# In-service Teachers' Familiarisation of the CEFR-aligned School-based Assessment in the Malaysian Secondary ESL Classroom

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate in-service teachers' familiarization of the CEFR-aligned school-based assessment (SBA) in the Malaysian secondary ESL classroom. It also intends to explore teachers' knowledge, understanding, and perceptions of the CEFR-aligned SBA. The study also examined the implementation of the SBA and the challenges that TESL teachers faced embracing the CEFR-aligned SBA in their ESL classroom. An exploratory mixed-method research design was employed. Data were collected by administering a survey to 108 in-service teachers, and 12 in-service teachers participated in the interview. The results show that the in-service teachers have rather a good level of familiarization with CEFR-aligned SBA and a moderate level of awareness and comprehension of the CEFR-aligned SBA. However, the in-service teachers are aware of the importance of CEFR-aligned SBA to assist students to improve their proficiency. In-service

teachers exhibit a good understanding of selecting the appropriate assessment tools and methods to assess students' learning. In-service teachers expressed their struggles and concerns regarding implementing CEFR-aligned SBA effectively, including lack of training, sourcing for good materials to teach, students' negative attitude towards the teaching and learning process, students' attendance, time constraint and their workload. In conclusion, the implementation of the CEFR-aligned SBA is crucial as it is a national agenda and teachers' involvement in executing the assessment is obligatory.

## INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an inseparable part of teaching and learning, as it assists teachers in monitoring students' progress and the achievement of educational goals. Assessment has always been part of the education curriculum. Teachers can assess students' learning through a formative or summative manner (Box et al., 2015). Teachers can use formative assessment to focus ongoing development of the student's language. Formative assessment allows teachers to evaluate students in 'forming' their competencies and skills to assist them in monitoring performance (Singh et al., 2017). So, when a student shares a suggestion or makes mistakes, teachers must offer feedback to improve the student's language ability (Liu & Li, 2014). Summative assessment assists

teachers to summarize and measuring student attainment generally at the end of a course or unit of instruction. Both forms of assessment are important and necessary as they serve different purposes. Assessment helps teachers make decisions about curriculum, attainment of learning outcomes, grades, achievement, placement, instructional needs, and formation of skills and competencies of students. Teachers must incorporate assessment in the teaching and learning process as it can enhance or promote learning. Therefore, assessment must be formative and embedded with teaching. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010, p. 3) refer to assessment as an ongoing process encompassing many methodological techniques. These techniques include teachers' effort to appraise the students' response to a question and written work. Assessment is also defined as 'appraising or estimating the level or magnitude of some attribute of a person (Mousavi, 2009, p. 36). Hancock and Brooks-Brown (1994) opine assessment as an active process that enables the teacher and student to monitor the student's performance. Assessment has always been a concern in all educational institutions where one form of assessment is used. The question about the effectiveness of assessing student ability is of great concern.

## School-based Assessment

In Malaysia, the entry and introduction of school-based assessment (SBA) is in line with the National Philosophy of Education, an ongoing effort toward developing the potentials of individuals

in a holistic and integrated manner to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious. In line with current trends in assessment, SBA or PKBS (*Penilaian Kendalian Berasaskan Sekolah*) has been introduced into Malaysian schools under the New Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools. Now 'coursework' has been recommended for a few secondary school subjects. The Ministry of Education introduced the school-based oral assessment for both *Bahasa Malaysia* and English Language in 2003. It is a compulsory component for Secondary Five candidates taking the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) Examination. It gives all educational stakeholders the power to improve teaching and learning practices.

**Inception of CEFR-Aligned SBA**

The Malaysian Ministry of Education implemented *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* (KSSR) or the Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (SCPS) in 2011. The main purpose for introducing the curriculum was to set national standards and performance for all primary school level subjects, including ESL (Sidhu et al., 2018). A modular structure approach was introduced for the four language skills under the Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (SCPS). In addition, phonics approaches for basic literacy, language arts and penmanship were introduced. Furthermore, importance was placed on critical and creative thinking skills (CCTS) specifically for incorporating and fostering

higher-order thinking skills (Ministry of Education, 2017). The Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (SCPS) emphasised a learner-centred approach and focused on the 4Cs (communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration) of traversal skills required for 21st-century learning. The Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools also focused on the e-assessment through the Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools. Teachers should not just focus on assessing students' skills and competencies, but students must be taught to exhibit cognitive operations at higher levels. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) recognises the importance of developing and applying 21st-century curriculum and assessment (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). It aligns with the government's policy to enhance English Language mastery among teachers and students, exceeding the English Language curriculum benchmark internationally.

