

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ADAPTING CEFR-BASED ENGLISH CURRICULUM IN INDONESIA

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Abstrak - Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tantangan dan peluang dalam mengadaptasi Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) ke dalam kurikulum bahasa Inggris di Indonesia. Meskipun CEFR telah diakui secara luas sebagai kerangka komprehensif untuk pembelajaran dan penilaian bahasa di Eropa serta beberapa negara Asia, penerapannya di Indonesia masih terbatas dan belum bersifat resmi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, penelitian ini menganalisis berbagai literatur dari jurnal nasional dan internasional yang membahas penerapan CEFR dalam konteks pendidikan di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat tantangan utama, yaitu: (1) ketidaksesuaian antara tujuan pembelajaran siswa dengan sasaran CEFR yang sering kali berfokus pada sertifikasi daripada kompetensi komunikatif; (2) kurangnya pengakuan terhadap CEFR dari pihak perancang kurikulum dan pembuat kebijakan karena masih berpedoman pada Kurikulum 2013 dan Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia (KKNI); (3) keterbatasan kesiapan profesional guru serta minimnya pelatihan dalam menerapkan CEFR secara efektif; dan (4) ketidaksesuaian budaya dan konteks lokal terhadap bahan ajar berbasis CEFR. Namun demikian, CEFR juga menawarkan peluang besar untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan bahasa Inggris di Indonesia dengan menyediakan tolok ukur yang jelas terhadap tingkat kemahiran, mendukung standar internasional, serta mendorong pendekatan pembelajaran yang komunikatif dan berpusat pada peserta didik. Oleh karena itu, adaptasi CEFR di Indonesia memerlukan persiapan yang matang, pelatihan guru yang memadai, serta penyesuaian konteks agar selaras dengan tujuan pendidikan nasional dan nilai-nilai budaya Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Adaptasi CEFR, kurikulum bahasa Inggris, Indonesia, pendidikan bahasa, kesiapan guru.

Abstract - This study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities in adapting the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to the English curriculum in Indonesia. Although CEFR is widely recognized as a comprehensive framework for language learning and assessment across Europe and several Asian countries, its implementation in Indonesia remains limited and unofficial. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research analyzes relevant literature from national and international journals discussing the application of CEFR within the Indonesian educational context. The findings reveal four main challenges: (1) the mismatch between students' learning objectives and CEFR goals, which often prioritize certification over communicative competence; (2) the limited recognition of CEFR by curriculum designers and policymakers due to the existing national frameworks such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (KKNI); (3) the lack of professional teacher readiness and ongoing support to implement CEFR effectively; and (4) the cultural and contextual incompatibility of CEFR-based teaching materials with Indonesian learners. Despite these challenges, CEFR offers potential opportunities to enhance English language education in Indonesia by providing a clear benchmark for proficiency levels, supporting international standards, and encouraging communicative, learner-centered teaching approaches. Therefore, its adaptation requires comprehensive preparation, teacher training, and contextual modification to align with Indonesia's educational goals and cultural values.

Keywords: CEFR adaptation, English curriculum, Indonesia, language education, teacher readiness.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has long been recognized as an international language that serves as a medium of global communication across various nations. In some countries, English functions as a

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formal or second language, while in Indonesia, it remains a foreign language (Crystal, 2018; Mason & Smith, 2021; Foulkes, 2020). Despite this status, English has been established as one of the compulsory subjects in Indonesian schools and was once a major component of the national examination. This recognition highlights the importance of English as a key subject that students must master in order to compete in the global era. The inclusion of English in the national curriculum demonstrates the government's concern for foreign language education and its role in preparing students to engage in international communication (Khanh, 2021; Aji, 2023).

However, the teaching and learning of English in Indonesia still face numerous challenges. One of the main difficulties lies in the fact that English is rarely used outside the classroom. Students tend to use English only during lessons, and even then, in limited contexts. This lack of a supportive linguistic environment makes it difficult for learners to acquire communicative competence effectively (Ng et al., 2019; Byram, 2020; Becerra-Posada et al., 2022). Language acquisition requires consistent exposure and use in authentic situations, but such opportunities remain scarce in the Indonesian context. Consequently, the process of English learning often becomes passive and examination-oriented rather than communicative.

