachers. This is unfortunate according to Abdul Aziz et al. (2018) because in

a case study of curriculum innovation in Malaysia, for the curriculum to be effectively implemented, the materials have to be of high quality and meet the needs of both teachers and students, have to be available in adequate numbers and at the appropriate time. This opinion is concurred by Berlinski and Busso (2017) when they proposed that materials support is paramount in building teachers' readiness in implementing a new change.

4.1.3 Time

Time is another challenge that was highlighted in the interview. According to thirteen of the participants, time was an essence to any change implementation but they were not given ample time to learn about the CEFR before the implementation commenced. R2, R8 and R11 made clear statements that teachers, students alike, were not given enough time to get familiarized with the CEFR before they were asked to implement it in schools. This view is shown in the following quotes from the interview *"for me time is always the challenge...there was not enough time given to get to know the CEFR first before we implement it in school, they announce it, and we implement straight away...I think it is a hasty decision"* (R2), *"I think because we were not given much time to be familiar with the CEFR first before it is being rolled out by the authority...that is the challenge"* (R8), *"we are not given enough time to familiarize ourselves with the CEFR"* (R11).

Another remark made by the participants was that time was never enough for them as there were other responsibilities they had to bear such as keeping record of students' result, attending school meetings, planning and running school events, disciplining students and many others that they had to complete apart from their core business of teaching. Hence, learning about the CEFR would take up some of their time and this would be another task they had to shoulder. Some of the responses that represent this view are as articulated by R13 and R14 where they claimed that *"time alone is already a challenge if you want to see it from the challenges we face...because not only we have to teach, think about our lesson plan, how to teach better in class, disciplining is also our responsibility, where when our students do something wrong, we have to be responsible for it, and plus, we have to plan school meetings, attend the meetings also, many other things la...and now adding the CEFR in the list...pretty intense"* (R13), *"Time is an issue also, there are a lot of things to do in school, not just teach, we also have to go for meetings, planning for school events, teachers' day celebration, and we also have to check students' assignments"* (R14). In this vein, both participants believed that they needed the extra time to get acquainted with the CEFR before would they be able to implement it properly. Time being one of the challenges in the CEFR implementation has

indeed been pointed out by Nurul Farehah and Mohd Sallehudin (2018) in their study where they highlighted teachers had to be given more time to get familiar with the framework.

4.1.4 Students' Proficiency Level

Another challenge that seems apparent from the interview responses was students' proficiency level. Seven out of 15 participants mentioned that their students' proficiency level was one of the limiting factors to a successful change implementation in the classroom. R2 and R14 testified that some of their students could not understand basic instructions even though they were given examples of such instructions like *'please submit your work on my desk'* and *'don't forget to refer to the example given'*. According to R2 and R14, the two instructions they gave were simple yet their students could not comprehend the instructions. R2 ended her remark by saying that *'how are these students going to cope with CEFR?'* and R14 also voiced her frustration that the CEFR is way beyond her students' level which to her is disheartening. Similarly, R11 mentioned about her students being very 'slow' in learning the English language as she stated in the interview *"I tried to do speaking activity with them, asked them to talk about independence day celebration at school, after forcing them to speak you know only two out of my thirty-five students responded"* (R11).

Additionally, R5, R12 and R14 called attention to the issue with students' low English language proficiency level was not uncommon to teachers as R5 said *'the issue of students' low proficiency is not new to us'* and has always been the challenge as far as teaching English language is concerned even before the implementation of the CEFR. However, participants viewed this problem as even more worrying at the present time where the CEFR is brought to the classroom because of the internationalized contents of the textbook they used in lesson delivery in the classroom. As aptly described by two of the participants *"now is more challenging because we need to teach based on the standard set for international level"* (R12), *"now is more difficult because the textbook we used has contents that are based on international standard, no longer based on local context"* (R14). In addition, R5 and R14 voiced out their concern regarding the learning opportunity students could get when the contents were too hard for them and learning seemed to be impossible especially when students could not understand most of the contents of the lesson. This issue has also been pointed out by Mohd Dzaquan (2020) where teachers were always concerned about the lesson based on CEFR standard being too difficult for students to grasp.

