

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores a thorough analysis of the collected data, offering insights into the results of the study guided by the research questions. The data were gathered using two main instruments: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Chapter 4 aims to present the findings and engage in discussions centred on teachers' views regarding the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)-aligned assessments for writing skills. The challenges associated with CEFR-aligned assessments and the proposed potential solutions are also addressed in this chapter. It is crucial to recognise that these research questions are not isolated; rather, they are connected, all aiming to explore how participants navigate the implementation of CEFR-aligned assessments. As a result, cross-references are made, and data extracts or quotations may be repeated at times.

Chapter 4 comprises two sections. The first section provides detailed information about the participants, including ESL teachers, the Heads of the English Language Panel, and SISC+. In the second section, Research Question 1 (RQ1) examines the teachers' views on the implementation of CEFR-aligned assessment of writing skills in ESL classrooms. Subsequently, Research Question 2 (RQ2) addresses the teachers' actual implementation of CEFR-aligned assessments of writing skills, followed by

Research Question 3 (RQ3), which identifies potential challenges during implementation. Then, Research Question 4 (RQ4) discusses solutions to these challenges proposed by the teachers.

The themes and sub-themes were developed based on data sets that included interviews with participating ESL teachers, interviews with the Heads of the English Language Panel and SISC+, reflections from online posts by three out of six ESL teachers, and several related documents, such as the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013), English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2015), Teacher Guide Implementing CEFR-aligned curriculum: Planning and Managing Learning (Ministry of Education, 2020), Teacher Guide Implementing CEFR-Aligned Curriculum Planning And Managing Learning Second Edition (Ministry of Education, 2020), English Language Education Reform 2015-2025: Planning in Retrospect, Implementation and Prospective Planning the English Language Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2021), English Language Management Guidebook (Ministry of Education, 2019), and the *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP) Tingkatan 5* (Ministry of Education, 2020).

4.2 SECTION ONE

This section outlines the fundamental elements underpinning this study, introducing the ESL teachers, the Heads of English Language Panel, and the SISC+ as participants in the discussion. The incorporation of data extracts or quotations lends a realistic dimension to the study. The sample adheres to three recommendations outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), which are the triangulations, member checking, and peer

checking. Data extracts or quotations are seamlessly integrated into the text, as demonstrated by the following: "Yes, oral questioning definitely in every lesson." (Head A_Int1), or they are directly inserted into the paragraph (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:195), followed by the notation "(Head A _ Int1)" to denote the source and number of the data item. Alternatively, data extractions or citations are presented in a distinct block, as illustrated below:

but now it's supposed to be simple, short but nice full of the information.

yes, focus writing.

(Head A_Int1)

The researcher opted for all three methods to enhance readability for the reader. Following this approach, the participant's code name is enclosed in brackets after the data extraction, followed by the record. Verbatim data extracts may contain grammatical errors, inconsistencies in pronouns, non-parallelism, capitalisation, and spelling errors. This method is equally applicable to teachers' reflective journals and document analysis. These representations are utilised in Chapter 4. For the interviews, only the participant's code name and the specific data item (the interview) are necessary, as each participant is interviewed only once. The participant forms share similarities but include additional details, such as "doc Teacher A_J1," indicating journal reflection number 1. This additional information is pertinent for the journal reflections. At this juncture of the research, it is the participants who infuse vitality into the study.

4.2.1 The Participants

All participants were selected by the State Education Department (JPN) officer based on the criteria outlined in Section 3.4.1, which primarily focused on their service of more than five years within the ministry and their sufficient experience for data collection purposes. In this context, teachers have in-depth knowledge of their subject areas along with effective teaching strategies to facilitate student learning (William et al., 2021). This is to ensure that they can effectively convey the content to students and foster their understanding. This is essential as teachers bear significant responsibility for executing the policies delineated in documents such as syllabi and curricula. This section is dedicated to the analysis of data pertaining to individual participants. Each is addressed via their code names and pseudonyms.

4.2.2 English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers

4.2.2.1 Teacher A

Ms. Dewi, 56, is a highly experienced English educator with a distinguished career. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language and a Master's in English Linguistics, with a PhD in progress. Her 30-year teaching experience includes significant roles as Head of the English Language Panel and a CEFR item writer. Recognised as an excellent teacher at both district and state levels, Ms. Dewi remains dedicated to her profession and continues to teach at the same school where her career began.

4.2.2.2 Teacher B

Ms. Aini, aged 31, holds a Bachelor of Education (Hons) in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). She has taught at the same school in Seremban for the past

eight years. Known for her creativity in the classroom, Ms. Aini actively engages her students by introducing English drama activities. Her compassionate nature has given her extensive experience as a research participant. She employs personalised teaching methods to foster a love for English among her students and ensure enjoyable lessons.

4.2.2.3 Teacher C

Madam Sarbiah, aged 38, holds a Bachelor of Education (Hons) in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and has 14 years of teaching experience in this field. Actively engaging in school innovation competitions with her students, she is regarded by her colleagues as a dedicated teacher who values continuous learning. Transitioning to her third school, she feels challenged yet remains committed to her profession. Dedication and passion are integral to her teaching philosophy, as she believes these qualities are essential for effective teaching.

4.2.2.4 Teacher D

Madam Nini, aged 34, holds a Bachelor of Education (Hons) in English as a Second Language (TESL) alongside other degrees. With a decade of teaching experience, she actively engages her students in competitions promoting innovative teaching methods. Regarded by colleagues as a dedicated educator, she is known for cultivating her pedagogical concepts. Currently at her second school, she maintains a positive attitude and emphasises the importance of enthusiasm and commitment in teaching.

4.2.2.5 Teacher E

Miss Sofia, aged 38, is recognised as one of the diligent teachers in the Seremban district. Holding both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), she leverages her 14 years of teaching experience to guide her students to achieve their potential. She encourages peer mentoring among students and promotes writing as a stress-relief method. Known for her amiable demeanour, she is highly regarded by colleagues for her willingness to assist, particularly in facilitating school projects.

4.2.2.6 Teacher F

Madam Iman, aged 34, brings a decade of teaching experience to her role. Holding both a Master's and Bachelor's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), she is an engaged member of the English Co-Curricular activities in the Seremban District. Renowned for her diligence, she provides consistent support to her students, including those who have been absent. She emphasises the importance of teachers inspiring their students to foster interest and engagement in learning.

4.2.3 The Heads of English Language Panel

4.2.3.1 Head A

Madam Mariam, aged 54, is a seasoned educator with a strong background in English language teaching. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language and a Master's in English Literature. With nearly three decades of experience, she has served as the Head of the English Language Panel since 2018 and is recognised as an Excellent Teacher. Collaborating closely with Madam Dewi, she has

been instrumental in implementing CEFR standards. Known for her dedication to teaching, Madam Mariam finds fulfilment in her interactions with students.

4.2.3.2 Head B

Madam Suriani, aged 41, is a dedicated educator with a strong leadership background. With 20 years of teaching experience, she has served as Head of the English Language Panel for eight years. Known for her approachable leadership style, she effectively manages her panel and ensures they stay updated with Ministry guidelines. Committed to professional development, Madam Suriani actively shares resources and supports other schools in enhancing their English language programmes.

4.2.3.3 Head C

Madam Aqila, aged 43, is a seasoned educator with a strong focus on innovation. With a Bachelor's and Master's degree in TESL, she brings over 20 years of experience to her role as Head of the English Language Panel. Known for her commitment to staying updated on English language teaching trends, Madam Aqila is recognised for her innovative teaching approaches. Her active involvement in district programs demonstrates her dedication to improving English language education.

4.2.4 School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+)

4.2.4.1 SISC+

Madam Damia, 43, is a dedicated SISC+ with extensive experience. With a Master's degree in TESL, she brings over 20 years of teaching experience to her role. Having transitioned from the Rembau District to the Seremban District in 2019, she provides valuable coaching and support to ESL teachers. Her focus on lesson

preparation and effective implementation of CEFR-aligned curriculum demonstrates her commitment to teacher development and student success.

Table 4.1 provides a summary of all the participants' details, including specific information about their backgrounds that is in line with the requirements of this study.

Table 4.1: Summary of Participants' Details

Participants Code Name	Gender	Age	Level of education	Teaching experience (Years)	Implementing CEFR experience (Years)	Other information
Teacher A	Female	56	Master	30	5	Excellent teacher (GC) Item writer (CEFR)
Teacher B	Female	31	Bachelor degree	8	5	-
Teacher C	Female	38	Bachelor degree	14	5	-
Teacher D	Female	34	Bachelor degree	10	5	-
Teacher E	Female	38	Master	14	5	-
Teacher F	Female	34	Master	10	5	-
Head A	Female	54	Master	28	5	Excellent teacher (GC)
Head B	Female	41	Bachelor degree	17	5	-
Head C	Female	43	Bachelor degree	20	5	-
SISC+	Female	43	Master	20	5	-

4.3 SECTION TWO

This section provides a detailed analysis of the research question, breaking it down into key themes and subtopics. Each part is carefully structured to explore these themes in depth, drawing on existing research. The chapter concludes by summarising the findings from this analysis.

Research Question 1 (RQ1) aims to understand teachers' perceptions of implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment in ESL classrooms. Data was

collected from three Head of English Panels, one SISC+ representative, and six English teachers to get the data for RQ1. The findings provide insights into overall attitudes towards CEFR-aligned assessment in secondary schools after more than five years of implementation.

Research Question 2 (RQ2) investigates the assessment methods teachers use to evaluate CEFR-aligned writing skills in ESL classrooms. It also explores teachers' instructional practices for teaching writing skills. Research Questions 3 and 4 examine the challenges teachers face when implementing CEFR-aligned writing assessments and suggest potential solutions. Data for all research questions was collected from Head of English Panels, SISC+ representatives, and English teachers.

This chapter presents a thematic analysis of the data using ATLAS.ti 9 software. A network view was created to visualise and organise the identified themes and sub-themes. Key themes with the most participant responses were prioritised for in-depth analysis. By examining these prominent themes, the study sheds light on their importance within the research context. The main themes were examined in detail, derived from interview transcripts and document analysis. Rich and descriptive examples are provided to illustrate participants' experiences and viewpoints on implementing CEFR-aligned writing assessments.

Following the presentation of each main theme, a detailed discussion is provided, drawing on relevant literature and theoretical frameworks (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This involves carefully analysing the research findings in light of existing knowledge. The discussion connects key literature to the themes explored for

each research question. Each section concludes with a summary of the main findings and a transition to the next research question.

4.3.1 RQ1: How do teachers perceive and view the implementation of CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments in ESL classrooms?

For RQ1, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with all three participant groups and document analysis of relevant policies. Eleven overarching themes emerged from the data analysis. In general, the participants expressed positive views about implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments in ESL classrooms. Figure 4.1 presents a mind map illustrating the network of themes and categories derived from the interviews and document analysis.

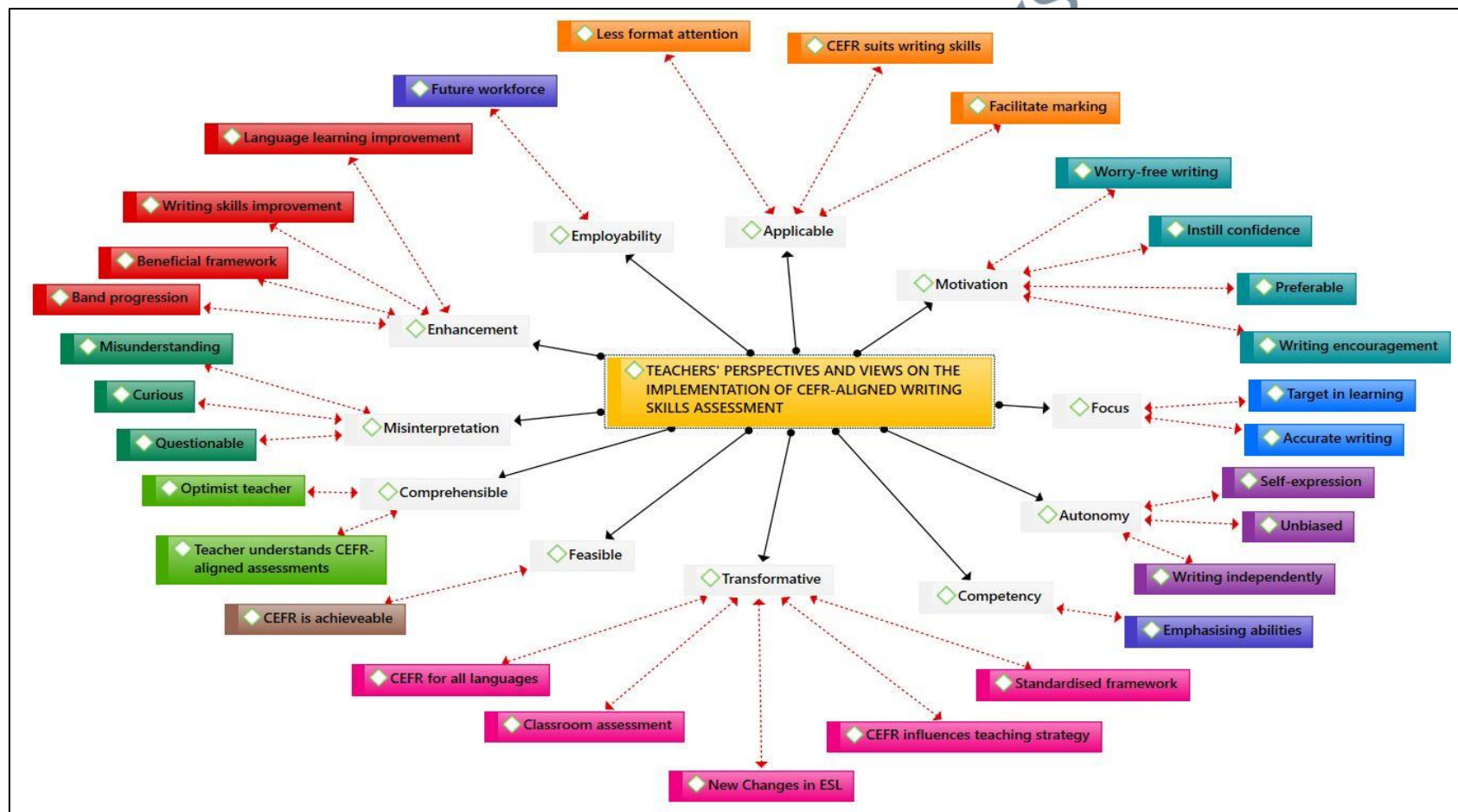


Figure 4.1: Themes and Sub-themes Network on Teachers' Perceptions and Views on the Implementation of CEFR-aligned Writing Skills Assessments in ESL Classrooms, derived from Semi-Structured Interviews and Document Analysis

To gain a clearer understanding of the themes in Figure 4.1, as well as to demonstrate triangulation, the researcher provides detailed information on the identified themes, sub-themes, and definitions based on the combined data from interviews and document analysis in Table 4.2

Table 4.2: Research Question 1 - Themes, Sub-Themes, and Definitions

RQ	Sub-themes	Themes	Definition
RQ1	▪ New Changes in ESL ▪ CEFR is for all languages ▪ CEFR influences teaching strategy ▪ Classroom assessment ▪ Standardise framework	Transformative	The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is used to assess students as part of a redesign of language teaching and learning. As CEFR can be applied not only to English but also to other languages, they are aware of the changes that are taking place. CEFR is a standardised and well-known framework that can be used when teachers assess students in the classroom (Council of Europe, 2001).
	▪ CEFR suits writing skills ▪ Facilitate marking ▪ Less format attention	Applicable	Teachers agree that CEFR-aligned assessment is feasible or appropriate because it leads to continuous assessment rather than exam-based testing. Since teachers do not put so much emphasis on structure, students can focus on developing their writing talent. Therefore, teachers can make changes by using writing tests aligned to CEFR. CEFR can also help teachers assess students' written work (Council of Europe, 2001).
	▪ Teachers adjusting to changes. ▪ CEFR is achievable	Feasible	If teachers can successfully apply CEFR-aligned assessment in the classroom and use it to help their students achieve the learning target, they generally feel that this is a viable option. Implementation is feasible and useful for use in the classroom (Council of Europe, 2001).

Table 4.2, continued

RQ	Sub-themes	Themes	Definition
RQ1	▪ Accurate writing	Focus	Teachers also report that using a writing skills assessment aligned to CEFR helps them focus on instruction and improves students' knowledge of what to write, leading to more polished and precise writing. Teachers generally agree that students have higher expectations in English classes (Council of Europe, 2001).
	▪ Target in learning		
	▪ Future workforce	Employability	Teachers are optimistic that the introduction of CEFR in their classes will help students better prepare for careers in the global economy of the future. The students' educational experience will improve, and they will receive recognition for their achievements both nationally and globally (Council of Europe, 2001).
	▪ Teachers understand CEFR-aligned assessment	Comprehensible	Teachers generally agree that prejudices against CEFR are dispelled because it is so easy to understand. Teachers can help their students improve their writing skills using CEFR-aligned assessment, and students can improve their writing skills over time (Council of Europe, 2011).
	▪ Produce optimist teachers		
	▪ Writing skills improvement	Enhancement	Teachers talk about how they think CEFR has improved the teaching of English in their classrooms. This is because they assume that the widespread adoption of CEFR will lead to an improvement in students' writing skills. The band system makes it less of a guessing game for teachers to measure student progress. Students' attention spans and overall writing skills will improve as a result. Assessments linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) are another way to help students learn the language and achieve their goals (European Commission, n.d.).
	▪ Band progression		
	▪ Beneficial framework		
	▪ Language learning improvement		
	▪ Writing independently	Autonomy	Teachers believe that assessments aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) give them and their students more freedom in the classroom and in their written work. Independent writing is a skill that students can practise and develop. CEFR is also neutral in that it allows students of different levels to be placed at the most appropriate level for them. Writing skills, in particular, are an area where everyone has something to offer and can receive help. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) encourages students to write about topics that are personally meaningful to them and reflect their own values and interests (Council of Europe, 2011; North, 2016).
	▪ Unbiased		
	▪ Self-expression		
	▪ Writing independently		

Table 4.2, continued

RQ	Sub-themes	Themes	Definition
RQ1	▪ Emphasising abilities	Competency	One technique teachers use to highlight students' proficiency in the language is CEFR-aligned assessment. By focusing on what students can do, CEFR raises awareness of their strengths while downplaying their weaknesses, especially in written work (North, 2016).
	▪ Writing encouragement ▪ Worry-free writing ▪ Preferable ▪ Instil confidence	Motivation	Teachers believe that assessment aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) motivates their students and makes them improve their writing and expressive skills. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) allows students to learn from their mistakes, so they do not have to worry about making mistakes when practising their writing skills. Teachers report that students prefer CEFR because it gives them more confidence in writing (Little, 2002; European Centre for Modern Languages, 2018).
	▪ Misunderstanding ▪ Curious ▪ Questionable	Misinterpretation	Teachers report that they were initially under the impression that CEFR-aligned assessments would devalue the English they taught their students. They are also perplexed by how CEFR piqued the ministry's interest enough to justify implementing it in the classroom. They did not have a clear picture of CEFR-aligned assessment, so they have many questions about it (Byrnes, 2014; North, 2015).

Then, using Table 4.3, the researcher triangulated the themes from the three groups of participants to identify the most important sub-themes that the majority of the participants rated as very important. A summary of the main themes and the most important sub-themes is shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Summary of the Most Important Themes Responded by Participants for Research Question 1 derived from Semi-structured Interviews

No	Themes	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D	Teacher E	Teacher F	HoELP A	HoELP B	HoELP C	SISC+
1	Transformative	/	/	/			/	/		/	/
2	Applicable		/	/	/			/	/		/
3	Enhancement	/	/		/			/	/	/	
4	Autonomy	/				/	/	/	/		
5	Competency		/				/		/	/	
6	Feasible		/					/			
7	Focus	/					/	/			
8	Comprehensible				/			/	/		
9	Motivation					/					/
10	Misinterpretation	/	/							/	
11	Employability				/			/			

*HoELP = Head of English Language Panel

*SISC+ = School Improvement Specialist Coach

Based on Table 4.3, two main themes, transformative and applicable, received the most responses from the three groups of participants (as highlighted in purple). In relation to RQ1, the analysis of these themes has identified common sub-themes related to the two main themes, as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Themes and Sub-Themes for the Most Important Theme Highlighted by Participants.

Theme	Transformative	Applicable
Sub-theme	Standardised framework	Facilitate marking
	CEFR for all languages	Less format attention
	New Changes in ESL	CEFR suits writing skills
	Classroom assessment	
	CEFR influences teaching strategy	

The themes and sub-themes for RQ1 are discussed in the following sub-section.

4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Transformative

Participants viewed the implementation of CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments as a positive transformation within Malaysia's evolving education system. They perceived the CEFR as a global standard that could enhance cross-cultural communication and align with the nation's English Language Education Reform. Specifically for writing skills, teachers believed the CEFR could improve student learning and necessitate innovative teaching approaches. While the CEFR is a framework and not a curriculum, it offers a standardised approach to language assessment. Based on the data presented in Table 4.3, five sub-themes emerged under the overarching theme of transformative standardised framework, CEFR for all

languages, changes in ESL, classroom assessment, and CEFR's influence on teaching strategies. These sub-themes are explored in detail in the following sub-sections.

In this study, the definition of transformative, including the CEFR, is used to assess students as part of a redesign of language teaching and learning. As the CEFR can be applied not only to English but also to other languages, they are aware of the changes that are taking place. It is a standardised and well-known framework that can be used when teachers assess students in the classroom.

a. Sub-theme: Standardised Framework

Data analysis from the semi-structured interviews indicated that participants viewed CEFR-aligned assessment as a standardised framework providing a common measure of language proficiency. This standardised approach facilitates cross-border communication, a crucial aspect of today's globalised world. Participants believed that the CEFR could transform English language teaching, learning, and assessment in Malaysia. They emphasised its accessibility to teachers both domestically and internationally, highlighting its standardised structure for evaluating students' language proficiency levels. As outlined by the Council of Europe (2011), the CEFR offers a standardised framework for describing language skills, simplifying the assessment process for teachers and leading to consistent student outcomes.

As ESL teachers, the participants believed that the CEFR-aligned assessment is standardised, which means that everyone has the same idea of CEFR: *“What I like about CEFR-aligned courses is that it’s standardise it’s the same is the same throughout so if you’re an A2 candidate you will be you will be able to you can construct sentences, you*

are you able to construct sentences used for your daily activities, for your daily life...so it's very useful so the grading is very structured from A1 to C2 so we can see the progression there" (Teacher A_Int1).

Then, the grading process related to student development would also be standardised, and it would be much easier for teachers in subsequent years to monitor the levels of competence achieved by students. The CEFR offered great help to teachers, especially in determining the level of proficiency each student should achieve: *"CEFR can be considered as a 'new assistant' for teachers in class"* (SISC+_Int1).

