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Investigating Pre-Service English Teachers' Understanding and Practices of CEFR in English Language Teaching

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This study investigated pre-service English teachers' understanding and perceptions of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) within the Malaysian teacher education context. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, beginning with a questionnaire administered to 54 pre-service pre-service English teachers in a Malaysian teacher training institution, followed by semi-structured interviews with five randomly selected participants. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers recognised CEFR as a global framework for describing language proficiency and aligning teaching, learning and assessment with international standards. Taken together, these findings suggest that while in-service teachers conceptually endorse the CEFR and its descriptors, implementation challenges remain underexplored or underacknowledged in their narratives. The positive perceptions highlight the perceived potential of CEFR for improving teaching, but the negative insights point to risks of over-standardisation, checklist-oriented teaching and insufficient localisation. Addressing these gaps requires professional development that emphasises the critical use of the CEFR, encourages teachers to adapt global standards to local cultural contexts and provides structured support for overcoming practical barriers in the classroom.

Keywords: the common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR), implementation, pre-service English teachers, professional development, perceptions

INTRODUCTION

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages was established to provide a comprehensive guideline for language syllabi, curriculum structures and assessment standards globally. It is an international standard for describing language ability which ranges across six proficiency levels - A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 (Council of Europe, 2020). These levels describe what a learner 'can do' across the four core language skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The levels could be put into 3 broad categories: the basic user (A1/A2), independent user (B1/B2) and proficient user (C1/C2). Teachers' preparedness plays a major role in the successful integration of CEFR into the national curriculum in Malaysia. Teachers are responsible for putting these international standards of language learning and assessment into practice, and it is essential that this driving force fully comprehends the foundations of the framework. Pre-service teachers are essential to ensuring a successful implementation because they are the next generation of educators

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entrusted with providing CEFR-aligned instruction in the classroom. According to recent research, there are significant issues with the implementation of the CEFR, specifically with regard to inadequate teacher training and a lack of comprehension of the framework (Che Musa et al. 2025). In order to find actual gaps and improve teacher preparation programs, there is an increasing need to look into pre-service teachers' perceptions and knowledge of the CEFR and its practical implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review explores the CEFR framework and its implementation in Malaysian teacher education. It highlights the core principles of the framework, the role of pre-service English teachers, challenges faced in local contexts and the importance of professional development in supporting CEFR-aligned teaching practices.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The CEFR framework was developed by the Council of Europe to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the development of language syllabi, curriculum guidelines, assessments and textbooks across Europe and increasingly worldwide (Council of Europe, 2001). It outlines six proficiency levels (i.e., A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2), describing what learners can do in listening, speaking, reading and writing at each level. The CEFR framework emphasises learner autonomy, communicative competence and the use of 'can-do' statements to describe language ability. Since its adoption, the CEFR framework has been widely recognised as a valuable tool for aligning language education systems, improving the transparency of qualifications and facilitating mobility and mutual recognition of language competencies. Its influence has extended beyond Europe, including many countries in Asia, such as Malaysia, where English is taught as a second language in ESL classrooms nationwide. In Malaysia, this reform was specifically operationalised through the Roadmap for English Language Education 2015-2025, which serves as astrategic blueprint to ensure students achieve proficiency levels aligned with international CEFR scales across all educational tiers (Hishamudin & Kee, 2023). It is emphasised that such adoption is part of a global trend where standardised frameworks are used to harmonise curriculum objectives and assessment benchmarks.

Pre-Service English Teachers and The CEFR

Pre-service English teachers are pivotal in the success of the CEFR implementation as they represent the next generation of educators who will be responsible for delivering CEFR-aligned instruction. Several studies have examined pre-service teachers' awareness, understanding and readiness regarding the CEFR (Azman, 2016; Hamid & Said, 2021). Findings often indicate that while most pre-service teachers recognise the importance of CEFR in language education, their practical knowledge and application skills remain limited. Research has shown that pre-service teachers may struggle with interpreting CEFR levels and descriptors appropriately, translating CEFR-aligned goals into effective lesson plans and assessments and integrating communicative competence and formative assessment practices in line with CEFR benchmarks (Yamat, 2020). These challenges highlight the need for explicit CEFR training in teacher education programmes, including coursework, practicum experiences and reflective tasks that build confidence and competence in using CEFR tools. Synthesising these findings, it is evident that a persistent theory-practice gap exists where high levels of conceptual input do not necessarily contribute to classroom readiness in implementing CEFR instruction.

