"I Need More Hands-on Training": Rural Primary School Teachers' Self-efficacy Beliefs about the Adoption of the CEFR[1]

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Abstract

In pursuit of internationalisation, Malaysia undertook the alignment of its English language curriculum with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in 2017. This step prompted a comprehensive restructuring of materials, assessments, and teaching methods for all English language teachers, while simultaneously creating distinctive high-stakes scenarios for their rural counterparts compared to those in urban areas. With the use of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) and seven semi-structured interviews, this mixed-method study, involving descriptive, correlation, and thematic analysis explored the level of underprivileged teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (TSEB), the relationship between TSEB with the frequency of training attended, and issues regarding the newly implemented curriculum that might affect their TSEB. The quantitative findings revealed that rural schoolteachers possessed high levels of TSEB in all three dimensions: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. It was also reported that there was no significant relationship between TSEB and the frequency of training attended. However, the outcome of the semi-structured interview contradicted the quantitative findings in which most respondents indicated that CEFR-related training, along with teaching materials and assessment, could affect their TSEB, especially in dealing with the new curriculum. The rationale behind these findings was discussed, and pertinent recommendations were outlined at the end of the study.

Resumen

En su afán por la internacionalización, Malasia se comprometió a alinear su currículo de inglés con el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia (MCER) en 2017. Esta medida impulsó una reestructuración integral de los materiales, las evaluaciones y los métodos de enseñanza para todos los docentes de inglés, al tiempo que creó escenarios de alto riesgo distintivos para sus homólogos rurales en comparación con los de las zonas urbanas. Mediante la Escala de Autoeficacia Docente (TSES) y siete entrevistas semiestructuradas, este estudio de métodos mixtos, que incluyó análisis descriptivo, correlacional y temático, exploró el nivel de creencias de autoeficacia (TSEB) de los docentes desfavorecidos, la relación entre TSEB y la frecuencia de la formación recibida, y los problemas relacionados con el nuevo currículo implementado que podrían afectar a su TSEB. Los resultados cuantitativos revelaron que los docentes de escuelas rurales poseían altos niveles de TSEB en las tres dimensiones: participación estudiantil, estrategias de instrucción y gestión del aula. También se informó que no existía una relación significativa entre TSEB y la frecuencia de la formación recibida. Sin embargo, los resultados de la entrevista semiestructurada contradijeron los hallazgos cuantitativos, en los que la mayoría de los encuestados indicó que la formación relacionada con el MCER, junto con los materiales didácticos y la evaluación, podría afectar su TSEB, especialmente al abordar el nuevo currículo. Se analizó el fundamento de estos hallazgos y se presentaron recomendaciones pertinentes al final del estudio.

Introduction

Many non-native English-speaking countries have either adopted or adapted the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) in their respective education systems (Franz & Teo, 2018; Nguyen & Hamid, 2020; Zhao et al., 2017). The CEFR was piloted in a draft version in 1996 by the Council of Europe and eventually published in 2001 with the aim of facilitating "transparency and coherence between curriculum, teaching and assessment within an institution and transparency and coherence between institutions, education sectors, regions, and countries" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 25). The CEFR is viewed as an international standard that has been used in many countries as a performance benchmark in language learning (Don, 2015). An A1 level in one country should be equivalent to the same level in other countries that have adopted the CEFR in their language assessment. There are six basic levels of the CEFR, consisting of A1 and A2 for Basic, B1 and B2 for Independent, and C1 and C2 for Proficient users. This is all well but some organisations, and governments have interpreted the CEFR differently, to benefit only the key stakeholders involved in the implementation (Savski, 2022).

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There have been numerous issues concerning the acceptance and rejection of the framework in the global context. For instance, a study by Nishimura-Sahi (2020) revealed that the adoption of the CEFR in Japan was due to educational and political agendas endorsed by different authorities such as academics, business associations, politicians, and the Ministry of Education. Meanwhile, the initial plan for adopting the global framework in Vietnam was based on the changes in English language policy, the need for economic and political developments, and the government's inclination toward external solutions for local issues in Vietnam (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020). However, it eventually had to be replaced with a revised version because it was pointed out that the government's language proficiency targets were "too ambitious" (Foley, 2019a). As in the case of Thailand, a revised version of the CEFR called the Framework of Reference for English Language Education in Thailand (FRELE-TH) was introduced as the CEFR did not provide solutions to the poor level of English in the country (Foley, 2019b). In addition, the contradicting policy agendas of the relevant Thai stakeholders at the national level had serious implications on how CEFR was implemented on the local scale (Savski, 2020).