Consequently, this study investigates the in-service teachers' familiarisation of CEFR-aligned school-based assessment (SBA) in the Malaysian secondary ESL classroom. More specifically, it explored teachers' knowledge, understanding, and perceptions of the CEFR-aligned SBA. Therefore, this study will answer the following research questions: What is the in-service teachers' familiarisation and knowledge of CEFR-aligned SBA? What are in-service teachers' mastery of formative assessment? How is SBA implemented in the secondary ESL classroom? What are the challenges faced by the teachers in implementing SBA?

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**Past Studies on In-service teachers' Familiarisation of CEFR-aligned School-based Assessment**. Uri and Aziz (2018) carried out a study on CEFR implementation in Malaysia based on the teachers' awareness and the challenges. Their study reported that the introduction and implementation of CEFR in Malaysia began with forming the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC) in 2013. The Council extended help to the English Language Teaching Center (ELTC) to support the Ministry of Education to uplift the English language proficiency of Malaysian students. The Council introduced the CEFR framework into the education system and developed a roadmap for systematic English language education reforms. The need to align CEFR to the education system was crucial in the Malaysia Education Blueprint as it aims at enhancing the standards to meet international benchmarks (Azman, 2016). However, a study conducted by Malakolunthu and Hoon (2010) on teachers' perspectives of school-based assessment in Kuala Lumpur revealed that they need a proper grading guideline and the implementation procedures; in other words, they still lacked the information on implementing formative assessment skills. In addition, teachers shared that they lack basic knowledge of school-based Oral English Assessment (OEA).

The roadmap, implemented in 2013, was anticipated for completion in 2025 with the hope to deliver the best language education beginning from pre-school up to tertiary education (Uri & Aziz, 2018). The

findings of this study showed that teachers are familiar with CEFR and believe that implementing CEFR onto the Form 5 English syllabus and assessment can assist in upgrading students' English proficiency, thus enabling them to compete at a global level. Their findings also revealed that adopting the CEFR framework would solve the graduate employability issues in Malaysia. On the other hand, some teachers agreed that they have limited knowledge and exposure to the CEFR. Therefore, it may also slow down the CEFR implementation process in our educational context. Other related problems that surfaced with CEFR include teachers' English proficiency, teachers' cooperation, and willingness to learn and shortage of experts who can write and produce CEFR aligned textbooks, inadequate training and the mindset of teachers who believe that it is challenging and complicated to integrate CEFR in their instruction were reported in the study.

The CEFR-aligned SBA puts emphasis on both peer and self-assessment as one of the important components for developing autonomous language learners (Little, 2013). It is a holistic approach in which cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains are equally assessed. Thus, it can be concluded that many teachers view CEFR-aligned SBA as a transformative approach to assessment practices (Sidhu et al., 2018). The CEFR-aligned ESL secondary school curriculum restructure has proposed an innovative assessment system in the education system. The formative SBA complements the summative assessment putting forward the

significance of learner autonomy to ensure enhanced language learning.

Past studies in second language assessment abound; these have provided data empirically to support research on formative SBA. Formative assessments are deemed effective in facilitating student learning provided they are implemented in problem-based learning and inquiry-based (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Grob et al., 2017; Weiss & Belland, 2016). Teachers and students must collaborate in the formative assessment process. It would then allow the teachers to understand and monitor students' level of achievement and knowledge. Only then can teachers use the information obtained from the students' mastery of knowledge to get information about their strengths and weaknesses to adjust teaching and learning, thereby enhancing the instructional value of assessment. Details regarding students' strengths and weaknesses can reveal weaknesses in teaching and provide useful information to improve teaching. It may also suggest that students have not mastered a particular unit or syllabus content that is being assessed. It could be due to the weaknesses in instruction and thus necessitates implementing more effective teaching strategies (Cizek, 2010). The combination of formative assessment and summative assessment are well-practiced in some schools and educational institutions. However, teachers still lack the confidence to implement formative assessment and summative assessments successfully due to their inability to carry out the assessment process successfully, complexities involved

or fear that this approach may disrupt the teaching and learning process.

SBA's main focus and initiative under the CEFR-aligned ESL curriculum restructure on implementing formative assessment in secondary schools. Teachers were given a variety of strategies for incorporation during the teaching process to collect evidence related to student learning and help learners improve mastery of learning. As a result, teachers were exposed to some training guiding them on implementing the formative assessment. However, SBA has been implemented in the Malaysian school context. Therefore, not much empirical evidence can be gathered or shared on implementing the CEFR-aligned SBA in Malaysian secondary ESL classrooms.

Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the in-service teachers' familiarisation of CEFR-aligned school-based assessment (SBA) in the Malaysian secondary ESL classroom. More specifically, it explored teachers' knowledge, understanding, and perceptions of the CEFR-aligned SBA. The study also examined the SBA implementation and the challenges TESL teachers faced in embracing the CEFR-aligned SBA in their ESL classroom.

