

Formative Assessment in Writing in CEFR-aligned Secondary Curriculum: Malaysian Teachers' Practices and Beliefs

Tavamani Thiagarajan¹, Tan Kim Hua²

¹Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Malaysia, ²Taylor's University, Lakeside campus, 47500, Selangor, Malaysia, ²Pusat Pengajian Citra Universiti, UKM, 43600, Selangor, Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i2/17271>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i2/17271

Published Online: 10 June 2023

Abstract

The alignment of the CEFR framework in the Malaysian English curriculum has significantly changed Malaysian English classroom teaching and learning. The new curriculum shifted from emphasising centralised exams to measuring learning progress; hence, formative assessment was introduced. Previous research highlighted a substantial gap between secondary school teachers' understanding and actual formative assessment practises in the classroom. The research also found that writing was the most challenging language to teach and assess in the classroom. This paper seeks to find the practices of formative assessments in writing lessons and explore the teachers' beliefs of formative assessment in their writing lessons. This study involved seven secondary English teachers in Selangor chosen through convenience sampling. Two data collection methods were used: a semi-structured interview and classroom observation and the data were analysed using transcription and content analysis. Results showed a contradiction between teachers' practices and beliefs. The findings revealed that teachers did formative assessments in writing with the summative assessment as their primary target, and the teachers misperceived the formative assessment practices. It was also found that challenges like lack of time, class size, student language proficiency, work burden, and parents' expectations hinder the effective implementation of formative assessment. The study implies effective formative assessment benefits both teachers and students to teach and learn writing skill. Future research could explore students' perspectives of formative assessment in their writing lessons.

Keywords: Education, CEFR Assessment, Formative Assessment, Writing Skill, Writing Assessment

Introduction

In the 1950s, the Council of Europe devised the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), a pan-European module system for language difficulties that allows students to get global foreign language certification (Foley, 2019). When the council again altered and amended the CEFR criteria, it no longer represented a target language speaker's proficiency level (Foley, 2019). This revised CEFR outlines language learners' abilities at each competency

level. They are no longer penalised or punished for their weakness or inability to perform in the target language. CEFR, now language-neutral, can encompass more countries and languages (EnglishProfile, 2015). This adaptation makes the CEFR more suitable for language acquisition because it may be applied to any language learning situation. This increased global use of the CEFR for various purposes. (Marzaini & Yusoff, 2022) Since its inception in 2001, the CEFR has been translated into 37 languages and used as a tool to establish levels for learning, teaching, and evaluation in regions outside Europe across Asia and Latin America. Malaysia, like Japan and China, embraced CEFR in its language education system.

The Malaysian education system aims to generate citizens who are worldwide competitors and workers. The mastery of an internationally recognised language like English is crucial for this. Hence, a curriculum that produces a competent global worker becomes a requisite (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013). As a result, Malaysian curriculum adopted CEFR standards and CEFR-aligned national curriculum was introduced in 2016. The alignment of CEFR framework in the Malaysian English curriculum has caused significant changes to many existing aspects of classroom teaching and learning (Norshaidatul et al., 2021; Uri et al., 2018). Assessment methods was the one with the most major transformation. This move intended to shift education focus from centralised exams towards measuring learning progress. The new curriculum acknowledges the things language learners could while learning language rather than their failures.

Language learning includes acquiring four skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Among these four, the ability to write well is the hardest part of learning English. Writing is the hardest and often the last skill one acquires when learning a language owing to its complexity (Cole & Feng, 2015). Since writing is not a skill that comes easily to students especially to those non-native learners who learn English as a second language, it becomes a hurdle that students must overcome to be successful. As Noor et al (2019) highlighted, pupils find writing a taxing cognitive activity. In writing, pupils must execute several different processes while ensuring effective author-reader communication.

Due to the intricacy of English language, pupils must master many aspects of writing such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, consistency, and organisation to write well. Due to this, most students struggled with English writing (Noor et al., 2019). Rashid et.al (2021) also agreed and stated that writing is the hardest language skill to teach and learn. While students struggle to write, teachers also struggle to teach and assess writing in the classroom.

Assessment is essential to teaching and learning since it benefits both teachers and students. Assessments allow students to track their progress and validate their understanding of the topics taught in the classroom. Assessment would also help teachers to be aware the efficacy of their teaching methods and classroom practises in improving 'pupils' learning. This results in teachers finding it easier to plan and organise their lessons, ultimately boosting student academic performance. Assessments that are implemented in schools can be divided into three. They are assessment of learning, assessment as learning and assessment for learning(formative). Formative Assessment (FA) has replaced summative assessment, the traditional method of assessment, in many developing countries.

Malaysian secondary schools have used the CEFR-aligned secondary curriculum since 2018. Regrettably according to past research on implementing CEFR, teachers are still unfamiliar with the curriculum including FA. Many difficulties and concerns were highlighted and identified in the past in the real practice of FA in the classroom. Mudin (2019) and other studies show that teachers' understandings and their classroom practises differ greatly. Studies on secondary school teachers' practices and beliefs of using FA in the classroom to

assess students' progress in writing skill, a skill considered to be the most difficult to teach and learn, is still lacking. Hence, this study aims to explore and investigate Malaysian secondary English teachers' FA practises and beliefs in writing class within the CEFR-aligned Malaysian Education curriculum. This study aims to bridge the gap of implementation of FA and teachers' belief in writing lessons in secondary school context. The findings of this study is hoped to provide in-depth insights teachers' real views and classroom FA techniques in the classroom. This study also hopes to encourage teachers to employ FAs in writing lessons. The specific objectives of the study include to investigate the FA practices used in the class by the teachers to assess pupils' CEFR based writing tasks and to explore the teachers' beliefs towards the use of FA in assessing pupils' progress in CEFR based writing tasks.

