

## **Challenges in Implementing the CEFR in English Language Classrooms**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025 is a reform effort to enhance the standard of our students' English language proficiency level. While it is a commendable initiative, its implementation in schools has received mixed reactions especially from teachers who are confronted with a number of challenges. Hence, this study was carried out to investigate the nature of challenges encountered by English language teachers in implementing the CEFR in their classrooms. Data for this study were collected from questionnaires gathered from 117 English language teachers in primary schools in Johor Bahru district. The findings revealed the challenges were related to teachers' English language proficiency level, designing class activities, students' participation in class, the textbooks used, teachers' workload, and students' proficiency level. The challenges were found to be inter-related and could be traced to lack of CEFR-related training, insufficient teaching and learning materials, constraint of time, and the policy which does not allow for students to be streamed based on their proficiency level. All this seemed to make it more difficult for the teachers to implement the CEFR successfully.

*Keywords:* Challenges, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), English language teachers, reform effort

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025 is a reform effort initiated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in its effort to enhance the English language proficiency level among Malaysian students (Ministry of Education, 2015). This move is also seen as an initiative to align our education system with international standards as the Roadmap adopts the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to benchmark the target performance of students as they progress from preschool to tertiary level and beyond.

The CEFR is a standard used to describe a person's language ability, in this case, English. It is a globally accepted standard which uses a six-point scale focusing on what a person can do, from A1 (basic users) to C2 (proficient users) (Council of Europe, 2001). In Malaysia, The CEFR is implemented in three phases. The first phase (2013-2015) being to elevate the proficiency level of school teachers through various programmes. The second phase (2016-2020) focused on setting the

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appropriate CEFR levels against each stage of education and the implementation of the new CEFR-aligned curricula. In this phase teachers were sent out for training to familiarize themselves with the CEFR and related matters. The third phase will look into the evaluation, review and revision of the implementation (Ministry of Education, 2015).

This reform effort is timely as a number of studies reveal a worrying concern on the English language proficiency level of students (Sasikala, 2012; Cambridge Baseline, 2013; David, Thang & Azman, 2015). In the long run, a huge impact of this, as discovered by Rusreena, Melur and Harwati (2018), is that poor English language capability among undergraduates has been unmistakably regarded as one of the top five issues confronting Malaysian employers. The implementation of the CEFR is seen as a means to address this issue. Nevertheless, teachers, especially those teaching English language, often face a great challenge to provide the best for their students, particularly when changes are introduced in the education system. With the current English language curriculum in Malaysia, the expected challenges facing the teachers would probably be related to their readiness to implement the CEFR in their lessons, the teaching-learning materials or strategies to engage students in class. Though a number of studies have been conducted on the implementation of the CEFR in the education system such as by Nurul Farehah and Mohd Sallehudin (2018) and Ngu and Azlina (2019), many more need to be carried out to highlight the challenges teachers are facing so that we are aware of the current situation and that appropriate assistance could be rendered to them. Hence, this study set off to find out the challenges faced by teachers in teaching the CEFR-aligned English language syllabus in schools.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In any education reform effort, teachers would be the most important group of people involved. Regardless of how big or well-funded a reform is, it is the teachers who ultimately have to execute the changes in the classrooms. Hence, it is crucial to listen to their thoughts on the change, and to gain insights from their experience in implementing the change. As this study is focusing on the challenges faced by teachers, a review of related literature on this is deemed necessary.

One of the challenges faced by teachers to implement changes in education is the misconceptions of the CEFR even before it is fully comprehended by them. Teachers seriously had false ideas about the CEFR and its relationship with the Roadmap, which needed to be set right (Zuraidah & Mardziah, 2019). One misconception was that the CEFR was the reform plan, which is incorrect. The CEFR and the Roadmap are not the same thing because the CEFR is the basis of the framework of reference, while the Roadmap is designed by policymakers to plan our education system (Zuraidah & Mardziah, 2019). Besides, due to the CEFR implementation, it was also assumed that Malaysian students' proficiency will be evaluated against native-speaker proficiency (Zuraidah & Mardziah, 2019). It is an inaccurate perception as the 'can do' statements in the framework describe a learner's ability to communicate in a foreign or second language and not intended to measure them against any native speakers. Due to these misconceptions, teachers tend

to lack confidence in implementing the CEFR which could eventually lead to less effective lesson in the classroom.