## METHOD

According to Creswell (2012), a research design is a blueprint known as the initial step in planning and organising the research process (Toledo-Pereyra, 2012) that regulate factors that might affect the validity of the finding. Therefore, an exploratory mixed-

method research design entailing two phases was employed (Creswell, 2012).

In-service teachers from twelve different schools participated in the study. The schools were selected randomly and located in Perak, Kuala Lumpur, Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Kedah, Johor and Sarawak. The twelve schools were labelled as School 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. Google survey approach was used in the study. Respondent confidentiality and anonymity are some of the advantages of a Google survey. In addition, such a survey can reach a larger number of respondents in a different location (Bourque & Fielder, 2003). Furthermore, the Google survey gives respondents flexibility as they can take their time to answer all the questions given. According to Punch (1994), respondents will give more honest responses, and the process avoids interviewer bias. Other advantages of the google survey are permitting quick and inexpensive data collection, as it only involves mailing expenses (Creswell, 2012), and this is the most economical form of data collection.

A group of individuals who have the same characteristics constitute a population (Creswell, 2012). The study population is selected from lower and upper secondary school's in-service ESL teachers in Malaysia. A total of 108 in-service teachers responded and were assigned numbers ranging from 1 to 108. The study is divided into two phases. In the first phase, which took a quantitative approach, the researcher administered a survey to 108 in-service teachers. In the study's second phase, which employed a qualitative approach, the researcher elicited in-service teachers' knowledge of CEFR-aligned school-based assessment. Therefore, samples that were selected need to be those who are experts in concern (Kruger & Stones, 1981) and who "understand the central phenomena" (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). The sample size selected was based on the study's judgement and purpose, as opined by Groenewald (2004). In this study, twelve in-service ESL teachers volunteered to be interviewed.

The survey employed in the study had two sections. The first section included respondent demographic background. Section B explored in-service teachers' familiarisation of CEFR based on a 4-point Likert Scale where a score of 1 reflected strong disagreement while a score of 4 indicated a firm agreement. The survey validity was checked by a panel of four experts— three TESL lecturers and one teacher who has been the master trainer for CEFR. The reliability of the survey was performed through a pilot study with 28 teachers from another district in Perak. The reliability of the survey was 0.954 based on the Cronbach alpha.

The researchers approached twelve in-service teachers from each school from the lower and upper levels. All the twelve teachers were interviewed. The interview was conducted to triangulate data gained from the survey instrument. Data obtained from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics using the SPSS (version 20), and the interview data were analysed thematically.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses findings from the survey. The survey data revealed in-service teachers' familiarisation of CEFR, in-service teachers' knowledge of CEFR-aligned SBA, goals of formative assessment and formative assessment strategies. In addition, the data obtained from interviews showed how in-service teachers implement SBA and the challenges that TESL teachers faced in embracing the CEFR-aligned SBA in their ESL classroom. The following Table 1 explains the in-service teachers' familiarisation of CEFR.

Table 1

*Means and standard deviations of in-service teachers' familiarisation of CEFR, CEFR-aligned SBA and mastery of formative assessment*

|  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| --- | --- | --- |
| In-service teachers' familiarisation of CEFR | 48.9630 | 5.21666 |
| In-service teachers' knowledge of CEFR-aligned SBA | 23.4352 | 3.72733 |
| Goals of Formative Assessment | 14.1852 | 1.96297 |
| Planning of formative assessment: Initial stage | 17.4167 | 2.20503 |
| Planning of formative assessment: Developmental stage | 17.2130 | 2.22581 |
| Planning of formative assessment: Closure | 17.6667 | 2.18320 |
| Formative assessment strategies | 17.6389 | 2.38554 |

These are seven main constructs based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The constructs were adopted from a manual on school-based assessment (SBA) prepared by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The formative assessment has been divided into four subheadings: goals of formative assessment, planning of formative assessment: initial stage, planning of formative assessment: developmental stage and planning of formative assessment: closure. The findings shown in Table 1 reveal that the in-service teachers strongly agree and had rather a good familiarisation of CEFR ($M = 48.96$, $SD = 5.21$). However, in-service teachers' knowledge of CEFR-aligned SBA is moderate ($M = 23.43$, $SD = 3.72$), indicating that they lack awareness and comprehension of CEFR-aligned SBA. In terms of understanding the goals of formative assessment ($M = 14.18$, $SD = 1.96$), in-service teachers' mastery and understanding of the formative assessment goal is still at the infancy level. As for the planning of formative assessment, the initial stage ($M = 17.41$, $SD = 2.205$) indicates that teachers can plan activities to incorporate formative assessment at the beginning of the instruction. Planning of formative assessment: developmental stage ($M = 17.21$, $SD = 2.225$) shows teachers can plan the activities to be assessed at the developmental stage fairly. Planning of

formative assessment: closure ($M$ = 17.66, $SD$ = 2.183) showed teachers could plan and assess students throughout instruction. Teachers' ability to construct formative assessment strategies ($M$ = 17.63 $SD$ = 2.385) revealed that assessing student performance during teaching permits them to monitor student learning.