Teacher F, an ESL teacher, shared her opinion that the CEFR is a standardised framework that is beneficial for students preparing for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). She also mentioned having encountered a situation similar to the one described above. Both the students and the prospective teacher who taught them derived advantages from the continuation: *"Yes, it is very good in terms of you know where you are going if let say the student you know especially in writing and let say for the weak students, if they want to take their MUET, I think CEFR and MUET doesn't have much different. It is a standardised framework"* (Teacher F_Int1). The participant considered the CEFR an early exposure for the students to sit for MUET later, where they could familiarise themselves with the format earlier. Teacher F also added that the CEFR can be used for students *"when they're in the tertiary education, yes, it is good for their future"* (Teacher F_Int1).

Meanwhile, SISC+, as a proxy participant, also agreed that the CEFR serves as a standardised framework, the same as other ESL teachers that she had observed. Within this framework, she emphasised the importance of ensuring that all teachers have a

common understanding of the CEFR and its practical application in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching. Based on her observations, she found that teachers understand the CEFR as soon as it is introduced: *“It is an indicator to show the level of proficiency in English but that is our root or ground-based of our discussion we hope. I repeat it’s a framework, which should be used by everyone and it is a framework, it’s not the art of teaching, it’s not the way to teach something. Okay. That’s our ground”* (SISC+_Int1). The CEFR serves as a pedagogical and assessment tool to guide teachers in designing curricula and assessments. However, some teachers have mistakenly associated it with a pedagogical approach. It has therefore been standardised according to the globally recognised standard for English.

The analysis of the participants' interview responses related to RQ1 was subsequently connected to the researcher's document analysis. Thus, the document analysis of existing policies corroborated the semi-structured interview findings regarding the CEFR as a standardised framework. This implies a shared understanding among teachers of the CEFR and its application in student assessment, ensuring consistent and comparable outcomes. Furthermore, the adoption of CEFR as a standardised framework aligns with the broader goal of achieving international English language standards, as outlined in the Roadmap 2015-2025.

Having benchmarked the current performance in English of students and teachers from preschool to the post-secondary level, we are in a position to go on to align our English language education system to international standards in the form of CEFR.

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 4)

This baseline study used CEFR to evaluate the current state of English teaching and learning in Malaysia according to prevailing international standards and assessed the proficiency of samples of students from preschool to post-secondary education, and also the proficiency of a sample of English teachers.

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 8)

Our key aims are:

1. to produce an English language programme of the international standard supported by a quality delivery system;

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 9)

Having been developed in the course of more than 30 years of thinking and research on language teaching, learning and assessment, CEFR is a comprehensive, well-established framework which has international currency and is used in more than 40 countries.

(Doc_Teacher_Guide_2020, Page 9)

The extracts indicate that Malaysia is aligning its English language education with international standards, with the CEFR serving as the primary framework for language acquisition. This was evidenced by the fact that the transformation is based on the international English standard: *“We want our students to reach the international English standard with CEFR”* (SISC+_Int1). The CEFR has been adopted and refined within the Malaysian education system. As outlined in the Roadmap 2015-2025, teachers were made aware of the CEFR as a standardised framework for teaching, learning, and assessment. Aligning teacher perspectives with policy goals is crucial for the successful implementation of English language reforms in Malaysia.

Data triangulation further solidified the notion that the CEFR is the primary framework for language acquisition in Malaysia, aligning with international standards. This alignment supports ongoing efforts to modernise English language teaching in Malaysia. To ensure successful implementation, it is crucial for teachers and policymakers to share a common understanding of the CEFR. Overall, the analysis emphasises the pivotal role of the CEFR in transforming English language education in Malaysia by providing a standardised framework and enhancing proficiency outcomes.

Discussion of Sub-theme: Standardised Framework

A standardised framework provides clear guidelines for consistent practices. The CEFR is a prime example of language assessment. As Muhammad Uri (2021) highlights, the CEFR positively impacts education in a globalised world. Teachers value the CEFR for its potential to improve English language skills and gain international recognition. They also appreciate how the CEFR helps students track their progress by clearly outlining language abilities at different levels. It is the world's most widely used language framework (Foley, 2019), influencing policies and assessments globally (Figueras, 2012).

The CEFR aligns with international English standards, a goal shared by Malaysia's Ministry of Education (Uri, 2022). Its clear structure, adaptability, and continuous improvement make the CEFR a leading framework for language learning and assessment. Malaysia's adoption of the CEFR demonstrates a commitment to global standards and better student outcomes.

b. Sub-Theme: CEFR for All Languages

The second sub-theme for transformative theme is CEFR for all languages derived. From the semi-structured interviews, participants recognised the CEFR's versatility as a language assessment framework applicable to multiple languages. This suggests that the CEFR transcends specific languages, providing a universal standard for measuring language proficiency: *"teachers are clear that CEFR is a framework for all languages but not a teaching method"* (SISC+_Int1). Although the ideas and descriptors of the CEFR were first designed with an emphasis on European languages, they have now been widely adopted and modified for languages all over the world. Importantly, participants emphasised that the CEFR should not be perceived as a burdensome teaching methodology: *"no burden should be added to teachers with CEFR"* (Head A_Int1), but rather as a framework guiding curriculum development and assessment practices. The interviews conducted with teachers underscored their recognition of the CEFR's significance in promoting globalisation: *"it defines six global levels of language proficiency (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2) with consistent descriptors for each level across all languages"* (Teacher A_Int1).

Head A's realisation during the interview that the CEFR extends beyond English language assessment to encompass other languages reflects a broader awareness among teachers regarding the CEFR's applicability. This recognition implies the potential for the CEFR to be implemented into the Malaysian education system to enhance students' international recognition in terms of language proficiency: *"...everybody is already exposed err..to this CEFR assessment and I just got to know that CEFR assessment is not only used for English language but it's used for other languages as well"* (Head A_Int1).

Similarly, ESL teachers echoed Head A's sentiments, emphasising the utility of the CEFR across languages. Teacher C highlighted the desire for standardised assessments to ensure international recognition: *"But on the surface I do understand what we want to do, in my understanding, they want to use the same assessment so that we can be recognised by others. So, when we go to other countries we get the same recognition for English"* (Teacher C_Int1).

Meanwhile, Teacher D expressed optimism about the CEFR's potential application to languages beyond English, such as Bahasa Melayu.

For me as CEFR is used for English, it would be another successful to be used for other languages such as our Bahasa Melayu.

(Teacher D_Int1)

Teacher E reinforced this viewpoint by asserting the CEFR's status as a framework applicable to multiple languages, not limited to English alone, which helps learners set their goals.

Come on, CEFR is a framework for languages, so it does not only apply for one language.

(Teacher E_Int1)

CEFR gives clear, explicit descriptions of what learners can do at each level, helping them set realistic goals and track their progress.

(Teacher F_Int1)

Participants demonstrated a broader understanding of the CEFR, recognising its potential application to languages beyond English. They emphasised the importance of aligning language teaching with CEFR standards to equip students with effective communication skills in real-world contexts. The CEFR's standardised nature also led participants to believe that it could serve as a valuable reference point for learners of multiple languages: *“makes CEFR familiar with all languages, it surely helps them a lot in learning”* (SISC+). This understanding alleviates concerns among teachers about the additional workload associated with CEFR implementation: *“CEFR is for curriculum and assessment which later can guide teachers for assessments, not only for this (English) language but also other languages”* (Head C_Int1).

The participants' insights into CEFR's adaptability for various languages signify an expanded understanding of its role beyond English language education. The sub-theme on CEFR for all languages matches the Malaysian Education Blueprint's vision of aligning the education system with international standards, including language proficiency benchmarks set by frameworks like the CEFR to support the findings in the semi-structured interview.

As the world grows more connected and competitive than it has ever been before, it is imperative that Malaysia capitalises on its inherent advantages to strengthen its position in the global economy. Neighbouring Asian education systems in China, South Korea, and Singapore are increasingly focused on developing students that are proficient in their national language, and the English language to maximise their employability in the global workforce.

(Doc_MEB_2013, pages 4-10)

Triangulating the data with policy documents such as the Malaysian Education Blueprint and English Language Education Reform underscores the strategic importance of adopting the CEFR to meet global workforce requirements and enhance students' proficiency in national and international languages: *“CEFR is a worldwide undertaking, and it has been put together over the last fifty years or so through the contributions of scholars from all over the world”* (Doc_ELR_2021, page v). The widespread adoption of the CEFR by countries worldwide, including Malaysia, reflects its utility as a standardised language proficiency framework applicable across linguistic contexts: *“CEFR is being adopted by countries across the world, but in many cases, it is being adopted only partially, e.g. just for the curriculum, or for some level of education”* (Doc_ELR_2021, page 4).

Overall, the participants' recognition of the CEFR as a framework applicable to all languages underscores its potential to standardise language education, curriculum development, and assessment criteria, benefiting learners across diverse linguistic backgrounds. This aligns with the broader objectives of the Malaysian education system to enhance students' language proficiency and international competitiveness.

Discussion of Sub-theme: CEFR for All Languages

Participants perceived the CEFR as a valuable tool for all languages, not just English. They believed that it can help students set goals and track progress. This can be linked to the broad use of the CEFR globally (Foley, 2019) and the influences that the CEFR brings to the education systems worldwide (Figueras, 2012). The sub-theme CEFR for all languages can also be linked to the CEFR's impact on language teaching and learning (Byram and Parmenter, 2012) and its importance for higher education and

careers (Zhao, 2017; Brunfaut & Harding, 2019). This shows that the CEFR helps standardise language learning and assessment across different countries, including Malaysia, which aligns with the country's goal of improving language skills and global competitiveness.

c. Sub-theme: New Changes in ESL

The third sub-theme that links to the transformative theme is new changes in English as a Second Language (ESL) when the CEFR is implemented. Teachers recognised the need to adapt to changes in curriculum, textbooks, and assessments to align with the CEFR. This reflects the broader shift towards a more globally-oriented education system in Malaysia.

For example, participants reported that the implementation of writing skills assessment aligned to the CEFR has led to changes in English as a Second Language (ESL) learning: *“we always need a remarkable changes in education in order to improve”* (SISC+_Int1). The CEFR is a framework that has proven effective in improving English language skills through its use in European countries. Based on assessments and current needs, the CEFR framework enables continuous improvement in the learning and teaching of English. Academic achievement is promoted and serves to develop human capital.

Participants expressed the need for a CEFR-focused approach to English language teaching. They agreed that this reflects a broader shift in English language education. Head A highlighted the CEFR as a new approach to teaching, emphasising its focus on

quality learning over exam preparation. Other participants agreed, noting the shift towards meaningful language use and independence.

Err regarding CEFR this, this is very new okay... for the teaching profession.

(Head A_Int1)

The CEFR represents a shift from a curriculum focused primarily on exam results to one that emphasises students' actual language abilities. As one participant stated, *"CEFR itself is about highlighting students' capabilities in language proficiency"* (SISC+_Int1). This indicates a greater emphasis on meaningful language use and independent learning compared to traditional approaches that often prioritised content coverage.

yes..so I guess regarding this what I have learned from the very little reading that I did, it was emm, the new kind.. the new kind of teaching and learning English that is taking..taking place in Malaysia now, it is more of. the key word that is quality culture in an English language education...

(Head A_Int1)

Teacher B noted the introduction of a new curriculum in English teaching aligned with the CEFR, emphasising its potential benefits for students, *"I just because we don't want to reverse back to what we did before so with have started with CEFR and that's they way forward, and I see it's beneficial for the students so that's why I think so. Okay, so for writing skills for me there is a huge difference between CEFR one and the previous one"* (Teacher B_Int1). It is noted that participants were aware of the changes in ESL learning.

While most participants welcomed the CEFR's focus on meaningful language use, Head C expressed concerns that the previous emphasis on essay writing might have been more effective in developing writing skills. This highlights differing opinions on the impact of CEFR-aligned practices.

emm, being a teacher myself like teaching upper forms I would like the quality goes of writing among students was much better last time with the previous format when we have A script it is the candidate really deserved the A script in a way. Of the standard of the language, I would say in that sense. But now, based on my experience of looking into SPM 2021 paper...

(Head C_Int1)

I would say personally I have changed my strategy of teaching classroom especially right after marking experience that I have received.

(Head C_Int1)

While there is a growing acceptance of the CEFR as a catalyst for change in ESL education, opinions vary. Some teachers enthusiastically embrace the CEFR as a means to improve language proficiency and adapt their teaching strategies. Others express reservations and require additional training to fully implement the framework. It is clear that the focus on examinations is shifting towards a more holistic approach to language learning. As one participant noted, "*some teachers need more training and exposure to make them feel more confident towards CEFR*" (SISC+).

The study analysed documents such as the English Language Education Reform 2015-2025: The Roadmap and Teacher Guide for CEFR-Aligned Curriculum, Planning, and Learning. These documents align with the interview findings for the sub-theme of

new changes in ESL, emphasising the broader context of educational reform in Malaysia. They highlight the need for teachers to incorporate 21st-century skills into their teaching practices as the country strives to improve education quality.

The analysed documents strongly support the alignment of Malaysia's English language education with the CEFR, corroborating findings from previous interviews. The Malaysian Examination Syndicate (LP) is actively collaborating with the Council of Europe to develop CEFR-aligned assessments, impacting test formats and administration. This alignment extends to English proficiency courses, where graduates are required to achieve specific CEFR levels.

Changes in the curriculum essentially lead to changes in other aspects of education including assessment of learning, which is integral to the teaching and learning process.

(Doc_ELR_2021, page 55)

LP has been working closely with CE to develop the new CEFR-aligned assessment. This has brought about some changes in current practice in test construction, resulting in the adoption of a new approach. The alignment of the new examinations to CEFR resulted in the design of new constructs, test specifications, item writer guidelines, test production and administration, scales as well as standardisation and validation procedures.

(Doc_ELR_2021, page 58)

The Ministry of Education has established high standards for teacher training, including a comprehensive understanding of CEFR-aligned assessment. Teachers must also be aware that assessments aligned to the CEFR lead to an appropriate language learning approach and professional development. The Roadmap 2015-2025, Teacher

Guide- Implementing CEFR-Aligned Curriculum, Planning, and Managing Learning and Planning in Retrospect, Implementation, and Prospective Planning support this claim.

All skills in ESL learning are aligned with the CEFR: *“As described in the Roadmap, English Proficiency courses will be aligned to CEFR, and trainees are required to reach C1 upon completing their B. Ed programme. With this view in mind, several changes are being made to proficiency courses, and among them is the development of a comprehensive series of content and learning standards based on CEFR descriptors in the syllabus and schemes of work”* (Doc_ELRL_2021, page 93).

The well-planned transformation in ESL learning ensures that changes in ESL are a proactive and strategic approach to ESL education in order to achieve lasting positive outcomes, preventing them from being just temporary ideas, as noted in the following excerpts.

Without changes in the classroom, the influence of CEFR will remain superficial. This is the only way to achieve genuinely higher standards by the end of Wave 3.

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 78)

Action plans for Teaching and Learning consider changes to improve the efficacy of EL teachers, teaching, and related resources, including what is needed to implement CEFR-oriented pedagogy.

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 78)

It is noted that teachers undeniably play an important role in the changes in ESL teaching and learning: *“These changes should bring about a systemic transformation of English language learning accompanied by the creation of the English-rich environment mentioned above. Existing English Language teachers will be key agents in the process of change, and thus, they will need to have a qualification in education and an adequate level of proficiency”* (Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 266).

Thus, when changes happen in ESL learning: *“The adoption of CEFR leads to changes in curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment. All of these, including teacher education and training, are being aligned with CEFR. Teachers need to know about CEFR, and as part of their continuous professional development, they are given CEFR-related training to familiarise them with CEFR, and with appropriate approaches to teaching and learning and learning materials”* (Doc_Teacher_Guide_2019, page 40), teachers are prepared to adapt their teaching and learning methods by implementing new and appropriate approaches in the classroom.

The documents highlight the crucial role of teachers in implementing the CEFR. Teacher training and familiarisation with the framework are essential for adopting appropriate teaching and learning methods. This involves a systemic overhaul of ESL education, encompassing curriculum, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices. Furthermore, the policy documents highlight the need for continuous professional development among teachers to adapt to these changes effectively. The goal is to ensure that English language education in Malaysia is aligned with international standards, fostering proficiency among second language learners in line with the CEFR.

In conclusion, the CEFR is changing English language teaching in Malaysia. Teachers and policymakers agree that it is moving towards a student-centred approach focusing on language use, not just exams. While there are challenges, the overall direction is positive.

Discussion of Sub-theme: Changes in ESL

The sub-theme of changes in ESL under the transformation theme shows that Malaysia's education system is evolving to meet global challenges. As Kondakci et al. (2016) noted, educational systems must adapt to rapid changes, and Malaysia is doing this by improving English language education. Adopting the CEFR is a key step towards this goal. The CEFR is transforming English language teaching and assessment. It provides clear guidelines for teachers and test developers, outlining the language skills needed at each proficiency level (Bérešová, 2017). Unlike traditional methods, the CEFR focuses on long-term language development, offering a more comprehensive view of learners' abilities. The Ministry of Education Malaysia's initiative to align its education system with global standards, whereby it adopts the CEFR, is a key step in improving English language proficiency. This is because the CEFR offers clear guidelines for teaching and assessment, which teachers find beneficial. While challenges exist, an overall positive outlook is crucial for successful implementation.

d. Sub-theme: CEFR Influences Teaching Strategy

A prominent sub-theme emerging from this study is the influential role of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) on teaching strategies. Participants identified a paradigm shift towards an action-oriented pedagogy, prioritising students' functional language use (Moonen et al., 2013; Díez-Bedmar &

Byram, 2019). This transition towards a communicative and competency-based approach underscores a transformative evolution in teaching methodologies, placing significant emphasis on linguistic skills.

Participants highlighted the imperative for pedagogical adjustments in response to the CEFR's proficiency-based framework. A departure from traditional exam-centric approaches is necessary to accommodate the diverse needs of learners. The integration of CEFR-aligned assessments acts as a catalyst for instructional innovation, prompting teachers to tailor teaching materials and strategies to cater to a range of proficiency levels.

In their interview responses, they found the CEFR helpful in planning writing lessons. By providing clear guidelines, the CEFR helped teachers focus on specific learning goals for their students: “...it definitely has changed my way of teaching for writing okay” (Head A_Int1). Head A understood that the need of students to acquire language proficiency is based on the ‘can-do’ descriptors that the CEFR highlighted, “...because now it would guide the students to really close...to closely look at the 1st of all the...the number of words that you are supposed to write for examination even though it is a little bit examination oriented but the key word here is focus and guide..okay so with the 80 words length for part 1 part 2 and part 3..and also for err secondary school also they have limited number of words that they have to write and they also have to focus closely on the questions..okay” (Head A_Int1).

Head A emphasised that the CEFR provides clear guidelines for assessment but is not solely focused on exams. She advocated for a shift from traditional exam-oriented assessment to classroom-based assessment aligned with the CEFR. Meanwhile, Teacher

F noted that implementing CEFR-aligned assessments helped teachers to change classroom resources for teaching writing skills: *“Of course, teachers will be influenced by CEFR but we know our students and we make the adjustment regarding to the level of proficiency of our class, we need to adjust, because like what I did in the course maybe if the text is too difficult you know for the low level of the students, maybe you can you can find other other resources that has you know that can easy I mean, the different levels of materials. Because we would be motivating our learners right”* (Teacher F_Int1).

Head B shared a similar perspective, emphasising that the CEFR-aligned assessments helped her develop effective writing strategies. Like Head A, she stressed that the focus should be on student learning, not solely on exam preparation.

yes, it should influence teachers' strategy in teaching writing skills, ok how? I can notice that among my ESL teachers too. now, in my own class, when we know CEFR is implemented the emm marking scheme is not I'm not focusing on exams yes but in a way err us teachers need to know the marking scheme it does help, it can help, it does help in making helping us to note strategy of teaching writing skills.

(Head B_Int1)

Head C also agreed that the CEFR influenced her teaching approach. She emphasised the need to adapt her teaching methods to match students' current abilities to help them achieve their goals.

I would say personally I have changed my strategy of teaching classroom especially right after marking experience that I have received, so do my teachers in schools.

(Head C_Int1)

Participants recognised the need to adapt teaching and assessment strategies in response to the CEFR. They emphasised the importance of ongoing assessments to track student progress. By using the CEFR as a framework, teachers can better monitor students' development at each proficiency level: *"I could see that teachers are able to look at student's progress in learning according to CEFR band or level"* (SISC+_Int1). Once students reach their target proficiency level, teachers can evaluate their teaching methods. This process, combined with regular student assessment, can enhance teacher-student relationships and inform future instruction.

Both interviews and document analysis show that aligning assessments with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) significantly impacts teaching methods, especially differentiated instruction. The CEFR provides clear goals and highlights the time teachers need to learn and use new teaching strategies for writing.

Differentiated teaching has to be included not only in pre-service teacher education but also in-service training to enable teachers to provide paths to learning so that the classroom becomes a 'good fit' for learners of varying proficiency levels (Adami, 2004).

(Doc_ELR_2021, page 13)

The English Language Education Reform 2015-2025 emphasises the use of diverse teaching methods. The implementation of CEFR-aligned assessments has

further encouraged this approach. As one participant stated, *"of course there are differences that we can notice before we have CEFR and after teachers implemented it"* (SISC+_Int1). To effectively cater to all students, a variety of teaching methods are essential.

Alignment of curriculum and teaching and learning to CEFR:

To specify learning outcomes and setting clear and attainable standards in the curriculum to enable teachers to use appropriate teaching strategies to achieve differentiated goals

(Doc_ELR_2021, page 13)

Apart from this, the English Language Education Reform 2015-2025 emphasises the use of appropriate teaching methods. Aligning teaching and learning with the CEFR provides teachers with clearer learning objectives and goals. This framework offers new opportunities for teachers to explore effective teaching strategies, including for writing skills.

In order to implement the new curriculum effectively, teachers need to be familiar with the new way of doing things. They have to adopt and adapt to new ideas, teaching strategies and delivery practices...

(Doc_ELR_2021, page 44)

Teachers must be familiar with the CEFR-aligned assessment as part of their writing instruction. The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and the Roadmap 2015-2025 emphasise the importance of embracing new approaches.

The Curriculum Induction training provided teachers with input for differentiated teaching strategies in order to prepare lesson plans, adapt learning materials to fit different learning needs and abilities, and practise delivering supportive feedback. Teachers were also introduced to formative assessment strategies to enable them to track their students' development and needs.

(Doc_ELR_2021, page 44)

Teachers received initial training on the updated syllabus, which includes the CEFR-aligned assessments. Adapting to these changes requires integrating them into daily teaching and learning practices. The clear descriptors in the DSKP (Curriculum Standard Document) make it easier to achieve writing goals. The CEFR-aligned tests have also influenced teaching strategies. Overall, the CEFR has significantly impacted ESL teaching, prompting a shift towards more proficiency-focused methods and assessments.