Challenges in CEFR Implementation in Malaysia

Despite the potential of CEFR to improve English education outcomes, its implementation in Malaysia has faced numerous challenges. These include the inadequate teacher training and support materials (Ali & Razali, 2019), limited understanding among stakeholders, including teachers and

school administrators (Lee, 2020), discrepancies between policy and classroom practice, particularly in rural or under-resourced schools (Yunus & Hashim, 2018) and assessment-related issues, such as aligning classroom assessments with CEFR levels and interpreting performance appropriately (Puteh et al., 2020). These issues are becoming complicated for pre-service teachers who are still developing their teaching identities and pedagogical expertise. Therefore, understanding their perceptions and preparedness is crucial for ensuring that the CEFR implementation is effective and sustainable.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

The role of teacher education institutions is critical in equipping pre-service English teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to implement the CEFR successfully. Research recommends the integration of CEFR-based frameworks into courses on lesson planning, language assessment and materials development (Yunus et al., 2021). According to Sukri et al. (2024), the efficacy of such academic preparation is often compromised by the top-down nature of implementation. When reforms are imposed without fostering a genuine sense of ownership and accountability among educators, the resulting classroom changes are often merely symbolic rather than profound (Sukri et al., 2024). Moreover, reflective practices and critical discussions on the appropriateness of CEFR in local contexts should be encouraged to foster adaptive and culturally responsive teaching practices. Ultimately, for CEFR implementation to achieve lasting impact, professional development must transcend abstract framework familiarity and embrace experiential, reflective learning models that empower teachers to adapt global standards to the nuanced demands of their specific classroom environments. Professional development programmes should focus on interpreting CEFR descriptors and integrating them into learning objectives, designing CEFR-aligned assessments and rubrics and developing materials that reflect real-life communicative tasks at various proficiency levels.

Theoretical Framework

The implementation of CEFR in teacher education can be understood through two key frameworks: Shulman's (1987) Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which highlights the integration of content and pedagogy, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasises the importance of social interaction, scaffolding and mediation in teacher learning and development.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

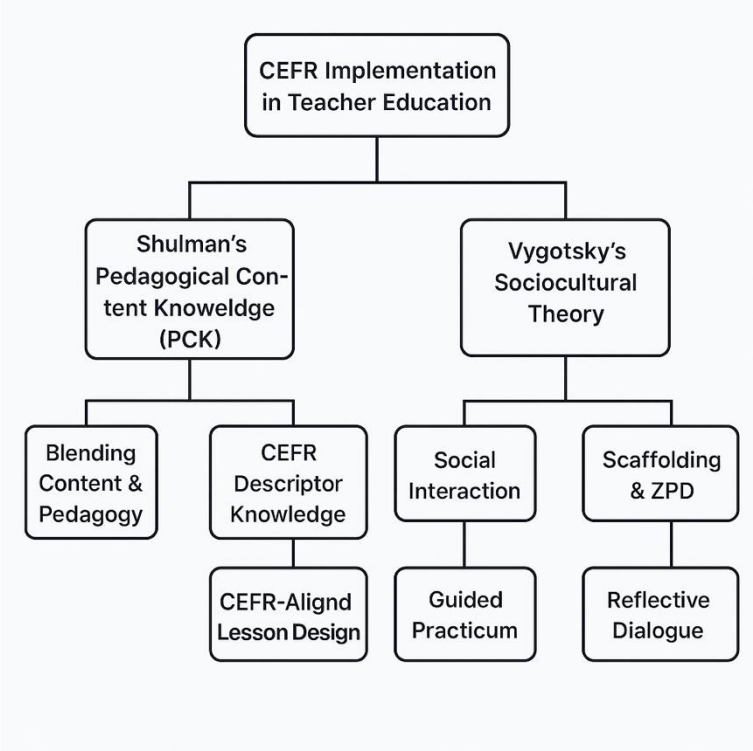
Shulman (1987) introduced the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) to bridge the gap between subject matter knowledge and effective teaching practices. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) emphasises the need for teachers not only to know what they teach (i.e., content) but also how to teach it effectively (i.e., pedagogy) to diverse learners. In the context of CEFR implementation, pre-service English teachers must understand CEFR levels, descriptors and communicative competencies, design appropriate teaching strategies that align with these descriptors and adapt CEFR-aligned materials and assessments to suit student needs. Thus, teacher education must cultivate both CEFR-related knowledge and the pedagogical skills to apply it meaningfully in the classroom.