Another challenge pertains to the issue of materials used for teaching and learning. A textbook is supposed to work in unison with a newly developed curriculum standard and scheme of work, but in implementing the CEFR, teachers seemed to face difficulties in using the textbooks prescribed (Rashid, Rahman & Yunus, 2017). Although it is a common practice in our education system to develop a textbook following a completed curriculum, in the case of the CEFR implementation, the textbook was already made available by the time the new aligned syllabus was implemented. Furthermore, only one textbook is being used for both Year 1 and Year 2, whereby Year 1 covers Topic 0 to Topic 4, and Year 2 covers Topic 5 to Topic 9. This has caused confusion among students and teachers, especially for the current Year 2 students, as they had to start at the middle of the textbook. Whereas, previously during their Year 1, they had used the old KSSR textbook which did not contain similar topics to the CEFR textbook which they are currently using. It means the students had missed the earlier topics found in the CEFR textbook.

In the other situation, as the textbook is used for two years, if the topics for Year 1 students have not been covered during they are in Year 1, they will have another problem when they are in Year 2. When they move to Year 2, they would face difficulties understanding the missing topics in the book as all topics in textbook are related to each other and is a continuation from the previous topics. For example, in Year 1, they learn about animals in Topic 3 entitled 'Pet Show'. They are introduced with a lot of animals in this topic. They need to use the vocabularies about animals when they learn about animals' habitats in Topic 6 for Year 2. Thus, it is a challenge to the teachers to utilise the textbooks as best as they can.

In addition, Lo (2018) found that though English teachers claimed to be familiar with the CEFR and its concepts, they also showed high levels of concern and anxiety towards its implementation. The 200 teachers involved in his study were uncertain of their roles and lacked the information about the changes to be made. It seems to indicate that they did not have a clear understanding of the CEFR after all and they might not know the information which were missing that could affect their readiness to implement the CEFR. Furthermore, Nurul Farehah and Mohd Salehuddin (2018) also discovered similar findings from their study that most of the teachers had very limited knowledge, minimum exposure and low level of awareness about the CEFR. This led to misconceptions about the CEFR and this caused them to struggle with the implementation. Despite that, they believed in the implementation of the framework and could make positive changes to the level of English proficiency of Malaysian students.

Focusing on the CEFR-aligned writing class, Mohd Dzaquan (2020) observed a group of teachers who were supposed to incorporate the CEFR in teaching writing to primary school students. He found that the teachers were still practicing teacher-centered approach with a lack of emphasis on developing students' autonomy towards their own learning as they were uncertain on how to implement it because of their unfamiliarity of this new change. Perhaps it was because the teachers lacked the necessary exposure and training in the CEFR or probably, as Mohd Dzaquan (2020) purported, the training model used was less effective.

In another recent study, data gathered from a survey of 365 English language teachers revealed that teachers were ready to accept the change despite the challenges faced because they had positive

belief in the CEFR (Alih, Abdul Raof and Md. Yusof, 2021). Nevertheless, the researchers further explained teachers' cognitive readiness depended on three factors namely time, collective effort, and sufficient materials. Thus, only when these supports are provided will teachers be able to successfully implement the CEFR in schools.

Thus far, studies disclosing some of the challenges faced by teachers have been reviewed. Despite these challenges, many teachers, teacher trainers and academics concurred with Alih, *et al.* (2021) in that it was worth the effort to implement the CEFR in the classroom. They stated the good sides of the CEFR as it focused on what learners were able to do rather than what they were not able to do, stimulating learner autonomy and encouraging the use of the language through diagnostic assessment (Morrow, 2004). Nonetheless, it is unquestionable that the CEFR is now a universal standard and has been accepted by many countries and is used extensively in assisting users in learning a language.

The Malaysian government has taken a bold decision to implement this framework in an effort to improve the English language proficiency of its students (Zuraidah, 2015). Hence, to have a better understanding on the current situation, it is pivotal to get acquainted with the status of the implementation of the CEFR in Malaysian schools. Thus, this study was carried out to discover the challenges faced by teachers in executing the CEFR into their English teaching lessons.

### **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a quantitative method approach to seek answers to the research question "What are the challenges faced by teachers teaching the CEFR-aligned English language syllabus for primary school students?"

The participants of the study were primary school teachers teaching English in Johor Bahru. They were selected using simple random sampling. This type of sampling was employed to cull a smaller sample size from a larger population and to make generalizations about the larger group (Depersio, 2018).