Discussion: Sub-theme - CEFR Influences Teaching Strategy

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) promotes diverse teaching methods to cater to various learning styles, from traditional techniques to modern technology. By providing concrete examples of language tasks, the CEFR aids in lesson planning and material selection. A shift from grammar-focused to communicative language use is emphasised and influenced by the CEFR, which shapes teaching strategies (North & Piccardo, 2016). It also serves as a robust framework for enhancing language education. By providing clear benchmarks for language proficiency, it empowers teachers to create assessments that accurately measure student progress. This focus on assessment aligns with the CEFR's emphasis on communicative competence, as outlined by Little (2018) and Byrnes and Maxim (2014). Ultimately, the

CEFR's holistic approach, encompassing teaching, learning, and assessment, contributes to more effective and engaging language learning experiences.

4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Applicable

The second theme highlighted by the participants, including the Head of English Language Panel, SISC+, and also English Teachers, on CEFR-aligned writing skills assessment illuminates the concept of applicability within language education. Applicable means teachers agree that the CEFR-aligned assessment is feasible or appropriate because it leads to continuous assessments rather than exam-based testing. Since teachers do not put so much emphasis on structure, students can focus on developing their writing talent. Therefore, educators can make changes by using writing tests aligned to the CEFR, which also helps teachers assess students' written work (Council of Europe, 2001).

The CEFR's comprehensive and adaptable framework significantly enhances language teaching and learning, as evidenced by its impact on assessment, teaching strategies, and inclusivity. Most participants agreed that it helps track student progress and guide teaching. The CEFR also promotes global understanding by providing a common standard for language proficiency. Its flexibility allows for adaptation to different languages and learning environments. The CEFR is inclusive, catering to diverse learning styles. It supports a variety of teaching and learning approaches. Through in-depth interviews and document analysis, five key themes about the CEFR's usefulness emerged. These themes encompass facets such as facilitating assessment processes, prioritising content over format, and the suitability of the CEFR framework

for teaching writing skills, thereby enriching our understanding of its multifaceted utility in educational contexts.

a. Sub-theme: Facilitate Marking

The first sub-theme under the main theme of applicable is facilitating marking. This is highlighted by the participants regarding CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments. Participants emphasised the role of CEFR-aligned assessments in streamlining the marking process. Teachers highlighted the importance of regular writing opportunities and the need for effective feedback. By closely monitoring student progress, teachers can identify strengths and weaknesses, providing targeted support and guidance. This formative assessment approach is crucial for enhancing student writing abilities.

I guess they (the ESL teachers) have the same, same err request as I do.. I guess marking is not really so tedious like like the previous curriculum.

(Head A_Int1)

okay, so this is more I think it is much more easy for the teachers as well, marking is much more easy.

(Head A_Int1)

Head A emphasised the facilitative role of the CEFR-aligned rubrics in streamlining the grading process, highlighting their effectiveness in guiding teachers' instructional practices. The establishment of standardised rubrics equips teachers with clear guidelines for assessing student performance, thereby enhancing consistency and clarity in grading procedures. This standardised approach enables teachers and

examiners to conduct assessments with consistency and equity, ensuring that learners' writing abilities are evaluated objectively across different contexts: *“now we have the standardise framework, we should work for it”* (SISC+).

Similarly, Head B emphasised the instructive value of CEFR descriptors in guiding students' understanding of assessment criteria, facilitating alignment between instructional objectives and assessment expectations: *“yes, it should influence teachers' strategy in teaching writing skills, ok how? now, in my own class, when we know CEFR is implemented the emm marking scheme is not I'm not focusing on exam yes but in a way err us teachers need to know the marking scheme it does help, it can help, it does help in making helping us to note strategy of teaching writing skills”* (Head B_Int1).

Teacher B explained to the students that they must first understand the CEFR before they can solve their tasks. This became part of their students' learning objectives so they could figure out what to focus on when written tasks were given. So, when the students received instructions, they already knew what to do: *“Definitely, so I want them to understand the rubrics first, and make them understand and relate it to the Malaysian marking system. And then I tell them how do we match the rubric to the level of the question in the essay, so like part 1 and part 2 is for A1 and A2, part 3 is for B1 and B2 and Part 4 is for C1 and C2 ok and why is it easier for you to score in part 1 but why is it harder to score in Part 2 and Part 3, what are the things that will be looked at when we're giving your mark and so on, ok so they have to understand that first, then I teach them as usual, and give them exercises and basically once they understand the rubrics it's easy for them to understand like why it's harder for part 3 and so on”* (Teacher B_Int1).

Teacher F echoed these views, noting the ease of marking associated with CEFR-aligned assessments compared to previous methodologies: *“Compared to the previous one, as an examiner myself, CEFR-aligned assessment is easier to mark and it gives chances for the students to express themselves as we can compare to the previous cycle okay”* (Teacher F_Int1). The structured nature of the CEFR-aligned assessment enables teachers to evaluate student work systematically, providing both teachers and students with a clear understanding of performance expectations. Moreover, Teacher F highlighted the empowerment afforded to students through the application of the CEFR-aligned assessment, emphasising the expansion of creative expression and autonomy in writing tasks. Using this tool can improve the ability of teachers and examiners to accurately assess learners' writing skills and provide more targeted and meaningful criticism: *“CEFR offers us (teachers) a really beneficial tools in assessing students”* (Teacher E_int1).

In line with the findings from the semi-structured interview with teachers about their views on implementing a CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills, teachers found the CEFR-aligned assessment user-friendly and therefore used it when marking their students' essays. Writing that follows a structure and is directed towards a specific goal reveals the abilities, understanding, and effort of the students who wrote it. It demonstrates their capacity to organise thoughts, adhere to guidelines, and effectively communicate their ideas to achieve a particular objective. Most students write with enthusiasm, and allowing them some autonomy can have a significant impact on their ability to write freely. Both teachers and students can benefit from the CEFR, which supports the learning and teaching of writing.

The researcher found that the sub-theme of facilitate marking identified in the semi-structured interview is also supported by the findings in the document analysis. Effective implementation of the CEFR-aligned assessment requires a deep understanding of the framework's rubrics and descriptors. While the goal is to shift away from traditional, exam-focused assessment, accurate evaluation of classroom activities is essential. Teachers need to develop the expertise to apply CEFR principles to everyday assessment practices. This knowledge will enable them to provide targeted feedback and support student growth.

Regular training in marking, for example, is crucial to ensure that teacher-examiners develop the knowledge and skills that they need to establish consistency and standardisation when assessing the candidates.

(Doc_ELR_2021, page 66)

It is important to emphasise that the introduction of the CEFR also has an impact on teachers' assessments of students' progress. The applicability of the CEFR stems from its function as a comprehensive and adaptable framework that addresses the intricacies of language teaching, learning, and assessment. Its wide acceptance contributes to an integrated and standardised approach to language teaching on a global basis.

In summary, the integration of CEFR-aligned assessment practices reflects a concerted effort to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of language education. By providing a standardised framework for assessing language proficiency, the CEFR promotes consistency, clarity, and autonomy in both teaching and learning endeavours.

Discussion of Sub-theme: Facilitate Marking

The CEFR is a valuable tool for assessing writing skills. Participants agreed that it provides a clear framework for evaluating language proficiency at different levels. By aligning their assessments with CEFR levels, teachers can accurately determine students' strengths and weaknesses. This level-based approach enables teachers to provide more targeted feedback, supporting students in their writing development. Additionally, the CEFR serves as a valuable tool for both assessment and instruction. By providing clear benchmarks for writing proficiency, it enables teachers to set appropriate learning goals and track student progress. Teachers can use the CEFR to design tasks that challenge students at their current level while also pushing them towards higher proficiency.

As Phillipakos (2017) suggests, clear expectations are crucial for effective learning. By familiarising students with the CEFR, teachers can foster a deeper understanding of their writing goals and the steps needed to achieve them. This helps students be clear of the CEFR requirements based on the descriptors and also facilitate teachers in their marking. In conclusion, the CEFR's role in enhancing writing assessment and instruction is evident. Its standardised framework provides a shared language for discussing and evaluating student performance, promoting consistency and fairness. By aligning teaching, learning, and assessment with the CEFR, teachers can create a more effective and equitable learning environment.

b. Sub-theme: Less Format Attention

The next sub-theme under the main theme of applicable is less format attention, which is viewed as important by the participants, especially in marking written tasks

using the CEFR. Participants emphasised a shift from rigid format-focused assessment to a greater emphasis on content and language use. Previously, strict adherence to prescribed formats, such as the SPM-guided essay, was often prioritised over the quality of students' writing.

The CEFR promotes a more flexible approach that allows students to express their ideas in their own unique style while still assessing their language proficiency. This shift encourages creativity and critical thinking. If teachers focused less on formatting, students could put more effort into developing their writing and linguistic skills: *“now we understand that helping students to acquire the language proficiency is important than asking to write a long essay”* (Teacher C_Int1). As a result, learning the structure will not be as much of a hindrance to students as they work to improve their second language writing skills.

This sub-theme came to light as the researcher was conducting the data analysis required to answer RQ1. The participants understood and agreed with the transformation and implementation of the CEFR-aligned assessment, which led to the format of writing that teachers needed to teach students: *“new way of writing is highlighted based on the written task instructions”* (Teacher E_Int1). However, with the CEFR, the format of writing did not receive a lot of attention this time around. As a result, it was noticed that students could concentrate more on the subject, as well as their language skills, and that teachers could supervise students' writing based on the standards that are matched with the CEFR. The following are extracts selected from the interview that describe the perspectives and views of the participants with regard to the sub-theme of less format attention.

Quality wise, I think it is much easier as before so before in the old format it gives room for for the good students, it helps the good students. Those who are a avid reader, you find they able to score, you know this is the time for them to show and tell. But it doesn't really help the weak students, but with this new format it gives improvement, it helps the weak students you find the big big purpose they can show their what they can write as well so I think it is fair right for all. So, I really like it. I like it.

(Teacher A_Int1)

Teacher A noted that the current format of the CEFR was able to accommodate all levels of proficiency, making the standard fair for students of all ability levels. The format used earlier would give an advantage to students who strive for greatness because of the goal. On the other hand, the talent of weak students was less appreciated because the exam-oriented format was more valuable at this point. When the CEFR-aligned assessment was introduced, even the learning efforts of the weakest students were recognised and praised, which Teacher A believed was one of the reasons why students' performance may improve after the transformation with the CEFR. As a teacher, she was pleased to see that her students were working at a level that matched their abilities, while at the same time they showed significant growth and were highly motivated to progress in their studies.

Teacher B noted that the CEFR helped teachers realise that the new method of assessing writing should change over time. Teacher B also noted that the new transformation includes CEFR-changed teaching, assessment, and curriculum. The CEFR is part of this transformation. For example, the new learning objectives should focus on student behaviour appropriate to the framework: *“so when you know how you are assessing the student you cannot use the same method as before, like that not*

relevant anymore and I think it's for me, it's actually easier for us for the teachers, so we don't have to focus on the format and we it's easier to motivate the students to write, there's no pressure for them, so I see in a positive way” (Teacher B_Int1).

The shift from rigid formats allowed both teachers and students to focus more on language development and content. Without the constraints of prescribed structures, students were encouraged to express themselves freely. Teachers found it easier to identify students' strengths and weaknesses as the focus shifted from format to content. Importantly, this approach fostered a positive learning environment where students were motivated to improve their writing without the pressure of external competition. This shift can be linked to the “can-do” statements of the Roadmap (2015-2025), which emphasise the ability of students to move through the CEFR levels. These levels are shown in Table 4.5. Thus, it is important for teachers to know the abilities of their students, based on the CEFR levels.

Table 4.5: Performance Standard Guide for Writing

PERFORMANCE LEVEL	DESCRIPTORS FOR WRITING SKILLS
1	- Can display minimal ability to communicate information, ideas, feelings and opinions as well as organise information with a lot of support. - Can display minimal ability to produce a plan or draft and modify this in response to feedback with a lot of support. - Can display minimal ability to use registers, punctuations and spell with a lot of support.
2	- Can display some ability to communicate information, ideas, feelings and opinions as well as organise information with a lot of support. - Can display some ability to produce a plan or draft and modify this in response to feedback with a lot of support. - Can display some ability to use registers, punctuations and spell with a lot of support.
3	- Can communicate information, ideas, feelings and opinions clearly as well as organise information coherently. - Can produce a plan or draft and modify this appropriately independently. - Can use registers appropriately as well as punctuate and spell with reasonable accuracy.

Table 4.5, continued

PERFORMANCE LEVEL	▪ DESCRIPTORS FOR WRITING SKILLS
4	▪ Can communicate information, ideas, feelings and opinions clearly as well as organise information coherently with very few relevant details. ▪ Can produce a plan or draft and modify this appropriately independently. ▪ Can use registers appropriately as well as punctuate and spell with reasonable accuracy.
5	▪ Can communicate information, ideas, feelings and opinions clearly as well as organise information coherently with some relevant details. ▪ Can produce a plan or draft and modify this appropriately independently with some relevant details. ▪ Can use registers appropriately as well as punctuate and spell with reasonable accuracy.
6	▪ Can communicate information, ideas, feelings and opinions clearly as well as organise information coherently using a variety of relevant details. ▪ Can produce a plan or draft and modify this appropriately independently with a variety of relevant details. ▪ Can use registers appropriately as well as punctuate and spell with reasonable accuracy. ▪ Can display exemplary model of language use and guide others in a given task

Source: Doc_DSKP_T5_2020, page 51-52

The DSKP indicates a shift in assessment focus from rigid format adherence to a holistic evaluation of overall language proficiency. This shift aligns with the findings from the semi-structured interviews. There has been a paradigm shift, prioritising the quality of students' writing over rigid format compliance. Participants were satisfied with the CEFR-aligned assessment because it seemed to measure students' language and content rather than format: *"surely using CEFR with the guidelines provided for writing, it shows that content is most matter than the format itself"* (Teacher B_Int1).

Teachers who pay less attention to format were therefore more likely to focus on what students could do and valued their ability rather than focusing on the format or structure of the assessment: *"can-do descriptor is like a mantra for us to focus on what should we focus on in assessing students writing"* (Teacher A_Int1). This emphasis on learners' inherent ability to learn and progress through the CEFR levels is consistent

with CEFR's 'can do' statements, which describe the language skills and competences that learners should be able to demonstrate at each level. By focusing on what learners can do and helping them reach the required level of proficiency, teachers can help promote student learning and progress.

Therefore, the CEFR has proven invaluable in assessing writing skills by providing a standardised framework for evaluating proficiency, setting clear learning goals, and ensuring equitable assessment practices. Its widespread adoption in education has made it a cornerstone for developing students' writing abilities and academic success.

Discussion of Sub-theme: Less Format Attention

This study indicates a shift in writing instruction to content over format, prioritising clear communication while still emphasising the importance of fundamental writing rules. A comprehensive approach that combines both content mastery and formal skills is necessary for effective writing development. Reduced emphasis on formatting enhances students' focus and writing skills. This aligns with cognitive theories of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) that view writing as a complex cognitive process involving problem-solving and decision-making (Smith et al., 2022). This study highlights the importance of a balanced approach to writing instruction, emphasising both content and form, while format is no longer the main focus of writing. By understanding the complex cognitive processes involved in writing and applying this knowledge to the pedagogy, teachers can create learning environments that foster critical thinking, creativity, and effective communication.

c. Sub-theme: CEFR Suits Writing Skills

The findings of this study, obtained through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, reveal the views and perspectives of teachers who are in favour of the suitability of the CEFR for writing skills. Insufficient practise opportunities hinder students' ability to acquire the skill of writing. Acquiring the skill of writing is considered quite challenging (Johnson et al., 2021). Consequently, the introduction of an assessment aligned to the CEFR has raised optimistic expectations about its potential to help students who struggle with any of the four primary skills in English language learning: Writing, Reading, Listening, and Speaking. Furthermore, it is crucial for teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of the CEFR, as it is used in the assessment of student work.

Participants underscored the importance of aligning assessments with the CEFR, citing its suitability for evaluating writing skills. Head A highlighted CEFR's capacity to guide assessment redesign, promoting precision and clarity in students' writing. This contrasted with previous curricula, where students had more freedom in writing but lacked focus and purpose. Teacher F noted that CEFR's structured approach addressed this issue by delineating clear assessment criteria, enhancing both assessment accuracy and student understanding of expectations.

The following extracts show why it is important to use an assessment aligned to the CEFR, which had been referenced by the participants to be appropriate for assessing writing skills: *“since everything should be synchronised so...”* (Head A_Int1).

so the whole of the teaching and learning reform and I feel that it is easier to follow... because err..because I believe that nowadays according to the new

syllabus, according to the new assessment...students are taught to write in a more precise manner. and it is straight to the point...not like those days whereby students can write just about everything and write about 5 pages. and there is a content point there err... then there is no purpose there is no focus there but using CEFR assessment is okay. we are able to guide the students for a more focused emmm... essay or writing..write up..

(Head A_Int1)

Head A explained that assessments based on the CEFR are appropriate for writing skills because the CEFR is appropriate for redesigning assessments. She emphasised that students need to write accurately. Direct and to-the-point answers are highly valued and seen as evidence that students understand the task set for them. Compared to the previous curriculum, where students had excessive freedom to write without a specific target in mind, it took a while for teachers to point out to students what the answers should be, which students gave when they wrote: *“previous curriculum is different of course, everything would more be based on teachers’ suggestions and answer schemes”* (Teacher F_Int1). This is because students were writing without a specific goal in mind. Students did not necessarily need to write more to improve their writing skills. However, as long as they focused on it, they could write what they thought was right.

Do you think CEFR is suitable to be implemented in ESL classrooms especially for writing skills?

my answer is a solid yes.

(Teacher B_Int1)

Teacher B confirmed and agreed that a writing skills assessment aligned to the CEFR was used and implemented and that this assessment was appropriate for writing skills if teachers could implement it accordingly in teaching and learning.

yes, one thing that what i like about CEFR itself, it's it teaches the students, the teachers not to be prejudice on students writing because..because before this writing skills is seen as something as it seems as holistic, the students are not be good in content but they also need to be good in the emm... sentence structure in the language itself. and we teachers, we are taught to penalised students when they cannot produce good sentence. meanwhile compared to CEFR, this CEFR itself, it consists, the writing consists of four elements which are content, communicative achievement, organisation and language. so here there are some students who are good in content, they read lots, they have many sources of informations, there are students who are good in the content itself but not very good in emm writing a sentence, not very good at producing simple and complex sentences, they could only some of them could only produce simple sentences. but we could focus on the different, these different elements need. so it's much better, we don't be prejudice on the students. we focus on what the students can do instead of what students can't do.

(Teacher B_Int1)

Teacher B talked about implementing an assessment that is in line with the CEFR, which helps teachers and students assess each other's writing skills to a lesser extent. She considered the CEFR as a framework that includes four relevant components to prioritise when improving one's writing skills. By considering the factors of content, communicative performance, organisation, and language, it was ensured that all students were treated equally. This is because some students may be able to fulfil all components, whereas others may only be able to fulfil one element. The skills that

students acquired and perfected would be beneficial to them regardless of the content they created. Their skills are recognised and appreciated for all that they can do.

Teacher B suggested that teachers should prioritise students' ability to improve their writing skills over their lack of ability to do so: *“we focus on what the students can do instead of what students can't do”* (Teacher B_Int1). By encouraging this approach, students are not constantly penalised for their mistakes, which increases their motivation to write.

Teacher B emphasised CEFR's profound approach to writing assessment, which encompasses content, communicative achievement, organisation, and language proficiency. This comprehensive framework enables teachers to recognise and value diverse student abilities, avoiding prejudice based solely on language proficiency. By focusing on what students can do rather than their limitations, Teacher B advocated for a more inclusive and motivating approach to writing instruction.

Teacher C echoed the response that a CEFR-aligned assessment is suitable for evaluating students' writing skills, aligning with the framework's broader goal of assessing overall language proficiency. This comprehensive approach facilitates monitoring students' progress across all language skills—reading, speaking, listening, and writing—ensuring holistic language development.

Yes, in my opinion, it should, okay because it is one of the assessments which can actually carry out to actually assess the progress that students are actually doing not only for writing but for the other three skills that they have which are reading, speaking and listening.

(Teacher C_Int1)

A CEFR-aligned assessment is appropriate for students' writing skills, and Teacher C agreed that it needs to be introduced. The development students' writing could be monitored by teachers, and at the same time, an assessment linked to the CEFR could be implemented for students' reading, speaking, and listening skills.

The semi-structured interview data corroborate the document analysis findings regarding the decreased emphasis on format in writing assessment. The CEFR is intended to provide teachers with precise guidance on how to properly assess their students, while emphasising the importance of appreciating and recognising students' achievements rather than focusing on their shortcomings. By using the CEFR as a reference point, teachers can ensure that their teaching and assessment are in line with globally recognised standards, ensuring that students make consistent progress at different levels: *"Several of CEFR level A1, and in some instances, level A2 "can do" statements can be used as a guide to teachers when formulating the assessment criteria for productive outcomes for speaking and writing abilities as well as for receptive outcomes involving listening (aural reception) and reading (visual reception)"* (Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 163).

The CEFR is divided into six proficiency levels, ranging from A1 (beginner) to C2 (advanced). Each level of the CEFR describes the language skills and competences that learners should be able to demonstrate at that level. Level A1 is the lowest level of CEFR and corresponds to a beginner level. *In the aspect of writing skills, it appears that CEFR level A1 Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences is the only "can do" statement that could be adopted for an overall written production (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 61)"* (Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 163).

It is noted that learners at the A1 level can understand and use simple words and phrases. They can talk about themselves, their home, and their basic needs. They can use the language in everyday situations. Teachers think that a CEFR-based writing test is good to show what these learners can do.

The CEFR provides a clear framework for assessing writing skills. Its structured proficiency levels enable teachers to accurately evaluate student performance and track progress. By focusing on student achievements rather than shortcomings, the CEFR promotes a positive assessment culture. This globally recognised standard ensures consistent assessment practices and supports student success.

Discussion of Sub-theme: CEFR Suits Writing Skills

The CEFR outlines a progression of writing skills, from basic sentence structure to complex composition. It emphasises writing as a core language skill and provides clear criteria for assessment. By incorporating CEFR principals, teachers can adopt a holistic approach to writing instruction, focusing on various writing competencies beyond grammar and vocabulary. This enables students to develop their writing skills for effective communication in real-world contexts.

Brown et al. (2020) highlight the CEFR's emphasis on language use within context. By focusing on learners as active language users, the CEFR aligns with a process-oriented approach to writing instruction. This approach, emphasising student development over error correction, is consistent with self-efficacy theory. The CEFR provides a shared language for teachers, promoting collaboration and consistency in writing instruction and assessment. By establishing clear standards and expectations,

the CEFR enhances transparency and accountability. This framework supports the development of effective writing programs that align with global best practices. Ultimately, the CEFR empowers teachers to improve student writing outcomes by providing a structured approach to assessment and instruction.