**Implementation of SBA in the ESL classroom**

**A Range of Assessment Tools Employed**. This section reports on the SBA implementation by the in-service teachers in the secondary ESL classroom. For the third research objective on in-service teachers' implementation of SBA in the ESL classroom, data were elicited from the interviews conducted with the teachers. It is essential to determine the types of assessment tools in-service used to evaluate the ESL students' performance. Therefore,

further analysis was carried out to investigate the types of assessment tools in-service teachers employ to carry out the formative assessment in the classroom. Based on the interviews conducted with the in-service teachers, various assessment tools were employed, including portfolio assessment, peer-assessment, presentation, exercises, worksheet, pair-work, role-play, authentic assessment, and exercises from the textbook (Table 2). The findings revealed that in-service teachers emphasise both formative assessment and summative assessment. Teachers employed the assessment tools to allow students to show their mastery of learning based on the topics taught. Teachers can activate formative assessment to monitor students' progress during the teaching and learning process. Students can only develop and build sound knowledge and fluency in English, which they can apply to survive in life outside the classroom.

Table 2

*In-service teachers' use of assessment tools*

| Teacher | Types of assessment tools | Types of assessment methods | SBA related activities | Type of feedback |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 1 | Exercises, worksheets, listening module, role-play, dialogues, pair-work | - | Sourcing for materials based on topics given, two times a week | Marks, grading, written feedback |
| Teacher 2 | exercises from textbooks, additional worksheets, pair work, presentation, writing exercises | Peer assessment, authentic assessment | Hardly any homework is given | Written feedback, verbal feedback, |

Table 2 *(Continued)*

| Teacher | Types of assessment tools | Types of assessment methods | SBA related activities | Type of feedback |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 3 | Workbook, other authentic materials including newspaper, presentation | - | Work is given in the class, no homework | Written feedback, verbal feedback, grades |
| Teacher 4 | projects, mind-map, group discussion | Portfolio assessment | Work is given in the class, no homework | End unit test, written feedback and oral feedback, rubric (band 1–6) |
| Teacher 5 | Class task, exercises | Peer assessment, self-assessment, video, brochure, diorama, essay writing, creating advertisement, writing song | Work is given in the class, no homework | Constructive feedback, rubric, written feedback |
| Teacher 6 | Debate, activity books, worksheets, role-play, presentation | - | Homework | Verbal feedback, written feedback, |
| Teacher 7 | Reflections, role-play, | Portfolio assessment, peer evaluation | giving students take home homework or extra worksheets, homework is given after every lesson. | Grading, marks, written feedback, grade them using an offline system |
| Teacher 8 | Mind map | - | - | Oral feedback |
| Teacher 9 | Exercise, worksheets | - | - | Oral feedback |
| Teacher 10 | Discussion | - | rarely give homework | Oral feedback |

Table 2 *(Continued)*

| Teacher | Types of assessment tools | Types of assessment methods | SBA related activities | Type of feedback |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Teacher 11 | mind-map, exercises, worksheets, videos and PBL, exercises, worksheets a | - | - | Oral feedback, written feedback, grading |
| Teacher 12 | Worksheets, mind-maps/ I-think maps, individual/ pair/ group presentations, exercises, reflection | Peer evaluation | - | Oral feedback, grading, star rating |

**Peer-assessment.** Teachers have also provided written and oral feedback on students' performance in the class. Both formative assessment and summative assessment implementation in SBA is apparent based on the interviews with the teachers. Evidence on summative assessment implementation is apparent using worksheets and grading. Two teachers (Teacher 2 & 5) employed peer-assessment that is highly recommended by the CEFR-aligned ESL curriculum to encourage learner autonomy in the ESL classroom. Peer-assessment includes students providing judgments based on the work submitted by their peers. Peer assessment has been effective to assist the teachers to modify teacher assessment (Brown, 2004; Li, 2017; Liu & Li, 2014; Pope, 2001), on the other hand some scholars reject the notion of integrating peer assessment into formal assessment (Anderson, 1998; Cheng & Warren, 1999). The obtained findings concur with Li (2017) who carried out a study on 77 students involved in a peer assessment activity and reported that peer assessment can improve students' learning provided the students are given sufficient training. Matsuno (2017) also supports it, researching if peer assessment can be implemented employing FACET analysis. Findings showed that peer assessment is a practical approach and can be used as a supplementary assessment in class. One of the problems scholars faced using peer assessment is when the learners have to assess more than thirty peers, resulting in not assessing them thoroughly (Domingo et al., 2014). Teachers and scholars are doubtful in terms of the effectiveness of assessing students through peer assessment, but much research has proved that peer assessment is still beneficial in most of the educational contexts as it helps to promote student learning (Liu & Li, 2014; Pope, 2001) autonomy, motivation and responsibility (Brown, 2004; Pope, 2001).