A set of questionnaires was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was adapted from Nurul Farehah and Mohd Salehuddin (2018), where both open-ended and closed-ended items were used as they would support each other (Zohrabi, 2013). The questionnaire was distributed via Google form as it was considered the safest and most effective way to reach as many participants as possible during the pandemic.

A pilot study was conducted where 30 participants were involved. Based on the feedback received, amendments were made for items which were unclear or biased, and a few more open-ended items were added. Consent was sought from the Head of English Panel of the Johor Bahru district office before the revised questionnaire was distributed to teachers. Data collected were analyzed in terms of descriptive statistics where percentages and frequency counts were tabulated.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data collected from two sections of the questionnaire which consisted of eight multiple choice (background of participants), and seven likert scale and five open-ended items (challenges faced by participants). The findings and discussion of the study make up the rest of the section.

### 4.1 Background of Participants

The background of the participants is presented in Table 1 and 2 below. A total of 117 primary school English teachers participated in the study.

**Table 1** Demographic of participants - gender and age

Gender	Age Group				Total	Percentage
	21 - 30	31 - 40	41 - 50	51 - 60		
Male	9	7	6	2	24	20.5%
Female	46	19	20	8	93	79.5%
	55	26	26	10	117	

The majority of the participants were females (79.5%) compared to males (20.5%). The age group with the highest number of participants was between the range of 21 to 30 while the least was from 51 to 60 range. It could be summed up that a large proportion of the participants of the study were young female teachers.

Other data of the participants include their status as an English teacher, the school location, the English language proficiency level based on Aptis test (a proficiency English language test developed by the British Council), and the number of CEFR-related courses attended could be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2** Demographic of participants - status, school location, Aptis test result, and number of CEFR-related courses attended

Background		Total	Percentage
Status	Optionist	95	81.2
	Non-Optionist	22	18.8
Location of school	Urban	64	54.7
	Rural	53	45.3
Aptis test result	C2	11	9.4
	C1	52	44.4
	B2	40	34.2
	B1-A1	14	12
Number of CEFR-related courses attended	1 - 2 times	79	67.5
	3 - 4 times	30	25.6
	More than 4 times	8	6.9

In terms of status of teachers, 81.2% were optionist teachers for English language and the rest were non-optionist teachers who had to teach English language in their schools. There was not a big difference in the percentage of participants' school location where about 10% more teachers were from the urban area. In terms of English language proficiency level of the participants based on Aptis test result, most of the teachers in the study achieved a C1 (44.4%) followed by B2 (34.2%). Only 9.4% obtained C2, which is the highest level. The rest achieved either a B1 or A2, with a few A1. Though school teachers should obtain a C1 or C2, the result shows only 53.8% had met the requirement level set by the MOE.

With regard the number of times CEFR-related courses attended by the participants, slightly more than two-thirds had attended once or twice, a quarter had attended three or four times, and only a few attended more than four times. From this result, all teachers had attended at least one CEFR-related course. The majority would probably need to attend more courses to familiarize themselves with the CEFR to have a full understanding of its concepts to assist them in implementing the CEFR in the classroom.

#### 4.2 Challenges Teachers Faced in Teaching English Language Using the CEFR

Table 3 below shows the close-ended statements followed by a list of open-ended questions used to explore the challenges teachers in the study confronted with. The enquiry was focused on teachers and resources.

**Table 3** Items in questionnaire to find out the Challenges in implementing the CEFR in teaching

Item	Closed-ended Statement
1	I realize that my English proficiency level can affect the content delivery for the CEFR to be well implemented.
2	I am in favour of using the CEFR in my class as it increases students' active participation in class.
3	I feel it is easy for me to design class activities based on the CEFR descriptors.
4	I am willing to accept the CEFR because this framework emphasizes on student-centered approach in which I believe is appropriate in Malaysian classrooms.
5	I believe teachers' limited understanding of the CEFR and the teaching approach based on "can do" tasks will be a challenge for teachers.
6	I find that the contents of the textbook suit the Malaysian culture.
7	It is easy for pupils to understand the contents of the textbook.
Item	Open-ended question
1	Do you think the textbook, <i>Superminds</i> , for Standard 1 and 2 pupils is suitable to be used?
2	Do you think the textbook, <i>Get Smart</i> , for Standard 3 pupils is suitable to be used?
3	Do students give cooperation (active) or they become more reluctant to respond (passive)?
4	What are the challenges you faced in implementing the CEFR in your lessons?
5	From the list you mentioned, which one is the biggest challenge for you?