The following research questions were used in this research:

- What are the FA practices employed by the secondary English teachers in their writing lessons?
- What are the secondary teachers' beliefs towards the use of FA in assessing students' writings in the class?

This research may contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning process. Past studies show that FA can function as an instructional and accountability tool in teaching and learning. This study aims to inform teachers, school officials, and the Ministry of Education about FA procedures, particularly in writing lessons. This qualitative study's drawback is its laboriousness and time-intensiveness. Since the interviewees were from various Klang schools, so scheduling was difficult. The interview transcription also needed word-by-word transcription, classification, and recoding.

Literature Review

The CEFR

Teaching and learning English language has been an obstacle in both primary and secondary schools worldwide. To strengthen the teaching-learning process of the English in Malaysia, the Malaysian Ministry of Education" (MOE) has been working hard to improve English language teaching and learning in the classrooms. According to Alihet al (2021), the MOE had initiated several modifications to strengthen the language curriculum in Malaysian schools. This move wasto improve Malaysian teachers' English and build a workforce capable of functioning in a globalised environment. As a result, in 2017, CEFR standards were implemented to improve English language skills and measure Malaysian pupils against worldwide language standards (Sufi & Stapa, 2020).

The CEFR standards-aligned new curriculum in elementary and secondary schools was introduced in Malaysia in 2013, however it was not implemented until 2018. The introduction of the CEFR framework into the Malaysian English curriculum changed several aspects of the classroom, especially assessment. This change ensured that education shifted from centralised tests to emphasising students' learning development. The language-neutral nature of CEFR framework is found to be helpful to Malaysian students and teachers for this purpose. However, Mudin (2019) stated that many Malaysian teachers were used to examination-based summative assessment, which had long been a fundamental part of the national education system. They were unfamiliar with the FA as it was very new to them.

Formative Assessment

Assessments have always been important in Asian education systems including Malaysia. The importance placed on examinations has resulted in a culture of teaching and learning for

knowledge regurgitation during exams. This education system produces students who can memorise but cannot apply the learnt knowledge (Kaur & Mah, 2022). According to Nawawi et al (2021), a significant shift in the focus is placed on FA ever since CEFR was introduced.

FA helps teachers and students track learning progress by examining evidence before moving on to the next phase of learning (Black and Wiliam, 2018). According to Moss and Brookhart (2019), FA is an active and deliberate learning process in which the teacher and students work together to acquire evidence of learning in a systematic approach with the goal of improving 'pupil's achievement. They claimed that FA is carried out intentionally in the classroom to inform the on-going learning. Heritage (2021) also agreed and elaborated that FA as a range of methodologies that allow teacher and students to gather evidence of learning as students develop their knowledge, skills, and understanding to inform ongoing learning. This claim is also supported by Bereiter and Scardamalia in Moss and Brookhart (2019) who stated that purposeful learning occurs when cognitive processes have learning as their goal rather than as a by-product. So, FA takes place when teachers and their students actively and consciously participate in its process when they collaborate to enhance the learning process.

Hattie & Timperley in Andrade et al (2019) said FA addresses three questions. First, 'where are we going?'" which informs learning goals. Second, how are we doing? which informs the current state of the learning progress and the last is what next? which explores ways to bridge the two prior questions. Vassiliou et al (2022) argue that rather what the student knows which is the focus of the summative assessment, FA emphasises what the student can do. FA's major goal is to improve students' learning by providing constant feedback on their progress and areas for growth, not assessing their achievements. In short, FA can be described as a tool that promotes student learning. Instead of reflecting their task achievements or failures, it guides students to move forward in their learning.

FA also known as "assessment for learning"—benefits teachers and students. This evaluation helps teachers and students track their own individual progress in teaching and learning. The CEFR framework's FA allows teachers to measure 'pupils' English proficiency attained in the classroom more accurately. Teachers can use FAs to help students improve their learning and plan their next lesson according to the 'pupil's learning progress. Hence, it is found that pupils have a positive view toward the use of FA in their writing lesson. As stated by Aziz and Yusoff (2018), students believe self-assessment improves their English writing and volunteered to be in their 'teachers' assessments. Some Form 5 teachers view FA favourably because they recognise that the CEFR assimilation into the English curriculum and exams is a vital part of globalisation and must be done in the classroom (Nurul & Mohd, 2018).

FA helps language learners self-assess, especially while writing (Jee et al., 2021; Hafizuddin et al., 2019). When students can conduct self-assessment, they are found to be able to prepare for and guide themselves through the process of essay writing (Jee & Azlina, 2021). Self-assessment is undoubtedly beneficial to English learners. Mohd & Abu (2019) stated that self-assessment encourages critical thinking and reflective practises during English learning and gives students a sense of independence in their English learning which makes them more motivated to learn English. However, self-assessment works best when teachers are engaged and can explain the steps to students (Mohd & Abu, 2019). If teachers give pupils a rubric without describing its purpose, they will not be able to self-assess their writing tasks. Peer assessment, another assessment type in FA, helped students write better, according to (Abdallah and Samsiah, 2019). They found that peer evaluation training helped pupils write better essays than typical essay writing training. Hence, it can be inferred that incorporating self- and peer-assessment in writing lessons would benefit greatly non-native students who

struggle to write.