In Malaysia, the CEFR was officially adopted in 2017. This implementation needs to be examined as it has been reported that the use of imported textbooks does not meet the country's English language agenda (Rahim & Daghigh, 2020) and the teachers' lack of training and their resistance towards the CEFR have been among the challenges towards the implementation (Uri & Aziz, 2018). The issues of teachers' lack of training and limited knowledge of the current implementation of CEFR are tightly intertwined themes, which could be the causes of teachers' struggles in accepting the newly adopted framework. Such situations could have caused the teachers' only superficial familiarity with the CEFR. Therefore, Díez-Bedmar and Byram (2019) propose extensive relevant training to ensure their teaching, learning, and assessment are integrated with the philosophy of the CEFR.

In the specific context of rural schools, it is expected that there will be even more serious challenges on implementing CEFR (Ahamat & Kabilan, 2022). In rural areas, the cultures are different, and English is not part of those cultures, even though it could be the official second language. To illustrate, Mbali and Douglas (2012) describe teaching English in rural schools in South Africa to school children who…

> *….would not be exposed to much English at home or in the surrounding community. Even with TV and radio, families would be most likely to read media and listen to programmes in their own language. So, although English is one of the official languages of South Africa, the English experienced by many school students is more a foreign than second language.* (p. 525)

The above scenario is very similar to many rural communities in non-English-speaking countries, especially when external factors further weigh down English language teaching. For example, in Indonesia, rural school students' enthusiasm and internet connectivity crucially affect English language teachers (Kusuma, 2022), although the CEFR is merely adopted at the micro-level (Yusra et al., 2022). Thailand's "socio-economic status of the community in which they are situated" (Hayes, 2017, p. 186) makes English less needed in national life than in international businesses and the tourism industry. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, a lack of interest, poor infrastructure, limited resources, and a lack of parental support (Renganathan, 2021) have put English language teachers at a disadvantage in executing the newly implemented English language curriculum, which consequently may also affect their self-efficacy beliefs. This case corresponds to the finding that students in remote and rural areas in Malaysia were found to perform "significantly worse" (Cambridge English, 2013, p. 16) than those in urban areas. These reported problems imply that teaching the English language in a rural school is challenging and demands extra effort and work from teachers, much more in executing a new curriculum that is completely new to them.

To successfully implement an innovative/new curriculum or change (in this case the CEFR), teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (TSEB), especially their acceptance, are integral (Cerit, 2013) and should be supported by careful planning that emphasises people, programs, and processes (Ornstein & Hunskins, 2018). Many new curricula fail when it comes to implementation because human resource factors are ignored, and the focus is only devoted to time and money for program and process modifications (Susilanas et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to examine teachers' level of beliefs of self-efficacy, as previous studies have shown that self-efficacious teachers are able to implement any educational policy introduced by the authorities despite unfavourable prevailing circumstances (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2020). Teachers with a high level of self-efficacy surmount challenges even with difficult students because they possess strong beliefs in their capabilities as well as those of their students, (DeCoito & Myszkal, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and are "willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their student" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, p. 783). Hence, it can be implied that teachers' level of self-efficacy beliefs could remarkably affect the way they implement the CEFR-aligned curriculum at their respective schools.

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The previous studies related to the CEFR merely focused on the teachers' awareness and challenges (Uri & Aziz, 2018), assessment (Sidhu et al., 2018), knowledge and practice (Yin & Ahmad, 2021), and issues with teaching material (Ahamat & Kabilan, 2022). These studies, however, have missed a crucial part of an educational reform, which is to investigate the implementers' self-efficacy beliefs in the execution of the newly introduced policy. The present study is, therefore, intended to fill in the gaps by discovering these research questions with special attention to rural primary school teachers:

1. What are the levels of self-efficacy beliefs of rural primary school English language teachers concerning the implementation of the CEFR-aligned syllabus?
2. Is there a significant relationship between the teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (TSEB) with the frequency of the CEFR training attended?
3. What are the issues that could affect rural primary school teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in the implementation of the CEFR?