Based on the analysis of responses gathered from the questionnaire, a number of challenges were found. These are discussed below.

### Teachers' English Language Proficiency Level

The table below displays the responses of the participants on the statement whether English language proficiency of teachers could affect content delivery for the CEFR to be well implemented. The participants seemed to agree with the statement showing a combined total of 71.8%. This indicates that English language proficiency of teachers might pose a challenge to teachers in ensuring the CEFR is well implemented which justifies the standard set by MOE (Ministry of Education, 2015). It should be noted that close to 50% of the participants of this study have yet to achieve a minimum of level C1 English language proficiency. Hence, it displays that they are well aware of their proficiency level of English language are not competent enough, aligned with the result of their CPT or APTIS test. Thus, it affects their confidence level either they are able to deliver the CEFR content successfully as they should be.

**Table 4** English proficiency level of teachers affecting delivery

Item	Statement	SD*	D	N	A	SA
1	I realize that my English proficiency level can affect the content delivery for the CEFR to be well implemented.	-	5.1	23.1	31.6	40.2

\*SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

From the open-ended question on the challenges teachers faced (item 4), six out of 117 participants listed teachers' English language proficiency as a challenge. Though the number is small, it should not be taken lightly. This could be especially true with teachers who have yet to meet the required proficiency level where they might feel that they were not competent enough to deliver the CEFR contents due to their language proficiency. Two of the participants voiced their concerns as follows:

P11: I'm a non-optionist in English language so my skill is not too good but I'm working on it.

P18: I am not very fluent in English. By looking at the framework, I find that my proficiency level will be my biggest concern as teachers have to grade and ensure our students to achieve certain level by the end of the schooling period. For sure, I have to be good enough and be at least at minimum level for a teacher.

### Designing Class Activities

The second challenge is on the design of class activities based on the CEFR descriptors. About 48% of the participants were unsure of the ease in designing class activities based on the CEFR

descriptors. In addition, a slightly less percentage believed it was not easy for them to design class activities using the descriptors (see Table 5 below).

**Table 5** Ease of designing class activities

Item	Statement	SD*	D	N	A	SA
3	I feel it is easy for me to design class activities based on the CEFR descriptors.	1.7	44.4	47.9	4.3	1.7
5	I believe teachers' limited understanding of the CEFR and the teaching approach based on "can do" tasks will be a challenge for teachers.	-	17.1	35.9	37.6	9.4

\*SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

Responses to Item 4 of the open-ended question reveal that 11 participants claimed it was not easy to design the class activities based on the CEFR descriptors. In addition, similar to the findings of Alih *et al.* (2021), availability of appropriate teaching and learning materials was also a concern which two of the participants had this to say:

P93: I have to find the suitable materials to be used and design the suitable activities and approaches to be implemented in the classroom, which aligned to the CEFR.

P37: As for me, I find it hard to adopt and adapt different activities to make it suitable for my students.

Understandably it would be difficult to come up with suitable class activities particularly when teachers had limited understanding on how to implement the CEFR as they might not fully understand the teaching approach based on the "can do" tasks. Referring to Table 5 above, the data for item 5 support this finding as there were a combined total of 47% of them agreeing that teachers' limited understanding of the CEFR and the related teaching approach were seen as a challenge. This was aptly shared by the following participant:

P4: My major concern is designing the activities based on CEFR objective. I'm one of the teachers who didn't attend any CEFR-related courses, I think the CEFR documents are too lengthy and overwhelming for me to read and understand in depth. In fact, one of the documents is as thick as a dictionary. I personally have difficulties in reading, understanding and picturing the implementation.

Perhaps what the participant and others like her need is to attend (more) CEFR-related hands-on workshops to have a better understanding in implementing the CEFR in the class as found in studies by Mohd Dzaquan (2020), Nurul Farehah and Mohd Salehuddin (2018), and Lo (2018).

It is important for them to have a good understanding of this framework as they would be able to see their students showing positive engagement if it is applied correctly in the lessons. Thus,



lack of understanding about the CEFR contributes to the issues in designing appropriate activities in accordance with the CEFR needs. Without interesting activities, it would be difficult to engage students with the lesson. The consequences can be seen from the aspect of students' participation, which is discussed in the following section.