FA and feedback are interconnected. The main purpose of FA is to track student progress towards their learning goals. Helpful feedback usually refers to reaching a goal or objective and it can be used to assess learning. When pupils have a clear goal, the feedback would demonstrate how far they've come and whether they need to revise. Plaidaren and Parilah (2019) found feedback is crucial in monitoring learning progress. In their study, the learners' utilisation of feedback had aided their improvement in writing. Past studies indicated that the practice of giving feedback is still lacking among teachers in writing classrooms. Hence, students cannot improve their writing skills since they are unaware of their weaknesses (Kee et al (2019); Lydia et al (2021) and lack the skills and strategies to write successfully (Jee & Azlina, 2021). Lydia & Hanim (2021) who investigated the intervention of reading activity in improving writing, discovered that the quality of 'pupils' writing improved when students could recognise and admitted their mistakes. When pupils can recognise and correct their mistakes, they learn to become autonomous learners and take charge of their education. Pupils are found to have favourable views on feedback as they know that teachers' written feedback is essential to develop their writing ability and influences their language acquisition (Saravanan & Azlina, 2021).

Teachers could not always give each student detailed individual comments on their writings due to few limitations like time constraint, class size, students' different language proficiencies and educational backgrounds. Teachers struggled to accommodate all pupils' writing abilities in a lesson, leaving them little time to provide personalised comments (Rahman et al., 2021; Cagasan et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2021). When teachers opt to offer feedback when they are free, Thiviyaa & Parilah (2020) stated that the late input did not affect the student's written work. The pupils had ignored the feedback as they had moved on to the next task. This indicates that feedback for writing should be given before the pupils lose interest.

Few past studies found problems with the implementation of FA in CEFR in Malaysian classrooms. Sidhu, Kaur, and Lee (2018), in their study on school-based assessment (SBA), found that classroom FAs "leave much to be desired" and were not like true FAs. Azli et al (2021), on the other hand, claimed that teaching and learning in classrooms still remain teacher-centred and teachers continue to function as instructors. Noor and Aini (2019) pointed out to have the least level of preference for time-consuming assessments when it comes to evaluation. Noor and Aini (2019) also stated that teachers believe that the assessment practise under the CEFR curriculum is by increasing the frequency of assessments offered to the pupils. The teachers' misconception, similar to Jee and Azlina (2021) claim, passing grade in an exam reflects level of learning and understanding. Rather than conducting FAs in the classrooms to measure learning progress, some teachers conduct them to evaluate 'pupils' understanding.

Writing

Second language acquisition refers to the process of learning languages other than one's native language. Listening, reading, writing, and speaking are four different language skills required for this acquisition. Writing is essential for pupils to succeed in language acquisition as it is an important tool for communication and conveying information. Yet, writing is seen as the hardest skill to learn (Cole & Feng, 2015). Tan in Javadi-Safa (2018) stated that writing is the most frequent way students are evaluated in their academics, so poor writing skills would jeopardise their academic success. Hence, writing can be intimidating to many. Writing

is a skill that does not come readily to students, especially non-native learners learning English as a second language, and it is a barrier that students must overcome to be successful (Rachel & Maslawati, 2019).

Due to the language's intricacy, writing is usually the final language skill mastered (Cole & Feng, 2015). Good writing includes the mastery of grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, spelling, sentence structure, coherence, organisation, and style. Good writing skills also involve communicating effectively, selecting an acceptable tone, and constructing clear and succinct sentences. Furthermore, good writing demands the capacity to properly organise thoughts and data as well as explain complicated subjects in an understandable manner. Writing is typically a tough and draining cognitive activity for students since they must perform numerous distinct processes while writing and ensure efficient communication between the author and the reader (Noor et al., 2019).

Hence, writing is the toughest language skill to teach and learn in school (Rashid et al., 2021; Rachel et al., 2019). As students struggle to produce written work, teachers struggle to teach this skill in the classroom. However, past studies on the use of FA shown that strategies like as self-assessment, peer evaluation, and feedback helps writers to overcome these writing challenges.

Teacher's Belief and Practices

Teachers believe is correlated to their classroom practice (Borg, 2012). This belief strongly influences 'teachers' teaching practices and how they act in the classroom. A teacher with a strong belief will ensure a good education quality. However, according to Borg (2012), many teachers are unaware of their beliefs as they have never been questioned or given the chance to discuss them. It is important to examine 'teacher's beliefs as it shape their views of their teaching. Teachers' beliefs strongly influence how they guide their students in the classroom and helps them to understand and improve the education process. It also helps them figure out ways for them to deal with challenges they face every day while teaching a language and positively affects the efficiency of their students' learning progress. overcome daily language teaching problems and improve student learning. (Wafa, 2016). Caner in Wafa (2016), stressed that the 'teachers' belief affect their classroom practices. This belief eventually assists the teachers to think about how they may use appropriate evaluation, activities, and materials to differentiate learning for each pupil.