In discussing the issue of internationalized contents of the textbook, eight out of 15 participants mentioned that because the contents of the textbook were not based on the local

context making it difficult for students to understand and comprehend because it is not within their background knowledge and not something that they were familiar with. To illustrate this view, R1 opined that *“the textbook is not based on Malaysian context...is more like it’s suitable for the other like overseas kids”*. R4 on the other hand, believed that *“if the content is based on local context, maybe it is less difficult for them because they might have experienced it before”*. R9 added by saying that *“I think if the content is something that students are familiar with like Hari Raya celebration, maybe learning can happen”*. Hence, it can be inferred that when students learn about something that is not within the local context and something which is not familiar to them, teaching and learning can be very challenging as Sumaryono and Ortiz (2004) stressed that English language learners could be disconnected from the learning process if the teachers do not display sensitivity towards their cultural identity. When this happens, the content that is internationalized not only made it difficult for students to understand but also difficult for teachers to make the lesson comprehensible for them. This is pointed out by R6 *“they learn about thanksgiving, they don’t know this. We teachers tried hard to make them understand, so difficult you know”*. The concern regarding the internationalized contents of the textbook being hardly comprehensible to students has been voiced out, among others by Monihuldin (2018) and Star (2018). Hence, in dealing with the issue mentioned, participants believed that localization of the material could be one of the initiatives to counter this issue. This is supported by a recent study by Deswila et al. (2020) who believe that cultures should be injected in the learning materials. This is warranted as the significance of localized materials has been proven to be effective in influencing participants’ comprehension in a reading lesson (Mahabadi, 2012) where it was revealed that students’ scores were higher when using a localized content material due to the familiarity of contents.

4.1.5 Facilities

Another challenge that was brought up by the participants is related to the teaching and learning facilities needed to implement the CEFR in the classroom. R2 had this to say when she did the speaking and listening activities *“because we’re lacking in the facilities itself... especially when I do the speaking and listening part cause for speaking and listening we have to carry our own speakers to the class and all those things”*. This view is concurred by R7 where he mentioned about having to prepare all the needed facilities like speakers and CDs *“we have shortage of support for facilities needed...we have to provide all, especially when you want to do activities say listening for example, we teachers have to bring our own speaker, CD and all...all these have to be operated within the limited teaching and learning period...it takes up most of the*

times already". A similar view was raised by R13 where the lack of facilities like speakers and radio would be a challenge for teachers when they wanted to do listening activities in the classroom.

On the other hand, R7 claimed that his school had a media room where all the facilities needed such as radio, huge white screen and speakers were provided, however, this room had to be shared with all other teachers in the school. Therefore, teachers had to queue to use the room as it was only available on first come first served basis. According to this teacher, waiting to use the room to be available was time consuming and they had to book the room at least a week before the time of use. Moreover, having the media room far from the students' classroom was also a challenge as commuting to the media room would take up some of the lesson's time as R7 puts it "*And plus when students are asked to use the media room, almost 20 minutes will be wasted just for them to get there. So time consuming*".