4.3.1.3 Summary of Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Research Question 1 successfully explored teachers' perspectives on implementing CEFR-aligned writing assessments. Participants overwhelmingly supported the CEFR alignment, aligning with the goals of the Roadmap 2015-2025 and the Malaysian Education Plan 2013-2025. The study revealed teachers' awareness of the curriculum's evolution and the crucial role of the CEFR-aligned assessment in its successful implementation.

4.3.2 RQ 2: How do teachers implement CEFR-aligned assessments for writing skills in ESL classrooms?

The second aim of this study is to explore the methodologies employed by teachers in assessing writing skills within the framework of the CEFR. The participants of this RQ involved semi-structured interviews with three Head of English Panels and one SISC+ as the proxy participants, as well as the six English teachers themselves. To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employed a triangulation approach using instruments such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis, which included existing policy documents and reflective journals.

From the findings, the researcher managed to come up with eleven overarching themes for RQ2, as shown in Figure 4.2. The figure illustrates a network depicting the development of themes and sub-themes resulting from the semi-structured interviews

and document analysis. This visual representation was generated using the ATLAS.ti 9 software, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the interconnected themes. The integration of both interview data and reflective journals offers a triangulated approach to data presentation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.



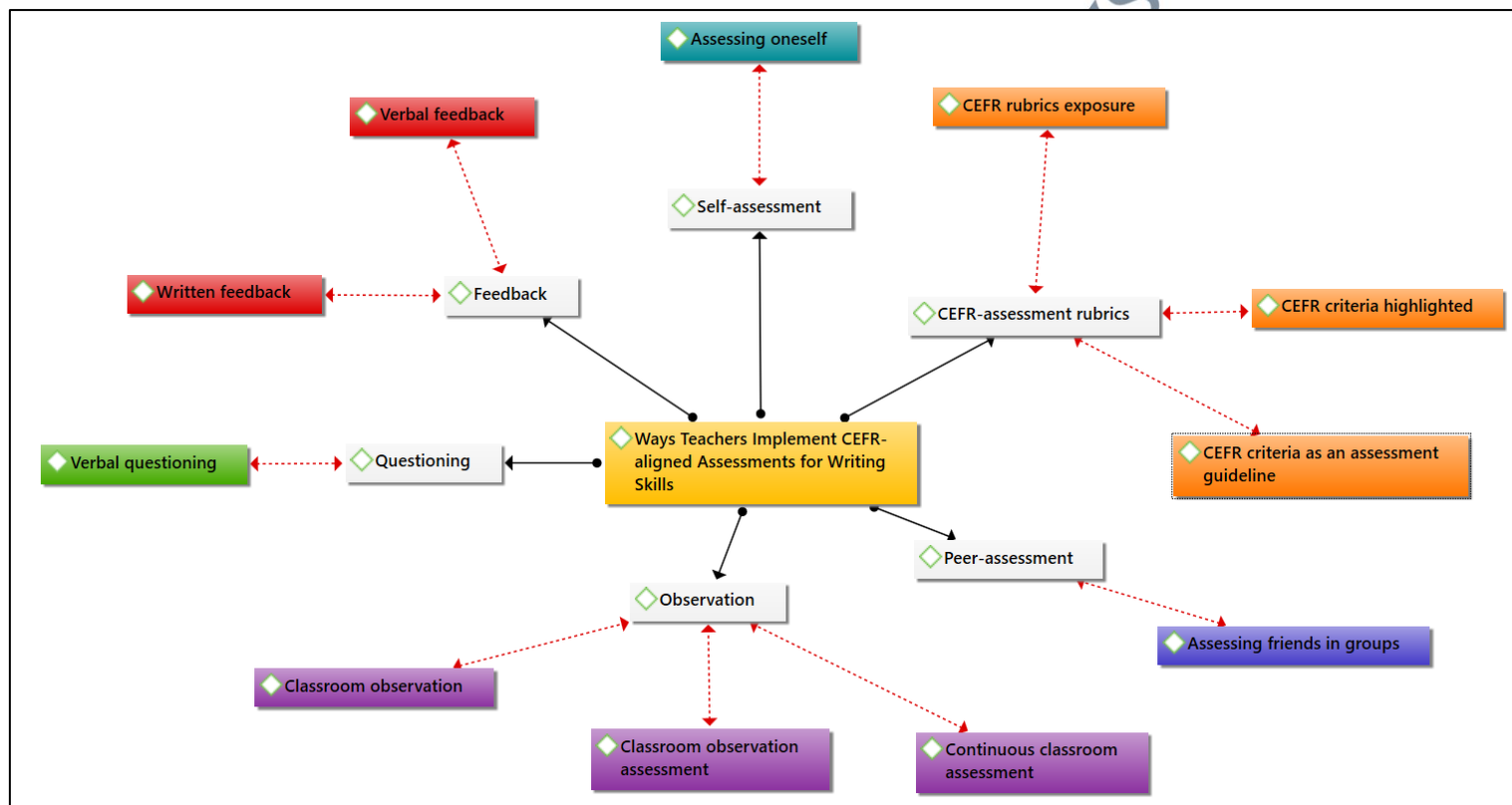


Figure 4.2: Themes and Sub-themes Network on Ways Teachers Implement CEFR-aligned Assessments for Writing Skills in ESL Classrooms, derived from Semi-structured Interviews and Document Analysis

To clarify the themes depicted in Figure 4.2 and validate findings through triangulation, Table 4.6 presents detailed definitions of the identified themes and sub-themes based on data from both interviews and document analysis.

Table 4.6: Research Question 2 - Themes, Sub-Themes, and Definitions

RQ	Sub-themes	Themes	Definition
RQ2	▪ Verbal questioning	Questioning	Teachers using assessment methods aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) sometimes resort to questioning students to assess their understanding of the content and their readiness to proceed to the next stage of the session. When instructing students, teachers usually use direct speech (Black & William, 1998).
	▪ CEFR rubrics exposure	CEFR-Assessment Rubrics	To help students focus on what they need to write and how they will be graded for their writing skills, teachers also highlight and familiarise students with the CEFR assessment rubrics (Brookhart, 2013).
	▪ CEFR criteria highlighted		
	▪ CEFR as an assessment guideline	Self-Assessment	Teachers are familiar with self-assessment and often give students the opportunity to practise in class. However, this is only done with teacher guidance to ensure that students stay on track (Black & William, 1998).
	▪ Assessing oneself		
	▪ Assessing friends in groups	Peer-Assessment	It appears that teachers prefer to evaluate each other in order to help students develop their skills and become more aware of their mistakes. There are several advantages to explicitly teaching students how to evaluate their own work and that of others. As a result, students are better able to take charge of their own learning and develop as learners (Black & William, 1998).
	▪ Students inaugurate CEFR		
	▪ Verbal feedback	Feedback	Teachers provide assessment-based feedback either after a task is completed or at regular intervals during the learning process. To give feedback to students, teachers need to explain to them both what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong (Black & William, 1998).
	▪ Written feedback		

Table 4.7 presents a summary of the main and most important sub-themes identified through the triangulation of data from the three participant groups. These sub-themes were determined based on the frequency with which participants rated them as highly important.

[illegible]

Table 4.7, continued

No	Themes	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D	Teacher E	Teacher F	HoELP A	HoELP B	HoELP C	SISC+
4	Self-assessment	/	/		/			/	/		
5	Feedback	/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/
6	Observation	/	/	/							

*HoELP = Head of English Language Panel

*SISC+ = School Improvement Specialist Coach

Participants pinpointed questioning, CEFR assessment rubrics, and peer assessment as the most effective strategies for implementing the CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills, as shown in Table 4.7. Table 4.8 provides a brief overview of the selected themes and sub-themes in response to research question 2 (RQ2) of the study.

Table 4.8: Themes and Sub-themes for the Most Important Theme Highlighted by Participants

Theme	CEFR-assessment rubrics	Questioning	Peer-assessment
Sub-theme	CEFR rubrics exposure CEFR criteria highlighted CEFR as an assessment guideline	Verbal Questioning	Assessing friends in a group

The sub-themes of RQ2 are discussed in the next section.

4.3.2.1 Theme 1: CEFR-Assessment Rubrics

The utilisation of CEFR assessment rubrics as a framework for implementing CEFR-aligned assessment practices emerged as a significant theme in the responses of the participants. The CEFR assessment plays a role in helping students focus on what they need to write and how they will be graded for their writing skills. Besides, teachers also highlight and familiarise students with the CEFR assessment rubrics. Consequently, the researchers identified three distinct sub-themes to delineate the facets of CEFR assessment rubrics based on the acquired data. These sub-themes encompass CEFR rubrics of exposure, highlighted CEFR criteria, and CEFR as assessment guidelines.

a. Sub-theme: CEFR Rubrics Exposure

Teachers emphasised the need for CEFR-aligned assessments and rubrics in writing classes. Students need to understand the CEFR to effectively show their language skills, especially in peer assessment. The CEFR helps teachers, parents, and education officials track and improve language learning (Wok Zaki & Darmi, 2021).

The interview data showed that teachers shared the CEFR rubrics with students from

the start of lessons. This helped students understand the assessment criteria for each task and gave them ongoing access to the rubrics.

Head C, for instance, conveyed the CEFR framework to students with emphasis, ensuring that they were cognisant of the proficiency bands they needed to attain and the corresponding expectations. Verbal questioning was employed to alert students to the learning objectives associated with each band, fostering greater awareness and consciousness among them: *“We did share the description of the framework...”* (Head C_Int1). She added that verbal questioning alerts the students to learning: *“I think it is quite interesting, they will be more conscious and aware of the expectation in the band so in the future I’m pretty sure they will have learnt the lesson and remember the bands”* (Head C_Int1).

Furthermore, Teacher A stressed the significance of teachers' familiarity with the CEFR framework, advocating for the consistent use of CEFR-aligned assessments in class assessments. By adhering to the prescribed assessment scales provided within the CEFR framework, teachers ensure standardised and objective assessment practices, thereby promoting fair and accurate assessment outcomes: *“I use the scale that are provided the assessment scales that are provided in our CEFR framework and you know that’s given to us, the scales that’s given to us by LPM and all that so I use them to grade my students’ work and I use it consistently. So, I don’t award mark as I like so it’s always based on the assessments scales that that when it comes to assessing students’ work. So I have to refer to it all the time. Then it will help”* (Teacher A_Int1).

This is because using assessments that are aligned with the CEFR is one of the most important aspects of the framework.

Teacher A further demonstrated a proactive approach by acquainting students with the CEFR rubrics at the onset of the term and continuously reinforcing this knowledge throughout the instructional period. This systematic exposure not only prepares students for upcoming examinations but also equips them with the requisite skills to navigate assessment tasks effectively.

Yes, definitely and I explain to them before the exams. I will expose them to rubrics, after the exams also when I'm going to the paper as I will explain to them, I think I have explained to them this form four batch and they came in March, maybe around 8 times already I have explained to them the rubrics because every chapters sometimes we have 2 or 3 exercises that comes to writing, so we will have to explain to them quite often like do it or on a regular basis I think we do it by explain to them the rubrics and all the scales and all that.

(Teacher A_Int1).

Teacher A did this regularly to help students retain information about CEFR-aligned assessments. This is especially helpful for them when it is time to take their exams, as they are better prepared for what to expect and how to answer the questions appropriately since the examination format is also aligned with the CEFR.

Similarly, Teacher B prioritised ensuring students' comprehension of the CEFR-aligned assessment rubrics by elucidating the rubric's components and their alignment with the Malaysian marking system. By fostering a deep understanding of the rubrics' intricacies, Teacher B empowered students to discern the assessment criteria associated with each proficiency level, thereby facilitating targeted and purposeful learning experiences.

Okay, for me, the first thing that I do is I make the students understand about CEFR related to CEFR...

(Teacher B_Int1)

so I want them to understand the rubrics first, and make them understand and relate it to the Malaysian marking system. And then I tell them how do we match the rubric to the level of the question in the essay, so like part 1 and part 2 is for A1 and A2, part 3 is for B1 and B2 and Part 4 is for C1 and C2 ok and why is it easier for you to score in part 1 but why is it harder to score in Part 2 and Part 3, what are the things that will be looked at when we're giving your mark and so on, ok so they have to understand that first, then I teach them as usual, and give them exercises and basically once they understand the rubrics it's easy for them to understand like why it's harder for part 3 and so on.

(Teacher B_Int1)

Additionally, Teachers C and D underscored the importance of students' access to the CEFR rubrics to guide their writing endeavours effectively. By familiarising students with the assessment criteria beforehand, teachers aim to cultivate a sense of agency and ownership over their learning, encouraging students to proactively engage with the writing process and set personalised goals for improvement.

Yes, yes, I do expose to them even for non-exam classes.

(Teacher C_Int1)

They need to refer to CEFR-aligned assessment rubrics before giving the comments to the other group.

(Teacher C_J3)

For the good students, yes, they know about the band and they usually teachers would expose them to the rubric and so on, what are the criteria or aspect when doing writing what should they have...

(Teacher D_Int1)

Due of their advanced academic standing, students are exposed to CEFR bands.

(Teacher C_J6)

I explain to them how should they assess their friends based on the band.

(Teacher C_J6)

Based on the earlier exposure, the score is based on CEFR band.

(Teacher C_J6)

I ask students to recall CEFR-aligned assessment rubrics as well for writing. They are already familiar with the rubrics because I have been exposed to them earlier.

(Teacher C_J7)

They become aware of what is their target for writing according to CEFR rubrics for example Express and respond to opinions and common feelings regarding travelling.

(Teacher C_J8)

Teacher E shared similar views, stressing the benefits of exposing students to the CEFR rubrics to scaffold their understanding of proficiency expectations and facilitate targeted skill development. Employing group work as a pedagogical strategy, Teacher

E leveraged the CEFR rubrics to assess students' progress and provide timely feedback, thereby promoting student engagement and accountability.

I also expose them with the rubrics, so they know what they should get, I mean what should they do to get the marks. Through group work as well, it is easier for me to ask them on their project. If they are able to answer well, I know they are on the right track on the lesson that day. So, through the criteria of CEFR and the rubrics help me to clearly assess my students throughout the lesson. I really like it.

(Teacher E_Int1).

Teacher E added that the importance of exposing the CEFR rubrics to students is: *“So that when they comment their friends, they will not go far from CEFR, they will engage with the learning activities as well”* (Teacher E_Int1).

Moreover, SISC+ highlighted the significance of integrating the CEFR rubrics into instructional materials, ensuring that students can discern the alignment between learning tasks and proficiency expectations. This practice reinforces students' awareness of their learning objectives and provides tangible benchmarks for self-assessment and reflection: *“when, I go through their exercise books, there are lots of motivation comments and of course based on CEFR rubrics”* (SISC+_Int1).

As a result, the majority of the participants agreed that it is important to familiarise students with the CEFR rubrics. They mentioned that students will benefit from this as they will be aware of their target band. In addition, students can have prior knowledge of the CEFR-aligned assessment that they can use when writing and assessing their friends. At the same time, teachers become more familiar with the students as they are

confronted with them on a regular basis. This makes it much easier for them to assess students in class or even for examination purposes.

Based on the extracts above, Teacher C taught her students that they should first look at the CEFR rubrics before assessing the work of other groups. This is because she felt that her students were advanced enough to understand what the CEFR is and how the rubrics can be applied to the assessment. Therefore, the acquisition of writing skills and assessment will be successful for students if they already have prior knowledge and regularly need to memorise it in classrooms. Again, Teacher C found that students had a better understanding of the CEFR and became more aware of their writing skill goals. Students found new motivation and learned valuable lessons from their previous mistakes.

In summary, participants agreed that familiarising students with the CEFR rubrics is crucial. This helps students set goals and understand assessment expectations. By giving students these tools, teachers empower them to improve their writing.

Discussion of Sub-theme: CEFR Rubrics Exposure

The data from the interview and journal show that the CEFR rubrics helped teachers in the classrooms. They exposed students to the CEFR, boosting their confidence in self and peer assessment. This aligns with past research (Wolf & Stevens, 2007; Chowdhury, 2019) on clear goals for students. The rubrics clarify tasks for students and teachers, reducing assessment anxiety (Hellens, 2020). They go beyond content and syllabi, setting clear goals and shared standards (Eisner, 1991; Hubers, 2020). The CEFR rubrics guide teachers in assessing writing. Good use needs teacher

skill (Biggs, 2003; Jaiswal, 2019). Clear rubrics help students understand their goals. Early use of rubrics builds a shared understanding between students and teachers. Students become aware of their writing goals and can work together to improve. Regular use helps students self-assess and grow as writers, promoting independence and continuous learning.

b. Sub-theme: CEFR Criteria Highlighted

The CEFR criteria are key to using the CEFR in writing assessments. Teachers stressed the importance of clear performance standards or criteria to guide students (Wolf & Stevens, 2007; Chowdhury, 2019). Criteria clarify expectations, making assessments fairer for both teachers and students.

Teachers articulated the necessity of focusing on the four key components of CEFR content, namely communicative competence, organisation, and language, to assess students effectively: *“if the students are able to communicate and achieve the appropriate forms, styles and register. I guess the students has already achieve at least the B1 or B2 level. as long as..and they have emm as long as they fulfil the criteria, they have the content, they have the communicative competence, the organisation err grammar and vocabulary and they are good to. and so i guess the teachers will have the focus on this four criteria so that the students writing would be would be on tasked”* (Head A_Int1).

This emphasis underscores the holistic nature of writing assessments, wherein students are evaluated based on their ability to articulate ideas coherently, demonstrate communicative proficiency, and exhibit linguistic accuracy: *“assessed the answers in*

accordance to CEFR assessment scales by checking their content, communicative achievement, organisation and language” (Teacher A_J1).

Furthermore, participants adopted diverse instructional strategies to ensure comprehensive coverage of the CEFR criteria. For instance, Head B advocated for a sequential approach that addressed different components of CEFR in separate lessons, allowing students to delve deeper into each aspect: *“students will paste the essay that they have done on mahjong that they have written on mahjong paper when do group work, so let say teachers focus only on the content and communicative achievement okay, the teachers will explain what they are looking for in content and what we are looking for in communicative achievement. Those two are the things are being so if focus only on that not focusing on the language so when they do all this gallery walk, they could err they could focus on what to what to tick what to give mark on their peers and even themselves. and even when they are writing err assessing, one more in writing itself, it's like I said like the teachers said okay today emm you are going to write an essay” (Head B_Int1).* This approach aimed to enhance students' understanding of the CEFR rubrics and criteria, thus facilitating more nuanced writing assessment.

This situation was also used by Teacher A in her writing lessons: *“So, when it comes to content, all the students will get 5 marks because all contents are five marks, so they will never be less than 5 marks because the questions are answered in the in the question itself because what I do is I believe in draft, when in the drafting part they must right answers, so for content they're able to get full marks that is the first strategy I will use for them to score in contents” (Teacher A_Int1).*

Teacher E shared that she had put a new emphasis on the students' writing skills and emphasised what the students were able to do: *“Ok before this, previous assessment I focus more on grammar. But for this assessment CEFR assessment, I think what important most is the what we call it, balance, it’s very balanced the content, the language, for example, my students who are weak in grammar they still can score, because they have the ideas, the content is there”* (Teacher E_Int1). Then, when she introduced the CEFR, she made sure that the students understood what they had already learned. Teacher E also explained that she focused on one component in one lesson and covered the other components in the next lesson: *“Okay, I show them, how to identify, we focus on the criteria. The lesson we focus on cohesive devices, so we focus on that element only, next class, we focus on tone or register, so every lesson focus on different thing”* (Teacher E_Int1). This is to ensure that the students can implement the lessons well, and that the implementation of CEFR-aligned assessment has its own focus.

Teachers emphasised the importance of the CEFR criteria for guiding student learning. By involving students in learning and using the CEFR rubrics, teachers helped students understand their learning goals and work independently.

The SISC+ has agreed on what teachers practise in the classroom. It is important that students know what the CEFR is and what is expected of them to achieve the learning objectives. It also confirmed that teachers are using the CEFR in their lessons and assessing students accordingly, as the Ministry hopes.

teachers do make sure students involve actively in the lessons. Collaborative learning is applied and students are given freedom to share their ideas and comments about their friends. This is a good sign. And yes, when I ask teachers,

they do expose students with CEFR rubrics, for me that is good also. Students will surely know what they need to do in the lesson and be a bit independent.

(SISC+_Int1)

throughout my observation since CEFR was implemented vividly in Malaysia I can see that teachers make use of CEFR in their lessons. They need to refer to the DSKP as well, revising on what students should achieve based on their level. When they assess students, I can see they use those four criteria of CEFR to assess. When, I go through their exercise books, there are lots of motivation comments and of course based on CEFR rubrics.

(SISC+_Int1)

Teachers A and B emphasised matching assessments to CEFR standards for fair and consistent grading. Using the CEFR criteria helped guide student progress and prepare them for international English levels. Teacher A also emphasised that: *“Teacher assesses students' work by following the grading methods in CEFR writing scales”* (Teacher A_J2). At the same time, participants noted that they aligned different types of assessment with the CEFR during the writing lessons: *“This time in class I wanted to try out criterion-referenced assessment as it is in line with CEFR scales for assessment”* (Teacher A_J3). This showed that the participants were ready and confident to implement the CEFR with different types of assessments without challenges.

Participants also noted that the CEFR acknowledges students' abilities and ideas for writing skills: *“What I like about CEFR writing is that any answers given by students are rewarded”* (Teacher B_J7).

From the extracts above, it is clear that the participants were aware of the importance of the CEFR and why they needed to emphasise the criteria in class,

especially in writing skills. It is important to acquire and understand all the components. How teachers do this depends largely on the level of their students. If they have advanced students, they can cover all the components in one lesson, but with weak and intermediate students, teachers tend to cover only one component in a lesson so that students have more time to understand the criteria.

The type of assessment carried out this time is ongoing and assessment as learning.

(Teacher A_J5)

I took a question from the real SPM paper and had asked the students to answer the question in half an hour's time. Once the time was up, I told them to stop writing and collected their papers. Later I started grading by using CEFR scales according to Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language.

(Teacher A_J7)

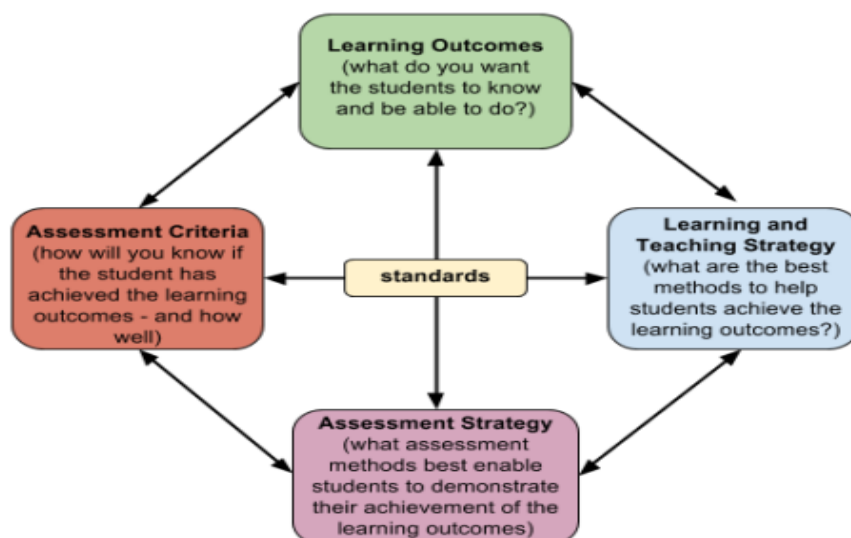
Teachers A and B consistently applied the CEFR criteria to their markings. This ensured accurate assessment and student progress. By familiarising students with these criteria, they prepared students for exams and helped them reach their target CEFR levels.