### Students' Participation in Class

With regard whether implementing the CEFR would increase students' active participation in class, more than half of the participants agreed or strongly agreed. Nonetheless, there were 22.3% of the participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed, and about 20% who were not sure of the claim that the CEFR would make students more active in class (see Table 6 below). Though those who agreed was higher than those who disagreed or were unsure, the difference in percentage was not that big. Those who were unsure were the majority in the latter group so, their evaluation in this matter was significance and can change the data presentation. They might change their opinion towards positive perspective once they are certain about their student's participation when they evaluate their lesson thoroughly in the this aspect.

**Table 6** Participation of students in class

Item	Statement	SD*	D	N	A	SA
2	I am in favour of using the CEFR in my class as it increases students' active participation in class.	0.9	21.4	19.6	51.3	6.8
4	I am willing to accept the CEFR because this framework emphasizes on student-centered approach in which I believe is appropriate in Malaysian classrooms.	0.9	0.9	49.5	7.7	41.0

\*SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

In relation to this, statement 4 asked participants to indicate their willingness to accept the CEFR due to its student-centred approach. While a total of 48.7% expressed their agreement, 49.5% of the participants were unsure. Apparently, responses from the two statements seem to suggest that there were two groups of participants, those who undoubtedly were in favour of the implementation of the CEFR bringing positive effects echoing findings of Alih *et al.* (2021) and Mohd Dzaquan (2020), and those who were still unsure or not convinced. The challenge facing the latter group would probably be the dilemma they were in. Hence, the right exposure should be given to them such as the CEFR workshops or courses that show the ways to apply student-centered approach in the lesson effectively.

From the open-ended questions, Item 3 "Do students give cooperation (active) or they become more reluctant to respond (passive)?" Most of the participants provided two kinds of responses. One, there were students who were really active and gave their cooperation. These were the high achievers. Two, there were students who were passive and did not participate well and they were mostly the low achievers. It was probably because they lacked confidence to express themselves, thus they tend to watch and listen to their classmates' responses only. Nevertheless,

having interesting activities would arouse students' interest to engage themselves in the learning process, from the beginning to the end of the lesson, despite their proficiency level. This view was voiced by the following participants:

P19: From my experience, the students are actively engaged when I execute the activities that need them to move around, which is something that they like to do. They become quite bored when they just need to sit, listen and write.

P55: I can see that a well-prepared activity can attract my students to participate in the lesson, however it is time consuming for me to prepare it daily.

### Textbooks Used

The next challenge is related to the textbooks used. More than half of the participants had strong disagreement on the contents of the textbook being suitable for the Malaysian culture. An additional 19.7% supported this stand by choosing disagree with almost the same percentage choosing neutral as shown in the table below.

**Table 7** The textbooks used

Item	Statement	SD*	D	N	A	SA
6	I find that the contents of the textbook suit the Malaysian culture.	57.3	19.7	19.6	3.4	-
7	It is easy for students to understand the contents of the textbook.	10.3	17.1	38.4	6.0	28.2

\*SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

In support of this, 110 participants cited culture being a concern in the open-ended item on appropriateness of the textbook used (See Table 3, open-ended Item 1 and 2). The textbooks used were 'Superminds' for Standard 1 and 2, and 'Get Smart' for Standard 3. Some of the topics in the textbooks which were seen not suitable to the Malaysian culture and students' real-life situation according to the participants were seasons (Topic 9 Year 2/Topic 4 Year 3), romance (Topic 10 Year 3), and monsters (Topic 2 Year 1/Topic 5 Year 3). This was clearly stated by two of the participants which echoed the voices of the majority.

P22: The biggest challenge for me is the contents of the textbook itself as it is not based on Malaysian culture which always make me stuck with no idea on how to conduct the lesson.

P115: The contents limit the learning and creative potential of pupils and teacher. The Easter and Valentine's Day topics are a concern for our cultural in Malaysia, which is 70% Malay (Muslim).

Some of the participants themselves had difficulties understanding specific contents of the topics covered as stated by the following participants:

P67: The contents are sometimes too much. For example, in the topic “At the Beach”, teachers teach the pupils about beach and suddenly there is a content about countries such as Australia and Canada. It is unrelated.

P73: Some of the contents are unfamiliar to a certain degree for me.

Another participant raised the following concern:

P31: The content of the textbook is too little and I have to work harder to expand it on my own alongside with the workload I already have. As English lessons are done daily, I am unable to produce and prepare the materials and activities for each class that satisfy myself.

