

Perceived View Of Teachers Towards *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga* (PT3) (Form Three Assessment) English Language: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The Standard-Based Curriculum for Secondary Schools (KSSM) was introduced in secondary schools in 2017. Parallel to the changes in the curriculum, Malaysian ESL (English as a Second Language) was revised to align with the *Common European Framework of References* (CEFR). Similarly, there is a change in the assessment of form three students. Therefore, this study aims to identify the perceived view of teachers towards '*Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga*' (PT3) (Form Three Assessment) English Language. A qualitative research method using snowball sampling was employed in obtaining the data. This study is designed based on a case study approach. Five TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) teachers were interviewed by using open-ended questions to ascertain their perceived view on the PT3 English language. The findings show that the teachers were generally positive on the CEFR-aligned PT3 English language. However, the teachers indicated that the teaching of CEFR-aligned English language in an ESL classroom must be tailored by the teachers according to the proficiency levels of the students. This study also illustrated that teachers faced challenges of facilities and relevant materials in assessing the students. Further research should employ a larger sample size to obtain broader perspective on perceived view of teachers towards PT3 English Language.

KEYWORDS: *Form Three Assessment (PT3), Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3), Perception of teachers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The English language is important in the education of students. Students who are proficient in the language are able to actively partake in intellectual discourse and extract knowledge from various sources especially in this borderless world. Proficiency of the language is nurtured from primary to higher education domains. There is a need to master the English language especially with the globalisation of education. Thus, there must be concerted efforts in equipping students with a good command of English.

The second wave in the *Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2015* (MEB) outlined the need to accelerate improvements of the education. Wave 2 planned for implementation from 2016 to 2020, is aimed to introduce the secondary (KSSM) and revised primary (KSSR) curriculum with the objective to 'raise content and learning standards to international standards'. Furthermore, the MEB also outlined to 'pilot options to increase English language exposure' (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Therefore, the Ministry of Education

implemented a synergised assessment system under the *Common European Framework of References (CEFR)*- aligned ESL curriculum. CEFR combines both formative and summative assessment based on the construct of *School Based Assessment (SBA)*.

A new curriculum referred as *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR)* was launched by the Ministry of Education into primary school. As a continuation, *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM)* was introduced in the secondary school in 2017. The curriculum innovation established national standards and performance level for all secondary school subjects including for English as Second Language (ESL). In Malaysia, English is officially used as a second language, therefore, it vital to master the language. In the education context, the *Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025* has accentuated on the importance of this language in schools and introduced various teaching strategies to enhance English proficiency of the students.

The Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) was revised in 2016 to align with the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for Languages in order to accommodate the needs of language learners in Malaysia. The Ministry of Education decided to adopt and implement CEFR for languages of the English language in education, as this framework has been used globally and in neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Phillipines and Vietnam (Nurul Farehah & Mohd Sallehudin, 2018). Furthermore, the adoption of CEFR is perceived as an international standard that provides a series of procedures which can meet the specific needs of the learners. The CEFR levels are defined into six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2).

These levels act as a guiding framework for curriculum development; teaching and learning; and assessment (Little, 2013) as cited in Sidhu, Kaur, and Lee (2018). These descriptors are used to analyse L2 learners' needs, learning goals, developing learning material activities and provide orientation for the assessment of L2 learning outcomes. Little (2013) posits that the CEFR is aimed to 'support the development of learner autonomy; and learner self-assessment based on the CEFR's common reference levels.

A study was conducted to investigate the implementation of the CEFR-aligned school-based assessment in Malaysian primary ESL classroom was steered by Sidhu, Kaur and Lee (2018). The study investigated the teachers' perception of SBA and the challenges faced by the teachers in implementing SBA. The study noted that the implementation of CEFR-aligned primary ESL syllabus is an innovative approach in advocating the development of autonomous language learners. This provides an important change from the traditional approach of assessment of learning to assessment for learning, focusing on peer assessment and self-assessment (Sidhu, Kaur, & Lee, 2018).