4.2 Teachers' Belief

Despite the challenges confronting the teachers, they were still able to look at the change as a positive move by the ministry. All 15 participants interviewed believe that the CEFR implementation could benefit the country's English language education system in the future. In order to demonstrate her positive view of the change, R2 articulated that "*I know it will work well through time, and of course it will be able to improve the system*". R4 also seemed to be in agreement when she mentioned that "*I do think the whole process can work, but for better outcome, it needs time, we need time*". R7 demonstrated his belief by saying that "*of course we change for better education, so does the CEFR and when all of us join together to make it work*". Other participants also concurred in this view; "*I believe all changes are for better education system so does the CEFR and I am confident it will make a difference in the future*" (R9), "*I think the CEFR would benefit everyone through a proper implementation...it is good effort*" (R11). From the remarks, it is apparent that participants viewed the change positively. However, all the remarks were accompanied by certain conditions for instance, R2 stated "*through time*", R4 mentioned "*it needs time*", R7 highlighted "*when all of us join together*", R9 said "*in the future*" while R11 pointed out "*through a proper implementation*". From the participants' point of view, the change would be beneficial for the system only when certain conditions are met namely through appropriate timing, collective effort and proper implementation process.

It seems apparent from the findings above that despite the challenges confronting teachers in implementing the CEFR in schools, they still viewed the reform as a positive effort

from the ministry to uplift the English language education system of the country which is parallel to the findings of Fatima (2019) and Faez, Taylor, Majhanovich, and Brown (2011) where all teachers exhibited positive belief on the incorporation of the CEFR in ESL classroom. Through the findings, it can be said that this positive outlook on the change might have eventually influenced teachers' willingness to make necessary contributions to the implementation of the change, which is most closely associated with their readiness of accepting the change. The next section will discuss this.

4.3 Teachers' Readiness for Change (RFC)

Data from the questionnaire provide answers to the third research question of this study which revealed teachers' state of readiness in implementing the CEFR in schools. This would offer a much more comprehensive understanding on the teachers' actual acceptance in implementing the new change. Data were analyzed using SPSS and the frequency for each response is recorded and presented in the form of percentage (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Teachers' readiness for change (RFC)

Emotional RFC		SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I have a good feeling about the change.	7.0	51.9	24.9	16.2	-
2	I experience the change as a positive process.	7.6	70.8	18.1	3.5	-
3	I find the change refreshing.	11.1	63.2	18.6	7.0	-
4	I am completely ready for the change.	3.5	24.6	28.6	43.2	-
5	I am ready to accommodate and incorporate changes into my teaching.	7.0	43.8	27.3	21.9	-
Cognitive RFC						
1	Most changes that are supposed to solve problems in English education are working effectively well.	-	20.8	48.1	27.8	3.2
2	I think the new change will be successfully implemented by teachers.	7.6	55.9	33.0	3.5	-
3	I believe that the change will improve my teaching.	10.5	33.5	38.6	17.3	-
4	I believe that the change will simplify work.	3.5	17.8	27.3	34.6	16.8
Intentional RFC						
1	I want to devote myself to the process of implementing the change.	7.0	79.2	10.5	3.2	-
2	I am willing to make a significant contribution to the change.	11.1	78.4	10.5	-	-
3	I am willing to devote my energy into the process of change.	7.0	47.3	35.1	7.0	3.5

Table 1 shows the findings for all dimensions of readiness for change namely emotional RFC, cognitive RFC and intentional RFC. Under the dimension of emotional RFC, statement 2 - I

experience the change as a positive process, recorded the highest percentage with a total of 78.4% of the participants responded 'agree' and 'strongly agree' while none of them strongly disagreed with the statement. For cognitive RFC, statement 2 - I think the new change will be successfully implemented by teachers, recorded the highest mode percentage with about two-thirds (63.5%) of the participants agreed and strongly agreed with the statement while only 3.5% of them disagreed. Under the dimension of intentional RFC, statement 2 - I am willing to make a significant contribution to the change and statement 1 - I want to devote myself to the process of implementing the change, recorded high percentages of participants agreeing and strongly agreeing, 89.5% and 86.2% respectively. Comparatively, these two statements 1 and 2 under the intentional RFC recorded significantly high percentages as compared to the other statements in all three dimensions.

The findings from the analysis above seem to be in tandem with the findings from the interview. For instance, the findings under the dimension of emotional RFC indicated that majority of the participants believed that the change is a positive effort from the ministry. This positive view was also noted in the interview as explained under teachers' belief.

