

# **Exploring the Applicability of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Shaping English Curriculum: Insights From Lecturers and Students**

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*CEFR is now widely used as the reference in developing English language program curricula in many higher educations worldwide. The framework has not been commonly adopted in the Indonesian context and attracts scholars to investigate. This research revealed how lecturers and students perceive CEFR as the basis for curriculum development for English courses. To gain the data, 8 lecturers and 94 students were purposefully chosen as respondents and were given a questionnaire developed from C1 level CEFR descriptors. Meanwhile, some respondents were interviewed to collect in-depth information about their perceptions. The quantitative data were analyzed by computing the average score and revealed that the students have a positive perception towards CEFR with an average of 3.78. The data from the interview uncovered that both lecturers and students agreed with the CEFR descriptors for four reasons: job requirements, communication tools, community expectations, and the need to support their learning. The findings imply that the stakeholders must specify the curriculum framework in which CEFR adoption can be an option.*

*Keywords: CEFR, higher education, English language curricula, perceptions*

## INTRODUCTION

Given the teachers' task as students' role models, English communication skills are a fundamental need for potential English teachers. As stated in the document Graduate Competency Standards and Learning Outcomes for Graduates at the Bachelor's Level of English Language Teaching Study Program number 3. c. 2.5, graduates of the English Teaching Study Program (TBI) must "be able to communicate orally and in writing in English effectively, emphatically, and politely when conducting English Language Teaching" (Director General of Islamic Education, Ministry of Religion, Republic of Indonesia, 2018). According to the international Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) scale, graduate competency standards, and learning outcomes are equivalent to level C1.

Although the significance of the target language acquisition has been acknowledged by all parties involved, English teachers in Indonesia continue to demonstrate a widespread lack of proficiency. According to Renandya et al. (2018), English teachers' English proficiency in Indonesia is classified as low and ranks 10th out of 20 nations in Asia. The phenomenon of low competence in mastering the target language also occurs in TBI Program, where, based on the lecturers' interactions in academic forums, most student-teacher candidates cannot effectively communicate their ideas in English. It is ironic because these conditions will make it difficult to do their tasks in the future (Renandya et al., 2018).

The issue of low proficiency in the target language of TBI students cannot be attributed to a single factor, as a variety of factors can impact the success of graduates. However, the curriculum, a crucial reference document for the execution of learning in the TBI study program, must be evaluated for its effectiveness in obtaining the desired number of graduates. Based on the preliminary study, each lecturer from the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (KKNI) learning outcomes independently prepared the curriculum for English courses. In addition, the TBI Study Program has not yet defined a standard and reference framework for its development. Because the parameters or references have not been agreed upon, it is highly possible that the validity of knowing the compatibility of learning outcomes with the KKNI cannot be determined.

To strengthen the ability of college graduates to master foreign languages, many nations have embraced international curriculum development frameworks based on international standards. This is done because international standards are an extremely effective driver for policy transformation, allowing education outcomes to compete internationally (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). Commonly, these nations use the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to establish English proficiency levels (Read, 2014).

The Council of Europe developed the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in 2001 to provide a common framework for developing learning syllabuses, curricular guidelines, competency examinations, and language learning materials for all European nations (Council of Europe, 2001). Due to its nature, which is not limited to English, and its clear and structured description of the degree of linguistic proficiency, the CEFR was translated into 40 state languages and accepted by numerous non-European nations during its development (Council of Europe, 2017). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is currently the language proficiency scale that has been the subject of the most scholarly research (Ito, 2020) and plays a crucial role in every language learning curricular policy (Hulstijn, 2007). CEFR describes acquiring the language skills and information necessary for regular communication. It has six competency levels organized into three clusters: primary users (Levels A1 and A2), independent users (Levels B1 and B2), and skilled users (Levels C1 and C2) (Levels C1 & C2). This is all documented in a paper that will be updated frequently (Council of Europe, 2017).