Socio-Cultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1970) theory views learning as a socially mediated process, where knowledge is constructed through interaction, dialogue and collaboration. Central to this theory are concepts such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding, which are crucial in supporting teacher learning. Specifically, research indicates that these collaborative behaviours allow educators to build professional competency through shared knowledge and reciprocal learning, underscoring that social engagement is a critical link between theoretical understanding and practical classroom application (Hossain, 2026).Applied to CEFR training, Socio-Cultural Theory supports collaborative lesson planning and peer feedback during practicum, guided mentoring from supervisors and experienced teachers and reflective practice through dialogue and observation. In the context of teacher

development, this social mediation is most effective when structured through consistent mentorship, which allows novice educators to bridge the theory-practice gap by learning from the real-world experiences of skilled professionals (Kheng & Rusli, 2025).These interactions help pre-service English teachers internalise CEFR principles and develop confidence in using them in real-world teaching situations. All in all, the visual representation of CEFR implementation in teacher education in Malaysia is as presented in Figure 1 as follows:

Figure 1
Visual representation of CEFR implementation in teacher education in Malaysia



Research Objectives

The research objectives for this study are as follows:

1. To investigate pre-service English teachers' understanding of CEFR.

2. To explore the perceptions of pre-service English teachers towards implementing CEFR into teaching practice.

Research Questions

The research questions formulated in this study are as follows:

1. What do pre-service English teachers understand about CEFR?

2. What are the perceptions of pre-service English teachers towards implementing CEFR into teaching practice?

METHOD

This section includes the research design opted for the study, participants and context, ethical considerations, instruments and procedures. The data analysis is also explained in this section.

Research Design

In the present study, the researchers chose an explanatory sequential design (Fetters et al., 2013) using a mixed-methods approach that allows the researchers to define the natural phenomenon, characteristics and the context to investigate the implementation of CEFR in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms. The sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, which utilises qualitative data to support an earlier quantitative conclusion, was used in this study. It was developed by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Clark (2018). The design begins with collecting and analysing quantitative data focused on the first research question of the study and moves on to collecting and analysing relevant qualitative data. The researchers evaluated how the qualitative findings help to make the original quantitative findings more understandable (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Creswell & Creswell 2018). Nevertheless, the selection of qualitative results to be used and the selection of samples for both phases are the main challenges in this strategy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell (2012), the explanatory sequential strategy is characterised by first collecting and analysing quantitative data and then collecting and analysing qualitative data.

Participants and Context

The current study was conducted at a teacher training institution in Malaysia. The 54 participants were the pre-service English teachers in the academic year of 2025. Participants were selected using the convenience sampling technique to answer the survey questions while 5 students selected through random sampling method. The students are currently second year students majoring in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL).

Ethical Consideration

Miller and Bell (2002) noted that the problem of access is not solved even after entry into an environment, as not everyone is willing to talk, and even the most open-minded informant may not be willing to reveal all the information needed. Accordingly, access can be two-sided. Firstly, official permission must be obtained. Secondly, once on the ground, researchers have to negotiate with potential informants via an online platform. The researchers obtained official approval from the Educational Research Application System 2.0 (eRAS 2.0) to perform a study in Malaysian primary classrooms. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study involving pre-service English teachers. Before data collection, participants were informed of the study's purpose and procedures. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their completion of the questionnaire survey. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or negative consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. No personal identifiers were collected, and all responses were used solely for academic and research purposes. The data collected were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers to ensure the privacy and protection of participants' information. The study adhered to appropriate ethical research guidelines for research involving human participants.