The CEFR-aligned secondary syllabus was implemented in 2017, parallel with the revised KSSM curriculum for secondary education. Fatima, Fhaiezdhyall, Nur Syamimi, and Aisyah (2018) conducted a study on the readiness of Form Three students towards the implementation of Form Three Central Assessments (*Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 – PT3*). PT3 is a component of school-based assessment in the lower secondary school education. The study posited a high level of readiness of students towards PT3 – within a span of seven months of introduction of the new assessment (Fatima et al., 2018). The introduction of PT3 was seen timely with a more global approach of education. Meanwhile, the English language syllabus through CEFR entails the need for students to develop the language skills by learning new structures, language functions and vocabulary. The standard curriculum and assessment document developed by the curriculum development division of the Ministry of Education

specifies that Form 3 students should reach at least B2 level of CEFR for language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018).

Past studies were conducted on English teachers' concern on CEFR at higher education, secondary and primary school levels in Malaysia. Studies were also undertaken in identifying the issues and challenges in the implementation of CEFR for language in Malaysia. Among them, Mohd Sallehudin and Nurul Farehah (2017) highlighted the important issues faced by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia in implementing CEFR.

In the context of primary schools, a study by Sidhu, Kaur and Lee (2018) focused on four parameters of CEFR-aligned school-based assessment in the primary ESL classroom, namely, teachers' knowledge and understanding of CEFR-aligned SBA; teachers' perceptions of formative assessment in SBA; implementation of SBA in the ESL classroom; and challenges faced by teachers in implementing CEFR-aligned SBA. The explanatory study posited that teachers had positive view of the curriculum innovation albeit having limited understanding of the revised CEFR-aligned SBA. Hazita (2016) studied on the implementation and challenges of English language education reformation in Malaysian Primary School. The study focused on the literacy performance of year three students when they sit for the LINUS (Literacy and Numeracy Screening for English Literacy) test, and the extent of the readiness of these young learners and teachers in embracing the new curriculum.

At secondary school level, Yueh (2018) studied on Form 1 and Form 2 English teacher's stages of concern towards CEFR for language innovation. The study indicated that Form 1 and Form 2 English teachers showed high concern in implementing CEFR innovation from the aspect of awareness information, personal, management and consequences of the implementation.

Ramaida et. al (2017) studied on teachers' views on students' performance in English Language Proficiency course via CEFR descriptors. The sample of the study was university students and focused on English language courses offered in a public university in Malaysia. The study indicated that the teachers had varied views toward the students' performance in English language proficiency courses.

Based on the above review, there has been little evidence on the implementation of CEFR-aligned secondary syllabus in the Malaysian lower secondary ESL classrooms, specifically among form three students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers' perception toward the CEFR-aligned *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga* (PT3) (Form Three Assessment) English Language. This study also investigates the challenges faced by the teachers in implementing the CEFR-aligned syllabus in the ESL classroom.

2. METHOD

A case study approach was selected to address the aim of the study in examining the objectives outlined. A case study method is applied to obtain suitable and important information on the subject matter discussed as well as to acquire insights of the subject matter, and to understand the study subject that is new or yet to be ascertained. The approach is deemed suitable as this study involves of a case within an actual context or setting (Yin, 2009). Therefore, this study employed a case study method to explore the intended scope of study by detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources of information (Cresswell, 2013). This study employed a snowball sampling method. Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) mention that a snowball sample is selected based on the need to attain the content during the conduct of the

study. The participants are recommended as they are well-informed as well as well-versed about the content and context of the research. Five English language teachers participated in this study. The number of teachers were perceived sufficient, as in any qualitative research, the main concern of a research is to develop an in-depth investigation of the subject matter (Creswell, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain data for the study. This design provides the participants adequate time to express their views and also allows the researcher to prompt and follow-up on the views and events. The questions were validated by two experts from the education field. Validity is an evaluation of the appropriateness and adequacy of the interpretation and uses of assessments (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The suggestions of the experts were reflected and taken into consideration. Semi structured interviews were used to obtain information- in order to compare these data, as the participants are required to express their views about the same general themes (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). All participants were asked the same basic questions in the similar order. The participants answered all the questions; therefore, increasing comparability of responses (Creswell 2013). Moreover, Creswell (2013) also states that participants are able to express their experiences freely, and reduce the influence of the researcher's perceptions of the subject matter; thus, facilitating on the organization and analysis of the data.