Additionally, from the data on cognitive RFC, majority of the participants agreed that they can implement the change successfully. The interview data seem to show parallelism to this stance. When asked about their opinion whether participants think they are capable of implementing the change in the classroom, 13 out of the total 15 participants claimed that they believed they are capable of implementing the change in schools. For instance, R3 stated that *"I believe we can implement it successfully in school with sufficient support of course, from the authorities...like enough materials, and trainings maybe do workshops for us"*, R7 also pointed out his view by saying *"I think we can do it...we can implement changes, but just give us time to be familiar with the system first, maybe let us learn what CEFR is, then we can implement it better"*, R8 demonstrated her thoughts through her sentiment *"if we have enough support we need from the government...sufficient materials and training, together we teachers also can support each other throughout the process, I am confident we can make it work"* while R11 also mentioned that *"if we are given more time to study and learn what CEFR is, I believe we can implement it successfully"*.

However, quite interestingly, despite being optimistic about their ability to carry out the change successfully, participants based this view on a certain condition. As can be seen in the excerpts above, the use of phrases like *'with sufficient support'*, *'but just give us time'*, *'if we have enough'* and *'if we are given more time'* were used by these teachers, indicating that their ability to implement the CEFR is dependent upon a certain requirement namely sufficient

time to get acquainted with the change, support from the authorities in terms of adequate materials and training, and collective effort from colleagues. However, despite being pointed out as determinants of influencing factors in shaping teachers' ability to successfully implement the change, insufficient time and inadequate materials unfortunately have been pointed out as issues in implementing policy change in school (Chin et al., 2019; Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Othman, Md Saleh, & Mohd Nooraini, 2013). Abdul Aziz et al. (2018) pointed out that curriculum documents such as Curriculum Standard were not yet fully ready when teachers attended courses and this had caused problems throughout the course while Kenayathulla and Ibrahim (2016) mentioned the insufficient implementation modules during the time of change.

In addition, from the point of view of the intentional RFC, the finding dictates that majority of the teachers agreed that they were willing to devote themselves and willing to make a significant contribution to the change. These notions have also been pointed out by all participants in the interview when prompted about their willingness to pursue the change in classroom as follows *"I will, I am willing to change in any way especially my teaching as parallel to the CEFR standard"* (R1), *"since the change is happening now, I am and I know all are willing to contribute to the change"* (R3), *"of course I am willing to contribute to the change"* (R11). Similar views were also noted in all other responses in the interview. Hence, it can be opined that all of the participants were willing to contribute to the change implementation.

From the discussion, it can be postulated that despite challenges confronting teachers in the implementation of the new change, positive belief about the CEFR implementation is evident and this shows that teachers are emotionally ready to accept the change. However, important facets namely time, collective effort and sufficient materials are the determinants that would shape teachers' cognitive readiness for change. This study points to the direction that only when these supports are provided will teachers be able to successfully implement the CEFR in schools.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Given that the implementation of the CEFR in the English language education system is still at the stage of infancy, it is presumed that challenges revealed by this study namely teachers' motivation, materials, time, students' proficiency level and facilities are inevitable. Improvements would still be needed in the implementation of the CEFR. Nonetheless, constant support in terms of adequate time, sufficient materials and training from the authorities are deemed necessary in order to intensify teachers' readiness to implement the change because

when teachers are ready to accept the change, alteration of actions will happen accordingly (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993).

Change is not always easy however, if change is necessary all will have to come together and do their part to support it. The implementation of the CEFR is seen as a promising reform in the English language education system and a step in the right direction to ensure the standard of English language in our country is enhanced.