Instruments

The instruments utilised in this study include a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol. These instruments were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for the study.

Survey Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire was adapted from the previous study (Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021) to address the research questions. The survey questionnaire included three sections and used a seven-point Likert scale to explore the views of the pre-service English teachers. The first section gathered the respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, years of study and knowledge of the CEFR. The second section examined the respondents' insights into CEFR. It focused on three elements: 1) principles for teaching and learning (items 1 to 7), 2) principles for assessment (items 8 to 13), and 3) principles for development and the application of referencing level (items 14 to 20). Respondents were asked to score items on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The third section was the open-ended question. It asked the respondents to share their opinions about the CEFR implementation in teaching practice. The pilot study was carried out in another teacher training institution. The questionnaire was validated using Cronbach's Alpha, which gave a reliability coefficient of 0.951. Respondents were asked to score items on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The interpretation of the mean scores was based on a 7-point Likert scale. Mean scores (Table 1) ranging from 1.00 to 2.33 were interpreted as low, 2.34 to 4.66 as moderate, 4.67 to 5.66 as high, and 5.67 to 7.00 as very high.

Table 1

Interpretation scale
Mean score range interpretation

Mean Score Range	Interpretation
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 4.66	Moderate
4.67 – 5.66	High
5.67 – 7.00	Very High

Source: Adapted from Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

The third section was the open-ended question. It asked the respondents to share their opinions about the CEFR implementation in teaching practice. The pilot study was carried out in another teacher education institution.Cronbach's Alpha was employed to determine the reliability of the questionnaire, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.951, which indicates excellent internal consistency. The questionnaire was reviewed and validated by two experts from a local public university in Malaysia.

Semi-Structured Interview

Five of the participants were randomly selected for the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews explored how these pre-service English teachers felt about the implementation of the CEFR in their teaching practice. The duration of the interview was between 15 and 20 minutes and was conducted after they completed the survey questionnaire. The interviews were also audiotaped and transcribed for thematic analysis. After the interviews, the transcripts were verified by the interviewees and the researcher. Then, the transcripts were coded and categorised into themes.

Procedures

A total of 54 respondents completed the 20-item survey questionnaire. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 randomly selected participants to collect in-depth data about the implementation of the CEFR in primary ESL classrooms. A mixed-methods design was employed in this study to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions and enabling a comparison between the two data sets (Creswell, 2013).

Triangulation was also used to ensure the validity, reliability and comprehensibility of the study.

Data Analysis

The data was collected using a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol. The responses for the 20 questionnaire items were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 software. The data was analysed using descriptive analysis. This approach is particularly well-suited for providing a comprehensive overview of the attitudes, beliefs and opinions held by this specific population (Caballero et al., 2023). Descriptive research allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data to depict the characteristics of a population. Thematic analysis was used to categorise the audio transcription of the interviews into themes. Then, to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcript, the interviews were emailed to the participants to validate their responses.

FINDINGS

This section includes the presentation of demographic data of the respondents. The findings were discussed in tandem with the research questions formulated for this study.

Demographic Information

The number of respondents in this study was 54. The female respondents were 30 and the male respondents were 24. The respondents were from 2 different teacher education institutions in Malaysia.

RQ1: What do pre-service English teachers understand about CEFR?

To answer RQ 1, descriptive statistics were analysed using SPSS.