Thus, teachers should clearly communicate learning objectives and success criteria to students in order to ensure successful learning, as outlined in the Teacher Guide (Figure 4.3). The CEFR is a crucial component of this process. By familiarising students with the CEFR criteria, teachers equip them to apply the framework effectively in their writing.

Discussion of Sub-theme: CEFR Criteria Highlighted

The assessment criteria clearly outline the requirements for students to demonstrate learning and how their work will be evaluated. By sharing these upfront, students gain confidence, focus on key learning goals, and can independently track their progress. This fosters a deeper understanding of the curriculum and empowers students to take ownership of their learning. Essentially, the assessment criteria provide a roadmap for students and teachers, guiding instruction and assessment.

Before students begin writing the assessment criteria, it is important that they understand the relationship between the assessment criteria and course design. Bingham (2002) establishes a relationship between how learning outcomes influence and are influenced by the assessment criteria. Figure 4.3 illustrates this relationship, showing how learning outcomes both influence the assessment criteria and are influenced by the assessment criteria.



Source: Bingham (2002)

Figure 4.3: Planning a unit of study

Figure 4.3 depicts the interconnectedness between the assessment criteria and learning outcomes. The criteria determine if students achieve learning goals, while also providing teachers with a clear measure of student progress. Importantly, assessments are not about judgement but about evidence of learning. In order to effectively create the assessment criteria, teachers must understand how they fit within the broader programme structure. This emphasises assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning, ensuring that students meet learning objectives.

c. Sub-theme: CEFR as Assessment Guideline

The sub-theme of CEFR as an Assessment Guideline emerged from the participants' responses, indicating unanimous acknowledgement of CEFR's pivotal role in guiding assessment practices aligned with its framework. Participants asserted that when implementing the CEFR-aligned assessment of writing skills, they relied on the CEFR as a primary reference point, utilising its rubrics and descriptors to effectively assess students' work.

A standardised framework such as the CEFR provides a general structure for language learning and assessment without specifying any particular language content. Instead, it furnishes general recommendations and descriptors, serving as a blueprint for curriculum and assessment tool development across diverse educational contexts (Council of Europe, 2018). Nonetheless, scholars argue that for assessments to be meaningful and effective, it is imperative to contextualise descriptors and ensure their alignment with language-specific nuances, thereby contributing to the validation and calibration of the CEFR (Huang et al., 2018; Shackleton, 2018; Carlsen, 2018). By offering detailed descriptors for each proficiency level, the CEFR facilitates the design

of fair, valid, and reliable assessments that accurately gauge learners' language abilities and guide the selection of appropriate assessment tasks and skills (Smith et al., 2021). This enables teachers to select appropriate assessment tasks and skills that effectively assess learners' proficiency levels.

Participants' reflections further underscore the integration of the CEFR guidelines into assessment practices. For instance, Head A observed that ESL teachers utilise the CEFR as a guiding framework for assessing students' writing skills, ensuring clarity and consistency in the assessment criteria: *“I can also see, CEFR assists teachers to assess students clearly with the criteria so that teachers have clear assessment guidelines”* (Head A_Int1).

This observation is corroborated by Teachers A and C, who explicitly detailed their use of the CEFR-aligned assessment criteria, encompassing content, communicative achievement, organisation, and language proficiency, to evaluate student work. Such alignment with the CEFR underscores its pivotal role as the standard reference point for assessment practices in writing classrooms.

This situation was confirmed by Teachers A and C in their reflective journals:

I read their essays and started grading them according to CEFR aligned assessment which are based on content, communicative achievement, organisation and language.

(Teacher A_J5)

Subsequently, I marked according to CEFR scales to award them based on Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language.

(Teacher A_J8)

After reading their pieces, I began grading them using CEFR-aligned assessment criteria, which focus on language, communicative proficiency, organisation, and content.

(Teacher C_J5)

It is clear from the extracts that Teachers A and C used the same assessment method aligned to the CEFR, which ensured that the CEFR was their guiding principle when assessing students. This also ensured that the CEFR was used as the standard. Content, communicative performance, organisational structure, and language are the four main components. The CEFR assessment requirements that students must focus on and teachers must assess determine how students are assessed during the assessment process.

In addition, Teacher D adopted a proactive approach by providing students with firsthand experience in practicing the CEFR-aligned assessment and encouraging them to assess and correct their peers' writing based on the CEFR criteria. This approach not only fosters students' familiarity with the CEFR guidelines but also cultivates their autonomy and active participation in the learning process.

..like I said like giving them first-hand experience to assess their own friends' writing and let them evaluate, correct errors, identify errors, mark the sentence structure for example and it is very good approach, in fact I encourage them to do this kind of activity because by doing so they are able to notice or become aware of what are the do's and don'ts in writing, in terms of many aspects such

as the content, the language, the use of certain words that are repeat a lot of time in each paragraph example and so on, so yes I let my students and I encourage my students to implement the assessment.

(Teacher D_Int1).

SISC+'s observation reaffirms teachers' adherence to the CEFR guidelines, highlighting its utility in lesson planning and enhancing teaching effectiveness: *“as my observation, they are doing as what the government or what CEFR guideline, yes true”* (SISC+_Int1). She added that the CEFR will benefit teachers: *“As CEFR gives teachers guidelines, I think teachers should take it as an advantage for them to plan the lessons well”* (SISC+_Int1). Ultimately, by utilising the CEFR-aligned assessment as a reference point, teachers and students alike are equipped with a standardised framework for improving writing skills and achieving learning objectives. Familiarity with the CEFR ensures that students can align their writing with established proficiency standards, facilitating targeted efforts towards skill enhancement, and promoting a deeper engagement with the writing process. Thus, the integration of the CEFR as an assessment guide not only enhances the quality and consistency of assessment practices, but also empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey.

Discussion of Sub-theme: CEFR as an Assessment Guideline

The CEFR provides a clear framework for assessing student work fairly and consistently. It supports constructive feedback and transparent grading, which becomes an assessment guideline. Unlike traditional methods, the CEFR aligns assessment with learning objectives rather than vice versa. Performance standards within the CEFR show how well students meet these goals. The CEFR, introduced in 2001 by the Council of Europe (CoE), offers a comprehensive framework for language education

(Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021). Malaysia adopted the CEFR to improve English language teaching and learning, while also serving as an assessment guideline. It ensures consistency and standardisation in language education (Council of Europe, 2001).

Teachers in this study valued the CEFR as a guide for assessing writing skills. It helps standardise grading across classrooms and aligns assessments with clear benchmarks. This approach goes beyond exams and includes everyday classroom assessments. The CEFR's impact is global, as seen in its adoption by other countries like Thailand. In 2014, the Thai Ministry of Education embraced the CEFR as a practical tool for enhancing English language proficiency through communicative language teaching (CLT). By providing a clear framework for curriculum development, syllabus design, instructional strategies, and assessment methods, the CEFR facilitated a paradigm shift in English language education in Thailand (Ministry of Education, 2014).

The CEFR also delineates principles of quality assessment in educational settings, aiming to guide practitioners in conducting fair and effective assessments aligned with its standards. Emphasising formative assessment, which entails ongoing observation of student learning and performance, the CEFR aims to enhance teaching practices and maximise student learning outcomes. By encouraging schools and teachers to adopt high-quality assessment procedures consistent with the CEFR guidelines, the framework has the potential to improve school-based assessment practices, thereby enhancing educational policy decisions and fostering the development of standardised assessment indicators to gauge assessment quality.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Questioning

The theme of 'questioning' emerged from the data collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and the examination of pertinent documents. Questioning means that teachers using assessment methods aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) sometimes resort to questioning students to assess their understanding of the content and their readiness to proceed to the next stage of the session. When instructing students, teachers usually use direct speech (Black & William, 1998). It was found that 90% of the participants utilised questioning techniques as a means of assessing students in ESL classes, aligning these techniques with the CEFR framework. The use of questioning was perceived as a catalyst for fostering curiosity among students. Participants believed that questioning fosters connections, enhances cognitive abilities, and provides insights into students' cognitive processes.

Despite the benefits of questioning, there are two notable challenges associated with its implementation. Firstly, while all teachers possess the capacity to ask questions, formulating effective questions can be a complex task. Effective questioning entails providing prompts or cues that aid students comprehend the material and guide them in their learning process.

In addition, questioning serves various purposes, such as facilitating material review, assessing comprehension, promoting critical thinking, fostering creativity, highlighting key concepts, monitoring classroom dynamics, aiding in assessment, and encouraging discussion. This finding aligns with previous literature emphasising the multifaceted role of questioning in educational settings (Chen et al., 2016). The

predominant strategy identified by the participants for implementing questioning techniques was verbal questioning.

a. Sub theme: Verbal Questioning

The investigation into the strategies employed by teachers to assess writing skills aligned with the CEFR revealed verbal questioning as a prominent technique in ESL classrooms. This approach, rooted in the routine practice of teachers, involves active participation alongside students during various learning activities. Within the pedagogical setting, the question-and-answer session stands out as a pivotal component, reflecting a dynamic interaction between teachers and students (Mahmud et al., 2023).

Verbal questioning holds significance in the assessment process (Mahmud et al., 2023) due to its seamless integration with the teaching methodology. It serves as a conduit for gauging students' comprehension levels and eliciting their cognitive processes. This indirectly demonstrates the extensive use of verbal questions in the classroom, which undoubtedly plays a role in ensuring that a learning objective can be achieved (Mahmud et al., 2020). Cauley and McMillan (2010) highlight the importance of verbal questioning in collecting valuable data for enhancing teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

The findings from semi-structured interviews and document analysis shed light on how teachers implement verbal questioning as part of the CEFR-aligned assessment practices. Observations from the School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC+) and Heads of the English Language Panel underscore the pervasive use of questioning as a means to gauge student understanding and foster active participation in classroom

discourse. Teachers like Head A and Head C emphasised the importance of active discussion and questioning sessions to ascertain student comprehension levels and encourage critical thinking skills.

The SISC+ and Heads of the English Language Panel found that the teachers that they observed frequently question students as they teach and learn in the classroom to determine whether or not students have understood what they have learned. Head A shared that *“from my observation, I can see that teachers really help the students especially by encouraging active discussion and questioning in the lessons”* (Head A_Int1). Head C also shared her experience and her teacher experience where *“when the face-to-face sessions take place, I usually make sure my students actively participate in discussion and also questions and answer sessions. And this also happened to the teachers in my school from my observations”* (Head C_Int1). This situation was also experienced by SISC+ while observing: *“However, from my observation, I can see that teachers are trying their best to encourage students in questioning sessions and encourage problem solving skills among students. The session will make students actively participate in the lesson including writing class”* (SISC+_Int1). Thus, verbal questioning is one of the ways to investigate students’ understanding of the lessons.

In addition, students can also increase their confidence and actively participate in class, which gives them more opportunities to share what they have learned with their peers. Teachers can make an assessment of students’ writing skills that is in line with the CEFR by asking them questions. This can be done using the six stages of the writing model developed by White and Arndt (1991), two of which are drafting and generating

new ideas. This approach was also followed by the ESL teachers: “Yes, *verbal questioning definitely during every class in my writing class*” (Teacher B_Int1).

Teacher D emphasised the adaptability of verbal questioning, tailoring the approach to students' proficiency levels. For higher-level students, asking open-ended questions fosters critical thinking, whereas for lower-level students, visual prompts or descriptions facilitate vocabulary acquisition and idea generation. Furthermore, verbal questioning seamlessly integrates into various classroom activities, such as group work or individual exercises, facilitating continuous assessment of students' writing skills.

For upper form students asking question is very suitable, for low level students, maybe by describing pictures is more appropriate so that they can produce some vocabularies to trigger and elicit some ideas for them to write.

(Teacher D_Int1).

Verbal questioning can also be done conveniently in the classroom, for instance: “*While doing the while-writing activity I can I can gradually go observed and ask questions from if it is group work so I can walk around asking them what are their plans what do they want to include in the paragraph and another way of doing it which I often do is to give them evaluation or assessed them individually in their exercise book*” (Teacher D_Int1).

In order to practise verbal questioning, the participants played their roles well during the lessons, with the promotion of question-and-answer sessions among the students coming from the teachers themselves. It can therefore be concluded that the use of verbal questioning in class leads to students being encouraged to participate: “*I also make sure my students participate in the lessons actively at least they must ask*

questions or answer my questions, so that I will know do they really understand the lesson? Ya, that's my strategy" (Teacher E_Int1).

Another participant highlighted the advantage of verbal questioning: *"If verbally I asked them, what do you think what's is wrong in this sentence, they can find the mistake"* (Teacher F_Int1).

Teachers in this study were able to fully assess their students by asking them verbal questions and then evaluating their written skills after they participated in a classroom discussion. Teachers were able to actively engage their students. Concurrently, students were encouraged to ask questions of their classmates, which shifted the responsibility from the teachers to the learning process: *"Asking questions to students always make them aware of the task that they need to fulfil"* (Teacher A_J5). Therefore, a bilateral exchange of information between teachers and students in the classroom is crucial.

Verbal questioning also enables teachers to carry out CEFR-aligned assessments during lessons. However, certain information must be made available to students prior to conducting the assessment in class: *"After I had gone through the answers with the class, I asked the students to come up with their own story as I will be grading them with this question"* (Teacher A_J1).

Teacher A used the data provided to show that there were several strategies in which verbal questions could be used to assess students. The participant was able to keep students on task by asking questions and asking students to generate ideas before they wrote their essays: *"The way it was carried out was interview response manner.*

Here, each student had to ask their friend the questions on the favourite activities done in school as well as at home. They record each other's responses for them to write their essays which is their final product" (Teacher A_J8). In addition, students now recognise how to formulate correct sentences and content when writing their essays. Finally, students also practise being assessed by other students in class as a new way of learning: *"Then, other students need to ask 3 questions to the presenter"* (Teacher A_J12).

Furthermore, Teacher B emphasised that practising verbal questions in class can be her strategy to assess students' understanding: *"As simple as it sounds, asking questions is the main method that I use to assess students' understanding"* (Teacher B_J1). Similarly, Teacher C usually relied on verbal questions to determine whether or not her students understood the topics of the day: *"During the presentation, there will be a question-and-answer period. The group members also contribute by responding to any questions that are raised by the audience. Both the opposite group and the teacher ask questions "Then, each group must give the given group their scores. This is one of my ways to check their understanding"* (Teacher C_J6). Moreover, students showed active engagement during the session by responding thoughtfully to the questions posed to them by both teachers and their classmates. This also highlights the importance of verbal questions in helping students stuck in the brainstorming phase move to the writing phase and start writing.

Other than that, Teacher B emphasised that higher order thinking skills can be promoted through verbal questioning: *"Next, I will assess them by giving 3 different sets of questions. I will ask them information on the questions to ensure they read the*

whole question carefully. I want to see their critical level of thinking” (Teacher B_J1).

More evidence on critical thinking is provided by Teachers B and C, as follows:

By the time I reached the second set, there will still be mistakes done. I would highlight the necessary prompts to remind them of what is right and wrong. Finally, by the third questions they would answer correctly. I could see they are trying to be creative and critical in thinking.

(Teacher B_J1)

Students volunteered to answer the questions, they were able to independently construct their own sentence and the sharing portrays variety in students' answers. Higher order thinking skills applied.

(Teacher B_J5)

While they brainstorm and draft, I go to them group by group, trying to ask their opinion and discuss in a small group with them. They actively engaged with the discussion and throwing good ideas.

(Teacher B_J6)

I brainstorm with each students especially who got stuck with their writing. I encourage them to think and respond to my questions accordingly. I can see their crack their heads to think critically.

(Teacher C_J9)

By triangulating the policy framework outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 with empirical evidence from Figure 4.4 and corroborating findings from earlier semi-structured interviews, this study highlights the effectiveness of question-based assessments in evaluating writing skills. Building on this evidence,

the study shows that questioning has significant potential for enhancing writing instruction and assessment in Malaysian classrooms.

In order to deliver on these goals, a school-wide transformation is required. A major focus for the Trust Schools is the enrichment of teachers who make it all possible. During the initial stages, emphasis is therefore on structured professional development to enhance key competencies. School Leadership Teams (SLT) also attend training to hone their skills as leaders of learning and administrators of school organisations. This process is supported by dedicated Teaching and Learning Advisors (TLA) assigned to each school to act as coaches to the teachers and SLTs.

The programme has now entered its second year of a five-year engagement with the schools. Early results are promising as positive changes have started to take root. From February 2012 to June 2012, lesson observation showed a 25% overall improvement in teachers. Specific areas of improvement identified by Yayasan AMIR and BPSH include:

- 33% increase in usage of strategic questioning to promote student thinking;
- 40% increase in usage of defined collaborative and cooperative learning structures; and
- 18% increase in usage of positive behaviour management strategies.

Source: Doc_MEB_2013, page 208

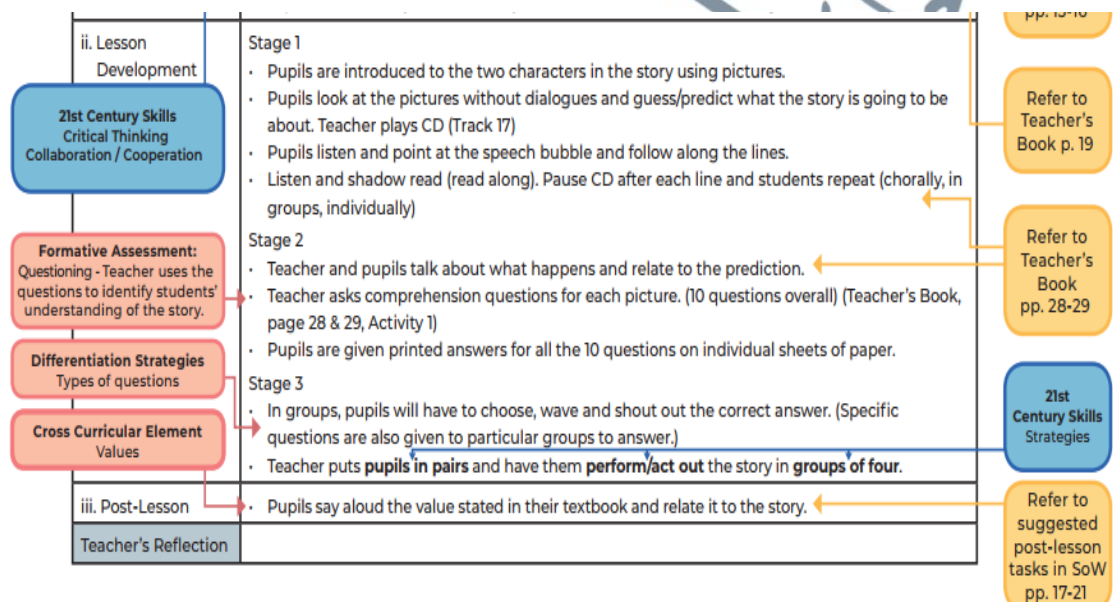
Figure 4.4: Questioning technique in classroom to promote student thinking

The Teacher's Guide document also mentions questioning, as seen in the extract under Figures 4.5 and 4.6, where it is part of the formative assessment (FA) for learning objectives (LO) that teachers can use in the classroom.



Source: Doc_Teacher_Guide_2019, page 20

Figure 4.5: Questioning in formative assessment for learning objective



Source: Doc_Teacher_Guide_2019, page 27

Figure 4.6: Questioning in Formative Assessment to Achieve Learning Objective

The IB Middle Years programme will use the Malaysian curriculum. The pedagogical approach emphasises the use of project-based activities and **questioning techniques** to develop students' capacity for higher-order thinking skills and to help students see the connection between different disciplines. IB is used in over 141 countries and its graduates' record of consistently outperforming the OECD average, and A-level graduates at university provide the assurance that it will offer many valuable best practices for the broader system.

At the same time, Teacher C succeeded in getting students to respond confidently to her questions in class. Active student participation in a fruitful discussion can be a part of learning that benefits students the most and allows participants to easily assess students: *“Another presentation day I decide for the lesson. The topic is still under globetrotting. This time I decided to do oral questioning and also only I give feedback and comments meanwhile the class need to listen carefully and respond accordingly to my question”* (Teacher C_J8). This happens when questions are asked and students are able to respond appropriately.

It is clear from the transcripts that the use of verbal questions played an important role in teachers' assessment of students in their classrooms. Teachers were guided by the CEFR descriptors so that they could explore students' achievement levels and areas of weaknesses, while also encouraging students to ask verbal questions. Consequently, the CEFR-aligned assessments were used effectively by the teachers, making it easier for them to assess their students.

Verbal questioning is a two-way street. Teachers assess while students actively learn. Question-and-answer sessions boost student confidence, thinking, and writing. This shifts the learning focus to students, creating a dynamic classroom. It helps teachers assess students using the CEFR. Teachers like A and B used questions throughout the writing process to guide teaching and provide feedback. Verbal questioning sparks deeper thinking, as shown by Teachers B and C. By asking thought-provoking questions, teachers encourage creativity and independent thought. This fits with learning models such as the International Baccalaureate IB and Malaysia's

education plan, which value questioning for deeper understanding. Furthermore, verbal questioning is a versatile tool for assessing writing in ESL classrooms (Black et al., 2003). It engages students, promotes critical thinking, and supports ongoing assessment. Teachers can effectively use it to align with the CEFR standards and improve student writing.

Discussion of Sub-theme: Verbal Questioning

As presented above, the sub-theme of verbal questioning falls under the main theme of questioning, which is related to RQ2. According to Al-Zahrani and Al-Bargi (2017), questioning boosts higher-order thinking. It is a tool for gathering student data and aligns with Malaysia's formative assessment criteria (Curriculum Development Division, 2014). All participants agreed that it is essential for teaching writing, engaging students, and fostering critical thinking. Teacher questioning helps gather reliable data for better assessments and informed decisions. It is a key part of formative assessment, boosting student involvement (Boulter, 2010). While Zakaria and Addenan (2015) see it as a one-way tool, Black et al. (2003) highlight its role in deeper learning through well-crafted questions, group discussions, and extra tasks.