**The Adaption of CEFR-aligned SBA.**
Teacher 8 expressed that she has limited knowledge and exposure to CEFR-aligned SBA. Despite training and exposure given, Teacher 8 is still unclear what exactly CEFR is. She admitted that she is unfamiliar with the CEFR-aligned SBA. She further mentioned that the adaption of CEFR-aligned SBA for English Language Education is still not taken seriously among the language teacher in Malaysia. Teachers still lack understanding and have lots of confusion about the method and the framework of the CEFR- aligned SBA. However, she knows SBA and finds SBA as one of the effective efforts towards developing the proficiency level of the English language among the students. SBA ensures the integration of all four language skills, and her role in encouraging students to participate in the language activities can help strengthen their understanding. She also mentioned that it is very important to teach students to connect ideas and concepts when they learn to increase their confidence. Findings obtained from Teacher A are in line with findings reported by Uri and Aziz (2018), as most teachers have restricted knowledge and little information on CEFR. However, Uri and Aziz (2018) also reported that the teachers know the significance and the importance of the CEFR framework to help learners enhance English proficiency levels. Policy developers were optimistic about the implementation of the CEFR despite the obstacles and challenges faced.

Other factors that could impede CEFR implementation include teachers' attitude and resistance towards CEFR, negative perception and lack of training (Uri & Aziz, 2018).

**Portfolio Assessment.** Teacher 4 explained in his interview how he implemented portfolio assessment for his students. He shared that he used portfolio assessment as one of the assessment methods to assess them. He also mentioned that to implement and assess students using the portfolio assessment, teachers must adopt it. He continued sharing those portfolios will allow students to exhibit their work, progress, and achievement. The teacher shared two reasons for using portfolio assessment: the core element of the SBA-aligned curriculum emphasised both formative and summative evaluation. The teacher added that he usually instructs his students to create portfolios for a particular unit, not throughout the whole year. He limits monthly exams and replaces them with portfolio assessments. Each task and activity given to the students will be compiled in the portfolio, and students were asked to record the scores obtained. The teacher mentioned that portfolios show cumulative efforts and learning of a student over time. He also shared that portfolio assessment is valuable as it offers data about student improvement and skill mastery. Teacher 4 explained:

> Teacher 4: I will have my students create portfolios of their work for a particular unit...
>
> I will try not to do monthly exams and will replace them using portfolio assessment...
>
> Portfolios show the cumulative efforts and learning of a particular student….

According to Singh and Samad (2013), portfolio assessment is becoming significant as an assessment strategy that gives a holistic view of student performance. It is also viewed as an alternative to the shortcomings of the traditional form of examination. Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991) stated that "portfolios offer a way of assessing learner learning that is different from the traditional methods. Portfolios allow the teachers to observe the students in a wider context which include students taking responsibility towards their own learning, taking risks, and developing creative alternatives to make judgments of their own performances."

Based on the interview conducted with Teacher 5, she shared her experience implementing SBA in her class. She explained that each student must complete at least one assessment for each unit taught throughout the year. All the units are from the English textbook. There are five unit plans that students must complete: People and Culture, Health, Social Issues, Environment and Science and Technology) to be taught in a year. Hence, upon teaching the unit, the students must complete an assessment consisting of two tasks in that unit. The assessment can be in a video form, brochure, diorama, essay writing, creating an advertisement, writing song, and so on. This assessment is completed apart from worksheets and exercises given during the lesson. The teacher will give written feedback and grade their work according to the rubrics. The best assessment will also be displayed in their classroom or language room. Teachers are the leading players to ensure the assessment process is carried out appropriately in class. Teachers' skills, knowledge, commitment, and competency are the main elements to ensure success in any assessment planned for the students (Malakolunthu & Hoon, 2010; Pantiwati et al., 2017).

According to Torrance (1995), past studies have shown that teachers plan and execute assessment practices well to differentiate the assessment tools and methods deemed important for their students. Chapman and Snyder Jr (2000) and Stillman (2001) divulged that SBA is valuable and powerful for teaching, learning and assessment; teachers must be equipped with the appropriate skills, knowledge, competencies, and commitment to implement it successfully. Findings from Malakolunthu and Hoon (2010) revealed that teachers have limited knowledge, including content, learning outcomes, assessing students and some ideas to carry out the Oral English assessment activities. However, they reported teachers' inability

to assess the students accordingly because of improper guidelines prepared by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, teachers find it challenging to implement SBA (Malakolunthu & Hoon, 2010).