Table 1
Descriptive analysis

No.	Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
	What do Preservice English Teachers understand about CEFR?	54	6.53	.463	Very High
1	CEFR is a guideline for developing English language teaching.	54	6.54	.926	Very High
2	CEFR is an essential document for curriculum design in English language teaching.	54	6.54	.926	Very High
3	CEFR is a guidebook used to design teaching materials.	54	6.57	.924	Very High
4	CEFR can be used to enhance English language skills.	54	6.52	.720	Very High
5	CEFR should be adapted to the local English curriculum in each context (i.e., the English curriculum in Malaysia).	54	6.63	.592	Very High
6	CEFR is a handbook used to assist learners in English language learning.	54	6.52	.693	Very High
7	English learning activities should focus on plurilingualism.	54	5.93	1.043	Very High
8	The aim of test development depends on the implementation of the CEFR in each context.	54	6.31	.773	Very High
9	The development of language evaluation should be aligned with the CEFR descriptions.	54	6.54	.693	Very High
10	English test assessments should be based on the CEFR document.	54	6.50	.818	Very High
11	English test assessments should be verified by experts.	54	6.51	.800	Very High
12	The test designs should be consistent and aim to improve language proficiency.	54	6.74	.483	Very High
13	The results of the test can be used to identify English language proficiency.	54	6.57	.772	Very High
14	Developing CEFR reference level descriptions brings transparency to English language teaching.	54	6.52	.637	Very High
15	The development of reference level descriptions should illustrate what learners know and their abilities at each level.	54	6.57	.633	Very High
16	The development of CEFR reference level descriptions should designate learners' proficiency related to indicators in the national curriculum.	54	6.48	.666	Very High
17	CEFR reference level descriptions should aim to improve all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing).	54	6.72	.529	Very High
18	CEFR reference level descriptions need to identify what learners can do at each level.	54	6.66	.586	Very High
19	CEFR reference level descriptions should explain what learners can achieve in any skill.	54	6.56	.664	Very High
20	CEFR reference level descriptions can be a guideline for English language assessment.	54	6.74	.483	Very High

The average overall rating of CEFR understanding among pre-service English teachers was very high (M = 6.53, SD = 0.463). This demonstrates that the respondents possessed a strong understanding of the CEFR framework. An item-by-item analysis revealed that items related to assessment and skill development recorded the highest levels of understanding. Respondents strongly agreed that test designs should be consistent and aimed at improving language proficiency (M = 6.74), that CEFR reference level descriptions should improve all four language skills (M = 6.72), and that CEFR reference level descriptions can serve as guidelines for English language assessment (M = 6.74). These findings indicate that the respondents clearly recognised the CEFR as an important framework for language assessment and skill development. In terms of adaptability and application, respondents also demonstrated very high understanding. Pre-service teachers agreed that the CEFR should be adapted to the local curriculum context in Malaysia (M = 6.63), that CEFR reference level descriptions help identify learners' abilities at each proficiency level (M = 6.66), and that the CEFR can enhance English language proficiency (M = 6.52). These findings suggest that respondents viewed the CEFR as relevant, practical, and beneficial for English language teaching and learning. However, the item related to plurilingualism recorded the

lowest mean score (M = 5.93, SD = 1.043), although it still fell within the "Very High" interpretation range. This suggests that plurilingualism may be less clearly understood compared to other CEFR components. Overall, the low standard deviations across the items indicate a high level of consistency in respondents' perceptions. The findings demonstrate that the pre-service English teachers in this study possessed a strong understanding of the CEFR, particularly in relation to curriculum design, language assessment, and the development of learners' proficiency in the four language skills. Nevertheless, further training and practical exposure may help strengthen their understanding of more complex CEFR concepts such as plurilingualism.

RQ2: What are the perceptions of pre-service English teachers towards implementing CEFR into practice?

To address Research Question 2, semi-structured interviews were conducted with pre-service English teachers to explore their perceptions of implementing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in teaching practice. Several themes emerged from the analysis: understanding of the CEFR concept in teaching and learning, understanding of CEFR descriptors, and practical implementation of CEFR in classroom practice. The qualitative findings were further supported by quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire.

Understanding of the CEFR concept in Teaching and Learning

All participants recognised the CEFR as an international guideline that describes the language levels from A1 to C2. The participants viewed the CEFR as a guideline supporting curriculum design, lesson planning, assessment, and the systematic organisation of teaching and learning activities.

