

# Adopting CEFR for English Language Learning in Indonesia to support 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

Alfi Hidayatu Miqawati<sup>1</sup>, Fitri Wijayanti<sup>2</sup>, Titik Ismailia<sup>3</sup>

{alfi\_hidayatu@polije.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, fitri@polije.ac.id<sup>2</sup>, titik@polije.ac.id<sup>3</sup>}

Politeknik Negeri Jember, Jember, Indonesia<sup>1,2,3</sup>

**Abstract.** English is taught from secondary to tertiary levels of study in Indonesia and it is pivotal to establish a framework that is able to integrate foreign language mastery and the students' communication. This study aimed at discussing the strengths and weaknesses of adopting CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) in the context of ELT in Indonesian vocational higher education. It deployed a library study and focused on analysing several previous findings related to CEFR and its implementation. The findings showed different results about CEFR implementation. Several studies mentioned that CEFR is an effective tool for curriculum guideline, assessment, language proficiency level descriptor, and material development and is best suited to meet the students' needs. Meanwhile, the others stated that CEFR needs several adjustments to be used in the Indonesian context. Therefore, a more comprehensive discussion about CEFR should be carried out, especially in vocational education context.

**Keywords:** CEFR, Language Teaching and Learning, Vocational Education.

## 1 Introduction

The world develops and moves quickly and dynamically and human beings must be able to keep up with the times and civilizations. Skills needed to be mastered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are quite different from the skills that need to be mastered in previous centuries. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, humans are required to master a variety of skills which include creativity, divergent thinking, critical thinking, working in teams (especially in heterogeneous groups), working autonomously, developing cognitive and interpersonal skills, mastering social competence, and society, becoming global and national and responsible citizens, recognizing and respecting diversity, being able to communicate using mother tongue and foreign languages, being competent in mathematics, social, and technology, and possessing accountability and leadership [1]. Meanwhile, the US-Based Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) emphasizes that the framework for 21st century learning includes 4Cs, namely Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity [2].

The communication referred to in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is the ability to communicate in conveying ideas clearly and effectively [3]. As a part of a global society in the 21st century, must be able to master these skills, one of which is being able to communicate using their mother

tongue and foreign language (English). English is the most commonly used language around the globe. As a foreign language in Indonesia, English is taught from secondary to tertiary levels of study to promote students' proficiency in English so that they are able to communicate with people around the globe and meet job requirement standards.

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is an internationally recognized standard for describing and determining the level of ability or proficiency in a foreign language, especially English. Based on the reference from the CEFR, a person's English proficiency can be described in several levels, namely A1 and A2 (Basic User), B1 and B2 (Independent User), and C1 and C2 (Proficient User) [4]. The use of international standards in determining the level of English proficiency is very important to do so that English language skills can be measured properly. According to [5], the presence of the CEFR is very important and provides significant changes including avoiding the "Tower of Babel" language learning that is only done to get scores and certificates without being able to use the target language (English) properly or contextually. [6] added that this framework can measure the extent to which students can learn the language and can also determine at what level students can learn the language. In this regard, in terms of language learning materials, it can be adjusted to the level of students. Hence, CEFR in learning English can be implemented based on the level of language proficiency where in the end students will be able to use English well based on the context they face.

The application of the CEFR reference to learning English in the classroom requires a fairly complex commitment and preparation. In this case, support and cooperation from various parties are needed so that the learning process can be carried out optimally, such as the availability of quality infrastructure and learning media. Teaching staff/lecturers must also pay attention to many things in implementing CEFR in learning English. In this regard, [7] explained that the CEFR is a basic reference for learning a second or foreign language that elaborates on the linguistic syllabus, curriculum, various forms of text, and textbooks. In addition, there are several principles that must also be considered in language learning, namely language activities, language processes, text, language learning domain, language learning strategies and tasks [4] and CEFR can be used to guide teaching and learning. In this case, when these principles are integrated, the learning process will run well so that students can use English appropriately.

In detail, the use of CEFR in English learning will provide opportunities for students and teachers to apply 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in the classroom. First, communication skill as a part of 21<sup>st</sup> century skill can be mastered through effective speaking activity in the classroom. Speaking skills are included in the CEFR, where students focus on their natural activities and they play a more active role and the role of teachers/lecturers in the classroom is also limited. In addition, this will encourage students to be critical in thinking. Students are also taught to be more creative because with their active participation, students become independent and they can hone more skills in working together [8]. In other words, several 21<sup>st</sup> century skills like communication, critical thinking, and creativity can be achieved by adopting CEFR in the teaching and learning activity. Collaboration with peers can also be done when the students carry out their tasks or projects. Through the CEFR, students are directly involved in their thinking processes, which is in accordance with the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning paradigm that emphasizes student independence, project-based learning, and student-centered learning. In implementing it, educators (teachers/lecturers) may apply new and innovative teaching strategies, such as questioning, problem solving, project-based learning, simulations, discussions, and role play based on complex and difficult tasks that require higher-order thinking skills [9].

CEFR adaptation in foreign language learning has been carried out in several countries whose residents are not native speakers of English. In fact, there are several contexts where CEFR is not only focused on learning English, but also other foreign languages such as Arabic and other foreign languages. The context of CEFR adaptation is not only limited to one level of education, but also varies from primary, secondary, and higher education. Several researchers have also analysed the advantages and disadvantages of implementing CEFR at a certain level or level of education. This article focused on discussing the results of the analysis of research findings that had been carried out by previous researchers to obtain a comprehensive discussion regarding CEFR in English language learning in Indonesia.

## **2 Method**

This study was library study. The data collection technique used in this research was documentation. Data analysis technique in this research was descriptive analysis technique. In this case, the data collected were then analysed descriptively. The primary data sources of this research were documents or papers published and were in the form of information, ideas, data and written evidence in the form of policies, theories or empirical findings regarding English language learning, CEFR, and 21st century learning. The papers were published in both national and international journals.