Findings from the teachers' interviews showed that teachers put in their efforts to implement peer assessment, portfolio assessment and self-assessment under SBA as directed by the CEFR-aligned ESL curriculum that would help to enhance learner autonomy. The portfolios assist the teacher to observe students' learning over a period based on the units assigned. These portfolios contained a variety of unit plans based on the textbook that students must complete. The use of portfolio assessment would also benefit teachers in improving their teaching practice, allowing them to see new directions and developments in instruction that would benefit their students (Knight, 2002; Mohtar, 2010).

**CEFR-aligned SBA Activities for All the Language Skills.** To further confirm on teachers' understanding of the CEFR-aligned SBA, the teachers were also asked during the interview session to share how they implemented activities for all the language skills. The findings obtained from the interview are reflected in Table 3. All the teachers agreed that they carried out the activities for all the four skills in an integrated manner. The teachers shared they usually plan reading and listening activity together. The teacher instructed

the students to listen while their friends are reading. Students must ask questions after each paragraph and at the same time they have to come up with higher order thinking skill question (Teacher 3). All the students must bring their textbook so that they can complete the listening tasks. As for Teacher 6, she used the audio from British Council websites to conduct the listening activity because it covers many topics. She also shared that she ensures the topics selected from British Council reflect the unit plans of the textbook. Teacher 6 preferred selecting materials from British Council because they are authentic, and she also get the reading materials from websites like National Geography. As for the writing skill, teacher 6 instructs students to write essay based on books or book review. Teacher 7 shared that she prefers to use lot of worksheets and grade the students using the offline system. She also gives feedback on the work submitted to her so that the students can improve. All the teachers expressed that they aware of the need to assess the students formatively so that they can acquire the competency levels, and this is supported by Ashraf and Zolfaghari (2018). The assessment stipulated in the English language syllabus is in line with the competence level based on CEFR descriptor. So, teachers must grade students' competency levels based on CEFR descriptors.

Table 3

*SBA language activities conducted by teachers*

| Teacher/ Language skills | Listening skills | Speaking skills | Reading skills | Writing Skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 1 | listen to dialogues and answer the questions & listen to songs on YouTube that relates to the topic learnt | group discussion to express an opinion about general issue & pairing dialogues about one's routines | identify true false statements & match the words or phrases with the correct meaning. | Response to an email from a friend & write a guided composition with the note's expansion. |
| Teacher 2 | Listen to conversations, advertisements, announcements | group discussion and talk about real life events | True/ False, identify title/ sub-title/main ideas | Rearrange paragraphs, guided essay (WH-questions) |
| Teacher 3 | Listen to the audio, be interview, talk, song and answer questions on it | Based on topics, relate to past experiences, with good fluent proficiency | A text is given & while reading, asks questions after each paragraph, applying hots questions | Prepare mind map, write accordingly with Wh-questions, write based on experience with a good flow of grammar & lexical |
| Teacher 4 | listen and sing songs with action | Group discussion, giving and sharing their opinions on a given topic, brainstorming and mind map to help them for the points they could speak about | process the information and ideas, | read and write short response |
| Teacher 5 | listening to the speech, all the other friends will write feedback | impromptu speech | think and write their idea | Idea rush |

Table 3 *(Continued)*

| Teacher/Language skills | Listening skills | Speaking skills | Reading skills | Writing Skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 6 | use audio from the British Council websites to conduct listening activity because it covers many topics | impromptu speech, debate, and role-play interview | Authentic reading text from the British Council websites and text from websites like National Geography | essay and sometimes book or movie reviews. |
| Teacher 7 | listen to songs, poems, and texts. Students then answer questions related to the listening audio. | Use role-play, group discussion and dialogues based on the topic | linear and non-linear text. Non-linear texts like table, mind map and graph. | Give the short answer and long answer response based on the topic and task given. |
| Teacher 8 | - | Role-play | read and transfer information from non-linear to linear text and vice versa. | - |
| Teacher 9 | students listen to the songs and sing to the lyrics (pronunciation) | share their personal experience related to failure in front of the class | sing while reading the lyrics. Discussion of new vocabulary and their meanings before singing the song | short responses about the songs and related issues found in the song |
| Teacher 10 | listen and sing songs with action. | group discussion, talk about actual life events | Read and answer short-structured questions | read and write a short response |