Issues related to textbooks used in the CEFR-aligned classrooms have been highlighted by a number of studies including those by Rashid, Rahman and Yunus (2017), Ngu and Azlina (2019), and Mohd Dzaquan (2020).

This strong view, however, did not follow through with the statement on whether it was easy for students to understand the contents of the textbook (Item 7). Referring to Table 7, the responses gathered show that 34.2% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement while 38.4% were neutral. In contrast, the responses to item 1 and 2 of the open-ended questions show 59 participants said the language was appropriate with 58 saying otherwise. This could most probably be related to where a school was located, urban or rural as claimed by one of the participants:

P115: Pupils in rural area already difficult to study local textbook. It will be harder with ‘Superminds’ and ‘Get Smart’ as these books are imported from overseas.

Evidently, it was the suitability of the contents of the textbook to the local culture that was the main concern and to a certain extent the difficulty level of the language used in the textbooks. The challenge could then be for teachers to adapt the contents and language of the textbook to suit the local culture and students’ proficiency, if possible.

### **Teachers’ Workload**

In response to the open-ended item on the biggest challenge faced in implementing the CEFR, six participants perceived that it was the amount of workload as teachers. This apparently did not help with their personal development as a lot of their time would be dedicated to work-related matters. Time is one of the three factors necessary to support teachers in ensuring a successful implementation of the CEFR as found by Alih *et al.* (2021). The following excerpts describe what two of the participants felt:

P6: The biggest challenge for me is my workload. Because of this new framework, I need to start from zero. I have to find and produce my own resources and materials. As a

result, this hinders the teachers' jobs and the quality of the preparations as I need to produce it hurriedly.

P12: My limitations are stress & workload. I also must do extra works on limited contents in textbook.

### Students' Proficiency Level

Referring to the same open-ended item, another challenge highlighted was related to students' proficiency level. This garnered the highest number of responses; 59 out of 117 participants claimed that the biggest challenge for them was having students of different proficiency level in the same class. As students come from different locality and family background, their English language proficiency would likely be different. Thus, different groups of students would have different pace of learning and understanding of contents delivered by the teacher. A similar finding emerged in the Alih *et al.* (2021) study whereby they found a mismatch between students' proficiency level and the syllabus taught, thus raising concerns among teachers on how best to implement the CEFR in schools.

Despite this, a directive from the MOE does not allow students to be streamed according to their English language proficiency level. Hence, it is common to find students with mixed abilities in the same class. Many participants voiced their apprehension on this as reflected in the following excerpts:

P17: I have major problem because of the different proficiency level of my students. It is quite difficult as the pupils are still clingy and very depending on me. They need more attention from the teachers. Teachers may guide them but the low achievers still need to be facilitated from time to time.

P35: The pupils' proficiency level is the most challenging. As they come from different family background, their English level is different. So, different pupils will have different pace to cope with the lesson and understand the learning content delivered by the teacher.

Some topics are able to be taught and suit for students with different abilities. However, most of the topics may not be adapted into one lesson in the time allocated for daily English language period. If the lesson plan is too easy, the higher ability students will get bored. On the other hand, if it is too difficult, the slow learners would not be able to catch up with the lesson and would lose their interest easily. This sentiment is shared by a participant as follows:

P78: There are limited activities and language practice for young learners in the book. As there are high and low achievers' students in my class, the language practice provided does not cater for all level of students. Somehow, I cannot focus on many sentence patterns in one period lesson. Or else, the objectives cannot be achieved.

In view of this challenge, the MOE should look into reconsidering the implementation of the streaming system in schools. This could most likely reduce the burden currently faced by teachers.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that there were challenges highlighted by the participants in implementing the CEFR in the classroom. These concern the teachers' English language proficiency level, designing class activities, students' participation in class, the textbooks used, teachers' workload, and students' proficiency level. These challenges could have arisen due to factors including insufficient availability of teaching and learning materials, lack of CEFR-related training, and the constraint of time and streaming students according to their proficiency level.

In conclusion, the introduction of the CEFR in our English language curriculum is seen as a good reform in enhancing the English language standard of our students. Nonetheless, this study has revealed that there is more to be done before the English Language Education Roadmap 2015-2025 could be realized. Teachers, who themselves are the true agents of reform, should be given the right support in addressing challenges. Stakeholders involved have to come together to lend support to ensure good implementation of the CEFR syllabus to prepare our young generation to become competent users of the English language.

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