Methodology

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research is a study that employs and collects a wide range of empirical materials to comprehend routines, difficult situations, and their meanings in people's lives. Qualitative research looks at the causes and meanings of a phenomenon. In a variety of methods, qualitative research is best utilised to analyse, characterise, or explain social processes Leavy (2017) "from the inside" (Flick, 2018). The FA processes used by secondary school instructors to evaluate students' CEFR-based writing projects and their thoughts about utilising FA to monitor students' development were examined, described, and explained "from the inside" in this study. This study uses a case study design. According to Yin (2018), case study research is most useful when it comprehensively portrays a current reality, especially when analysing "how" or "why" a social phenomenon operates. This case study explores the present usage of FA to evaluate writing in the CEFR-aligned curriculum, particularly how and why it is used in writing lessons. This design is intended to reveal things statistical generalisation cannot (Cohen et al., 2017).

This research was conducted in the secondary schools in Klang, Selangor. The classroom observation was carried in two schools in the Klang district and the students' essays collected for document analysis were from schools around Selangor. The teachers participated in the interview worked in secondary schools in the Klang. The participants were chosen using the purposive sampling method. The term "purposive sampling" refers to a collection of sampling techniques often used in qualitative research. This method chooses cases that are helpful in addressing research questions (Flick, 2018). therefore not everyone in the general population will be included (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). This study aims to explore secondary English teachers' beliefs and practises of FA in writing lessons, therefore teachers had to meet the requirements before being selected for data analysis. Hence, the purposive sampling method was the most appropriate for this study.

This study collects data mostly through semi-structured interviews. According to Suhaimi et al (2019), semi-structured interview is the most frequently used method for small-scale social research. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher asks open-ended questions under the issues that they seek to find answers for instead of yes/no questions. It allows the researcher the freedom to follow up on points or answers as well as seek in-depth clarifications as needed during the interview (Ruslin et al., 2022). This interview also as claimed by Ruslin et al (2022), helps to reveal hidden emotions, attitudes, and beliefs. This study interviewed secondary English teachers individually to ensure teachers can explain and share their FA practices in the CEFR writing class at ease. The teachers were chosen to answer two research questions. First, what teachers thought about the implementation of FA in writing lessons and what are their own thoughts, feelings, and ideas about their own FA techniques. The interview was also used to highlight obstacles the teachers while conducting FA in writing lessons.

Document analysis triangulates qualitative research approaches. This study used classroom observation to supplement document analysis. Immersion in classroom social interactions allows researchers discover what truly occurs in the classroom. Formative writing assessment may go beyond feedback. The researcher examined classroom participants' facial expressions, emotions, and behaviours and recorded behaviour and gestures. The digital audio recorder cannot register these.

To verify the study's validity, researchers' interpretations were verified. The participants' interview transcripts and field notes of the observation were returned so they could analyse and ensure that their intended thoughts and opinions were clearly communicated throughout the interview and classroom observation. Doing so decreases bias, data deficiency, and misinterpreting participants' behaviour during observations (Cohen et al., 2017). This study used semi-structured interviews and observation to verify its reliability. To verify consistency and similarity, all two instruments' data were triangulated.

Findings and Discussion

This interview sought to understand teachers' thoughts and beliefs on FA in writing classes. The findings from this data collection answered two research questions: what the teachers' teachers' beliefs on FA practices are and how teachers use FA practices in their writing lesson and. This study's semi-structured interview and observation yielded some important findings. Teachers believe FA monitors student learning. Teacher B checked if her students "followed her written responses," while Teacher C "can see" students' improvement "in their exam marks," which are summative assessments. The teacher's concentration on summative assessment grades is demonstrated by their assumption that pupils learn more when they

score higher on tests. FA let Teacher D identify "what the children need to revise" before exams. Jee & Azlina (2021) revealed that learning understanding correlates with exam success. Hence, some teachers prefer exams and tests to formative classroom assessments. Despite believing FA tracks student growth and helps them reach learning goals, teachers had used it to help students succeed in summative tests.

FA is also believed to help teachers guide students' learning. Think, pair, share, lollipop sticks, and exit cards helped teachers measure student understanding. Teacher A uses success criteria to develop lesson goals, but she claimed to use traffic lights and ice cream to assess her students by focusing "mainly on their errors" and "what they should work on to improve their writing." FA allows teachers to reflect on where low-proficient students are in the learning process and what they need to do next rather than explaining why the assessment is done. FA also encourages teachers and students to gather evidence of learning to inform future learning, according to Moss and Brookhart (2019). When teachers know where students are in the learning process, they can adapt their teaching style and plan lessons accordingly. Teacher F used FA to check students' essay goals before and after class. One teacher shared that learning evidence was used to plan language-appropriate enrichment and remediation activities. When their experience and understanding were considered, students were more motivated and confident to learn the language. Thus, this study found that FA improves student learning motivation by identifying learning.

The interviewed teachers had some positive perceptions on FA. Teacher A strongly believed that her students would like and benefit from the FA techniques she had learned, even though time and class size made them impractical. Teacher G agreed that FA and feedback improve students' writing. Teacher B thinks FA and personalised writing feedback help students learn. Teacher B also said that FA helped her understand why some students, especially those with lower language proficiency, were reluctant to write. Teacher A thinks students should improve their learning from feedback. She believed that students should use their writing grades to self-correct. Teacher A thinks it's the students' "responsibility" and "job to improve" after receiving her score, since the national curriculum emphasises autonomous learning.