Table 3 *(Continued)*

| Teacher/ Language skills | Listening skills | Speaking skills | Reading skills | Writing Skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 11 | listen to conversations and descriptions | presentation of PBL, projects | read a text and answer WH-questions and short structured questions | writing reports, letters, descriptions, story |
| Teacher 12 | Questions in a textbook, listening activities from websites such as English teens, listen to songs and complete the lyrics by filling in the blanks | individual presentation on things they like to do or personal experience, events | Reading comprehension questions, short responses, guessing meanings | group writing, rearranging jumbled-up words to form a sentence, joining sentences, rearranging jumbled-up sentences to form a paragraph, using conjunctions and cohesive devices |

Teacher 1 also mentioned that she usually shares the listening module for the listening skills so that the students can practice regularly at home at their own pace on weekends. As for the speaking skills, Teacher 1 instructs students to do role-play in groups and get the students to have dialogue in pairs to exchange ideas and talk about the topic.

Teacher 1: For listening teachers will share the listening, module so that the students can have regular practice at home on weekends, and for speaking, the students will do role-play in groups and dialogue in pairs to talk about the topic discussed.

All the teachers agree that the purpose of integrating all four language skills is to assist the students in understanding meaning in a variety of familiar contexts. Students need to be exposed to deliver and communicate ideas; opinions based on familiar topics outlined in the unit plan. When students are exposed to reading activities, it allows expanding and exploring ideas for personal development. Teachers must prepare the activities to allow learners to appreciate and teach values and patriotism through language activities. All these aspects can be achieved through the tasks and activities planned for teaching and learning purposes. Only then can the curriculum develop the students to fulfil the requirements demanded by the workforce.

**Assessment Tools.** The data presented in Table 2 indicate teachers' ability to identify assessment tools and assessment methods that they can use to evaluate their students. Some of the assessment tools used include exercises, worksheets, role play, dialogues, pair work, mind map, discussion, debate presentation, reflections and class tasks in line with cross-curricular elements of the English language curriculum. In addition, teachers are aware of the assessment methods they can use to evaluate the students, namely portfolio assessment, authentic assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment. Finally, teachers can use different assessment methods to give learners a firm idea of the learning objective (Stiggins, 2005).

**Challenges and Concerns Expressed by the In-service Teachers in Implementing CEFR-Aligned SBA.** This section describes the challenges in-service teachers encounter during SBA implementation. Interview data shed light on some of the problems and challenges faced by the teachers in the implementation process. Some of the challenges and concerns are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Challenges and concerns of the teachers implementing CEFR-aligned SBA*

| Teacher/ concern | Time constraint | Students' negative attitude, poor attendance of students | The facilities, especially the audio for the listening activities | The understanding of SBA from the parents is too limited, parents' preference towards grades (traditional examination) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 1 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Teacher 2 | ✓ | | | |
| Teacher 3 | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Teacher 4 | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Teacher 5 | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Teacher 6 | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Teacher 7 | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Teacher 8 | ✓ | | | |
| Teacher 9 | | ✓ | | |
| Teacher 10 | | | | |
| Teacher 11 | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Teacher 12 | ✓ | | | |

Table 4 *(Continued)*

| Teacher/ concern | Student involvement in the class activities, | Teachers' workload | Lack of training | Availability of materials/ resources/ Access to Internet | Lack of confidence, motivation among teachers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 1 | | | | | |
| Teacher 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Teacher 3 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Teacher 4 | | | | | |
| Teacher 5 | | ✓ | | | |
| Teacher 6 | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Teacher 7 | | | | ✓ | |
| Teacher 8 | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Teacher 9 | | | | | |
| Teacher 10 | | | | | ✓ |
| Teacher 11 | | | | | |
| Teacher 12 | | | | | |

**Time Constraint.** Table 4 clearly show the challenges, problems and concerns face by the teachers. Teachers know the importance of implementing the CEFR-aligned SBA for improving student proficiency but faced some constraints. Teachers 1 and 8 shared that time constraint impedes implementation of the CEFR-aligned SBA because she cannot complete the units stipulated in the syllabus. As for Teacher 2, he shared problems faced in terms of time constraints to carry out teaching and learning activities; students' involvement in the activities conducted, heavy workload that demotivates Teacher 2 to cover all the topics and lack of training and exposure to how CEFR-aligned SBA can be implemented successfully. Teacher 9 shares that her students are not enthusiastic. Her students used to copy their friends' work and claimed they had attempted the tasks given.