> *"It provides a standardised scale to describe language proficiency levels from A1 to C2."* (P1)
>
> *"It serves as a common reference point for curriculum design, lesson planning and assessment."* (P4)
>
> The CEFR was seen as a way of systematising lesson design, defining learning outcomes and tracking progress.
>
> *"CEFR helps teachers ensure that instruction is systematic, learner-centred, and aligned with global standards."* (P2)
>
> *"It provides students with a globally recognised method to track their progress."* (P3)

The CEFR is not only based on levels, but also on the practical use of the language.

The quantitative findings strongly supported these interview responses. Respondents demonstrated a very high level of understanding regarding the role of CEFR in curriculum design and language teaching. For example, the items "CEFR is a guideline for developing English language teaching" and "CEFR is an essential document for curriculum design in English language teaching" both recorded high mean scores (M = 6.54). Furthermore, respondents strongly agreed that CEFR can be used to enhance English language skills (M = 6.52) and should be adapted to the local curriculum context (M = 6.63).

The findings also revealed that participants understood CEFR as a framework that emphasises practical language use and communicative competence. Participant 4 explained:

> "*Learners are viewed as social agents who use language to accomplish real-world tasks.*"

However, although participants generally showed strong comprehension of CEFR, the concept of plurilingualism appeared to be less well understood compared to other CEFR components. The item "English learning activities should focus on plurilingualism" received the lowest mean score (M = 5.93), suggesting that pre-service teachers may need further exposure and training in this aspect of the CEFR.

Understanding of CEFR Descriptors

Another important theme identified was the participants' understanding of CEFR descriptors. All participants recognised the descriptors as "can-do" statements that describe learners' abilities in observable and measurable ways across the four language skills.

Participant 1 stated:

> "*They describe what learners can do in all four skills, making learning goals concrete and measurable."*

Participant 4 further explained:

> *"Descriptors ensure consistency in evaluation and help both teachers and learners understand progression."*

The quantitative data also reflected a very high level of agreement regarding the importance of CEFR reference level descriptors. Respondents strongly agreed that reference level descriptors should identify learners' proficiency (M = 6.66), explain learners' abilities at each level (M = 6.57), and improve all four language skills (M = 6.72). In addition, respondents agreed that CEFR reference levels should serve as guidelines for assessment (M = 6.74). These findings indicate that pre-service teachers perceive CEFR descriptors as valuable tools that support transparency, consistency, and clarity in language teaching and assessment.

Practical Tips for Teachers

The findings further showed that pre-service teachers perceived CEFR as a practical framework that can be integrated into classroom instruction, assessment and feedback. Participants explained that CEFR descriptors help teachers design suitable learning activities and assessments that correspond to learners' proficiency levels.

Participant 2 stated:

> "*They guide teachers in assessing learners' performance and designing suitable tasks.*"

Similarly, Participant 3 noted:

> "*They translate abstract levels into practical abilities, such as introducing oneself at A1 or participating in discussions at B2*."

The participants also emphasised the importance of authentic and task-based learning activities in implementing CEFR effectively. Participant 3 explained:

> "*I would integrate authentic, task-based activities that require students to use the language in real-world contexts*."

Likewise, Participant 5 provided an example of contextualised classroom practice:

> "*I may design speaking activities where students role-play ordering food at a local mamak stall (A2)*."

The quantitative findings complemented these responses. Respondents strongly agreed that test designs should be consistent and focused on improving language proficiency (M = 6.74), while English language assessments should align with CEFR descriptions (M = 6.54). The low standard deviation values ranging from 0.48 to 0.93 further indicate that the respondents shared relatively consistent perceptions regarding the implementation of CEFR.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that pre-service English teachers possess a strong understanding of the CEFR and perceive it as a valuable framework for curriculum design, language assessment, skill