REFERENCES

- Abdul Aziz, A. H., Abd. Rashid, R., & Zainudin, W. Z. W. (2018). The enactment of the Malaysian Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR): National master trainer's reflection. *Indonesia Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 409-417.
- Armenakis, A., Harris, S. G., & Mossholder, K. W. (1993). Creating readiness for organizational change. *Human Relation*, 46(6), 681-703.
- Armenakis, A., & Harris, S. (2009). Reflections: Our journey in organizational change research and practice. *Journal of Change Management*, 9(2), 127-142.
- Azman, H. (2016). Implementation and challenges of English language education reform in Malaysian primary schools. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 22(3), 65-78.
- Badugela, T. M. (2012). *Problems facing educators in implementing the national curriculum statement: The case of Tshifhena secondary school, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa*. (Unpublished master thesis). University of South Africa.
- Béřešová, J. (2011). The impact of the common European framework of reference on teaching and testing in central and Eastern European context. *Synergies Europe*, 6(2011), 177-190.
- Berlinski, S., & Busso, M. (2017). Challenges in educational reform: An experiment on active learning in mathematics. *Economics Letters*, 156(1), 172-175.
- Bouckennooghe, D., & Devos, G. (2009). Organizational change questionnaire – Climate of change, processes, and readiness: Development of a new instrument. *The Journal of Psychology*, 143(6), 559-599.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(1), 77-101.
- Broek, S., & Ende, I. V. D. (2013). *The implementation of the common European framework for languages in European education systems*. Directorate-General for Internal Policies, European Parliament.

- Buckland, S. (2010). *Using the CEFR to benchmark learning outcomes: A case study*. Wall Street Institute, Spain.
- Chin, H., Thien, L. M., & Chew, C. M. (2019). The reforms of national assessments in Malaysian education system. *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, 4(1), 93-111.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research. Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Day, C., Elliot, B., & Kington, A. (2005). Reform, standards and teacher identity: Challenges of sustaining commitment. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(1), 563–577.
- Deswila, N., Kustati, M., Yusuf, Y. Q., Raja Nor Safinas, R. H., Besral, & Rehani. (2020). Cultural contents in the ELT textbook prepared by the Indonesian ministry of education for secondary schools. *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, 6(1), 222-241.
- Faez, F., Taylor, S. K., Majhanovich, S., & Brown, P. (2011). Teacher reactions to CEFR's task-based approach for FSL classrooms. *Synergies Europe*, 6(1), 109-120.
- Fatima, S. (2019). Perceived view of teachers towards Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) (Form three assessment) English language: A case study. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 15(3), 34-44.
- Figueras, N. (2012). The impact of the CEFR. *ELT Journal*, 66(4), 477–485.
- Fulcher, G. (2004). *Testing second language speaking*. Routledge.
- Fulcher, G. (2010). The reification of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and effect-driven testing. In A. Psyltjou-Joycey & M. Mattaioudakis (Eds), *Advances in research in language acquisition and teaching* (pp. 15-26). GALA.
- Ghazali, N. H. C. M. (2016). An evaluation of teachers' perception in implementing school based assessment. *Jurnal Pendidikan Sains dan Matematik Malaysia*, 6(1), 24-40.
- Goullier, F. (2012). Policy perspectives from France. In M. Byram & L. Parmenter (Eds.), *The common European framework of reference: The globalisation of language education policy* (pp. 37-44). Multilingual Matters.
- Harsch, C., & Martin, G. (2012). Adapting CEF-Descriptors for rating purposes: Validation by a combined rater training and scale revision approach. *Assessing Writing*, 17(1), 228-250.
- Kenayathulla, H. B., & Ibrahim, M. S. (2016). Analisis terhadap pelaksanaan dasar pentaksiran berasaskan sekolah di Malaysia: Persepsi guru [Analysis about the implementation of school-based assessment in Malaysia: Teachers' perception]. In H. Ahmad & M. S.