**Students' Attitude and Lack of Support from the Parents.** Not only that, Teacher 1 mentioned that students' attitude towards SBA is negative as they feel SBA is not as important as the previous examination. As for Teacher 4 and 5, both divulged that students' attitude leads to negative opinions on school-based assessment. Students' poor attendance and low cooperation are the challenges faced by Teachers 4 and 5. When the teachers assign tasks, the students are reluctant to attend class, cooperate out of shyness and are not confident. Thus, it is very challenging to

assess such students, especially in the oral task. Besides that, SBA is time-consuming as it drains teachers' energy. Furthermore, she mentioned that parents do not support SBA as they lack understanding. Parents were very comfortable with the traditional examinations that give grades to students to measure student progress. Teacher 6 has attended various workshops and seminars based on CEFR and SBA, but she still lacks confidence in assessing the students by herself. It is because preparing the activities and tasks in the classroom takes much time and also because parents and students from Chinese schools do not understand the importance of SBA, so it is often not being emphasised. They are more concerned with high stakes examinations such as the SPM. As for Teacher 7, he teaches in a rural school. So, his students are very weak in English due to the lack of exposure. They also do not get much help from their parents, who are not so literate. They also do not have access to the Internet. Teacher 9 divulged that the student has a negative attitude towards the tasks she usually implements in the class. She also feels each worksheet might not cater to the individual's proficiency.

**Availability of Resources to Implement CEFR-aligned SBA.** One more problem was the facilities available, especially the audio availability for the listening activities. Teacher 1 said she could not conduct listening activities due to the unavailability of the audios needed for listening. Teacher 3 has a different view in terms of the challenges she faces. Teacher 3 mentioned that she must use the materials required based on the student's ability. Most of the materials are extracted from workbooks, textbooks, and other relevant, authentic materials. However, the challenges are more as compared to the previous assessment. First and foremost, the textbook imposed by the curriculum development centre to use in classrooms does not reflect the students' ability. Teachers often refer to other simplified versions or better materials that suit the students' abilities. Teacher 3 believes that the textbook is a white elephant. Other than that, it is the time, the platform, facilities needed to implement the CEFR-aligned SBA, teaching workload, teachers who do not collaborate and share knowledge and students' negative attitude toward CEFR-aligned SBA.

**Limited Knowledge to Implement CEFR-aligned SBA.** According to Teacher 8, she is unprepared and not ready to implement SBA because she has a limited understanding of the rationale of implementing SBA. Teacher 8 shares that she also lacks confidence in conducting the assessment due to a lack of knowledge. The procedure of SBA implementation is remarkably complex as it involves much clerical work such as documentation, filing, and data entry. According to Teacher 10, he sometimes feels lost as this is a new evaluation system. Even though guidelines are given, not all can be applied 100% in the classroom setting. Teachers would usually adopt and adapt the best approach to get the desired results. Speaking lessons can be challenging as most

pupils are quite reluctant to participate in them.

The challenges and concerns expressed by the teachers in this study align with those in Darmi et al. (2017) as they showed teachers shared different views on CEFR; some of the teachers were uncertain how CEFR can assist in improving the proficiency courses, and some teachers disclosed positive attitude towards CEFR. It was reported that about 200 teachers in Malaysia agree that they are familiar with the CEFR concept (Uri & Aziz, 2018). However, this group of teachers also displayed a high level of anxiety and concern over CEFR implementation in Malaysia because they lacked information and were unsure of their roles in the changes (Don, 2015; Li, 2017; Omar & Sinnasamy, 2017; Lo, 2018). Overall, the in-service teachers faced some challenges and problems implementing CEFR to teach English; nevertheless, they also revealed an excellent familiarity with CEFR and moderate knowledge of CEFR-aligned SBA.

## CONCLUSION

The main reason for introducing and implementing CEFR-aligned SBA was to facilitate and prepare the students to upgrade and improve their English proficiency to use and apply the language globally. The CEFR-aligned SBA aligns with government policy to ensure English language mastery among students and teachers and benchmark the English language curriculum. The findings of this study highlight the need for teachers to embrace assessment for learning and

assessment as learning to complement the assessment of learning to ascertain the extent of student learning. Teachers also understood the requirement of the global world, which requires the students to have a good mastery of the English language that would enable them to function, and this could be realised through the adoption and reformation of the English curriculum and adoption of CEFR.

Furthermore, some teachers are aware of the integration of CEFR-aligned SBA. However, some also expressed their uncertainties of incorporating the CEFR-aligned SBA due to their inability to accept the new shift toward assessment for learning. Teachers' incompetence in understanding the revised CEFR-aligned SBA may contribute to hindering the smooth implementation of CEFR. Teachers' knowledge of the types of assessment tools to use for assessment can assist them in developing language skills among students. The finding also suggested that teachers provide oral and written feedback on students' work based on the CEFR-aligned SBA. Other factors that hinder smooth implementation of CEFR-aligned SBA include time constraints, teachers' workload, searching for simplified resources, lack of training and awareness that could hinder the whole process of implementing the CEFR-aligned SBA. Assessment of students should be ongoing to allow students to improve their performance. A new culture is now evolving, and the demand for education requires students' broad spectrum of competencies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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