development and classroom practice. Nevertheless, the findings also suggest the need for additional training and practical exposure, particularly regarding plurilingualism and the practical implementation of CEFR principles in local teaching contexts.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concludes that pre-service teachers in Malaysia typically demonstrate a high level of comprehension of the CEFR as a worldwide framework for language instruction. Their positive opinions show that they understand how the framework can organise lesson planning, enhance communication skills and match teaching strategies with international standards. This finding is consistent with previous studies which reported that Malaysian pre-service and in-service teachers generally perceive the CEFR positively due to its systematic structure and international recognition (Alih et al., 2020; Uri & Aziz, 2018). The quantitative findings showed that respondents strongly agreed that CEFR reference levels should guide assessment and support the development of the four language skills. These findings support the Council of Europe's argument that the CEFR promotes transparency, consistency, and communicative competence in language education (Council of Europe, 2020). Similarly, Muniandy et al.(2025) and North (2014) emphasised that CEFR descriptors provide clear "can-do" statements that help teachers and learners understand language progression and learning outcomes more effectively. But the results also showed significant gaps in both conceptual knowledge and real-world application in the classroom. Certain ideas, like plurilingualism, are still unclear to pre-service teachers, and this needs to be corrected right away. The results also show significant differences between knowledge and real-world application. Despite having a firm grasp of CEFR descriptors and concepts, pre-service teachers continue to struggle with practical application in actual classroom settings. The existence of issues like the need to adapt the CEFR to fit the local context highlights the need for additional support. This finding is consistent with Faez et al. (2011), who reported that teachers often understand CEFR proficiency levels but experience difficulties comprehending more abstract concepts such as plurilingualism and intercultural competence. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on CEFR implementation by offering details on the readiness of potential instructors. Additionally, it highlights how important it is to situate global frameworks within local educational realities. Improving in-service teacher preparedness would ultimately be necessary to ensure the successful and long-lasting implementation of the CEFR in Malaysia.

Based on the findings of the study, several implications for teacher training and policy making emerge. There is a critical need to move beyond theory by integrating practical CEFR-based modules into teacher training programmes. Teacher training programmes must equip pre-service teachers with increased exposure to authentic, real-time instructional materials and opportunities to design lessons, learning and assessment materials that are CEFR-aligned. As indicated in this study, modules should also be focused on the areas where understanding was lower, specifically in translating plurilingualism into viable classroom strategies. Teacher training should prioritise social mediation through guided practicums and peer feedback. Providing pre-service teachers with expert mentorship can help them navigate the practical barriers of implementation, such as inadequate support materials or rural school constraints. Since pre-service training now includes practicums and school-based experience activities that are carried out in isolated semesters, a continuous mentorship module would provide a more comprehensive education for the pre-service teachers. Teaching materials should be localised to fit the needs of the learners here in Malaysia. Textbooks should be inclusive of Malaysia and the culture of its people. Removing the cultural barrier that is present in the current CEFR-aligned materials would undoubtedly be a prudent move in ensuring a smooth implementation of the curriculum. Teachers should also be encouraged to adapt the current materials and CEFR descriptors to fit the Malaysian cultural context. This ensures that the framework remains a flexible tool rather than a rigid, checklist-oriented system. The findings of this study have several implications for classroom practice. As pre-

service English teachers demonstrated a strong understanding of the CEFR framework and its descriptors, teachers can apply CEFR principles by designing learner-centred and communicative classroom activities aligned with students' proficiency levels. For example, teachers may use CEFR "can-do" descriptors to develop lesson objectives, classroom tasks, and assessments that reflect learners' actual language abilities.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions for future research can be made to further enhance the understanding of CEFR implementation. Future studies could track pre-service teachers from their final year of training into their first few years of full-time service to observe how their perceptions and implementation practices evolve in real-world environments. Research could compare the challenges faced by teachers in urban and rural settings. The study would ideally provide an insight into the discrepancies in policy application and help identify specific localised needs. As indicated in the findings, plurilingualism was the least understood concept in this study. These findings suggest the need for more targeted training and practical guidance to strengthen pre-service teachers' readiness to implement CEFR effectively in diverse classroom contexts. Therefore, further qualitative research is needed to explore how Malaysian teachers perceive the pedagogical strategies of plurilingualism. Future research could also investigate the correlation between teachers' CEFR proficiency and the actual English language learning outcomes of their students to validate the effectiveness of the current curriculum.

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