## **3 Results and Discussion**

The adaptation of CEFR in English language teaching curriculum is not officially stipulated by the government of Indonesia, both in primary and secondary as well as tertiary level of education. However, in general, [10] revealed several challenges and considerations if CEFR needed to be implemented in primary and secondary education in Indonesia. At least, there were four issues discussed in his findings. First was the learners' objectives of learning English. Many were found that learning English was just to obtain a diploma or certificate, not to master the language or able to communicate with others using English. Second and third were related to curriculum and professional development. The government has implemented Curriculum 2013 and it has its own goals. Professional human resources and their integrity is also needed to implement CEFR. Last was adjustment of materials that could meet the needs and culture of Indonesia. Since the focus of the study was on the implementation of CEFR in primary and secondary education, thus, it can be further evaluated. The shift of curriculum from Curriculum 2013 to Outcome-Based Curriculum offers a possibility for teachers to use CEFR in designing their curriculum based on their needs to gain students' optimum competence.

In the context of higher education settings, several studies have shown how CEFR was adopted to design different courses and tests. [11] explored CEFR levels and ICT-competencies as shown in grammar courses syllabuses. They analyzed as many as fifteen grammar course syllabuses from eight private and public universities. The syllabuses were identified as Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced Grammar. The CEFR levels were A1-B1 (basic grammar), A1-B2 (intermediate grammar), and B2-C2 (advanced grammar). However, there are still works to do to gain an ideal implementation of CEFR standard because the CEFR bands have not solely incorporated in all of the grammar syllabuses. From this situation, it can be inferred that a

standardized content of grammar syllabus can be designed by following the descriptors provided in CEFR.

Another implementation of CEFR in higher education setting was its use in test development. [12] analysed listening test specification in listening courses of several universities in Jakarta and West Java. His findings showed that the test specification was equivalent from the CEFR A1 to C1 levels. The listening skill test was divided into three groups, Basic Listening, Intermediate Listening, and Advanced Listening. Each of them consisted of specifications for the mid-semester and end-semester exams. In addition to what had been done by [12], [13] also measured graduate candidates' English proficiency by administering TOEIC. By doing so, they were able to know the graduate candidate CEFR level. The result showed that the levels varied from A1 to C1. In this context, it can be concluded that CEFR is useful to help teachers develop their test specification and measure their students' language skills.

[14] used CEFR for extensive reading activities and language program evaluation. [13] focused on adapting CEFR for boosting students' reading skill through extensive reading activities. As mentioned in CEFR, extensive reading is defined as a leisure activity and the materials used are based on students' interests. Based on CEFR framework, there is a number of reading sources that students can choose, such as newspaper, poems, short stories, travel diaries, biographies, novels, etc. In the study, they noted that the provision of various texts based on CEFR could build the students' critical reading, positive attitude, and self-confidence. They also perceived the activity positively because they got much information related to the texts they read and they had freedom to select their reading materials. From these findings, it can be seen that CEFR can also be used for developing and selecting materials as well as creating a program or an activity for our students.

Due to the CEFR's widespread implementation in educational systems, its strengths on global policymaking are now more apparent. The discussion of the adaptation of CEFR in many contexts is in line with [15] who claimed that the CEFR played a pivotal role in English language teaching and learning and was a useful tool for curriculum guidelines, English language courses, assessments, and describing language proficiency levels. Besides that, a recent study by [16] revealed participants' understanding that the CEFR is an essential and beneficial guideline for English language teaching classrooms. Not only that, according to [17], the CEFR aims to create a shared meta-language that could be used to talk about objectives and assessments, to encourage practitioners to think about their practices by considering their context, and to reach a consensus on common reference points. In conclusion, dealing with its usefulness of CEFR, the teachers are required to apply it in their teaching practice effectively.

Despite being widely used, the implementations of CEFR in the classroom instruction get criticized. The first is about confusing descriptors for each level. [18] argued that each descriptor limited the description of the learners' performance and is based on teachers' views, not Second Language acquisition (SLA). The second criticism is the difficulty of integrating the CEFR into language curriculum. [19] claimed that the adaptation of the document in the classroom was unsuccessful because it was not easy to understand. These findings emphasized the need to deploy CEFR in more flexible and comprehensive ways.

To ensure that the adaptation of the CEFR is truly beneficial to the learners, educators, policymakers, and school administration must collaborate. They should examine how they adapt

CEFR and convey the policy related to the deployment of CEFR in the teaching learning process. If they understand about the concepts of CEFR, together with the descriptors, CEFR will be deployed easily and comprehensively in teaching learning process. According to [20], language instruction should be focused on teaching students how to express themselves, act in real-life circumstances, and complete a variety of tasks. With this mind, it enables the students to meet the international standard of English mastery. As the result, the students are ready to compete internationally with the other international students.

#### **4 Conclusion and Suggestion**

CEFR has been adopted as a useful tool in many language teaching contexts. In this paper, several adaptations of CEFR in English Language Teaching in Indonesia were discussed. A number of papers were studied and it was found out that CEFR possessed a significant role in designing school curriculum, developing test specification, conducting assessment, developing materials, and measuring students' ability. However, the discussion was limited to the contexts of secondary schools and academic higher education in Indonesia. Few studies had revealed the adaptation of CEFR in Indonesian vocational education. Therefore, discussion about the implementation and adaptation of CEFR in vocational education contexts should be carried out.

#### **Acknowledgments**

This publication was supported by Grant Number SP. 533/PL17.4/PG/2022 Date 2 June 2022 from DIPA Politeknik Negeri Jember. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of Politeknik Negeri Jember.

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