In response to the global development of English language education, Indonesia has implemented various curriculum reforms, such as the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013), which emphasizes character education, student-centered learning, and the integration of values into learning outcomes. Under this curriculum, teachers are encouraged to design creative and meaningful English lessons. According to Hamidah et al. (2020), students respond positively to the 2013 Curriculum, particularly in English subjects, because it promotes not only cognitive understanding but also affective and behavioral assessment. Nevertheless, the success of the curriculum implementation varies across schools depending on contextual factors such as facilities, teacher competence, and institutional support. Schools with adequate resources can maximize learning activities, while those with limited facilities often struggle to implement the curriculum effectively.

Beyond the 2013 Curriculum, several educational institutions in Indonesia, especially private and international schools, have begun to adapt the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a model for teaching and assessing English proficiency. CEFR provides a standardized framework that describes language proficiency levels from A1 to C2, focusing on communicative competence across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Foley (2019) notes that CEFR has become the most widely adopted framework for language teaching and assessment globally due to its clarity, flexibility, and adaptability to local contexts.

Several Asian countries have successfully localized the CEFR framework. For instance, Japan developed its own version known as CEFR-J, which adjusts the descriptors to fit the linguistic and cultural context of Japanese learners. Similarly, Vietnam introduced the MOET (Ministry of Education and Training) standards aligned with CEFR levels, while Malaysia launched the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC) and later integrated CEFR into its Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) in 2013. These examples illustrate that while CEFR serves as a global reference, its successful implementation often requires contextual adaptation to align with national educational goals and sociocultural realities.

In Indonesia, the adaptation of CEFR presents both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, aligning English education with CEFR can enhance international comparability, improve assessment consistency, and encourage communicative competence rather than rote memorization. On the other hand, challenges arise from differences in educational infrastructure, teacher readiness, and students' exposure to English outside school (Pratiwi et al., 2020). Teachers need professional development programs that equip them with a clear understanding of CEFR descriptors, learning outcomes, and assessment strategies. Furthermore, policy alignment is essential to ensure that CEFR-based implementation supports, rather than replaces, the national curriculum.

The opportunity for Indonesia lies in integrating CEFR as a reference for curriculum design, language assessment, and teacher development within the framework of Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes flexibility and learner autonomy. As English continues to play an increasingly important role in global communication, adapting CEFR-based approaches could support Indonesian students in achieving internationally recognized proficiency levels. However, this process requires careful policy planning, adequate training, and contextual modification to ensure that CEFR serves the needs of Indonesian learners effectively (Sari, 2020; Febriyanti, 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an internationally recognized framework developed by the Council of Europe as part of the Language Learning for European Citizens project conducted between 1989 and 1996. The main goal of this framework was to create a standardized basis for developing language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, and textbooks across Europe (Council of Europe, 2001). CEFR provides a comprehensive description of what language learners should be able to do at different stages of language proficiency, ranging from level A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient user). In November 2001, the European Council Resolution officially endorsed the CEFR as a reference instrument for evaluating and validating language proficiency in European countries (Pham, 2023).

According to Sudaryanto and Widodo (2020), CEFR serves as a broad European framework that integrates key aspects of language learning, teaching, and assessment. It provides a set of common standards that can be adopted by language educators and policymakers to ensure consistency in learning outcomes. The framework is not only applicable to European contexts but is also valuable for non-European countries seeking to align their English language education with international standards. Consequently, the CEFR has gained increasing attention in multilingual nations, including Indonesia, as a model that supports both national education goals and global language competence (Fauziah, 2012).

Further emphasizes that one of the key strengths of the CEFR lies in its flexibility and universality. It can function as a tool to measure the proficiency level of foreign language learners and as a framework for constructing foreign language learning systems at an international level. Additionally, CEFR is particularly beneficial for multilingual societies, as it accommodates linguistic diversity and supports the development of cross-linguistic competence. Therefore, implementing CEFR in Indonesia offers opportunities for aligning English language teaching with international benchmarks while respecting the nation's multilingual and multicultural characteristics.

From a pedagogical perspective, CEFR provides a comprehensive guide for planning, implementing, and evaluating language teaching and learning processes. As Arslan and Özenici (2017) argue, CEFR represents a new paradigm in the field of foreign language education by offering a unified framework that defines learning objectives, organizes teaching content, and determines appropriate teaching and assessment methods. At the tertiary education level, it provides a structured foundation for designing curricula that are coherent and competency-based. This framework encourages educators to develop learning materials and assessment tools that correspond to specific proficiency levels and communicative goals.