Teacher C believed FA helps determine the "pupil's understanding of the topic". Teacher E and Teacher F agree that FA methods like think, pair, and share, lollipop sticks, and exit cards help 'understand pupils understanding'. Teacher C said she used FA to identify "weaker students" who couldn't meet learning objectives and changed her teaching method. She believed that identifying her students' understanding helped her plan enrichment or remedial activities in her next lesson.

FA motivates students. Teacher D believed FA improves student learning and motivation. Teacher D said students were more motivated and confident to learn the language after completing the writing task. She said that some students, especially low-proficient ones, need the teacher's help to write. Teacher F agreed, saying that FA can track students' learning progress and make them "engaged and active" by acknowledging their experience and understanding. FA, especially with weaker students, allows teachers to reflect on where students are in the learning process and what they need to do next rather than explaining why the assessment is done.

Some teachers think summative assessment is more important than formative. According to Teacher E, parents and school administrators value summative assessment grades more than FA results. Parents and school administrators value test scores more than learning progress. He also noted that when students perform poorly on exams, the teacher's credibility is

questioned, and they become "answerable to both" parents and school administrators. Teacher E spent more time preparing his writing students for the summative assessment than assessing their learning objectives because parents and school administrators prioritised it. Some teachers believe FA is unreliable, so parents prefer summative assessment. Teacher A doubts the school-based assessment report based on FAs in lessons. As a parent, she found that teachers gave students who were "in the teacher's good book" higher bands. Thus, she believes summative assessment better reflects learning progress than FA.

Malaysian secondary teachers knew FA had benefits but didn't know why. Summative assessment is more crucial for student learning than FA and teachers' grading practices reflected this. Essays were graded using summative assessment criteria. To assist pupils to "write well," teachers C, D, F, and G indicated they will evaluate the essays only for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure. Teacher B said she marked her pupils' essays using the summative assessment's marking criteria to "prepare them for the exam" while Teacher E claimed parents and administrators value summative assessments' grades over FAs'. Teacher A also strongly believes parents think FA is unreliable. Parents assume summative assessments are more accurate than FAs because students who get along with their teachers do well on school-based assessments. Due to their influence and expectations, teachers had to prioritise summative assessment over student progress.

Teacher F believed FA should be implemented in every lesson and every part, if possible. FA requires teachers to observe and comment on students' progress (Rohaya et al., 2014). Teachers rarely use FA, although FA benefits pupils. FA is "supposed to be used in every lesson," but teachers A, B, C, and G admitted that they would do it monthly. Interestingly, Teacher E said his writing class does not employ FAs while Teacher D indicated she would only use FAs a few weeks before the summative tests. This contradicts the OECD (2005) authors' belief that student learning should be measured routinely and dynamically. The results should be used to identify student needs and how to teach them. Despite believing in FA, the teachers didn't employ it correctly in their classroom. This might be because teachers least preference for time-consuming assessment (Noor and Aini, 2019)

Teachers believed feedback helped students Teacher A uses feedback to "work on it (errors made) and do better in their exams" while Teacher B focuses on "what they should work on to enhance their writing." McGoldrick (2021) claimed students participate in FA better by receiving feedback on their understanding in pairs or groups. The writing feedback helps pupils identify their weaknesses and improve. Lydia & Hanim (2021) supported this and claimed acknowledging mistakes enables pupils write better. Feedback also helps students evaluate their learning and writing goals. Teacher E provides feedback so her students "would know what to write and how to score in the exam," whereas Teacher F goal is similar to FA. Her feedback is used to track students' progress towards learning goals (Jonglai et al., 2021). D explains that oral feedback is given in the beginning when the teacher explains the task, while written feedback is for students to "refer back later". Some teachers also had preferences for classroom feedback. Oral feedback helps teachers explain written feedback better. Oral feedback can be given to the class or individually, and students prefer it to reading lengthy comments. Teacher F prefers oral feedback because it gets "immediate response from pupils and reaches pupils directly instead of written form." Teacher B prefers written feedback because it is personalised and documented. Teacher G said students "can flip back pages for reference" with written feedback. Teacher B believes that personalised comments will greatly improve her students' writing, and since they're written in their books, they can always refer to them. This aids writing, the hardest language skill to master (Cole &

Feng, 2015)

Few classroom practices when providing feedback were noticed. The feedback given did not reflect teachers' views. Teachers thought feedback helped pupils learn but most did not do it. Teachers merely pointed out essay errors without proposing solutions. Some teachers even graded essays without explaining why. This prevented pupils from learning from their writing mistakes. Some teachers had given sample essays instead of feedback to promote self-assessment. However, but students had copied the samples instead of improving their writing. As Mohd & Abu (2019) stated, pupils cannot complete or produce significant writing if the teacher gives them a rubric without explaining its purpose or how it can be used to self-assess. They need sample essays to write. However, if it is given to them without explanation, the pupils would copy rather than improving their writing.

All participating teachers used peer and self-assessment. FA helps language learners self-assess while writing (Jee et al., 2021 & Mohd et al., 2019). Teacher C asked a few students to read their essays to the class. Teacher C gave oral feedback after asking the other students to "do peer 'correction.'" The sample essays were also used to help students assess their writing skills. Self-assessment helps students write better in English (Aziz & Yusoff, 2018) and prepare for and guide essay writing (Jee & Azlina, 2021). During the think-pair-share activity, students assessed their classmates' randomly selected essays. When students critique their peers' essays, they become more independent, responsible, and engaged. Abdallah and Samsiah (2019) found that peer assessment training helped students write better essays than traditional essay writing training without peer feedback.