This study would provide insights into teacher's self-efficacy, linked to the reforms of English language policy due to the CEFR, and teachers' confidence and competency levels in implementing a CEFR-based curriculum. Kaygisiz et al. (2018) consider this as something substantial in the English language teaching (ELT) context that could be a determinant for a better language teaching experience in the classroom. Thus, it is hoped that this study is able to address the vacuum of teachers' self-efficacy in terms of the CEFR (Mison & Jang, 2011) instead of merely focusing on the challenges in the implementation of the CEFR. It is hypothesised that TSEB is dependent on the CEFR-related training attended, as previous literature reported negative opinions about the newly implemented curriculum due to the superficial training provided to schoolteachers (Aziz et al., 2018).

CEFR as a new education policy

Ever since CEFR was introduced in Asia, researchers have examined the framework, especially when many countries have adopted it into the local English language policy. It has received numerous critiques from language practitioners for providing "significant leeway" and presenting "partial information and by extension require readers to fill in resultant gap" (Savski, 2022, p. 3) in its scales design. In a critical discourse analysis of language policy texts from Malaysia and Thailand, Savski (2020) perceives CEFR as a "vehicle of neoliberal ideology in language policy" (p. 543) that eventually gives more power to global institutions, such as Cambridge English and the British Council, from the implementation. The revelation is in line with Nishimura-Sahi's (2020) finding in Japan, where the CEFR was selectively implemented to fulfil continuing educational and political agendas promoted by multiple institutions in the country. In sum, the CEFR could be adopted for many distinct reasons in different countries depending on their language policy and national interests.

In Malaysia, the CEFR was adopted to improve students' as well as teachers' English language proficiency in respect of teaching, learning, and assessment (Don, 2015). With the implementation, *Cambridge English* was appointed to conduct a baseline study to present an evidence-based report on the existing proficiency among students and teachers. Teachers were also sent out to various CEFR familiarisation workshops and imported learning materials are used as main references for teaching and learning (Afip et al., 2019). Unfortunately, only a few local experts were involved in the implementation, which explicitly illustrates Savski's (2020) earlier paradox. Due to limited funding and time, a cascade training model was embraced and focused on (i) familiarisation, (ii) learning materials evaluation, adaptation, and design, (iii) curriculum induction, and (iv) item writing and formative assessment (Aziz et al., 2018). Clearly, the focus was only on CEFR-related topics per se, with no attention given to teachers as the real "implementers" of the new policy. Thus, an examination of TSEB of the rather limited training would be crucial in determining the direction and future of CEFR in the regional education system.

Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (TSEB)

Many of today's theoretical frameworks related to self-efficacy beliefs which originated from its pioneer, Albert Bandura (1977), are defined as "people's domain-specific perceptions of their ability to perform the actions necessary to achieve desired outcomes" (Gallagher, 2012, p. 314). This social cognitive concept is different from other self-conceptions like self-esteem and self-worth because it refers to a specific task. The theory of self-efficacy can be understood by having a closer look at Bandura's social cognitive theory, which provides a model to comprehend human emotion, behaviour, cognition, and motivation (Gallagher, 2012). An individual could have low self-efficacy for an activity, but at the same time does not diminish his self-esteem because that person has not instilled his self-worth in doing that activity. The present study,

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nevertheless, follows Tschannen-Moran et al.'s (1998) definition of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs which are described as "beliefs in his or her own capability to organise and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 233). This definition fits the context of the study because it is teacher-specific and meets the objectives of the study, in which it specifies "the knowledge and beliefs of teachers and not on the cultural meaning of efficacy" (p. 203) that can also contribute to the TSEB construction. If TSEB attainment is high, the prospect of the newly implemented curriculum continuation is also high because, according to Richards (2001), teachers' skill and expertise, as well as beliefs and principles are among the determinants in the "successful implementation of curriculum change" (p. 99). In the present study, it can be inferred that the CEFR-aligned curriculum would prevail only if English language teachers, especially those who are underprivileged, possess high self-efficacy beliefs in executing the policy at the school level.

Sources of self-efficacy

Self-efficacy can be developed as it is rooted in different sources. According to Bandura (1995), self-efficacy beliefs are dependent on four main origins: (i) mastery experiences, (ii) vicarious experiences, (iii) social persuasion, and (iv) emotional and physical states. The first source of self-efficacy is mastery experiences, which are formed based on an individual's appraisal of his previous successes or failures. After completing a task, a person interprets and evaluates the outcomes, since "...the results obtained, and judgments of competence are created or revised according to those interpretations" (Usher & Pajares, 2008, p. 752). In the school context, teachers who managed to overcome obstacles or accomplish challenging tasks (e.g., poor teaching facilities, a lack of communication, or managing unruly students) would perceive themselves not only as competent, but also confident of being successful in attending to comparable situations in the future. Alternatively, less capable teachers would feel less efficacious.