Moreover, CEFR distinguishes itself from traditional English language learning models through its action-oriented and sociocognitive approach. The framework views language learners as “social agents” who use language to perform meaningful tasks in real-life contexts (Council of Europe, 2001). This orientation reflects a shift from grammar-based instruction toward a focus on communicative competence and language use in authentic situations. Weir (2005, as cited in Béréšová, 2017) explains that CEFR incorporates sociocognitive principles, highlighting the interaction between cognitive processes and social contexts in language acquisition. Such an approach acknowledges that effective language learning involves not only internal linguistic knowledge but also social engagement and purposeful communication.

In the context of Indonesia, adapting the CEFR framework presents both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, the opportunity lies in its potential to modernize English curriculum design by emphasizing functional language use, learner autonomy, and competency-based assessment. CEFR can also facilitate the international comparability of English proficiency levels, which is increasingly relevant in higher education and professional certification. On the other hand, the challenges include aligning CEFR descriptors with local educational goals, training teachers to interpret and apply CEFR-based standards, and ensuring equitable access to resources and exposure needed to achieve higher proficiency levels.

Therefore, the implementation of CEFR in Indonesia should not be a mere adoption of a European framework, but rather an adaptation process contextualized to local linguistic realities, educational infrastructures, and sociocultural needs. This requires collaborative efforts between policymakers, educators, and researchers to design a localized CEFR-based curriculum that is both globally aligned and nationally relevant (Arslan & Özenici, 2017; Sudaryanto & Widodo, 2020; Béréšová, 2017).

3. METHOD

The implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Indonesia has not yet been formally regulated or endorsed by the national government. Although CEFR has been internationally recognized as a comprehensive framework for assessing and teaching foreign languages, its application within the Indonesian education system remains limited. Only a few schools, universities, and private educational institutions have voluntarily adopted CEFR-based principles as a reference for designing English language curricula and assessments. These institutions tend to use CEFR to align their English programs with international proficiency standards, particularly in contexts where English serves as a medium of instruction or academic requirement (Sudaryanto & Widodo, 2020; Zein, 2017).

This study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities involved in adapting the CEFR-based English curriculum in Indonesia. It seeks to identify key issues that arise during the process of implementation, including institutional readiness, teacher competence, curriculum alignment, and contextual adaptation to local educational settings. Given that CEFR has not been officially integrated into the national curriculum, understanding these challenges is essential to assess its potential role and relevance within Indonesia's multilingual and multicultural education system.

A qualitative descriptive approach is employed in this study to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The research relies on documentary and literature analysis, focusing on academic journals, policy reports, and previous studies published by both national and international sources. Through this literature-based inquiry, the paper examines the patterns, constraints, and possibilities of integrating CEFR principles into English language teaching and learning in Indonesia.

The qualitative nature of the study allows for a holistic interpretation of data, emphasizing the contextual factors influencing CEFR adaptation rather than quantifying outcomes. By analyzing diverse scholarly perspectives, this research highlights how CEFR, while not officially mandated, has begun to shape the way certain institutions conceptualize English language education in Indonesia. Furthermore, the study identifies the potential benefits of adopting CEFR, such as promoting international comparability of language proficiency and encouraging communicative competence, alongside the challenges of localization, resource inequality, and teacher preparedness (Foley, 2019; Uri, 2023).

Ultimately, this paper contributes to the ongoing discussion of how global frameworks like CEFR can be meaningfully adapted within local educational systems. It provides insights into how Indonesia might navigate the complexities of adopting an international standard while maintaining cultural and pedagogical relevance to its national education objectives.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result

In their studies, Miqawati et al. (2023) and Sudaryanto and Widodo (2020) identified four major issues that arise in the process of adopting and implementing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in non-European contexts, including Indonesia. These issues involve: (1) students' learning objectives, (2) curriculum designers' perspectives on CEFR, (3) the need for professional teacher support, and (4) the alignment of teaching materials with local needs and cultural contexts.

1) Students' Objectives in Learning English

One of the key challenges in implementing the CEFR-based curriculum in Indonesia relates to the objectives of English language learning. In many cases, students perceive English learning primarily as a means to obtain a proficiency certificate rather than to achieve communicative competence. This instrumental motivation learning English merely for certification limits students' engagement and reduces the depth of their learning experience (Rokhayati & Widiyanti, 2022; Sujati et al., 2023; Nugraha & Suyatmin, 2021). In Indonesia, where English is still categorized as a foreign language, language proficiency certificates such as TOEFL or IELTS are often viewed as indicators of one's English ability and are required for academic or professional advancement. As Roca and Palacios (2013, as

cited in Hadijah et al., 2018) note, English proficiency certification serves as tangible evidence of linguistic capability in international communication.