This study discovered many confused teachers. Teacher A thought traffic lights and lollipop sticks were of 21st-century skills. Instead of using them to inform learning progress, she had used them as a teaching aids. She admitted to only the assessment tool when her head of panel observed her, thinking it was one of the criteria for evaluation. This proves Borg (2012) claim that teachers' beliefs directly affect their classroom behaviour. Another teacher mentioned that she uses Kagan's structure to write feedback. However, Kagan's structure is unrelated to FA as it aims to boost students' confidence and keep them engaged through teamwork. According to Borg (2012), many teachers are unaware of their views since they have never been questioned or discussed. This teacher would not have misapplied Kagan's structure if her belief was questioned.

Teachers were also confused about which document to use to study FA. Teacher D and F cited the Ministry of Education's FA handbook correctly. Teacher E said this document gives them "a clear picture" on FA, while Teacher F said it provides detailed guidance on how and when to use it. The other teachers had quoted documents like Examination Syndicate marking criteria, English syllabus, and Yearly scheme of work. The marking rubric or criteria provided by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate has band specifications to assess essays and the "level she wants them (the students) to achieve," according to teachers A, B, D, and F. Teacher A said she used the English Syllabus "to refer to the learning standards" while Teacher C claims it guides her teaching. However, these documents are not the correct documents to be referred for FA. These findings reflect Sidhu et al (2018)'s conclusions at teachers were utilising the wrong document to execute FAs in the classroom, which deviated from the curriculum. Thus, like Sidhu et al (2018) had stated "much is left to be desired" in the classroom.

The teachers' interview revealed some obstacles to FAs in class. Most teachers said they struggled with time and work. Teachers said they barely had time to teach and assess in the classroom. The teachers said they were too busy with "administrative duties" and "clerical

jobs" to carefully review each student's essay and provide individual comments. Teacher B had to attend "unrelated to teaching" clerical and school administration courses for days or weeks. She had to rush through the syllabus rather than assess her students' progress. Teacher D said she couldn't "scrutinise every essay submitted and give personalised feedback" due to time constraints and clerical work. She also noted that after a long-time marking essays, her students had "moved on" and forgotten the task. Feedback didn't help students.

FA challenges included class sizes and students' mixed language proficiency. Teachers struggled to accommodate all students' writing abilities, leaving little time for personalised feedback (Rahman et al., 2021, Cagasan et al., 2020 & Zhang et al., 2021). Teacher E said students' proficiency hindered FA. She said low-proficient students took longer to complete written assignments. The class would end before she could formatively assess their knowledge. Since the next lesson covers a different topic, she cannot assess students' learning. Teacher G agreed that it's hard to assess all students in a mixed-ability classroom. Teacher G could not teach, guide, and assess 40 students with different writing abilities in one hour. Teacher A stated that she was not taught "to do in a large class size and within limited time" in Ministry of Education courses on FAs.

Due to parent and school expectations, some teachers did not prioritise FAs in class. Teacher E said parents value summative test grades more than learning. When students fail summative tests, the teacher's abilities are questioned. Teachers practise summative test-taking strategies in this situation. Teachers must also finish the syllabus before the year ends. Teacher A prioritised syllabus completion over student assessment due to this school's requirement.

All teachers believe FA improves students' writing skills. They know FA, especially feedback, self-assessment, and peer-assessment, helps students learn. This finding supports previous studies Crusan et al (2016); Guado et al (2018); Nguyen et al (2021); Burner (2016); Johansson et al., (2022) that teachers believe in FA and understand its benefits to students. The findings showed that Malaysian teachers' FA beliefs and writing classroom practises differed.

Conclusion

Secondary English language teachers are aware of the benefits of FAs to improve students' writing skills in the classroom. This study found that Malaysian teachers' FA beliefs and writing classroom practises differed. Many studies had raised concerns about CEFR curriculum implementation and classroom assessments. Since CEFR curriculum is new in secondary education, there is little research on Malaysian secondary education. Thus, this study examines FA practises and teachers' views on its effectiveness in improving writing skills under the CEFR curriculum.

This study found few important findings about writing teachers' FA practises. Teachers focus on summative assessment during FA. Teachers were still confused about FA and the Ministry's documents despite its benefits. Teachers also practised self- and peer-assessment but did not record student progress. However, teachers conducted FA less often than they should. Time, work, parents' scepticism, and the school's expectations prevented teachers from properly implementing FA in the classroom.

This study will make a positive contribution to the teaching and learning process. This study's findings may augment future formative assessment research by providing supplementary data points, notably for writing lessons. This study also would show teachers how vital an effective formative assessment is, particularly in writing classes. Hence, they would be more

motivated to help pupils become autonomous learners by relying less on them and taking charge of their learning. Finally, this study provides in-depth insights into the formative assessment practises in Malaysian writing lessons. It also informs Malaysian education policymakers about the actual formative assessment practices in the English classroom, secondary English teachers' beliefs about them, and their challenges in implementing them. Hence, through this study, it is hoped that policymakers will be able to improve, promote, and encourage formative assessments in writing lessons among Malaysian secondary English in the future.

The study's qualitative approach and small sample size make it difficult to generalise the findings. Few studies have examined other FA aspects, especially in Malaysian secondary schools. Future research should examine students' and parents' views of FA, the school's role in promoting it, and whether it affects academic success.