Apart from basing personal capability on the judgement of past actions or performance, self-efficacy beliefs also form through vicarious observation of others. This second source of self-efficacy beliefs comes in several forms. First, individuals can compare how they fare against people with similar abilities. Next, people may look for models with skills, competencies, or other traits that they aspire to have. The models, people of reputation, power, and prestige, could be social and professional acquaintances they interact with on a regular basis, or they may be people observed through social media. Third, individuals may make comparisons between current and past performances by engaging in self-evaluation activities. However, this form of vicarious information on self-efficacy overlaps with the judgement of self-efficacy resulting from mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). Finally, vicarious information could also emanate from personal observations of others' reactions or information received about self. For instance, a novice teacher informed by his students or superior that his teaching is as good as that of experienced colleagues would have his self-efficacy enhanced.

The third source of self-efficacy beliefs is social persuasion which refers to encouragement from the people around, especially those who possess a mastery of the given activity (Velthuis et al., 2013), family members, and close friends. Nonetheless, Gallagher (2012) added that the effectiveness of social persuasion may vary according to social factors like "closeness of the relationship" and "trustworthiness of the source" (p. 316). As for schoolteachers, encouragement can also come in the form of continuous training and resources provided by the authority to support their teaching in the classroom. Finally, varying emotional and physiological states such as lethargy, calm, and anxiety also serve as indicators of personal competence. Our bodies react differently to distinct situations and emotions. Positive emotion may boost an individual's perceived self-efficacy and motivation, while a negative state of emotion can make someone insecure about himself or herself.

These sources of self-efficacy, which are rooted in social cognitive theory, provide a foundation for understanding the development of self-efficacy that continuously takes place in one's own lifetime (Gallagher, 2012). A deliberate comprehension of the sources of self-efficacy and the level of TSEB would give wider insights to policymakers in constructing appropriate self-development training for teachers apart from merely providing them with task-oriented training that caters to the teaching and learning aspects of reform (Aziz et al., 2018). Since TSEB changes over time (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), continuous training is required so that TSEB can be enhanced, and the policy can be enacted and put into practice effectively.

Previous studies

Since the first year of implementation of the CEFR-aligned English language curriculum in Malaysia in 2017, there have been several studies conducted regarding the newly introduced policy, CEFR. Uri and Aziz (2018),

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for instance, examined teachers' awareness and challenges and highlighted "teachers' resistance, lack of training, and negative conception" (p. 168) as the biggest constraints in implementing the CEFR. The study was specific to secondary school teacher respondents but limited to three urban localities. Likewise, Yin and Ahmad (2021) also had secondary school teacher respondents in their study involving teachers' knowledge and practice on CEFR-aligned curricula. The samples of the study, nonetheless, were restricted to teachers teaching in a northern state in Malaysia. In a different setting, Sidhu et al. (2018) conducted a mixed-method approach in investigating teachers' practices in school-based assessments (SBA) as a result of the CEFR implementation, specifying primary school teachers.

Existing research has failed to account for the diversity of educational contexts in which primary school teachers operate. The previous studies' samples primarily consisted of teachers from urban or well-resourced schools, neglecting the unique challenges faced by teachers in rural or underprivileged settings whose students are generally at a disadvantage (Ahamat & Kabilan, 2022). The present study may bridge these gaps by emphasizing TSEB in rural school contexts, in which the findings can be used by stakeholders to promote inclusive education by providing necessary support to rural schoolteachers in future educational reforms.

Methods

Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design using a survey and semi-structured interviews. The mixed-methods design integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling the researcher to qualitatively understand complex phenomena and obtain statistical data (Creswell, 1999). In this case, an explanatory approach was employed where the qualitative data was collected after the survey. Hence, the interview transcriptions work as a support to the numerical data and explain the statistical findings concerning TSEB in implementing the CEFR-aligned English language curriculum. The qualitative data was required as the initial quantitative finding revealed high TSEB scores, hence semi-structured interviews were required to disclose the details that affected TSEB due to the implementation of the CEFR.