The data were then transcribed and provided a verbatim account of the interviews and relevant key themes based on the questions were determined. Themes are basically groupings of codes that forms common ideas (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The data were thematically examined using both deductive and inductive analysis. The analysis was conducted based on approach by Braun and Clarke (2006) of using two levels of themes; semantic and latent. Semantic theme was first identified according to the surface messages by the participants. Next, once the main theme was identified, latent analysis was conducted to look beyond the message communicated by the researcher and the underlying views were examined.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Salient findings gathered from the interview are presented based on the questions of the study. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the perceived views of teachers toward the CEFR-aligned *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga* (PT3) (Form Three Assessment) English Language?
- What are the challenges faced by the teachers in implementing the CEFR-aligned syllabus in the ESL classroom?

The findings are ascertained by interview session conducted with five participants who are teachers in urban and semi-urban schools. The interviews were transcribed and grouped into emerging themes based on the focus and objectives of the study.

Demographic profile of the participants

Table 1 shows the profile of the participants.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Participants of the study	Participant's Age	Teaching Experience (years)	Qualification	Location of School
A	40	15	Bachelor's Degree	Urban
B	56	34	Bachelor's Degree	Urban
C	58	37	PhD	Semi-Urban
D	42	16	Master's in Education	Semi-Urban
E	35	11	Bachelor's Degree	Semi-Urban

Based on Table 1, in terms of age, the participants are between 35 and 58 years old. All the participants have more than 10 years of teaching experience. Three participants possess a Bachelor's degree, while one participant each, has a Master's degree and a PhD, respectively. Two participants are teachers in urban schools, while three participants are teachers in semi-urban schools. All the participants are from the state of Selangor, Malaysia.

Perceived views of teachers toward the CEFR-aligned *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) (Form Three Assessment) English Language*

The first research objective of the study was to study the perceived view of teachers toward the CEFR-aligned *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) (Form Three Assessment) English Language*. Based on the interview conducted, all the participants provided positive feedback on the new format of the CEFR-aligned PT3 English language paper. The opinions of the participants are mentioned below.

It is a good start, a good effort. This format might be very conducive and may bring lots of changes in teaching English because it is more of...a good step that has been made. It is pretty clear. There are step by step procedures. (Teacher A)

I think it is good. They have all the four skills. The format concentrates on t all the four skills. The new format [CEFR-aligned] is quite consistent with the international standards. The inclusion of various segments to test the fluency of language is commendable. It is more structured...It is more set. The format of PT3 English language is aligned to the CEFR. And we use PULSE 2 since we started [teaching English in the beginning of the year]. (Teacher B)

I like it very much. Because the format focuses for students toward the syllabus to Form 4 and Form 5. Formerly, there was no such thing. I think it is better, because students can get more marks, their grades will be better, because there are four sections in PT3 now. (Teacher C)

The new format of PT3 English Language paper now is more structured. The format as in Part 1 is focused on understanding message and Part 2 is essay writing focusing on the content without any grading on the format, might be a concern,

moving forward in form 4 and form 5 where they need to use it in exams. (Teacher D)

The paper is aligned with CEFR and the content in Close Up book provided by the KPM when studied with enough time is align to the exam...Overall, the format is made easy for both teachers and students. (Teacher E)

Thus, the viewpoints corroborate with the study conducted by Nurul Farehah and Mohd Salehuddin (2018). The teachers in the above study indicated positive feedback and agreed that the implementation of CEFR in Form 5 English syllabus and assessments is part of globalisation. Thus, the adoption of CEFR in Form 3 PT3 assessment is beneficial for the progression of students from lower secondary to upper secondary. Similarly, findings by Sidhu, Kaur and Lee (2018) are also in tandem as the teachers had rather positive view on the CEFR aligned school-based assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom. Teachers' positive view in this study is also in-tandem with the study conducted by Faez, Taylor, Majhanovich, and Brown (2011) that teachers were basically positive on the incorporation of CEFR in and ESL classroom. The authors indicate that the teachers are also open to new ideas on approaches for a purposeful and learner-centred learning. Regardless of the different level of learners taught by the teachers, they agree on the adoption of CEFR in ESL classroom.