References

- Abdallah, M. S. A., & Samsiah, A. (2019). The Effect of Using Peer Assessment Training on Writing Performance among Arab EFL High School Students in Malaysia. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 10(1): 105- 115.
- Alias, M. D. I. M., Raof, A. H. A., & Abdullah, T. (2021). Teaching CEFR-aligned Writing to Young Learners: Practices and Voices of Teachers. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 29(S3), 351 – 368.
- Alih, N. A. C., Raof, A. H. A., & Yusof, M. A. M. (2021). Policy Change Implementation: The Case of the CEFR in Malaysian ESL Classrooms. *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)*, 6(2), 296-317.
- Alih, N. A. C., Yusoff, M. A. M., & Abdul, A. H. (2020). Teachers' Knowledge and Belief on the CEFR Implementation in Malaysian ESL Classroom. *Educational Research (IJMCER)*, 2(5), 126-134.
- Andrade, H. L., Bennett, R. E., & Cizek, G. J. (2019). *Handbook of FA in the Disciplines*. New York: Routledge.
- Aziz, M. N. A., & Yusoff, N. M. (2018). Experiences of using Authentic Assessment with English Language Young Learners. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(9), 375–384.
- Black, P. J., & Wiliam, D. (2018). Classroom assessment and pedagogy. *Assessment In Education*, 25(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2018.1441807>.
- Borg, S. (2017). Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices. In Garrett, P., & Cots, J.M. (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Awareness* (pp.75-91). London: Routledge.
- Cagasan, L., Care, E., Robertson, P., & Luo, R. (2020). Developing a FA Protocol to Examine FA Practices in the Philippines. *Educational Assessment*, 25(4), 259-275.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research Methods in Education* (8th Ed.). New York: Routledge.
- ole, J., & Feng, J. (2015). Effective Strategies for Improving Writing Skills of Elementary English Language Learners. *Chinese American Educational Research and Development Association Annual Conference*, Chicago. 15-16 April.
- Crusan, D., Plakans, L., & Gebril, A. (2016). Writing assessment literacy: Surveying second language teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices. *Assessing Writing*, 28, 43-56.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). 2018. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 5th Ed. California: SAGE Publications Inc.

- Englishprofile (2015). The CEFR. Available on: <https://www.englishprofile.org/the-cefr#:~:text=The%20CEFR%20describes%20what%20learners,detailed%20'Can%20Do'%20statements> (accessed June 2022).
- Flick, U. (2018). *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Foley, J. A. (2019). Issues on Assessment using CEFR in the Region. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network Journal*, 12 (2), 28-48.
- Heritage, M. (2021). *FA: Making It Happen in the Classroom*. California: SAGE Publications.
- Javadi-Safa, A. (2018). A Brief Overview of Key Issues in Second Language Writing Teaching and Research. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 6(2), 15-25.
- Jee, S., and Azlina, A. (2021) The Application of the Process-Based Writing Approach in Composing an Argumentative Essay: A Case Study of a Suburban Secondary School of Mukah District in Sarawak. *Creative Education*, 12, 880-896.
- Johansson, E., & Nadjafi, F. (2022). *FA of Writing: Practice and Perception Among English Teachers in Sweden* (Dissertation). Available on: <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mau:diva-53586> (accessed December 2022).
- Jonglai, S. A., Pike, M., & Lamb, M. (2021). FA: The Malaysian English Language Primary School Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs and Values. *International Journal of English Language Studies*, 3(4), 52-66.
- Kagan, S. (2009). *Kagan Structures: A Miracle of Active Engagement*. Available on: https://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/dr_spencer_kagan/281/Kagan-Structures-A-Miracle-of-Active-Engagement (accessed December 2022).
- Kaur, P., & Mah, Z. J. (2022). The CEFR-Aligned Curriculum: Perspectives of Malaysian Teachers. *Asian Journal of Research in Education and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 138-145.
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Lydia, E., & Hanita H. I. (2021). Incorporating Reading in Writing Classes and Its Effects on ESL Learners' Writing. *Creative Education*, 12, 1949-1962.
- Ministry of Education. (2013). *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025*. Putrajaya: MOE
- Marzaini, A. F. B. M., & Yusoff, S. B. M. (2022). Assessing CEFR-Readiness Test in Malaysian ESL Classroom: An Insight from English Language Teachers in Pulau Pinang. *Asian Journal of Assessment in Teaching and Learning*, 12(1), 1-9.
- McGoldrick, K. (2021). Think-Pair-Share: Analysing changes in supply & demand and predicting impacts on equilibrium. Available on: <https://serc.carleton.edu/econ/cooperative/examples/61511.html> (accessed June 2022).
- Mohd, H. M. J., & Abu, B. R. (2019). Using Self-Assessment as a Tool for English Language Learning. *English Language Teaching*, 12 (11), 64-73.
- Moss, C. M., & Brookhart, S. M. (2019). *Advancing FA in Every Classroom: A Guide for Instructional Leaders*. Alexandria: ASCD
- Mudin, V.F. (2019). *An Investigation into English Teachers' Understandings and Practices of FA in the Malaysian Primary ESL Classroom: Three Case Studies [PhD thesis]*. School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia.
- Nawawi, N. M., Zuhaimi, N., Sabu, K., Mahamud, N. S. R., & Nasir, N. A. M. (2021). CEFR for Languages and Its Effective Implementation in Secondary Schools in Malaysia. *Asian Journal of Assessment in Teaching and Learning*, 11(1), 63-72.
- Nguyen, T. H., & Truong, A. T. (2021). EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Writing Assessment at High Schools in Central Vietnam. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 11(10), 1187-1196.