Participants

The quantitative data were collected from 200 rural primary school teachers from all over Malaysia using purposive sampling (Table 1). The participants for the study had to be currently teaching English at any rural primary school in Malaysia and have experience dealing with CEFR-aligned English language curriculum. Schools in Malaysia are vaguely classified as either urban or rural with no specific criteria on the distinctions provided by the Ministry of Education (MoE) (Renganathan, 2021). Therefore, this study adopts the definition of 'rural schools' used by Supramaniyam (2015), where it is explained as "schools that are located more than six kilometres from the downtown area" (p. 15). Teachers in the study were aware of their school categories as the list of schools and the school category can be found on the MoE official website.

To obtain the participants' consent, they were briefed on the objectives of the study and informed that their participations were on voluntary basis. Once agreed, the teachers then signed the 'Letter of Informed Consent' (Appendix 1). They were then provided with the link to the questionnaire on *Google Forms*. The same procedures worked for the semi-structured interview.

	n	**%**
Gender		
Female	159	79.5
Male	41	20.5
Years of experience		
<1 year – 5 years	46	23.0
6 years – 10 years	36	18.0
11 years – 15 years	44	22.0
16 years – 20 years	25	12.5
>20 years	49	24.5
Frequency of training		
No training attended	14	7.0
1	57	28.5
2	46	23.0
3	34	17.0
4 or more	49	24.5

Note. N = 200

Table 1: Survey respondents' profile

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As can be seen in Table 1, gender distribution nearly represented the national percentage of primary school teachers in Malaysia where female teachers constituted 70 per cent of the whole population, and the remaining 30 per cent was male teachers (Ministry of Education, 2021)

Meanwhile, the qualitative data were collected from seven respondents, three male and four female who also participated in the quantitative study. A purposive sampling technique was employed in recruiting interview participants. The interview participants, as the other respondents were in-service teachers teaching at a rural primary school in Malaysia with experience using the CEFR-aligned textbooks and also were directly involved in the new English language curriculum. Direct involvement in the curriculum included having basic knowledge on the curriculum reforms, teaching the English language using the newly prescribed CEFR-aligned material, and assessing students using the CEFR assessment criteria. The seven respondents in this study had three to 15 years of teaching experience and participated voluntarily (Table 2).

Participant (P)	Teaching experience (years)	Gender
P1	15	Male
P2	7	Female
P3	11	Female
P4	5	Male
P5	14	Female
P6	13	Female
P7	3	Male

Table 2: Interview participants' profile

Instruments

The survey questionnaire was adapted from Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES, 2001) which contains 24 items (long form). The items were converted into short statements in the English language and reworded specifically to refer to the CEFR policy implementation. The Likert scales were also simplified from nine scales in the original form, to five in the adapted version, to get "absolute agreement" (Joshi et al., 2015) with the statements included in the questionnaire. The adapted questionnaire was validated by three experts in the field; one was an active researcher of English language teaching with more than 15 years of experience, and the other two were experienced English language teachers who had been in various expert panels related to the teaching and learning at the state level. From the validation process, there were only minor revisions required, mainly related to mechanics. Afterwards, a reliability test was conducted on 30 rural primary school English language teachers. From the pilot study, all dimensions of the questionnaire obtained .780 to .923 Cronbach's Alpha values which are in the "good" to "excellent" range according to Hair et al. (2015). All items, therefore, were accepted to be used in the questionnaire. The finalised version of the questionnaire was then distributed to potential respondents using *Google Forms* (Appendix 2).

The qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews via *Google Meet*, following phenomenological tradition, to understand participants' experience with the subject matter (Moustakas, 1994). Prior to the interview, questions were set and validated by two experts in English language teaching. In the initial stage of the interview session, participants were briefed on a short operational definition of self-efficacy beliefs that was adopted from Tschannen-Moran et al.'s (1998). In the interview sessions, participants were asked about their experiences dealing with the new CEFR-aligned English language curriculum and issues that could affect their self-efficacy beliefs in the implementation of the said curriculum (Appendix 3).

Data collection and analysis

The data from the questionnaire were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analysis was conducted to discover the mean score of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in all three dimensions. Pearson correlation analysis was executed to determine the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and the frequency of training. Apart from obtaining good scores of Cronbach's Alpha values prior to executing the study, the findings from the analysis were triangulated with the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews in ensuring the reliability of the data.