Challenges faced by the teachers in implementing the CEFR-aligned syllabus in the Form Three ESL classroom

The second objective explored is on the challenges faced by the teachers in implementing the CEFR-aligned syllabus in the ESL classroom. Based on the data transcribed and analysed, the challenges are themed to teaching materials, lack of technological resources and proficiency level of students.

The responses are discussed according to the themes. During the interview, the participants indicated that CEFR based material for in-class activity are insufficient.

The main problem is lack of material. The material they give for listening. It is only one CD. It is so expensive. Nearly RM 200+. We only have 1 CD in the school . . . and you can't burn . . . Speaking all comes in the book. We can handle. It is only the listening that we have the problem. (Teacher B)

Insufficient materials . . . as we usually find our material from the book store ourselves and even then, there are lack of sample for listening such as CDs . . . we are given workbook and CDs but we do need to find more ourselves thus, we need more CFR aligned materials. (Teacher E)

The books and content materials are foreign to students. Although the close-up book is superb but very difficult for the weaker classes. (Teacher C)

The concerns of the teachers are parallel with the findings by Aziz, Rashid and Zainuddin (2018) that teachers were having difficulties in using the textbook as it was intended in the secondary ESL classroom. The study also mentioned on concerns about the imported textbook to be carrying foreign context in its content. The Ministry of Education in the Roadmap 2015-2025 also indicated concern pertaining the materials produced. It is important for the materials producers to cater for the needs of teachers and the students (Ministry of Education, 2015).

The participants also cited lack of technological resources, specifically to conduct listening and speaking skills. The teachers felt that the lesson could be conducted better with technologically enhanced ESL classroom.

As for listening, we bring our recorder. It does hinder the teaching process . . . the speaker problem, and endless . . . sometimes, we just read from the script. (Teacher B)

Facilities such as computers, speakers, sound proof room to teach listening and speaking . . . we are only given the Close-up for speaking. (Teacher D)

You need to expose students to the new aids, but my school lacks in facilities . . . laptop, speaker, printer, and LCD which most of us bought at our own expenses (Teacher A)

Internet connections in school and LCD will help teachers to teach as students are more interested in visual learning, it helps them to understand more especially since most of the students in our school have low proficiency in English. (Teacher C).

Based on the feedback from the teachers, undeniably, information technology is a major force in the 21st century learning. It is pertinent for schools to be equipped with relevant technological resources to conduct lessons in the ESL classroom. The use of technology will trigger more active learning and increase the interest of the students to learn the English language as technology is a powerful tool in supporting students' learning (Alismail & McGuire, 2015)

Other challenges cited by teachers included proficiency of the students. Teachers from both urban and semi-urban school agree that the CEFR-aligned material is rather difficult for students with low proficiency.

Different level of student, differentiate way of teaching based on students' level. . . Streaming is important. . . Teachers able to focus on students' level of proficiency and horn their skills and proficiency . . . CEFR is not suitable for low level proficiency students especially rural school students . . . they have poor command of English language. (Teacher A)

Getting them to speak in English. Although we call it an urban school, getting them to speak in English, and the last class getting them to read and understand. Getting them to read is another thing. I have one girl, managed to improve her in reading . . . does not understand what she is reading. . . Students have limited vocab, lack proficiency, and of course, it is all their mother tongue . . . they only speak 20% English . . . 80% is Bahasa Melayu. (Teacher B)

It is the same challenges we face from the first year until now. How do we get them to speak, communicate and answer in English. . . I was the first group in Malaysia 1982, first batch to KBSR and it is all about the vocabulary.