- Noor, A. A. L., Aini, A. M. K., & Saidatul, A. Z. A. (2021). A review of the CEFR-aligned implementation in Malaysia and other countries [E-Proceedings]. *International Conference on Language, Education, Humanities & Social Sciences*, 556-567.
- Noor, A. A. L., & Aini, A. M. K. (2019). Implementation Of CEFR-Aligned Assessment Tools in Malaysian ESL Classroom. *Asia Proceedings of Social Sciences*, 4(2), 7-10.
- Noor, D. S., Maslawati, M., Wee, W. N., & Melor, M. Y. (2018). Writing the WhatsApp Way!. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Creative Technology*, 4.
- Norshaidatul, M. N., Natasha, Z., Khairunisa, S., Nur S. R. M., & Nur, A. M. N. (2021). CEFR for Languages and Its Effective Implementation in Secondary Schools in Malaysia. *Asian Journal of Assessment in Teaching and Learning*, 11(1), 63-72.
- Nurul, F. M. U., & Mohd, S. A. A. (2018). Implementation of CEFR in Malaysia: Teachers' awareness and the challenges. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 24(3), 168-183.
- Office of Economic Co-operation and Development. (2005). *FA: Improving learning in secondary classrooms*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Plaindaren, C., & Parilah, M. S. (2019) A Study on the Effectiveness of Written Feedback in Writing Tasks among Upper Secondary School Pupils. *Creative Education*, 10, 3491-3508.
- Moses, R. N., & Mohamad, M. (2019) Challenges Faced by Students and Teachers on Writing Skills in ESL Contexts: A Literature Review. *Creative Education*, 10, 3385-3391.
- Rahman, K. A., Hasan, M. K., Namaziandost, E., & Ibna Seraj, P. M. (2021). Implementing A FA Model at The Secondary Schools: Attitudes and Challenges. *Language Testing in Asia*, 11(1), 1-18.
- Rashid, M. H., Ye, T., Hui, W., Li, W., & Shunting, W. (2021). Analyse And Challenges of Teaching Writing Among The English Teachers. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 6(S2), 199-209.
- Rohaya, T., Mohd Z. K., Hamimah, A. N., & Adibah A. L. (2014). From Principle to Practice: Assessment for Learning in Malaysian School-based Assessment Classroom. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Education*, 4(4), 850 – 857.
- Ruslin, R., Mashuri, S., Rasak, M. S. A., Alhabsyi, F., & Syam, H. (2022). Semi-Structured Interview: A Methodological Reflection on The Development of A Qualitative Research Instrument in Educational Studies. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 12(1), 22-29.
- Saravanan, P., & Azlina, A. A. (2021). Systematic Review: Challenges in Teaching Writing Skills for Upper Secondary in ESL Classrooms and Suggestions to Overcome Them. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 6(4), 262 – 275.
- Savski, K. (2020). Local Problems and A Global Solution: Examining the Recontextualization Of CEFR In Thai and Malaysian Language Policies. *Language Policy*, 19(4), 527-547.
- Sidhu, G. K., Kaur, S., & Lee, J. C. (2018). CEFR-Aligned School-Based Assessment in The Malaysian Primary ESL Classroom. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 452-463.
- Sufi, M. K. A., & Stapa, M. (2020). Should the CEFR illustrative scales be localised to Malaysian higher education standards? [A conceptual paper]. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(9), 885-897.
- Suhaimi, N. D., Mohamad, M., & Yamat, H. B. (2019). The Effects of WhatsApp in Teaching Narrative Writing: A Case Study. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 7(4), 590-602.

- Thiviya, M., & Parilah, M. S. (2020). Students' Perception and Preferences on Teachers' Written Feedback in ESL Writing. *International Journal of New Technology and Research (IJNTR)*, 6(12), 55-61.
- Uri, N. F. M., & Abd Aziz, M. S. (2018). Implementation of CEFR in Malaysia: Teachers' Awareness and the Challenges. *3L, Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 24(3), 168 – 183.
- Vassiliou, S., Papadima-Sophocleous, S., & Giannikas, C. N. (2022). Formative assessment in second language learning: a systematic review and an annotated bibliography. Voillans: Research-publishing.net.
- Wafa, Z. (2016). Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices of English Teaching (A Case Study At Mts N Jeketro) [PhD. thesis]. Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. 6th Ed. California: SAGE Publications Inc
- Zaki, A. W., & Darmi, R. B. (2021). The Implementation Of CEFR In ESL Learning: Why Does It Matter To The Malaysian Education System? *Asian Journal of Assessment in Teaching and Learning*, 11(2), 1–13.
- Zhang, C., Yan, X., & Wang, J. (2021). EFL Teachers' Online Assessment Practices During The COVID-19 Pandemic: Changes and Mediating Factors. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 30(6), 499-507.
- Zou, S., & Zhang, W. (2017). Exploring The Adaptability of The CEFR In the Construction Of A Writing Ability Scale For Test For English Majors. *Language Testing in Asia*, 7(1), 1-16.