Questions in teacher training help teachers understand, improve feedback, and guide development (Smith et al., 2017). Teacher questioning skills can boost student learning (Johnson et al., 2023). Open-ended questions and active student involvement lead to better understanding and critical thinking. Verbal questioning boosts student thinking (Al-Zahrani & Al-Bargi, 2017). It helps gather data on students and fits well with Malaysia's school-based assessment standards (Curriculum Development Division, 2014). Teachers can use it to create extra learning tasks. This shows how

important questioning is for both students and teachers. According to Chen et al. (2016), despite its benefits, crafting effective questions is not easy. Good questions guide learning, but they serve many purposes: review, assessment, thinking, creativity, focus, classroom management, and evaluation. This aligns with research showing the complex role of questioning.

4.3.2.3 Theme 3: Peer Assessment

Peer assessment, where students evaluate each other's work, offers valuable learning opportunities. It helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses while developing new skills. Particularly effective in English language learning, peer assessment combines evaluation with skill development (Hounsell, 1997; Lee & Norbaizura, 2016). Peer assessment, as defined by Topping (1998) and Chien (2020), involves students evaluating each other's work. It offers mutual learning, diverse perspectives, and improved communication (Horbach & Halffman, 2018). Beyond assessment, it fosters both individual and group growth.

a. Sub-theme: Assessing Friends in the Group

The commitment to collaborative learning, evident among participants, emphasises its significance in facilitating peer assessment. Through collaborative tasks, students are empowered to assess their peers' work, thereby assuming a more active role in their own learning process. This approach not only helps teachers assess students but also promotes autonomy and responsibility among learners.

All three Heads of English Panel highlighted that their teachers did peer assessment during the writing skills lessons, as mentioned below:

And yes, self and peer assessment can be seen clearly practiced also by English teachers in this school.

(Head A_Int1)

Okay, there is and it's much easier using CEFR-aligned standard for students to assess themselves and even to assess their peers because it's clearly seen all the elements are clearly seen...

(Head B_Int1)

..that would be good but if the students are competent and have good language competency i think that would be more effective.

(Head C_Int1)

The Heads of English Language Panel: Head A, Head B, and Head C, noted that teachers practised the assessment for friends in groups and that assessments could be less difficult if they used the CEFR-aligned assessments. This finding was based on the responses of the Heads of English Language Panel. The students had already familiarised themselves with the rubrics of CEFR in an earlier unit. Therefore, the assessment exercise in which they assessed their peers served as both a guide for the students and a learning opportunity for them.

Teacher A demonstrated the integration of peer assessment into classroom practices, describing it as a supportive process in which students assist each other in refining their work: *"Can be peer assessment, can be peer evaluation or you can also call it shoulder friends that help each other, they help each other. I have checked your work, you have answered the questions, maybe you can add these words, you know, it's*

just like post essay that you have written, post work that you have written, for them to edit” (Teacher A_Int1).

By engaging in activities such as peer assessment and group assessments, students not only receive feedback but also gain insights into their own writing processes: *“Another group will check and give marks for the group presentation” (Teacher A_J3).* During this process, students could also recommend to their friends what they should work on to improve their writing.

As can be seen from the following extracts, students would experience less shame if they had their work assessed by their peers rather than their teachers: *“Yes, I would, I think when their friends evaluate their work, they find that it is better compare to a teacher looking at their work, they don’t feel so intimidated if their teachers are assessing, if their friends assessing, they feel like you know, it will have them, they can do better, after all it’s my friend only what, so they don’t have the feeling of being afraid of the teacher and all that, so peer assessment is good” (Teacher A_Int1).*

Teacher A took advantage of the situation by asking the students to evaluate their classmates’ learning performances. During the session, students were assessed by their classmates and, at the same time, encouraged to ask questions: *“This time around I asked my form 4M class to interview their partners on a few questions as I was focusing on formative assessment” (Teacher A_J8).* Teacher A also allowed students to assess their classmates according to the CEFR standards after they had familiarised themselves with the CEFR rubrics presented earlier in the class. The main purpose of this friend group assessment is to determine the extent to which students understand their assigned writing process and how they can develop based on their classmates' feedback.

The following extracts show how Teacher A implemented the CEFR-aligned assessment by emphasising peer assessments in the writing lessons:

The way it was carried out was interview response manner. Here, each student had to ask their shoulder friend the questions on the favourite activities done in school as well as at home. They record each other's responses for them to write their essays which is their final product.

(Teacher A_J8)

I wrote 5 questions on the board for the students to copy such as 1) What are your favourite activities at home and in school? 2) How often do you do it? 3) Do you spend any money doing these activities? Give reasons for your answer? 4) Why do you choose these activities among the others? 5) List 5 benefits of doing your favourite activities? They ask their friends and record the answers. later they need to write an essay on these answers.

(Teacher A_J8)

After each quiz I asked the students to exchange their papers and wrote the correct answers on the board. They graded their friends and returned the papers back to the owners.

(Teacher A_J9)

Then, each group need to give their marks to the presented group.

(Teacher A_J11)

Then, other students need to ask 3 questions to the presenter.

(Teacher A_J12)

Similarly, Teacher B highlighted the benefits of peer assessment in cultivating confidence and enhancing learning outcomes among students: *“I think it would be a good experience for them to assess their peers and actually I have done something like that indirectly, for example when I encounter a really good essay, I will definitely share the essay to the class. I would read it out loud and you know just from that they will be able to see why this student get a good mark for the essay just from hearing the essay they can understand”* (Teacher B_Int1). Through activities like Think-Pair-Share, students actively engage with course content, benefiting from peer feedback and support.

When they are doing class work, they will actively ask questions related to the task.

(Teacher B_J3)

Today I used the Think-Pair-Share activity in class. It seems so simple, yet so profound in assessing their understanding.

(Teacher B_J5)

Many of them were not confident with their answer although it's correct. Their confidence grew after seeing their friends' response.

(Teacher B_J8)

Teacher C reinforced the importance of peer assessment in promoting collaborative learning and self-awareness among students.

There will be guidelines and they are not going to just check your friends' essays. There will be guideline to follow and they can't actually go and write things on your friends' essay without guidance, because, why? sometimes when

they identify mistake if there are a lot, they you have to explain why they underline or identify that mistake as a mistake. So, they are going to explain and to learn and relearnt over and over again.

(Teacher C_Int1)

I will go around and check the essays as well. ok and for depending on the topic of the writing task, ok if there are going to be a lot of different mistakes that was made by the students ok or by the group okay, I will highlight one-by-one like first round is going to be peer assessment, second, it is going to be teachers assessment.

(Teacher C_Int1)

By emphasising group work and classroom interactions, Teacher C encouraged students to assess their peers' work based on the CEFR-aligned criteria, thereby facilitating peer learning and skill development. In addition, Teacher C incorporated learning through group work into her teaching. She noticed that, despite testing in groups, her students were still afraid of writing. When their classmates commented on their work, the students took note. Teacher C also encouraged the less engaged students in the class to participate. Overall, she encouraged students to assess their presentations and written work using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The following are additional excerpts from Teacher C's journal reflection on peer assessment:

For a writing assessment in an upper secondary class, I usually start with a Group or Pair work.

(Teacher C_J1)

Although the assessment is done in pair or group, a few students still feel nervous when writing process takes place.

(Teacher C_J1)

Thus, the other group will verbally be questioning and commenting on the spot. The respective group needs to be aware of their errors and comments given.

(Teacher C_J3)

Again, I pick a random student to give comments to their friend. I focus on students who are not actively speaking today to attract their attention.

(Teacher C_J4)

The comments given by 4 selected students as general comment and I also add up feedback for certain content that they need to highlight.

(Teacher C_J4)

The class must elect a leader who will go forward and convey the students' responses. During the presentation, there will be a question-and-answer period.

(Teacher C_J6)

Students assess their students writing based on CEFR band and they write on a sticky note then, they need to paste on their friends' flip paper.

(Teacher C_J7)

Teachers D, E, and F supported peer assessment as a way to improve writing skills. Teacher E noted increased student confidence and knowledge sharing through this method. When students had questions, Teacher E suggested using the CEFR rubrics for clarification.

yes, I think it is very good for students to do peer- assessment and in fact I also used this way of assessment because I find that it is very effective for learners,

(Teacher D_Int1)

Yes, of course I focus more on peer assessment where my students and I also do project-based learning.

(Teacher E_Int1)

So when they are independent in their learning, searching for information and all, they will be more confident in class to answer questions. They also able to ask questions to their friends because they have the information like schemata, and don't have to wait for me to spoon-feed them right.

(Teacher E_Int1)

Yes, I have done that peer assessment with my students, when I gave them the paper, back the paper to them, the exam paper, they query they asked me why they got such mark, that's why I teach them, I let them revise the rubrics and they make reflection why they got that mark, why they cannot achieve the highest mark, they said because in the essay there are no complex sentence and all, there's no common lexis, they have to know so that's for the individual assessment.

(Teacher E_Int1)

Usually, they have their peer assessment because after every presentation, the peer will comment and ask questions, I think they will improve together using CEFR.

(Teacher F_Int1)

It can be concluded that peer assessment, enhanced by a shared understanding of the CEFR rubrics, empowers students to become active participants in their learning.

Through peer evaluation, students not only identify their strengths and weaknesses, but also contribute to the overall growth of their classmates. This collaborative approach, combined with effective teacher guidance, fosters a supportive learning environment where students thrive and achieve their writing goals. Peer assessment emerges as a powerful tool for implementing CEFR-aligned assessment practices.

By fostering collaboration and self-reflection, it empowers students to become active participants in their learning journey. Through peer feedback, students refine their writing skills, develop a deeper understanding of assessment criteria, and cultivate a sense of ownership over their academic progress. Teachers, in turn, can leverage peer assessment to create dynamic and engaging learning environments that promote student autonomy and critical thinking.

Discussion of Sub-theme: Assessing Friends in the Group

In order to address the second research question, this study implemented the CEFR-aligned assessment through group-based peer assessment. Research by Hicks et al. (2016) and Meletiadou (2021) supports this approach, suggesting it fosters deeper reflection on writing. Peer assessment encourages meaningful dialogue, idea-sharing, and clarification (Zhu & Carless, 2018). While it offers unique perspectives, initial uncertainty might arise (Allen & Mills, 2016).

Teachers encourage group work and peer assessment to manage workloads and foster student learning. Students value peer feedback, gaining confidence and identifying errors. While teacher feedback is essential, peer advice can stimulate deeper thinking and conversation (Kuyyogsuy, 2019). Group assessment enhances student

engagement and self-correction, reducing teacher workload (Ashenafi, 2017). Although peer feedback might initially be less detailed than teacher feedback, its potential benefits for student learning and development outweigh this limitation. By empowering students as assessors, teachers can create a more dynamic and effective learning environment.

4.3.2.4 Summary of Research Question 2 (RQ2)

This study investigated ESL teachers' approaches to writing assessments aligned with the CEFR, demonstrating an alignment with national educational goals. Participants effectively introduced students to the CEFR as a foundational assessment framework. Classroom questioning and peer assessment, both aligned with CEFR descriptors, proved particularly effective. While verbal questioning might seem less formal, it provided immediate, informative feedback on student comprehension and writing progress. These findings underscore the importance of these strategies for enhancing student learning and assessment.

This study demonstrates the successful implementation of CEFR-aligned assessment practices. Teachers effectively integrated questioning, peer assessment, and CEFR rubrics, with peer assessment emerging as a key strategy. These approaches, by fostering student collaboration and ownership of learning, have shown promise in developing students' writing skills. Group assessment, in particular, has enhanced time management, collaboration, and student confidence. To maximise the benefits of the CEFR, both teachers and students should have a deep understanding of the framework, empowering learners to take an active role in their assessment.

4.3.3 RQ 3: What challenges do teachers face in implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments in ESL classrooms?

The primary challenge encountered by participants in ESL classrooms when implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments is identified as time constraints. Following data collection, the researcher conducted a thorough summarisation and analysis, resulting in the identification of ten overarching themes. Figure 4.7 presents a visual representation of the interconnectedness of these themes and subthemes, showcasing the evolution of the thematic network throughout the research process. Interviews and document analysis were instrumental in shaping this network, underscoring their significance in data synthesis. Utilising software such as ATLAS.ti 9 can help researchers effectively visualise and map these findings.

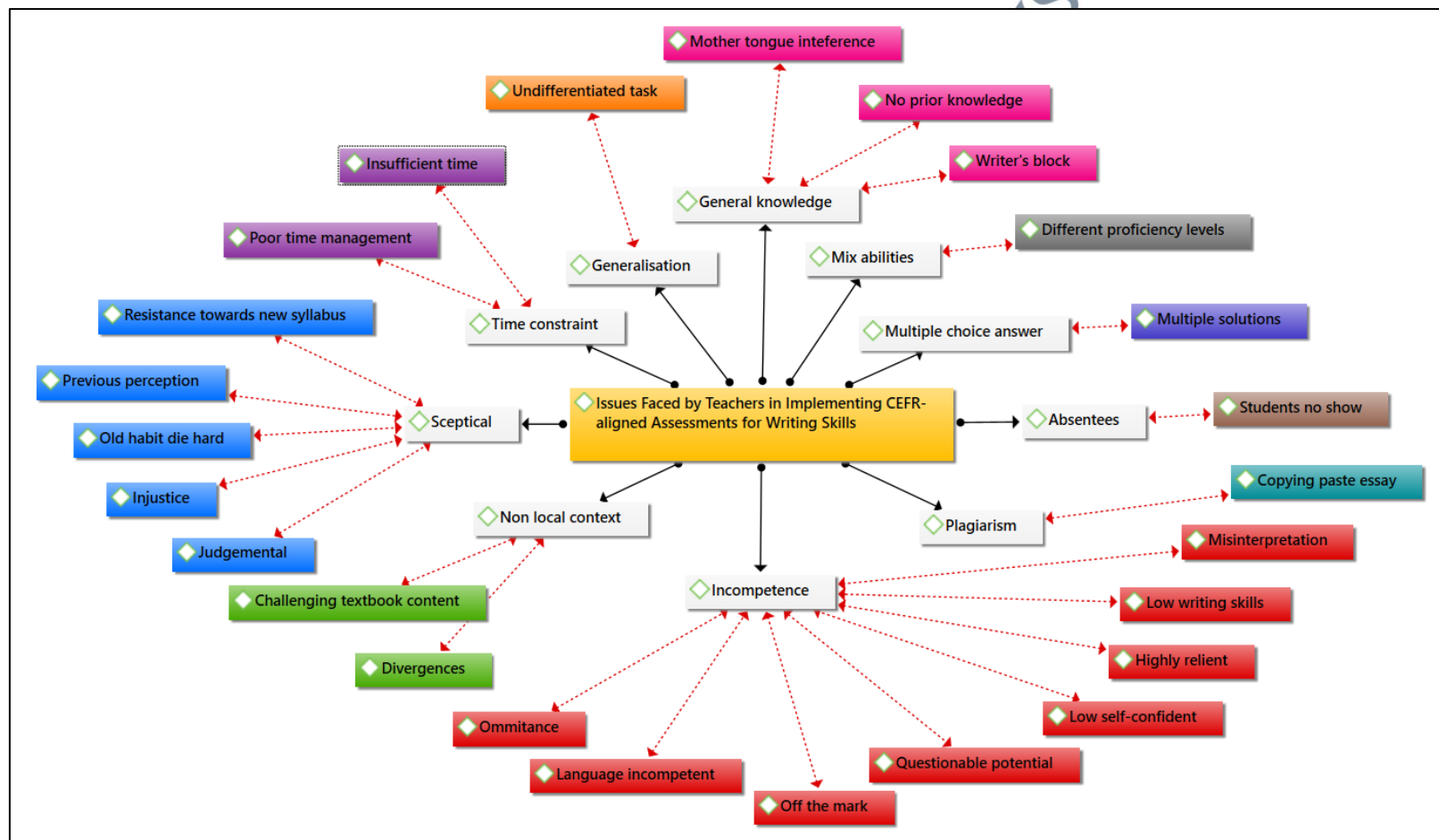


Figure 4.7: Themes and Sub-themes Network on Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing CEFR-aligned Assessments for Writing Skills in ESL classrooms, derived from Semi-structured Interviews and Document Analysis.

To have a clearer understanding of the themes in Figure 4.7, as well as to demonstrate triangulation, the researcher provides detailed information in Table 4.9 on the identified themes, sub-themes, and definitions based on the combined data from interviews and document analysis.

Table 4.9: Research Question 3 - Themes, Sub-Themes and Definitions

RQ	Sub-themes	Themes	Definition
RQ3	▪ Insufficient time ▪ Poor time management	Time-Constraint	Compounding these challenges, teachers often grapple with time constraints when assessing student progress. Students who struggle to complete writing assignments further complicate the assessment process (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).
	▪ Resistance towards new syllabus ▪ Previous perception ▪ Old habits die hard	Sceptical	Teachers are sceptical about CEFR-aligned assessments and it will take some time for them to fully embrace the new curriculum. Some of them are wedded to the old style of writing and have difficulty assessing student work written in the current style. The teachers, in turn, have little idea whether the way they teach their students and assess their written work would improve their students' writing skills, (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).
	▪ Judgemental ▪ Self-doubting	General Knowledge	When asked questions, students with little general knowledge have neither an answer nor an opinion to offer. Therefore, teachers need extra assessment time to ensure that their students perform within the target range (Shepard, 2009).
	▪ Different proficiency levels	Mix Abilities	Teachers often stress the importance of dealing with students of different abilities in a consistent way. For example, the teaching materials and time allocated for writing need to be adapted to the different skill levels of the students. Therefore, teachers need to assess children fairly because not all will reach the target band at the same time (Tomlinson, 2014).

Table 4.9, continued

RQ	Sub-themes	Themes	Definition
	▪ Questionable potential ▪ Low self-confidence ▪ Low-skilled ▪ Highly reliant	Incompetence	Some teachers have not yet reached the expected level of language proficiency. There are some of them whose assessment skills and confidence in using the language in the classroom are still low. Then, when students frequently seek help from their classmates, it can be challenging for teachers to assess their academic development (Shepard, 2009).
	▪ Divergences ▪ Challenging textbook content	Non-Local Context	The English textbook, especially for the upper grades, does not include a local context, which makes it difficult for teachers to use in class. It can be challenging for teachers to teach students who are not familiar with the culture (Banks & Banks, 2004).
	▪ Copying paste essay	Plagiarism	Students often plagiarise each other's work, especially in group work, and some even simply copy the answers suggested in the textbook. This makes it difficult for teachers to assess the actual level of knowledge of their students (Breivik, 2016).
	▪ No show	Absentees	The problem of students not showing up for class is also frequently raised by teachers. It is more difficult for teachers to assess students and they fall behind in their performance when they miss class. This means that teachers need extra time to help students with their writing and speaking skills, (Ingersoll, 2013).
	▪ Multiple solutions	Multiple Choice Answer	Although it is beneficial to be open to additional ideas, teachers worry that students may become overwhelmed if they are given too many options for a topic (Schwartz, 2004).
	▪ Undifferentiated task	Generalisation	When students in a class have different levels of competence, teachers often generalise tasks that could assess students' writing skills. Teachers feel they have treated students unfairly when they are unable to give them materials that are appropriate for their level (Tomlinson, 2014).

Subsequently, using Table 4.9, the researcher triangulated the themes from the three groups of participants to identify the most important sub-themes that the majority of the participants rated as very important. A summary of the main themes and the most important sub-themes is shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Summary of Most Important Themes Responded by Participants for Research Question 3 derived from Semi-Structured Interviews

No	Themes	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D	Teacher E	Teacher F	HoELP A	HoELP B	HoELP C	SISC+
1	Time constraint	/	/	/	/	/	/	/			
2	Sceptical		/		/			/	/	/	
3	Incompetent	/	/	/							/
4	Non local text	/				/					
5	Plagiarism	/	/	/			/				
6	Generalisation			/							
7	Mix abilities			/						/	
8	General knowledge	/	/	/					/		
9	Multiple choice answer		/								
10	Absentees						/				

*HoELP = Head of English Language Panel

*SISC+ = School Improvement Specialist Coach

The most important answer that the participants gave when asked about the issues in implementing a writing assessment aligned to CEFR was time constraint. The sub-themes identified for this theme are insufficient time and poor time management, as presented in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Themes and Sub-themes for the Most Important Theme Highlighted by Participants

Theme	Time constraint
Sub-theme	Insufficient time
	Poor time management

The next section discusses the two sub-themes of the study in order to find an answer to the third research question.

4.3.3.1 Theme: Time Constraint

Based on the data collected through the semi-structured interviews and document analysis for the third research question, it was observed that six participants: Head of English Language Panels, SIC+, and English teachers, highlighted time constraint as a significant issue faced by ESL teachers when implementing CEFR-aligned assessments. The theme of time constraint is compounding these challenges, as teachers often grapple with time constraints when assessing student progress. From the data, it shows that students who struggle to complete writing assignments complicate the assessment process even more.

This issue gives rise to two primary sub-themes: insufficient time and poor time management, which will be discussed in the sections that follow. Teaching English as a foreign language presents numerous challenges for teachers, with time constraints in

implementing the CEFR framework being particularly daunting. EFL teachers often struggle to facilitate effective learning and skill improvement due to limited classroom time (Mosbah & Benyagoub, 2020). Therefore, cultivating effective time management skills becomes imperative for teachers to successfully implement new policies and encourage students to achieve the learning objectives of the lessons.

a. Sub-theme: Insufficient Time

Insufficient time is a common challenge for participants implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments. While developing strong writing skills and producing error-free, informative essays typically requires ample time, the focused nature of CEFR assessments should mitigate this issue to some extent. However, this study reveals that other factors contribute to time constraints in developing writing proficiency. The following subsection explores participants' experiences with using ESL lessons to enhance their writing skills.

Participants highlighted insufficient time as a primary challenge in teaching writing skills. Head A emphasised the syllabus's focus on content levels, necessitating additional time to adequately address writing standards. Teacher A echoed these concerns, citing students' packed schedules as a contributing factor. To manage time constraints, teachers often resorted to reducing or eliminating writing lessons.

I guess there are things that the we have not covered enough of the content standard yet okay. Maybe there are still certain content standard that we have not fulfil yet so maybe we should expose that to the students as well because there are I guess there a few content standard and also learning standard okay, and that we have not tried out with the students yet. So maybe we can explore

this content standard and also learning standard so that students will be more exposed to learning all the skills needed in writing.

(Head A_Int1)

I agree that that is time-constrained because you know the student's life in school is pack and they got 1001 programmes in school and school life is like it's like a passive, they are going through some kind of festive mood, a lot of activities in school so we don't really have time to do all the writing activities that are in the textbook, so we tend to skip 1 or 2 or just after 2 unit do 1 writing activities. So, time constraint is a factor for us in finishing all the units, I agree.

(Teacher A_Int1)

Teachers highlighted the diverse writing abilities among students. They emphasised the need for additional writing opportunities to support students with varying proficiency levels. The challenge of completing essays within one class period was also identified, underscoring the importance of flexible time management to accommodate different student needs.

One issue is going to be time, okay.