Regarding incorporating CEFR standards into the English language curriculum at the tertiary level, several studies undertaken by specialists have yielded comparable findings. In Hismanoglu's (2013) survey of Turkish university students, respondents expected CEFR to serve as the basis for curriculum development in their study program. Afip et al. (2019) advised that the Malaysian government uses the CEFR as a reference for the English curriculum at the higher education level to balance the English requirement in schools with the English language skills of instructors. Their findings are comparable to those of Bakar (2020), who asserts that the alignment of the English curriculum with the CEFR provides optimism for the achievement of growing students' English proficiency at the higher education level.

Furthermore, Anwar et al. (2023) suggest that the higher education curriculum should be more flexible and adaptive to the new normal of education.

Regarding the perception of CEFR implementation, some research undertaken by various specialists has generated relatively similar results. In a study conducted on French teachers in Canada, Faez et al. (2011) reported that implementing CEFR positively affected students' motivation, self-confidence, and attention to their competence. In their research on students and teachers in Australia, Normand-Marconnet and Bianco (2015) found that respondents had a positive perception of CEFR for some reasons, including the facts that the framework is used globally, is simple to adopt, is internationally standardized, improves curriculum design, and corresponds to the level of proficiency. Trang and Lap's (2016) research on the attitudes of students and faculty at a Vietnamese university confirms the findings of the two prior investigations. He noted that respondents had a favorable view of the curriculum policies established using CEFR as the basis for curriculum development at the universities where the research is conducted.

More and more educational institutions and governments in other nations are becoming aware of CEFR's value as a curriculum framework for developing English proficiency. Therefore, the standard must be evaluated to be incorporated into Indonesia's higher education curriculum. It aligns with the university's third mission: to answer the demands of the government, industry, and society (Astuty et al., 2023). In addition, it is bolstered by the fact that at the secondary education level, the government has adopted CEFR as the benchmark for graduate accomplishment (Head of the Research and Development and Books Agency, 2021).

To carry out the process of adopting CEFR to the English curriculum in higher education in Indonesia, particularly in the TBI study program at UIN SAIZU Purwokerto, it is necessary to conduct a context-specific study that includes the perspectives of lecturers, as the curriculum policy implementers, and students, as the object of the curriculum. However, based on the literature research, this issue has become a burning issue for scholars. This condition implies that there is still room for investigation, which this study intends to fill in. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to address the following research questions:

1. How do the lecturers perceive CEFR as the basis for curriculum development for English courses?
2. How do students perceive CEFR as the basis for curriculum development for English courses?

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This descriptive study investigates the lecturers' and students' perceptions of CEFR as a framework for developing the curriculum for English courses at UIN SAIZU Purwokerto. Qualitative and quantitative data from respondents were collected to find out their views.

### **Research Subject**

To collect quantitative data regarding lecturers' perceptions of CEFR, all 8 lecturers from the TBI Study Program were chosen as respondents. Although not all of them teach English classes, all lecturers can do so in compliance with the TBI Study Program's requirements and regulations. That is, their selection as respondents is justifiable.

94 students from the fourth, sixth, and eighth batches were chosen randomly as research participants to examine student perceptions using quantitative data. To ensure that each batch is well represented, the proportions of each are standardized to contain roughly 30 students. The students have completed all English classes, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing instruction.

Eight English lecturers and two student representatives from the fourth, sixth, and eighth were interviewed to supplement the quantitative data. Those selected are some of the respondents involved in collecting quantitative data.

### Data Collection Methodology

Quantitative data were collected via a questionnaire distributed to respondents. It has 12 items with Likert scale responses: strongly agree, agree, do not know, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questions were constructed and modified based on the CEFR framework level C1 descriptors (Council of Europe, 2001). The framework contains indicators of English language skills relevant to the KKNI number 3. c. 2.5 developed by the Director General of Islamic Education, Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (2018). Before being distributed to respondents, the questionnaire underwent content and expert validation. In addition, respondents were given an explanation through a discussion forum to ensure the validity of the data.