However, when students' learning goals focus solely on passing examinations or obtaining certificates, their language acquisition tends to be surface-level and exam-oriented rather than communicative or contextual. To address this issue, teachers play a pivotal role in promoting meaningful and motivating classroom environments where students learn English for authentic communication rather than for credentials. By applying CEFR principles especially its action-oriented approach, which views learners as social agents performing real-life tasks teachers can help students connect language learning with everyday communication (Council of Europe, 2001; Foley, 2019).

2) Curriculum Designers' Perspectives and Policy Alignment

Another challenge concerns the perception of policymakers and curriculum designers toward CEFR. In Indonesia, the English curriculum at the secondary level still follows the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013), while higher education institutions design their programs based on the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia – KKNI). The KKNI, established under Presidential Decree No. 8 of 2012, serves as a national standard for aligning educational outcomes with workforce and competency goals. Consequently, curriculum design in Indonesia emphasizes character education, skills development, and employability rather than linguistic proficiency alone.

This orientation demonstrates that the Indonesian government has not yet prioritized CEFR adoption as a national standard. Curriculum policymakers aim for holistic human development students who are not only linguistically capable but also socially and professionally competent (Lahmar, 2020). In contrast, CEFR primarily emphasizes linguistic mastery and communicative competence. As Běrešová (2017) points out, adopting CEFR requires policymakers to shift the educational focus from “learning about English” to “learning in English,” emphasizing actual language use. Similar challenges were faced by countries like Japan and Vietnam, which consequently localized CEFR into CEFR-J and CEFR-V frameworks to reflect national goals and cultural contexts (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015; Foley, 2019). Therefore, the opportunity for Indonesia lies in contextual adaptation designing a localized CEFR-based curriculum that harmonizes international standards with national education priorities, particularly those embedded in the KKNI and Kurikulum Merdeka frameworks.

3) Teacher Readiness and Professional Support

The third challenge is related to teacher readiness and professional support. Implementing CEFR successfully requires teachers who are well-trained in communicative pedagogy, assessment, and proficiency level descriptors. However, studies reveal that many Indonesian teachers still face difficulties in mastering CEFR concepts and applying them in classroom practice (Kusuma, 2018; Sudaryanto & Widodo, 2020). Limited access to training, uneven teacher qualifications, and insufficient English proficiency among teachers have long been identified as obstacles to improving English education quality (Zein, 2017).

Effective CEFR adaptation requires long-term professional development programs and collaboration among educational stakeholders to strengthen teachers' pedagogical and linguistic competencies. Without professional support, the implementation of CEFR risks being superficial reduced to adopting terminology without truly transforming teaching

practices. This highlights an opportunity for Indonesia to invest in teacher development initiatives that integrate CEFR-based training within national certification and teacher education systems.

4) Cultural and Material Compatibility

The fourth issue concerns the alignment of CEFR-based teaching materials with local culture and context. Since CEFR was originally designed for European learners, its accompanying materials and textbooks often contain Western cultural elements that may not align with Indonesian values or real-life contexts (Aziz et al., 2018). Therefore, textbooks and materials used in CEFR-based programs must undergo contextual adaptation to ensure cultural relevance and meaningful learning experiences.

As Sudaryanto and Widodo (2020) argue, CEFR-based English education in Indonesia should incorporate local cultural content to promote intercultural understanding and authenticity in communication. This adaptation will not only enhance learners' engagement but also ensure that English learning supports students' ability to function bilingually and biculturally using English while maintaining Indonesian cultural identity.

5. CONCLUSION

Adapting the CEFR-based English curriculum in Indonesia involves both significant challenges and promising opportunities. Challenges include exam-oriented learning objectives, limited policy alignment, insufficient teacher preparation, and cultural mismatches in teaching materials. However, the opportunities lie in contextual localization, teacher professionalization, and curriculum innovation that integrate CEFR principles with national education standards.

For CEFR to be effectively adapted in Indonesia, policymakers must design localized frameworks, provide continuous teacher training, and ensure cultural integration in instructional materials. When contextualized appropriately, CEFR has the potential to enhance English education quality in Indonesia and align students' competencies with global communication standards while preserving national educational values.

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