(Teacher C_Int1)

Yes, time constraints because of the level of students when they understand how peer assessment and teacher assessment been done, okay. It is easy for it to actually run smoothly and you can also be done after English hours is finished, okay. If not, it is going to be quite difficult and time also place an important role especially if the students could not actually finish the essay on time. Truthfully, in terms of writing it will not be done in one lesson even though in the SOW it supposed to be for 1 hour ok for my students will not be for 1 hour ok. They need more time. Okay. Then, they are also having different level of proficiency.

Sometimes, it is quite difficult to teach when one level need extra attention, another level might easily feel bored if the activities are not really challenging.

(Teacher C_Int1)

Besides that, time constraint is also another issue because in order to complete very difficult in order to do post activity or while writing activity it requires a lot of time, so and then other than that, students did not know how to manage their time to write accordingly. You know, the stages in writing, there are many of them but for students they always take time to write the introduction, what more of the contents of their writing. And when they are discussing in groups, of course they take their own sweet time.

(Teacher D_Int1)

Okay, one of the challenges, in order to explain, it is going to take time...

(Teacher E_Int1)

Reflective journals further document participants' concerns about time constraints that impact teaching. Teacher A emphasised the efficacy of dedicating time to address students' writing errors individually. Conversely, Teacher C lamented the students' limited time for writing and interaction during peer assessments due to time constraints.

Even though it was time consuming but I believe it is the most effective manner to guide weak students by focussing on them individually.

(Teacher A_J7)

Because of time constraint, that not much students can ask or comments.

(Teacher C_J4)

The recurrent issue of insufficient time underscores the impact on classroom dynamics and the implementation of CEFR-aligned assessments. Teachers are compelled to navigate multiple demands amidst time constraints, necessitating adept management of both time and classroom activities. Consequently, the challenge of insufficient time directly influences the teaching of writing skills in ESL classes and may necessitate constraints in implementing CEFR-aligned assessments. Teachers must adeptly manage time and instructional strategies to effectively address students' needs within the confines of limited time.

Discussion Sub-Theme: Insufficient Time

The data on the sub-theme of insufficient time, which is one of the challenges in the main theme of time constraint, shows that time is crucial for learning. Students learn more when they have more time (Thompson & Wilson, 2022). Writing helps students to think, communicate, and solve issues (Garcia & Smith, 2023). To be good writers, students need lots of practice. Unlike the United States, where primary schools dedicate at least an hour daily to writing (Smith et al., 2020), Malaysia's curriculum does not assign specific time for writing instruction. Thus, teachers integrate it with other language skills. While the Netherlands lacks a strict mandate, its education authority recommends at least two hours monthly (Henkens, 2010). These international comparisons highlight the need for efficient use of learning time in Malaysia to bolster writing skills.

Learning time is defined as the time students actively engage in writing tasks. Research shows that maximising this time is crucial for student success. Effective teaching and classroom management increase student engagement (Johnson et al.,

2019). This active involvement enhances learning and retention (Johnson et al., 2021). By focusing on tasks, students become more productive, delve deeper into topics, practice skills, and strengthen their understanding.

While CEFR-aligned assessment offers a valuable framework for monitoring student writing progress within regular lessons, time constraints pose a significant challenge. The multi-stage nature of writing often requires more time than is typically allocated in a single lesson, hindering comprehensive assessment and limiting opportunities for in-depth student engagement with CEFR activities. Delayed feedback due to time pressures can also have an impact on student learning. To effectively implement CEFR-aligned assessment, careful planning and strategic teaching methods are essential to optimise instructional time and foster language development.

b. Sub-theme: Poor Time Management

In addition to insufficient overall time, poor time management emerged as a critical challenge. In today's fast-paced world, effective time management is essential for both teachers and students. While planning and controlling task duration are fundamental, the classroom environment presents unique time management pressures. Teachers juggle capturing student attention, implementing CEFR-aligned assessments, and adhering to curriculum demands. Simultaneously, students often struggle with time management, impacting their overall performance.

Students participate longer in discussions, as Teacher B noted: "So they like to discuss with their friends, so what they can write, what they can't write and so on. So the discussion will take up their time" (Teacher B_Int1). Some of them have no

background information to draw on when deciding what to write. Therefore, teachers need to stimulate their students' thinking by asking more questions. However, the appropriate level of enquiry needs to be determined by the students themselves. If the children are advanced, the teacher can simply ask questions and let them make the decisions. However, this is not the case with students who are struggling academically. Therefore, it is quite unlikely that Teacher B would be able to handle a single text in a single lesson.

Teacher B, who also provided this information, mentioned that her students took extra time to improve their writing skills when working on group projects.

However, I realised that when they are doing work in group, they will take more time. I need to remind them.

(Teacher B_Int1)

The same thing happened to Teacher D when it came to students not being able to manage their time well for writing lessons: “...students did not know how to manage their time to write accordingly. You know, the stages in writing, there are many of them but for students they always take time to write the introduction, what more of the contents of their writing. And when they are discussing in groups, of course they take their own sweet time” (Teacher D_Int1).

Document analysis, specifically the Roadmap 2015-2025, corroborates the interview findings. Page 194 of the English Language Roadmap 2015-2025 emphasises the importance of meeting timelines to engage students in English, aligning with the

interview sub-theme shown in Figure 4.8. This reinforces the critical need for sufficient instructional time to prepare students for CEFR-aligned writing assessments.

English teachers are thus the most important, and sometimes the only models for these students, and classroom activities provide the only opportunities to use the language for a purpose. The challenge is to provide enough engagement time with English for the students to develop familiarity with and fluency in the language.

Source: Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 194

Figure 4.8: Engagement Time as a Challenge in ESL Classroom

Both national and national-type schools grapple with insufficient time for writing instruction, hindering CEFR implementation, as shown in Figure 4.9. Despite curriculum revisions, more time is crucial for developing students' writing skills and familiarising them with the new framework.

Insufficient English Language engagement time

Learners currently do not have sufficient engagement time with English in order to gain familiarity with the language and confidence in using it. Engagement time needs to be increased, particularly for students in national-type schools (SRJK), where the medium of instruction is Mandarin or Tamil, for whom English class time is less than that in national schools (SK).

Source: Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 197

Figure 4.9: Insufficient English Language Engagement Time

Time management significantly impacts the implementation of CEFR-aligned writing assessments. This sub-theme is closely linked to overall time constraints,

influenced by teacher workload, student achievement levels, and unavoidable extracurricular commitments.

Time constraints significantly hinder the successful implementation of CEFR-aligned writing assessments in ESL classrooms. Poor time management, exacerbated by factors such as limited instructional time, student proficiency levels, and extracurricular activities, further compounds this challenge. Teachers must effectively address these time-related issues to optimise student learning and fully realise the benefits of CEFR-aligned assessments.

Discussion Sub-Theme: Poor Time Management

Time management, a complex interplay of administrative skills (Nigussie, 2019), significantly influences individual and societal outcomes. Poor time management hinders writing proficiency and classroom dynamics. Enhancing students' time management skills, characterised by goal setting, prioritisation, tool utilisation, and efficient structuring, can boost academic success (Johnson et al., 2020). Self-motivation, performance, ability, and motivation are key factors (Odanga, 2018).

Their performance in writing skills can hardly be improved in a short time. Students' academic performance and achievement can be greatly enhanced if they improve their ability to manage their time effectively (Smith et al., 2019). Effective time management is crucial for student success. Students should learn to set goals, prioritise tasks, and organise their time efficiently. Self-motivation is key to managing time well. Strong time management skills lead to increased productivity, reduced stress, and better academic performance. These skills are also valuable in the workplace.

In conclusion, effective time management is crucial for student success. By teaching students how to manage their time wisely, teachers can empower them to improve academic performance, reduce stress, and develop valuable life skills.

4.3.3.2 Summary of Research Question 3 (RQ3)

This study effectively addressed Research Question 3 by delving into the challenges teachers encounter when implementing CEFR-aligned writing assessments. A key finding was the significant impact of time constraints on teachers' ability to effectively implement these assessments. Teachers reported insufficient time allocated for writing instruction due to competing demands, such as extracurricular activities and other academic subjects. This limited their capacity to provide comprehensive feedback and support for students' writing development. Furthermore, teachers struggled with poor time management among students, which negatively impacted the implementation of comprehensive writing assessment models.

4.3.4 RQ 4: How do teachers deal with the challenges they face in implementing CEFR-aligned assessments for writing skills in ESL teaching?

Research Question 4 (RQ4) focuses on investigating how teachers deal with the challenges they face in implementing the CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills in their ESL teaching. The thematic analysis using ATLAS.ti 9 facilitated the data analysis. This visual representation is shown in Figure 4.10.

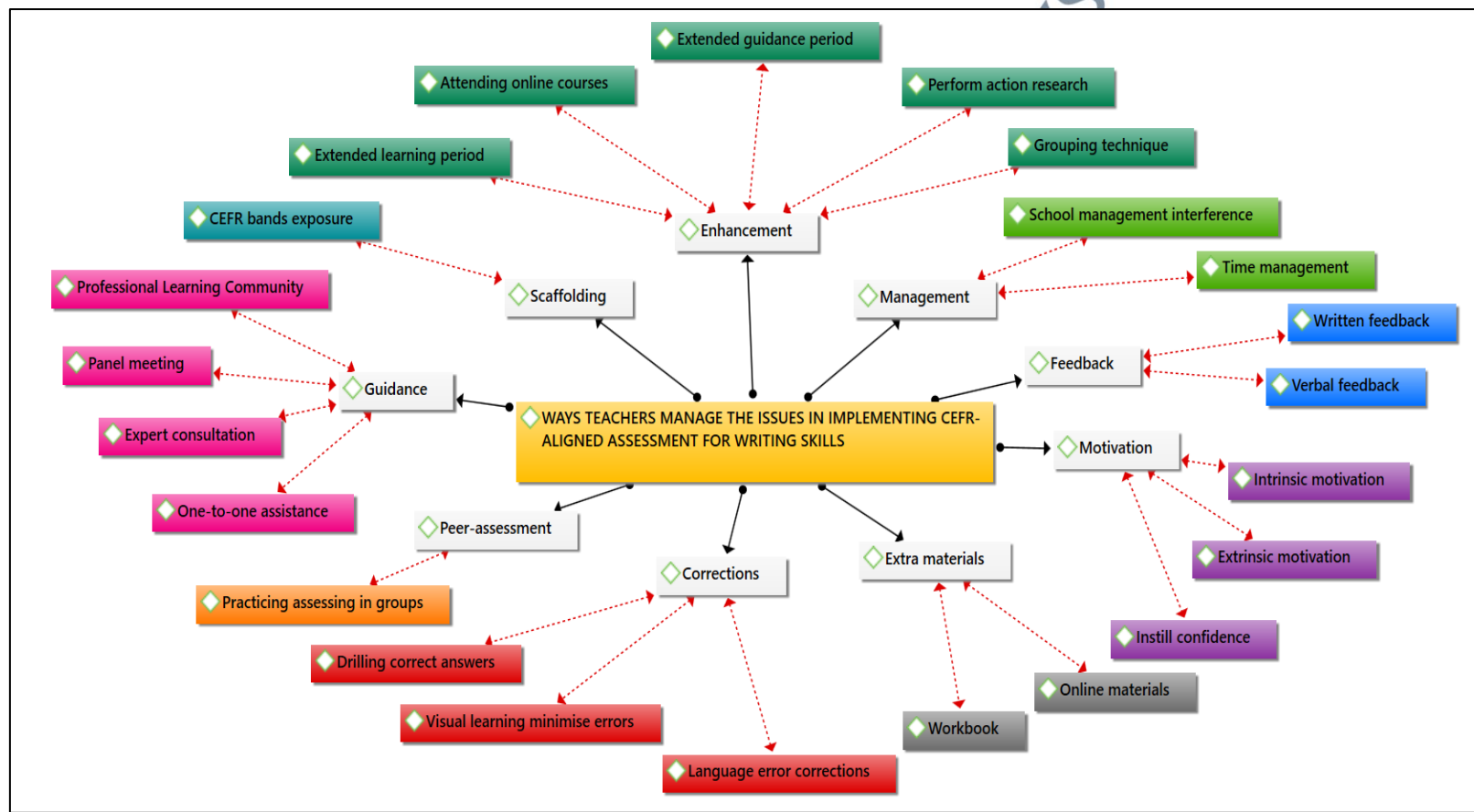


Figure 4.10: Themes and Subthemes Network on Ways Teachers Manage the Challenges in Implementing CEFR-aligned Assessments for Writing Skills in ESL Classrooms, derived from Semi-Structured Interviews and Document Analysis

To clarify the themes presented in Figure 4.10 and validate findings through triangulation, Table 4.12 provides detailed definitions of the identified themes and sub-themes based on data from both interviews and document analysis.

Table 4.12: Research Question 4 - Themes, Sub-Themes, and Definitions

RQ	Sub-themes	Themes	Definition
RQ4	- Panel meeting - Expert consultation - Peer Learning Community (PLC) - One-to-one assistance	Guidance	Teachers greatly benefit from expert guidance on CEFR-compliant assessment. Regular discussions among teachers help address challenges and find solutions. Access to resources like SISC+ and peer support further enhances understanding and practice. It is crucial to provide extra support to struggling students to prevent them from falling behind in their writing development (Fullan, 2015).
	Peer assessment practice	Peer-assessment	Teachers believe that students gain confidence through peer assessment, and therefore teachers may assess students' academic progress through both peer and teacher assessment. For example, instead of copying an essay from other sources, peer assessment could help students see where they have made mistakes and give them feedback for continuous improvement (Kearney et al., 2015).
	Online materials	Extra materials	Teachers sometimes resort to supplementary materials to replace textbooks that lack local references and provide additional challenges for their most advanced students. To ensure that their students receive the right materials and can subsequently be assessed against the CEFR, they adopt and adapt the materials to the students' needs in order to improve their writing skills (Council of Europe, 2001).
	Workbook		
	CEFR bands exposure	Scaffolding	To enhance students' language awareness and goal setting, teachers often utilise CEFR descriptors. By providing clear benchmarks, these descriptors empower learners to accurately assess their writing proficiency and strive for higher levels of achievement, (Council of Europe, 2001).

Table 4.12, continued

RQ	Sub-themes	Themes	Definition
RQ4	▪ Grouping techniques	Enhancement	To improve learning, teachers can group students by ability. Brighter students can help teach others, while those who struggle benefit from working together. Teachers should keep learning by taking online courses and reflecting on their work. Extra support and time can help all students succeed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).
	▪ Attending online courses		
	▪ Perform action research		
	▪ Extended guidance period		
	▪ Extended learning period		
	▪ Time management	Management	Teachers need to plan their lessons well to fit in tests. The school should help teachers when students are absent so they can still give tests (Wong & Wong, 2005).
	▪ School management		
	▪ Verbal feedback	Feedback	Oral or written comments in class are highly valued by teachers to help students succeed in exams. Sometimes a student takes the feedback and uses it to become a better writer (Hattie, 2009).
	▪ Written feedback		
	▪ Drilling correct answer	Corrections	When students receive constructive criticism from their teachers, they are expected to respond and make certain corrections. A student's self-corrections serve as a form of formative assessment through which they learn to recognise and correct their own mistakes in the future (Black & William, 2018).
	▪ Language error corrections		
	▪ Visual learning minimise errors		

Table 4.13 summarises the primary and most significant sub-themes identified through a triangulation of data from the three participant groups. These sub-themes were determined by identifying those most frequently rated as highly important by participants.

Table 4.13: Summary of Most Important Themes Responded by Participants for Research Question 4 derived from Semi-Structured Interviews

No	Themes	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D	Teacher E	Teacher F	HoELP A	HoELP B	HoELP C	SISC+
1	Guidance	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	
2	Enhancement	/	/								/
3	Motivation				/						
4	Feedback	/	/	/							
5	Peer-assessment							/			
6	Extra material						/		/		
7	Corrections	/									
8	Management			/	/		/				
9	Scaffolding								/		

*HoELP = Head of English Language Panel

*SISC+ = School Improvement Specialist Coach

Participants identified guidance as the most crucial response when addressing challenges encountered during the implementation of a writing skills assessment aligned with the CEFR. This insight highlights the significance of seeking guidance and support to navigate the complexities associated with introducing such assessments. The sub-themes associated with the main theme guidance are presented in Table 4.14. This tabulated summary encapsulates the key findings and insights gleaned from the study, shedding light on effective strategies for addressing challenges in implementing CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments.

Table 4.14: Themes and Sub-themes for the Most Important Theme Highlighted by Participants

Theme	Guidance
Sub-theme	One-to-one assistance Expert consultation Professional Learning Community (PLC) Panel meeting

Four sub-themes of the study were examined to address the fourth research question. This study has validated each of the aforementioned perspectives. The next section delves into more detailed discussions of some of the challenges raised in RQ4. The first sub-theme guides the discussion in this context.

4.3.4.1 Theme: Guidance

In order to address Research Question 4 (RQ4), the researcher extracted the overarching concept of guidance from both the semi-structured interviews and the document analysis. This question is closely tied to the challenges identified in Research Question 3. Throughout the research process, the researcher garnered additional feedback on many of the suggestions provided by participants to address their teaching

and learning challenges. Therefore, in this subsection, the researcher explores the various approaches adopted by participants to navigate the implementation of the CEFR-aligned assessment for writing skills in ESL classes, which align with their strategies for addressing the assessment's implementation.

Guidance is the process of providing advice and support to help individuals overcome challenges in work, education, or personal life. As Sood (2016) states, experienced individuals offer recommendations to improve situations. This support helps people reach their full potential by developing essential skills and making informed decisions that benefit both themselves and society. In this study, teachers benefit greatly from expert guidance on the CEFR-compliant assessment. Regular discussions among teachers help address challenges and find solutions. Access to resources like SISC+ and peer support further enhances understanding and practice. It is crucial to provide extra support to struggling students to prevent them from falling behind in their writing development.

Subsequently, the researcher identified four sub-themes under guidance, including one-to-one assistance, Professional Learning Community (PLC) involvement, expert consultation, and panel meetings. The following sections will elaborate on each sub-theme.

a. Sub-theme: One-to-One Assistance

Participants highlighted that one-to-one assistance to enhance students' writing skills aligned with CEFR standards. This individualised approach proved particularly

beneficial for struggling or shy students. The following section presents findings from interviews, teacher reflections, and policy documents.

Teacher B focused on supporting struggling students. She ensured students understood the CEFR and personal learning goals. While using a CEFR-aligned textbook, she recognised the need for extra support, especially for weaker students. One-to-one sessions helped these students build sentences and grasp concepts, aligning their progress with CEFR standards.

The next step I guess is I need to help them because most of the students who do that are weak students so I think they need a lot of personal help like if they can't copy-paste from the essay they have to construct their own sentences on how can do it. So that one actually they need a lot of one-to-one sessions because we just finish the middle exam right, then I could finally see their real ability.

(Teacher B_Int1).

She also added, *"I used the textbook fully utilise the textbook during my class, and what and how I differentiate my student is I would give more guidance to the weak students, so generally the textbook is for B1 level so, it's okay of it's too easy for the excellence students because they don't turn down their level based on the questions so it's not a problem for them but I would give extra attention to the weak students. So that's how I do it. Generally, I would use the intermediate level for everyone ok, but give extra attention to the weak students"* (Teacher B_Int1).

There are situations where a teacher has a student in their class who is less capable than the others in the group: *"CEFR helps me to focus on my students based on their needs"* (Teacher F_Int1). This can be challenging for both the student and the teacher.

When working with students with learning difficulties in the classroom, there are different strategies that can be used.

In order to effectively implement new policies, it is crucial to assess students' current abilities to prevent learning gaps. By aligning instruction and assessment with CEFR standards, teachers can effectively monitor student progress. Teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring students acquire the necessary skills. Ultimately, the CEFR provides a valuable framework for tracking student development in writing.

Teacher B emphasised that one of the ways she could help the weak students was to tutor them one-to-one: *"I'm still figuring out how to help really weak students. Usually, my lesson is suitable for intermediate and advanced students. Perhaps in the next class I could offer more one-to-one explanation to the weak students"* (Teacher B_J9). The main aim of one-to-one assistance is to address some of the concepts that need to be explained to the students. Through this innovative strategy, important social information can be imparted.

Accurately assessing students' abilities is essential for effective policy implementation. Teachers play a crucial role in aligning assessment with CEFR to ensure students acquire the necessary skills. By providing individualised support, such as one-on-one explanations for struggling students, teachers can enhance not only academic performance but also social skills. This approach benefits all students, including those with special needs. Ultimately, the CEFR offers a valuable framework for tracking overall student progress.

Discussion Sub-Theme: One-to-one Assistance

Classrooms are composed of students with varying abilities and learning styles. Addressing these diverse needs can be challenging. Teachers often employ strategies such as breaking down tasks, providing additional support, and creating a positive learning environment to provide one-to-one assistance to struggling students. It is also beneficial for students with autism and can also be applied to support students with learning difficulties in general education settings. By offering personalised support and structure, teachers can help students overcome challenges in classrooms. Creating a positive classroom climate with clear expectations, feedback, and recognition is crucial for student success.

In addition, individualised support, such as one-to-one assistance, is essential for addressing the diverse needs of students. By tailoring instruction to specific learning styles and abilities, teachers can foster deeper engagement and personalised learning experiences (Tamlinson, 2014; Souda, 2017). This approach complements whole-class instruction by providing targeted support for those who require it. Ultimately, creating an inclusive classroom where all students can thrive necessitates a comprehensive understanding of individual needs and the implementation of strategies like individualised support to maximise learning potential.

b. Sub-theme: Expert Consultation

In addressing complex challenges that affect learning effectiveness, participants in this study highlighted the importance of seeking expert consultation. Drawing on the insights of experienced professionals can provide invaluable guidance and support in navigating unforeseen obstacles or existing issues. Qualified experts, with years of

practical experience and knowledge gained from similar situations, offer valuable perspectives and advice to address challenges effectively.

Participants described consulting experts within or outside their school as one of the strategies for tackling CEFR assessment challenges. Prior to the implementation of CEFR-aligned assessments, certain teachers, such as SISC+ and Head of English Language Panels, served as key mediums of information within their districts and schools. Expert consultation emerged as a significant sub-theme, offering participants a pathway to address challenges related to CEFR assessments, particularly in grading.

The answer to RQ4 emerged from the semi-structured interview conducted with the participants, which led to the discovery of the sub-theme of an expert consultation. Five participants indicated that they had indeed turned to the experts they knew for support in implementing CEFR-aligned assessments, particularly in relation to grading.

Head B highlighted the establishment of an active Telegram group within her district, spearheaded by the district head teacher (*jurulatih-JU*). Amid the movement restrictions order, the Telegram group served as a virtual platform for teachers to pose questions and exchange ideas related to CEFR-aligned assessments. Similarly, Head C emphasised the importance of consulting the chief examiner, particularly for guidance on grading English language examinations based on CEFR standards.

Yes, emm we do. we have our JU; we also have our CEFR group in telegram. whatever teachers every teachers in the district are there so that we could ask and answer questions among ourselves. so yes.