In the meantime, in-depth information about lecturers' and students' perceptions of CEFR as the basic curriculum development framework for English courses was gathered through interviews. The interviews aimed to elucidate their expectations of the desired level of English competence, particularly regarding reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. These data demonstrate whether or not the CEFR meets their expectations.

### Techniques of Data Analysis

The results of a questionnaire were collected and statistically examined. During the piloting phase, SPSS was used to analyze data from 10 respondents to determine the questionnaire's validity and reliability. After establishing the results' validity and reliability, the questionnaires proceeded to all respondents.

In the meantime, the interview data were examined based on the attitudes and perceptions of the research subjects about CEFR as a curriculum development framework for the English language course. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) recommended, the data were analyzed through interactive model analysis. Based on this model, there were four foundational elements: data collection, condensation, data display, and verifying conclusions. The data gained were segmented, coded, and summarized for data condensation. Continuously, the data were displayed by presenting some tables for ease of viewing. Finally, all data processed were compared to the pre-existing related literature, interpreted, and made logically conclusive.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Students' Perception

#### *Quantitative Data*

The questionnaire data analysis findings demonstrate that, in general, students agree with the CEFR descriptor's competency standards.

**TABLE 1**  
**AVERAGE QUESTIONNAIRE SCORE**

	<b>Listening</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Writing</b>
<b>Mean</b>	3.95	3.59	3.85	3.73

According to Table 3, the lowest average score is 2.50, while the highest is 5.00. The mean of the 94 responders was 3.78, with a standard deviation of 0.50. According to the computation of the range on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, 3.78 falls within the agreed-upon range for the category. Thus, it may be stated that, in general, students have a favorable perception of CEFR as a framework for developing an English language program. In addition, when assessed from the perspective of each aspect of English proficiency, most respondents concur with the CEFR definition.

**TABLE 2**  
**MEAN QUESTIONNAIRE SCORES FOR EVERY LANGUAGE ASPECT**

N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
94	2.50	5.00	3.78	0.66

According to Table 4, the average response value of the respondents is in the agree range: 3.95, 3.59, 3.85, and 3.73. Based on these data, it can be inferred that, in general, respondents have a favorable perception of the CEFR framework for each language element. The data analysis results confirm earlier studies' conclusions about students' and teachers' perceptions of CEFR (Faez et al., 2011; Normand-Marconnet and Bianco, 2015; Trang & Lap, 2016).

#### *Qualitative Data*

The results of the qualitative data analysis support the quantitative data findings by elaborating on why the respondents generally agreed with the descriptors of the CEFR framework.

**Job Requirement.** Almost all respondents stated that CEFR descriptors were consistent with the needs they will face as instructors in the future. In their answers, they acknowledge that they must use English competently when teaching or outside of teaching tasks to fulfil their responsibilities. Without this talent, they will find it difficult to perform tasks.

This is strengthened by statements from several students (S) in the following interview excerpt:

*I completely agree, especially since we, as future teachers, will impart much knowledge and information to our students. It is only fitting that we should be proficient in English so that our students can have a good learning experience. (S4)*

*We plan to become English instructors after we finish college. English is regarded as a foreign language in Indonesia. Consequently, we need to have excellent English skills before we become teachers. (S1)*

*Certainly, mastering English is fundamental for a teacher. It will prove our professionalism as an English educator. If we lack proficiency in English, it will undoubtedly be a disaster for us. (S3)*

It is clear from the aforementioned interview excerpts that having a solid command of the English language is very advantageous for them because they are candidates of teachers and are expected to act professionally.

These findings verify what Renandya et al. (2018) stated regarding the necessity for English teachers to have strong English abilities to carry out their tasks effectively.

**Communication Tool.** We are all aware that the primary function of language is communication. For this reason, some respondents indicate that their high agreement with the CEFR stems from the importance of mastering the skills stated in the descriptors for communication purposes. In this modern era, backed by technological advancements such as those of today, the limits of connection between people are becoming increasingly permeable, allowing us to communicate with individuals from all regions of the world. At this point, proficiency in English as a global language becomes crucial. After analyzing the CEFR descriptors, most respondents believed that the established standards were highly relevant to the needs of TBI students, allowing them to communicate with relative ease in the target language.