- Ibrahim (Eds.), *Transformasi pendidikan nasional: Antara aspirasi dan anjakan* (pp. 395-423). Penerbit Universiti Malaya.
- Komorowska, H. (2012). Academic perspectives from Poland. In M. Byram & L. Parmenter (Eds.), *The common European framework of reference: The globalisation of language education policy* (pp. 104-113). Multilingual Matters.
- Kondakci, Y., Beycioglu, K., Sincar, M., & Ugurlu, C. T. (2016). Readiness of teachers for change in schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 20(2), 176–197.
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 30(3), 607-610.
- Lines, R. (2005). The structure and function of attitudes toward organizational change. *Human Resource Development Review*, 4(1), 8–32.
- Lowie, W. M., Haines, K. B. J., & Jansmaa, P. N. (2010). Embedding the CEFR in the academic domain: Assessment of language tasks. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 3(1), 152–161.
- Mahabadi, S. (2012). The role of localized materials in learning of FFL students. *Journal of Languages and Culture*, 4(5), 65-74.
- Maldina, E. (2015). *The impact of the common European framework of reference on foreign language instruction: The case of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence*. (Published master thesis). University of Toronto.
- Masashi, N. (2012). The development of the CEFR-J: Where we are, where we are going. http://www.tufs.ac.jp/common/fs/ilr/EU_kaken/_userdata/negishi2.pdf
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2015). *English language education reform in Malaysia: The roadmap 2015-2025*. English Language Standards and Quality Council, Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Mohd Don, Z. (2015). English language proficiency, graduate employability and the role of CEFR. <http://repository.um.edu.my/98438/1/Asean%20Seminar%202015%20English%20language.pdf>
- Mohd Dzaquan, I. M. A. (2020). *Practice of teachers' teaching common European Framework of reference aligned writing syllabus for young learners*. (Unpublished master thesis). Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Monihuldin, M. (2018). Discussion on use of foreign English textbooks in schools sparks debate. <http://news.iium.edu.my/2018/01/14/discussion-on-use-of-foreign-english-textbooks-in-schools-sparks-debate/>

- Nakatani, Y. (2012). Exploring the implementation of the CEFR in Asian contexts: Focus on communication strategies. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46(1), 771-775.
- Che Musa, N., Lie, K. Y., & Azman, H. (2012). Exploring English language learning and teaching in Malaysia. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 12(1), 35–51.
- Nurul Farehah, M. U., & Mohd Sallehudin, A. A. (2018). Implementation of CEFR in Malaysia: Teachers' awareness and the challenges. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 24(3), 168-183.
- Othman, I., Md Saleh, N., & Mohd Nooraini, N. A. (2013). The implementation of school based assessment in primary school standard curriculum. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 1(7), 1-10.
- Sani, R. (2016, July 18). Journey to master English. *The New Straits Times Online*.
<https://www.nst.com.my/news/2017/03/159164/journey-master-english>
- Star, T. (2018, February 4). Let's have our own textbooks. *The Star Education*.
<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2018/02/04/lets-have-our-own-textbooks/>
- Sumaryono, K., & Ortiz, F. W. (2004). Preserving the cultural identity of English language learner. *Voices from the Middle*, 11(1), 16-19.
- Vallax, P. (2011). *The common European framework of reference for languages: A critical analysis of its impact on a sample of teachers and curricula within and beyond Europe*. (Unpublished PhD thesis). The University of Waikato, New Zealand.
- Van Huy, N., & Hamid, O. M. (2015). Educational policy borrowing in a globalized world: A case study of common European framework of reference for languages in a Vietnamese University. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 14(1), 60–74.
- Winardi, & Prianto, A. (2016). Various determinants of individual readiness to change and their effects on the teachers' performance (A study on certified teachers in Jombang Regency East Java, Indonesia). *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 18(2), 22-32.
- Zheng, Y., Zhang, Y., & Yan, Y. (2016). *Investigating the practice of the common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR) outside Europe: A case study on the assessment of writing in English in China*. British Council.
- Zou, W. (2012). Perspectives from China. In M. Byram & L. Parmenter (Eds.), *The common European framework of reference: The globalisation of language education policy* (pp. 183-196). Multilingual Matters.