(Head B_Int1)

Teachers emphasised the importance of seeking expert guidance. To enhance their understanding and implementation of CEFR-aligned writing assessments, many teachers turned to experienced professionals for support. Teacher B sought mentorship from a former teacher and SPM examiner, while Teacher D leveraged webinars to deepen her knowledge. Additionally, Head C found invaluable assistance from her chief examiner, who possessed extensive expertise in CEFR-based exam papers. Teacher B also benefited from consultations with her group leader examiner to clarify aspects of CEFR-based written assessments. These examples collectively underscore the significance of external expertise in facilitating teachers' successful implementation of CEFR.

okay I guess we have person like good friend, a chief examiner so I most of the time like contacted him and seek for advice. in fact, we used to have him once for our panel PLC so that he briefs us and help us assisted us to how to go about and marking using this framework, once.

(Head C_Int1)

I would refer to my previous teacher who is also my previous leader in marking SPM. She's always being my mentor, so yes, I always refer to her any time, I need to ask something, especially about writing...

(Teacher B_Int1)

Head A was confident in her ability to implement CEFR-aligned writing skills assessments due to her experience as both an excellent teacher and an SPM examiner. She leveraged her existing training and expertise to introduce these assessments. Multiple participants shared Head A's experience, as they also held positions as SPM examiners. Six of the study participants held this role, demonstrating a strong

connection between the study participants and the assessment landscape. This overlap provided them with a deeper understanding of CEFR and its application in high-stakes examinations. Below are the extracts from their opinions.

okay, networking wise not really, I will just discuss with teachers in the English panel because err... we are quite close, most of us are examiner and usually we will make use our experience in marking to use CEFR-aligned assessments in classroom...

(Head A_Int1)

We do it among our English panel because they are the one who closes to us they have the same problems that we face and when we have our panel meetings we bring up the challenges and we try to resolve it to the best that we can. Since we are examiners, so we can refer back to our marking practice to be use in classroom for CEFR.

(Teacher A_Int1)

We also have examiner group to refer too for the sake of marking students' essays. So we can apply it in our classrooms. Our examiner leader also assists us and having sharing sessions too.

(Teacher B_Int1)

And we also refer to our examiner leader for SPM who always supportive if we have any challenges regarding CEFR because SPM also using the same format of SPM.

(Teacher C_Int1)

No, I think if we face this kind of challenges, we will you ask our colleague okay we will discuss on that and if it doesn't solve, am not sure who are we going to refer to, usually we will discuss among us. Me and my colleagues are examiner

for SPM, so we usually refer to whatever we have gone through in marking. It does help us so much, so we can exchange opinions among us.

(Teacher F_Int1)

In the case of Teacher C, she was aware that both the district head coach and the national head coach could serve as references for her. She also said that SISC+ played the role of teachers, visiting her school to help teachers with any concerns regarding the implementation of the CEFR. These people were there to help the teachers. This provided them access to a wider range of experts available for contact at any given time.

Just are not only JUD but we have JUK we have in our district.

(Teacher C_Int1)

SISC+ as well okay, so if there are any things that are unclear about assessment and so on and how we are assessed and so those are the people that we refer to because even before they set district level, last year there are courses about item building okay, also for the giving assessment for PBD and so on so everything makes things clearer for the teacher on how to access the students not only for formative assessment but for summative assessment as well.

(Teacher C_Int1)

Teacher D continued by saying that instead of her district's JUs and SISC+, she had participated in a series of webinars that provided knowledge about CEFR. This material could help her deal with CEFR challenges that may arise in the classroom: “one more how to handle the issue is maybe to refer to other schools, maybe the JUs or maybe the SISC+ for our district or maybe joining webinar to that can help to enhance our understanding about the challenges” (Teacher D_Int1). Since the introduction of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in her district, active programmes, such as

webinars, have been introduced to help her and other ESL teachers do their jobs more effectively.

Expert consultation proved invaluable in clarifying participants' CEFR-related challenges, particularly in writing and assessment. The availability of knowledgeable support is crucial for teachers. Timely problem-solving and collaborative discussions are essential to address ongoing implementation issues. The Ministry's commitment to supporting teachers is evident in the Roadmap 2015-2025, which emphasises the role of expert involvement. By leveraging expertise, teachers can effectively overcome challenges and successfully implement CEFR-aligned assessments.

According to the English Language Education Reform 2015-2025, the expert panel will consist of highly experienced practitioners who are familiar with CEFR. According to the Ministry's plan, this situation is of utmost importance. As a result, there are several phases to familiarise teachers with the new policy, involving different parties and departments of the ministry.

In the context of nation-wide ELE reform, engaging with the stakeholders can be divided into two broad phases according to the purpose of engagement: before the reform is officially accepted as the national agenda, and during the implementation. The first phase involved meeting those who were expected to be affected by the reform (e.g., MoE officials, teachers, teacher training, institutes, universities, etc.) so that they could bring to the table not only concerns that needed to be addressed, but also knowledge, expertise, resources, and experiences that could contribute to the development of an effective and acceptable plan.

(Doc_ELRL2021, page 25)

The Roadmap 2015-2025 stated that teachers can turn to more experienced teachers in their respective subject areas if they have issues. It is also important to use a group of knowledgeable people to share thoughts and viewpoints and discuss any issues that may arise in relation to the CEFR.

Any teacher can report problems, and they can be solved by experienced teachers with the necessary expertise.

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 54)

Work on CEFR has been progressing for over forty years, and CEFR document is long and complex. It is beyond the capacity of any single individual to write, and few if any individuals are likely to be able to understand it fully in its entirety. Implementing CEFR and even handling CEFR document will therefore require the cooperation of a group of people with complementary skills and high levels of expertise working closely together.

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 104)

The role played by SISC+ is also important in introducing CEFR-aligned assessments in schools, ensuring the improvement of English language proficiency and pedagogical skills that teachers can collectively use in their teaching. Moreover, this is in line with the fourth shift envisaged in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC+)

The School Improvement Specialist Coach Plus (SISC+) programme was set up in 2013 to help teachers improve their English proficiency and pedagogical skills. The programme employs experienced teachers and educators who have achieved excellence in curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy to provide integrated coaching in these areas. They occupy full time positions to allow them to work more frequently on site with more teachers in lower band schools, i.e., those in Bands 5, 6 and 7. The intervention of School Improvement Partners (SI

Partners), with the involvement of peer coaches, heads of panel (Ketua Panitia), and school principals will greatly assist the development of effective English language teaching practices.

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 117)

Advantage is taken of the expertise of teachers who can become resources for their colleagues in another initiative, namely SISC+ (School Improvement Subject Specialist Coaches) at the District Education Offices. The SISC+ are assigned the task of further improving the teaching and learning of English in line with the transformation of the system as stipulated in MEB Shift Four. Expert teachers are deployed to Bands 5, 6 and 7 schools to coach teachers and support them so that the curriculum is implemented as intended. There are currently 800 English Language SISC+ coaches operating throughout the country.

(Doc_Roadmap_2015, page 192)

The experts cited by the Ministry in the few documents already mentioned have shown that the Ministry is concerned about the level of readiness and awareness of teachers in relation to the CEFR introduced in schools. It is important that the Ministry of Education provide an expert at each level, down to primary school. This will ensure that all concerns can be addressed gradually and the new policy can be implemented successfully. There is no man-made island, so cooperation is needed on all fronts.

In summary, expert consultation emerges as a critical strategy for teachers to navigate the complexities of CEFR implementation and address associated challenges. By fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders, teachers can harness collective expertise to enhance teaching and learning outcomes aligned with CEFR standards.

Discussion of Sub-Theme: Expert Consultation

The study highlights the crucial role of Ministry-trained education experts in supporting teachers with CEFR-aligned assessments and curricula. Their accessibility facilitates effective communication and problem-solving. Expert consultation in ESL classrooms offers a multitude of benefits for both teachers and students. By providing specialised knowledge, skills, and perspectives, experts can significantly enhance teaching and learning outcomes (Brown, 2016). Participants emphasised the importance of consulting with chief examiners and examiner team leaders to understand CEFR-based exam formats. Aligning assessments with the CEFR criteria, as exemplified by examination papers, helped teachers focus on assessing students' overall language skills rather than just exam performance.

In conclusion, the study underscores the positive impact of expert support on teachers' ability to implement CEFR-aligned assessments. Expert-led coaching and mentoring significantly enhanced teachers' confidence and competence in developing and using CEFR-aligned assessment tools (Fullan, 2015). To further enhance the effectiveness of the CEFR integration, the Ministry should expand the pool of experts beyond existing roles and increase opportunities for teachers to engage with examination experts. By investing in professional development and providing wider access to expertise, the Ministry can significantly improve teaching and learning outcomes in Malaysian schools.

c. Sub-theme: Professional Learning Community (PLC)

The Professional Learning Communities (PLC) programme serves as a comprehensive initiative aimed at supporting and enhancing student and school

performance through five major strategies. It symbolises the Malaysian Ministry of Education's commitment to challenging, motivating, and assisting schools in improving their performance. Additionally, PLC refers to teachers who work collaboratively and continuously engage in inquiry or action research to achieve better outcomes for their students (Johnson et al., 2023).

PLCs have emerged as a valuable tool for enhancing teacher collaboration and supporting CEFR implementation. By fostering knowledge sharing, problem-solving, and resource development, PLCs have empowered teachers to address challenges and improve student outcomes. The ability to connect with colleagues, share best practices, and receive support has been instrumental in facilitating the integration of CEFR into classroom practice. Additionally, PLCs have provided a platform for teachers to collectively develop and refine assessment tools aligned with CEFR standards.

Head C emphasised that the PLC led to the understanding that teachers need to adapt the teaching material to the level of the students in order to be fair. At the same time, the PLC is also applicable when teachers need to standardise the assessment of students so that every teacher uses the same assessment method: *“but one good thing like doing PLC. So in that way we keep reminding ourselves like this level of students need certain materials and another level of students should be in category and what not, in a way we are reminding ourselves to make use of the framework”* (Head C_Int1). Then she also added that: *“we had PLC, where we sit together, we discuss the matter and then we had some sample scripts especially after topical and final year exam last year. we did sit together and we discuss together. the sample script together with marks how much the teacher gave. so that's how we do it. that was before”* (Head C_Int1).

Teacher A was able to share everything during the PLC, where any materials or notes she received would be uploaded to Google Drive and shared with the group so that everyone could easily access them. Teacher B shared that PLC is a way for her and the teams at school to share ideas and find solutions to issues, including CEFR, and Teacher D echoed this sentiment, saying that it was the same for her.

Yes, we do. In fact, when I attended the course, I was giving them a live PLC. So whatever that being said or been mentioned what I do is snap the photo and I'll try to type it that whatever information and I'm getting so that I don't forget, so during the PLC that we are having the formal one so it's always there for us to refer. Anyway, for PLC purpose everything will be the Google drive so it's easy to use it later in our PLC that we will combine to do it.

(Teacher A_Int1)

Okay, from what I know, when we do post mortem of the exam that is also considered as PLC, so yes, we do PLC at least three times a year and yes during that time we do discuss challenges and we do try to come up with what kind of solution can you do or what can we do to help the students. We consistently do PLC every

(Teacher B_Int1)

I can do PLC with other teachers like you know, having sharing of opinions, thoughts and experiences of a formal way. Just having or maybe can utter the issue in the panel meetings and so on.

(Teacher D_Int1)

Meanwhile, Teacher E revealed that the purpose of PLC was not only to improve her teaching, but also to address any concerns about teaching and learning: “We also do

PLC to share our lesson and teaching to improve our teaching and to solve any challenges” (Teacher E_Int1).

According to Teacher F, PLCs provide an additional opportunity for teachers to engage in in-depth dialogue on a variety of topics related to student teaching, learning, and assessment. The video comments they provided were a great help to her and the team in their efforts to improve their teaching.

Yes, in our panel, in terms of teaching we did video critics where everyone look at the video and then we discuss what can we improve and copy from the video. And we also did the PLC on marking since few of our teachers are the SPM markers for the latest syllabus, KSSM, so we did the PLC on that, we share how to mark the sample of the students to get 20 over 20. This is how we give marks. We don't judge based on the length of the text but we judge them overall.

(Teacher F_Int1)

PLC has been identified as one of the ways in which participants can address challenges in the classroom, including the CEFR. It is fascinating to see teachers collaborate with each other and continue to share information to drive their own professional development. It is possible that the introduction of the PLC by the Ministry can be seen as successful and beneficial for teachers to improve their understanding of the new policy.

References to the importance of PLCs can be found in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and the English Language Management Guidebook, as shown in Figure 4.11. PLCs are described as integral to collaborative learning, enabling teachers

to share knowledge, skills, and expertise to improve teaching skills and academic performance.

Selected examples of programmes in Malaysian schools		
Programmes		
From federal level	From state and district level	From school level
• Nilam • 1Malaysia Reading Camp • LINUS • PBS • SMART • PLANT • SMART Prayers Camp • TASMIK Class • MBMMBI • PPSMI • PROTIM • School Improvement Programme • 1 Student 1 Sport • 1Malaysia Run • 1Malaysia Grassroots Camp • Identify the Talent TID Programme • MSSM • SJKC Bahasa Malaysia Campaign Competition • Sports and Games, Clubs and Associations and Uniformed Bodies • "Syiar Islam" Development Programme	• Excel Programme • Strengthening Pedagogy • SAGA • TELT • 200m Programme • Final Acceleration Programme • Answer for Success • UPSR Motivation Camp SJKC • Success in UPSR Programme SJKC • Professional Learning Community (PLC) • TORA TORA Teaching & Learning for Teachers • MSSN • Hockey Talent Camp • Language Village • MSSD • Integrated Uniform Unit Camp	• ELITE Programme • NILAM Programme • Al-Fatah Programme • Big Brother/Sister Programme • Mentor-Mentee Programme • Excellent Student Award • Motivational Programme (UPSR, PMR, SPM, STPM) • Techniques to answer questions/ marking scheme • UPSR Clinic • Planned Revision Programme • Junior teachers • SPM/PMR Clinic • Enzyme-making Programme • Gardening Programme • School annual sports • Project "Boom" • 1 Teacher 1 Co-curriculum • SERASI Programme • LESTARI Programme • KEKAS Programme

SOURCE: Focus group discussions

Source: Doc_MEB_2013, page 160

Figure 4.11: PLC as one of the programmes in Malaysian schools

Another reference to the importance of PLC is found in the English Language Management Guidebook, where PLC is a part of collaborative learning that can assist teachers in sharing knowledge and skills with their colleagues.

Collaborative planning is encouraged through Professional Learning Communities (PLC). PLC enables teachers to meet regularly, share expertise, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of their pupils.

(Doc_ELMG_2019, page 10)

Other than that, in the same guidebook, PLC is described as a programme of continuous professional development for teachers.

TEACHERS' CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Teachers' development programmes need to be planned and implemented to enhance the knowledge and skills of teaching through programmes such as CPD and PLC. PLC activities serve to improve teachers' knowledge and skills, involve the sharing of expertise and working collaboratively. Aspects of English Language T&L such as pedagogy, methodology, and content knowledge should be included during the in-service training sessions.

(Doc_ELMG_2019, page 32)

Overall, PLCs benefit teachers in teaching and learning by providing opportunities for professional development, collaboration, and addressing challenges in pedagogical practices. By engaging in PLC activities, teachers can enhance their teaching practices and improve student outcomes.

Discussion of Sub-Theme: Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), as defined by Hord (1997a), involve collaboration between school administrators and teachers to study and share teaching and learning skills. This collaborative approach encompasses all members of the school community, both internal and external, to promote collaborative learning and enhance children's academic achievement (Senge et al., 2012; Salleh & Ibrahim, 2020). The concept of PLC was introduced in the Interim Strategic Planning 2011-2020 of the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE) with the aim of improving education for students and teachers alike.

Research by Ismail et al. (2018) found that some Malaysian teachers exhibited a lack of motivation to collaborate with colleagues or engage in professional development opportunities such as conferences, short courses, workshops, etc., to enhance their teaching practices. Research indicates that PLCs positively impact teacher development. While some studies suggest a lack of teacher motivation for collaboration, research by Salleh and Ibrahim (2020) found a strong link between PLCs and teacher growth. PLCs were shown to significantly influence teachers' workplace learning and career advancement, enhancing their teaching practices and overall professionalism.

This aligns with the findings of this study, where participants highlighted the value of PLCs for professional development and addressing classroom challenges. Based on the findings of the study, PLCs serve two primary goals: improving teachers' professional development through group study, knowledge sharing, and open discussion, and enhancing teachers' educational aspirations, student achievement, and success through more effective leadership and teaching.

d. Sub-theme: Panel Meeting

Essentially, the Head of English Language Panel (HoELP) is the leader of a group of English language teachers who work together to ensure the effective teaching and learning of English within the school. The HoELP conducts meetings to oversee annual programmes, projects, and activities aligned with the school's Curriculum Strategic Plan. A secretary, elected from among the members, is responsible for recording meeting minutes, documenting discussions, and distributing relevant materials to panel members.

The English Language Management Guidebook (2019) mandates panel discussions on assessment-related topics. This collaborative approach ensures consistent understanding and implementation of learning objectives. The study found that panel meetings provided a crucial platform for teachers to address concerns related to CEFR implementation. These discussions facilitated open dialogue and shared problem-solving.

Head A emphasised that in her school, any concerns that arise are only discussed in the English Panel meeting, and there was very little consultation from parties not associated with her school. This was because her school had three excellent teachers, including herself, an item writer for the CEFR who worked directly on CEFR materials, and teachers with a total of 20 years of teaching experience. Therefore, it was a great advantage for them to have experienced teachers who could work together on their subject to find the most effective answers to all challenges.

err..okay, networking wise not really, i will just discuss with teachers in the English panel because err.. we are quite close and then we will discuss how to err how to go about it and i guess for writing also most important thing is the reading part as well.okay, because by reading you can learn new vocabulary and you can learn new style of writing i guess that helps also..err in after an extensive reading i guess hwre students are being shown the correct phrases, the correct sentences, the correct them to be used i think they can write better.

(Head A_Int1)

okay, that is the good idea but normally we will just get together during the panel meetings and then err we then we will discuss and we will have this part called the sharing session okay whereby we share tips on how to go about

students' writing okay. or how to tackle students' errors or how to tackle or how we can improve students' vocabulary and also grammar wise.

(Head A_Int1)

Similarly, Teacher A frequently engaged in collaborative discussions with her team to address challenges pertaining to classroom assessment and the CEFR: *"We do it among our English panel because they are the one who closes to us, they have the same problems that we face and when we have our panel meetings, we bring up the challenges and we try to resolve it to the best that we can"* (Teacher A_Int1).

Although there were only two ESL teachers at Teacher C's school, including herself, the panel meeting discussion had the potential to be the main platform for them to discuss and exchange ideas about CEFR. Together they would go through the relevant documents and make sure they were going in the right direction.

Oo yes because in my school there's only two English teachers. Okay, so every year even though that we are teaching almost the same form and this only between the two of us okay, we always go through the SKP and also SOW every year to make sure that we still remember the difference for each of the form since before this we only teach three levels now each of us is teaching four levels.

(Teacher C_Int1)

Just having or maybe can utter the issue in the panel meetings and so on.

(Teacher C_Int1)

Teacher E disclosed her readiness to raise any concerns regarding the CEFR during the forthcoming panel meeting, noting that these issues would subsequently be

escalated to a higher level of expert consultation. This consultation tier involved the SISC+ and the District Coach.

Yes, we have discussed about this in our panel meeting and also, we have express, and over concerned about this to SISC+, they asked us about what we are facing when CEFR first introduce, so, we have Ju, SISC+ and head of panel as well.

(Teacher E_Int1)

A subtle distinction observed in Teacher F's response was her assertion of having no difficulties in implementing the CEFR. This indication suggests a comprehensive understanding of the CEFR and the ability to address challenges independently. However, Teacher F expressed readiness to bring forth any additional concerns during panel meetings for further discussion and potential resolution.

No, I think if we face this kind of challenges, we will you ask our colleague okay we will discuss on that and if it doesn't solve, am not sure who are we going to refer to, usually we will discuss among us.

(Teacher F_Int1)

Panel meetings serve as essential platforms for internal discussion and problem-solving among English language teachers. These meetings contribute to improving teacher morale and facilitating effective English language programme implementation. The English Language Management Guidebook emphasises the English panel's crucial role in overseeing all related programmes. Panel members collaborate to address curriculum, activity, and programme-related issues, ensuring optimal solutions.

g. Conduct panel meetings to monitor the yearly programmes, projects and activities conducted in line with the school's Curriculum Strategic Plan

(Doc_ELMG_2019, page 29)

In addition, panel meetings also serve as invaluable platforms for ESL teachers to collaborate, share best practices, and address common challenges. These forums align with the English Language Management Guidebook's emphasis on monitoring yearly programmes and activities, underscoring their importance in overseeing CEFR-aligned curriculum and assessments.

Discussion of Sub-Theme: Panel Meeting

English language panel meetings are essential platforms for ESL teachers to collaborate, share best practices, and enhance the overall quality of English language education. These meetings are pivotal for effective curriculum implementation and teacher support, fostering collaboration, idea exchange, and problem-solving (Fullan, 2015). Panel discussions significantly contribute to the integration of the CEFR. While external support is valuable, internal collaboration within schools, even those with smaller ESL departments, has proven effective. Ultimately, panel meetings are crucial for overcoming challenges and achieving optimal outcomes.

4.3.4.2 Summary of Research Question 4 (RQ4)

This chapter explores strategies for implementing CEFR-aligned writing assessments. Participants emphasised the need for support, including one-to-one assistance, expert consultation, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Teachers and educational experts are key stakeholders in this process. Teachers require ongoing support to effectively implement the CEFR and utilise it for assessments.

Educational experts, such as experienced teachers or those from the Ministry of Education, should provide guidance and training. By investing in teacher development and fostering collaboration through PLCs, the successful implementation of CEFR-aligned assessment can be achieved. To address these challenges, two recommendations emerge: 1) teachers should be given opportunities to serve as examiners to enhance their assessment skills, and 2) comprehensive training similar to that provided by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES) should be offered to teachers. These steps will empower teachers to effectively implement CEFR-aligned assessments and improve student outcomes.

4.4 SUMMARY

This chapter demonstrates teachers' positive reception of CEFR-aligned assessments, as evidenced by their responses to Research Question 1 (RQ1). While recognising implementation challenges, teachers view the CEFR as a valuable tool for enhancing teaching and learning. The study further investigated teachers' language learning strategies for CEFR-aligned writing assessments (RQ2) and identified key obstacles to implementation (RQ3). Findings revealed a correlation between CEFR assessment accessibility and its implementation, despite challenges such as time constraints. Teachers demonstrated resilience in seeking guidance to overcome these challenges (RQ4). In conclusion, teachers exhibited a willingness to embrace CEFR-aligned assessments and successfully implemented the framework in their classrooms.