Here are some interview excerpts from students:

*I will be able to communicate with anyone if I can master the English language. Consequently, I will gain much information to support my future career. (S2)*

*It is essential for teachers to be fluent in English. It is used for communicating with different parties as well as for education. For instance, it will be simpler for me to give my students a general review of how to use English. (S6)*

The above-quoted interview clip states that learning English will make it simpler for them to communicate, particularly when looking up information on a global scale. This aligns with Crystal's (2003) assertion that English serves to overcome communication barriers in the international community. On the other hand, the strict rules of English language usage cause fear when using it for communication. The following interview excerpt supports this notion:

*Being proficient in English for communication is essential, but the abundance of grammar rules sometimes leads to confusion, lack of confidence, and fear of using English. (S1)*

*The ability to speak or write in English is actually quite rewarding. Unfortunately, I sometimes hesitate to say it out loud because I worry I will mispronounce the words. (S4)*

**Community Expectation.** Some respondents are aware of the high expectations from others who believe they will be perceived as proficient English users after graduating from the TBI program. This is the reason why the majority of respondents agreed with the questionnaire statements. They believe that the CEFR descriptors are highly relevant to the public expectation for a graduate of the TBI study program.

*People around me automatically perceive me as having a much higher level of English competence because I am an English major. (S3)*

*People assume that students majoring in English are naturally adept at the language. As a result, it is normal for students in other disciplines to ask for assistance with their English homework. (S5)*

**Learning Process Requirement.** In addition to the three preceding factors, one of the respondents claimed that the need for English proficiency, as described in the CEFR descriptors, had emerged while they were still students. During their education, they must consult many reference materials, most written in academic English. In addition, they have begun to be required to utilize proper English in the learning process, for instance, while communicating with lecturers to ask about topics or answer questions posed by lecturers during the discussion process.

*Being an English major student requires us to master English as we extensively utilize English learning materials throughout our study process. (S1)*

*Whether we like it or not, we must work hard on the material and assignments because they are necessary for English major students to finish. (S5)*

### **Lecturers' Perception**

Interview results indicate that, in general, lecturers share the same perspective as students, with all lecturers agreeing with nearly all CEFR descriptors. In all other respects, the reason for their agreement was comparable to that perceived by students.

### *Job Requirement*

All respondents believed that English language abilities, as stated in the CEFR descriptors, are crucial for prospective TBI graduates to acquire, as future employment will require proficiency with such standards. They believe that proficiency at that level will greatly assist graduates in completing their tasks in the future, whether they are instructors or not. In carrying out their responsibilities, using English is a crucial asset. Here are some interview excerpts from lecturers (L):

*I agree because being professional in the workplace is greatly valued, and this includes possessing a strong command of the English language. (L2)*

*For instance, if they plan to instruct at a vocational school (SMK), they must comprehend technical literature about automobiles, light vehicles, computer networking, and other topics. (L3)*

*Along with becoming teachers, our graduates can also pursue jobs as curriculum designers, writers of books, translators, etc. In essence, students must be able to master every aspect of the English language. (L1)*

### *Communication Tool*

A person is expected to be able to speak a foreign language proficiently in an era in which the likelihood of interacting with a large number of people from diverse countries is growing. This issue is another reason the lecturers agree with the CEFR descriptor. They believe that English communication skill has become a need for nearly everyone. Therefore, graduates are expected to be able to demonstrate their proficiency in situations when they communicate through printed media or engage in one-way contact with foreigners.

