



IMPLEMENTATION OF CEFR-ALIGNED ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN MALAYSIAN ESL CLASSROOM

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Research Highlights

With the adaptation and implementation of the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) in Malaysia since the start of 2017, this preliminary study proposed to identify the variety of assessment tools used by Malaysian ESL teachers that correspond to the current CEFR-aligned syllabus in their ESL classroom and their frequency of use. Data were collected via google form questionnaires from Malaysian ESL teachers in secondary schools located throughout Malaysia via random convenient sampling. The initial findings revealed that the majority of the ESL teachers have difficulty designing CEFR-aligned assessments based on the descriptors even after it has been implemented for two years but are able to frequently conduct various assessment activities using conventional tools such as group discussions, using i-Think maps, mind mapping and oral quizzes. Unsurprisingly, almost all of the respondents agreed to always rely on textbook exercises as their main tool to assess their students.

Research Objectives

In Malaysia, there is an alarming interest in establishing standards for English language teaching and assessment in terms of international benchmark due to the need to elevate the English language proficiency among Malaysian students (Nurul Farehah & Mohd Sallehudin 2019). The introduction of CEFR into the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 breathes a new life in the Malaysian ESL education system changing it from an exam-oriented to a more action-oriented approach (Abdul Hakim, Radzuwan & Wan Zhafirah, 2018). With it comes a focus on integrating innovative school-based, CEFR-aligned assessment with student-centred teaching and learning to develop autonomous language learners (Sidhu, Kaur & Lee, 2018). CEFR-aligned assessment tools such as language portfolio, peer or self-assessment and others are encouraged to be used in schools to consolidate the existing conventional teaching methods (Le, 2018; Read, 2019). Teachers are encouraged to explore innovative methods of assessing and developing students' interest and proficiency in the language in and out of classroom. This article reported part of the study identifying the CEFR-aligned assessment tools employed by Malaysian ESL teachers in their ESL classrooms. Additionally, the study also looked into how frequent these teachers assess their students using these tools to facilitate learning and develop their English language skills.

Methodology

The respondents in this preliminary study involved Malaysian secondary school ESL teachers from various states. As individuals who are directly involved in integrating CEFR-aligned teaching and assessment tools in their ESL classrooms (Nurul Farehah & Mohd Sallehudin, 2018), they can provide a general consensus on the extent of implementation level and frequency of relevant tools used in developing ESL students' proficiency after two years of top-down trainings by master trainers and curriculum alignment (Abdul Hakim, Radzuwan & Wan Zhafirah, 2018). Data for the study were collected using online questionnaire (Google Form) via random convenient sampling. The sample consisted of ESL teachers from lower secondary school level. The link for the questionnaire was sent to various individuals who are school teachers and, at the request of the researcher, these individuals forwarded the link to other ESL teachers. A total of 30 teachers responded. One part of the questionnaire comprised 11 items on the respondent's implementation of CEFR-aligned assessment in ESL classroom with a six-point scale response ranging from 6 = Strongly Agree, 5 = Agree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree. Another part of the





questionnaire comprised 13 items related to the tools used by the respondent with a six-point frequency scale ranging from 6 = Always, 5 = Very Frequently, 4 = Occasionally, 3 = Rarely, 2 = Very Rarely and 1 = Never.

Results

Online data gathered from the questionnaire was analysed using Google Form. Parts of items in the questionnaire were then analysed systematically based on the aims of this paper. The results reveal that majority (80%) of the teachers are in favour of CEFR-aligned assessments but 25 out of the 30 respondents find designing assessment based on CEFR challenging. Although 19 respondents have insufficient understanding of assessment standards and types of CEFR-aligned assessments that can be used (63.33%), they have sufficient knowledge of ICT use for CEFR-aligned assessments (73.33%). The decision to incorporate CEFR in their teaching and assessment as well as to include CEFR-aligned assessments into each lesson has been divisive among respondents (50%). 22 respondents have no difficulty in using the given textbook but 45% of total respondents argue of its suitability.

Teachers have many choices when it comes to utilising tools for assessing students' proficiency. However, 80% of the respondents still heavily rely on textbook when developing students' proficiency. There is a preference of one-off activities (group discussion – 96.67%, i-Think maps – 90%, mind mapping – 86.67%) or assessments that can be completed in a short amount of time (written quizzes – 93.33%, oral quizzes – 86.67%, role plays and language games – 83.33%). Assessments that take longer duration such as portfolio (30%), scrapbooking (20%), slide presentations (26.67%), and feedback slips (26.7%) are less preferable by teachers.

Findings and Discussion

From the findings, the impact of CEFR-aligned outcomes on the assessment practice of teachers could be seen in higher frequency of assessments given by teachers to students. However, echoing Sidhu, Kaur and Lee's (2018) study, many are still falling back to the conventional textbook exercises as their standard practice and guide in developing students' ESL proficiency even though they argued on its contextual suitability. More celebrated CEFR-aligned self-assessment tools such as portfolio and scrapbooking are still less favoured by teachers as many preferred one-off activities to assess their students' current performance and understanding in contrast with studies by Le (2018) and Read (2019) on assessment practices in Vietnam and East Asia respectively which instructors focussed more on peer and self-assessment tools. The good news is, echoing past studies done, teachers are positive and generally receptive of the CEFR framework but needed more guidance and training for them to fully understand and utilise more innovative CEFR-aligned assessments in their classrooms (Abdul Hakim, Radzuwan & Wan Zhafirah, 2018; Nurul Farehah & Mohd Sallehudin, 2018).

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