The main thing is, it is student centred. . . . Materials we use computers, but for me if you use computers, at the end of the lesson what will they learn? You can use teaching aids but you can only use it once in a while, say once in a blue moon. Sometimes I use the bottle cap, mah-jong paper or manila card and that is more than enough because what you want is for students to talk and participate and now all the new things are nonsense . . . I'm an old school person, I don't mind. The important thing is that they can speak and gain something from my class and pass it. (Teacher C)

In Malaysian context, the students find it hard to relate [the Close-up book], especially students that are based in rural to sub urban background as they lack in curiosity. Thus, teachers have to explain and do a lot of research in an event where students ask questions. (Teacher D)

Students are lacking of vocabulary. . . They refuse to communicate. (Teacher E)

The discussion above postulates that the proficiency level of students in Malaysian secondary school is worrying. As English language is recognised as an important international language of communication, the Cambridge Baseline Study was conducted in 2013 to ascertain the baseline proficiency levels of student. The study indicates based on the CEFR or languages, the English language proficiency level achieved by secondary school students at the lower level (Forms 1 to 3) was A2 (Ministry of Education, 2015). This was rather disappointing as the level to be achieved by these students is B2.

Thus, among others, the initiative to uplift the proficiency level includes introducing the English language set system that enables teachers to group students according to various ability bands to address differentiated abilities of students. The set system is also proposed to inspire students to learn the language based on their learning needs. Teacher A mentions:

Streaming is important . . . Teachers are able to focus on students' level of proficiency and horn their skills and proficiency

Teacher B also agrees on the proposed set system, "Yes. Streaming, set system. . . Let us call it set system". Teacher C elaborated:

". . . for PT3, the level they gave us B1 and A2. It is not that they don't want to speak but how are you going to make them speak. They told me, "Dr. you make us communicate with us because last time the teacher is the only one that speaks in class". . . For six months, I will get angry and ask them to speak... My main concern is retaining power of English. Listening first then speaking, reading then lastly will be writing. Like now, my students 3C there are about 24 students that pass. There are nine classes and I taught 3 classes. My challenge is to get a B at least. Because now their results are D and E".

Thus, with the common viewpoints and issues mentioned, it is vital to note that the teaching and learning of language in Malaysian secondary ESL classroom should be conceptualised as a social activity, and not just learnt through practice and schooling. As Teacher C postulates:

For me, If I teach my students 10 words, at the end of the lesson they will at least learn 6 words. So, tomorrow, when we ask them, they know the word by heart.

We are teaching them to think and to repeat. I felt that my experience in school helps a lot in teaching secondary school.

Therefore, as teachers have a significant role in nurturing the students in the ESL classroom, teachers must be able to innovate strategies by integrating cognitive and social skills with content knowledge (Alismail & McGuire, 2015). This will allow students to enhance their learning content and become relevant as well as determined with an improved proficiency level.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as discussed in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2015 and Roadmap for English Language Education 2015-2025 is executed step-by-step with the aim to improve teaching and learning, and the overall English proficiency of students. This move is highly anticipated to enhance the level of English language of the students and is seen as a positive move. The results of this case study indicated that the participants, being the teachers in form three ESL classroom strongly posit that the CEFR-aligned PT3 is a move forward in empowering students' English language proficiency. Albeit the challenges faced, the teething issues and challenges of relevant materials and technologically advanced classroom can be overcome with the intervention by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, as well as other stakeholders. This issue is identified in shift one of the MEB's seven shifts, whereby, textbook, and other learning materials must be curated to support the teachers in the ESL classroom (Ministry of Education, 2015). Furthermore, the teachers are highly confident that the CEFR-aligned PT3 will be conducted for a longer period to ascertain the impact of proficiency among students. Continuous monitoring and improvement is the fundamental for a program undertaken (Tajularipin, Muniyan, Madhawan, Raidah, & Suzileez, 2017). There is a consensus among the participants that the adoption of the framework in form three ESL classroom is a dynamic step towards accomplishing the language goals and elevating the standards of English.

It is pertinent to note that the results are not representation of a larger community of secondary ESL teachers, specifically form three English teachers. As the study was conducted only based on snowball sampling and as a case study, there is a need to conduct a study using a broader sample size of teachers and focusing on the other factors such as the comparison of PT3 instrument for assessment prior and post CEFR-aligned English language in the ESL classroom. A study should also be conducted on the inclusion of listening and speaking skills as part of the overall grading of PT3. A study on a larger scale will provide an in-depth perception of teachers, students, and other relevant stakeholders on the implementation of CEFR-aligned English language in secondary schools.

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