*This is important since native speakers tend to be quite expressive. Therefore, our students need to know how to communicate with them. (L1)*

*Their ability to connect with others on the job, particularly after graduation, depends on their ability to communicate effectively. (L4)*

*At the very least, they should avoid misexpressing themselves in certain situations. (L2)*

*For instance, if they meet a native speaker, they should be able to communicate with them. It would be awkward if they couldn't speak when approached for a conversation. (L3)*

### *Community Expectation*

Like what students have expressed, one of the reasons the lecturers perceive future graduates to have high-standard English abilities, as stated by the CEFR descriptors, is because of people's expectations of their status as TBI study program students. Especially as instructors of English courses, they fervently expect that potential graduates will be able to use the target language effectively, armed with the skills taught during the learning process.

*It would be very awkward if our students, as English graduates, could not speak or keep speaking in Indonesian when meeting native speakers. (L1)*

*As English graduates, they are now expected to be trusted in specific circumstances. (L4)*

*Students with an English major will be seen differently by others. Compared to students in other majors, they are thought to have stronger language skills. (L2)*

### *Learning Requirement*

Despite the preceding three arguments, lecturers concur that students must possess competencies as described in CEFR descriptors since those aspects are essential to their learning process. In addition to the demands of student activities related to reference studies, TBI students will encounter other learning demands, such as essay writing, or more complicated ones, such as thesis writing and presentation.

The rapid popularity of English as an international language and its crucial function in all aspects of life requires Educational Institutions for Education Personnel (LPTK) to create qualified graduates of English teacher candidates. To meet these objectives, TBI study programs, which are, in fact, suppliers of prospective English teachers, must develop all supplementary elements, including a curriculum structure. The clarity of the curriculum framework is a prerequisite, as it will lead all academic activities toward achieving the specified objectives.

*Students must, in fact, be able to write clearly and effectively as they develop their thesis. (L3)*

*This includes writing essays or reports that are quite complex on various topics, just like their thesis. (L2)*

*Thus, we can observe their dedicated efforts in writing their thesis. (L4)*

## **CONCLUSION**

Students generally agree with the CEFR descriptors based on the quantitative data analysis. In addition, when analyzed separately for each facet of language ability, namely listening, reading, speaking, and writing, students generally concur with the claims. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that students favor CEFR as a curriculum reference in the TBI study program.

The aforementioned conclusion is bolstered by the results of qualitative data analysis, which reveal a number of fundamentals that contribute to students' good perception of the CEFR. The interview analysis revealed that they agreed with the CEFR descriptors for four reasons: job requirement, communication tool, community expectation of their status as students and graduates of the TBI study program, and the need to support their learning while pursuing higher education.

The lecturers and students have a similar perspective on questions drawn from the CEFR descriptors. Therefore, it can be inferred that TBI lecturers view the CEFR positively as a resource for curriculum framework development. Regarding the reasons for their perception, they also have the same perspective as the students. The results of the interview analysis indicate that they agree with the CEFR descriptor because students are required to master English to fulfil four requirements: job requirements, communication tools, community expectations of their status as graduates of the TBI study program, and the need to support the learning process while they study in college.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

For TBI study programs, establishing a curriculum framework as a reference for proper student standards and the teaching and learning process has become vital. The KKNi goals are, of course, still very general or are still in the form of a construct, which should be specified within a more standardized framework of learning outcomes. When developing a curricular structure at TBI, the results of this study may serve as a reference. In addition to being designed by specialists and internationally standardized, CEFR has also been widely adopted by numerous domestic and foreign institutions, including universities.

The study program can establish graduates' proficiency standards as the first step in formulating a strategy. Setting standards can be carried out step by step, considering the potential of the study program. However, as a minimum baseline, a criterion should be established to ensure that future graduates are ready to begin teaching immediately. The B2 CEFR level is considered adequate for teaching.



The TBI Study Program must perform a curriculum review and seek measures to ensure that graduates are proficient in the target language and ready to teach. The average of four years required to earn a bachelor's degree is sufficient to reach the B2 level. Obviously, if TBI relies only on the time allotted in the study program curriculum, the available time will not be sufficient to ensure the success of this accomplishment. Consideration must also be given to input standards or the selection of potential students. In addition, it is required to support additional structured programs (such as substantial reading and English presentations) that are integrated into learning activities for non-English courses.

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