The responses from the interview were orthographically transcribed and thematically analysed. Orthographic transcription refers to verbatim record, where false starts, repetitions, hesitations were all recorded in written form. Meanwhile, thematic analysis, commonly used in qualitative analysis, is described as "a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). In analysing the data, Braun and Clarke's (2008) six phases of thematic

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analysis tradition were followed, consisting of (i) data familiarisation, (ii) codes generation, (iii) themes search, (iv) themes review, (v) themes naming, and (vi) reporting. At the end of the process, the recurrent themes were subsequently labelled and calculated. Some the responses and the themes assigned are in Table 3.

Codes	Themes
Within 3-4 days, we have to digest all the information and deliver it back to other teachers at our schools. I find this method completely ineffective. (R3)	Training
If the government persists in implementing the CEFR, the content of the textbook must be culturally balanced and relatable to students' daily practices. (R2)	Teaching material
I am always confused every time I have to assess my students. I have to refer to the documents because sometimes I doubt myself. (R6)	Assessment

Table 3: Thematic analysis: Sample responses and themes

Several strategies were employed to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the thematic analysis such as using verbatim quotes from the participants to support the themes (Eldh et al., 2020), triangulating the data sources by comparing different participants' perspectives, and conducting member checking by asking participants to review and confirm the themes (Hsieh & Wang, 2020).

Results

Teachers' level of self-efficacy belief (TSEB) in the adoption of the CEFR

The mean scores were categorised into three: low (1.00 - 2.33), moderate (2.34 - 3.67) and high (3.68 - 5.00). It was found that rural primary school English teachers in Malaysia possess a high level of TSEB in all dimensions; student engagement (*M*=3.75, *SD*=.63), instructional strategies (*M*=3.80, *SD*=.67) and classroom management (*M*=3.77, *SD*=.68). The overall teachers' self-efficacy belief is also reported high (*M*=3.77, *SD*=.61) based on the mean score that responded to the first research question of the study (Table 4).

Dimension	*N*	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
Instructional strategies	200	1.63	5.00	3.80	.67
Student engagement	200	1.50	5.00	3.75	.63
Classroom management	200	1.38	5.00	3.77	.68
Overall TSEB	200	1.50	5.00	3.77	.61

Note. Item means are reported on a 5-point Likert scale

Table 4: Rural schoolteachers' self-efficacy beliefs in relation to the implementation of the CEFR

Relationship between TSEB and the frequency of the CEFR training

The correlation matrix below shows no significant relationship between TSEB and the frequency of training attended, where all the *p*-values for each dimension are greater than 0.05 (Efficacy in student engagement, *p*-value=.655, efficacy in instructional strategies, *p*-value=.801 and efficacy in classroom management, *p*-value=.863) (Table 5). The *p*-value for overall TSEB is also reported to be larger than 0.05 (*p*=.758); hence the hypothesis that there is a relationship between TSEB and frequency of training is not supported in this study.

		Frequency of training attended	Efficacy in Student Engagement	Efficacy in Instructional Strategies	Efficacy in Classroom Management	Overall TSEB
Frequency of training sessions attended	Pearson Correlation	1	-.032	-.018	-.012	-.022
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.655	.801	.863	.758
	N	200	200	200	200	200

Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Relationship of TSEB wand the frequency of training sessions attended

Problems with the implementation of the CEFR that could affect TSEB

Based on the thematic analysis, there were three major recurrent themes that could affect teachers' self-efficacy in CEFR mentioned by the participants throughout the interviews: training, teaching material, and assessment (Table 6).

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Recurrent themes	Frequency
Training	4
Teaching material	4
Assessment	3

Table 6: Recurrent themes in the interview sessions

Most respondents raised the issue of CEFR-related training as one of the factors that could affect their self-efficacy beliefs in the curriculum implementation. Respondent 7 (R7) for instance, was a novice teacher who had never attended any CEFR-related training on his own and had been relying on CEFR manuals since he began teaching at school in 2018. Due to the lack of training, teachers are "not completely ready" (R2) and are clueless about how CEFR should be "carried out in a classroom" (R6). R3, a CEFR trainer, reported that more training should be conducted because the CEFR-aligned syllabus is a major English language education reform. She described the CEFR training approach using the cascade model as inconvenient to district-level trainers because the information is "not well-disseminated" and only "benefits individuals who attended the training at the national and state level". Another respondent, R4, with the most frequent CEFR training attendance, had no issue with the newly implemented curriculum, but raised the need to further improve the quality of training, as projected in the following excerpt:

> *I like the idea of aligning the curriculum with the CEFR, but I need more hands-on training on that, not on the theoretical part. I can read those CEFR documents on my own; I just want to know how the new syllabus should be executed and how the assessment should be carried out. We couldn't find any of these in the training, which mostly cover only the basics.* (R4)

Training aside, teaching material was also put forward as an issue that could possibly affect respondents' self-efficacy beliefs in the curriculum implementation. Problems such as "insufficient supply of textbooks" (R2), and "absence of supplementary material" (R2, R5 R7) were among the major challenges, which clearly could affect classroom instruction. The CEFR-aligned textbooks, were not supplemented with student workbooks which the respondents found "very challenging" (R5) because they were expensive since the parents had to bear the cost and most of them were from low-income families and in fact "some of them were living in a slum" (R6). It was also mentioned that workbooks were essential in the classroom since the activities recommended in the textbooks could only be practiced by students in the workbook (R2, R5). Also very few reference books for teachers were provided, causing them having to share with each other (R7). Textbook contents also did not conform to students' "prior knowledge" (R3) and "local practice" (R2) and hence, students considered the textbooks to be "quite boring" (R3). Foreign content of the textbooks provided the teachers with little option but to rely more on technology like *YouTube* as a source of reference to demonstrate the real-life situation related to the content of the textbooks to the students (R2, R3, R5, R6). However, considering their location in rural areas, internet connections (R3, R5) and access to other facilities like a projector (R2, R6) always had caused major setbacks for them.

Classroom assessment could also affect rural primary school teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Teachers reported to be "confused" (R6) and to have "self-conflict" (R3) when it came to grading their students according to the CEFR levels. Teachers received little guidance on how the assessment should be interpreted (R3, R6, R7) and they wished they had more assessment-related training that could aid in grading their students in classrooms. Different perspectives and understanding of the assessment made it even more challenging for teachers to evaluate their students in the school-based assessment because they tended to have a perception that "different teachers would have a different interpretation of the rubric" (R3) even though they were referring to the same assessment manual, *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran* [Standard Document for Curriculum and Assessment]. For example, R7 believed that assessment based on the CEFR manuals had different techniques and did not merely focus on worksheets. However, he received negative remarks from an officer at the *Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah* [District Education Office] who during a school visit indicated that he had not adhered to the appropriate assessment procedures, as he had used oral-based assessment. This experience left him feeling confused and unmotivated.

Discussion

Self-efficacy beliefs of rural primary school English language teachers concerning the implementation of the CEFR-aligned syllabus

The present study revealed a high level of overall TSEB among rural primary school teachers in implementing the CEFR in the English language curriculum based on the mean score in the descriptive analysis. Klassen and Chiu (2010) reported that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are connected to job satisfaction. It may imply that the respondents are content with their current job, which could be measured by different clusters,

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including salary, working conditions, co-workers, promotion, workload, and supervision (Abdullah et al., 2009). In Malaysia, the teaching profession, especially at government schools, is considered a stable job with a good salary and annual raises. These factors may indirectly contribute to job satisfaction, which determines the level of self-efficacy beliefs among rural schoolteachers in this study. Additionally, Bandura's (1995) sources of self-efficacy, including mastery experiences, vicarious experiences provided by social models, social persuasion, and emotional states in judging their capabilities, could also be reasons for the present findings. The mastery experience is reflected in the present study, where 118 (59%) respondents have more than ten years experience teaching the English language, which implies they have adequate knowledge and experience in handling the classroom as well as the subject matter. Although years of experience in teaching is not the only measure of mastery, in this case, it may be implied that these teachers have faced various policy changes throughout their years of service, which made them able to surmount challenges. This could also be a justification for a high level of overall TSEB in the implementation of CEFR in the English language curriculum.

Relationship between TSEB with the frequency of the CEFR training attended

The present findings also show no relationship between TSEB and the frequency of CEFR-related training attended by teachers, implying that the frequency of training alone does not contribute to the level of TSEB. Personal factors such as length of teacher's tenure, level of education and experience, as well as contextual factors like features of the classroom, student socioeconomic status, and student behaviour could also be contributing factors (von Suchodoletz et al., 2018). While the quantitative findings show no relationship between TSEB and the frequency of training attended by teachers, most of the interview participants highlighted the insufficiency of training as one of the constituents that can affect TSEB in the execution of the CEFR in their respective classrooms. These findings may suggest the previous CEFR training sessions were not properly planned, had irrelevant content, or were based on an outdated approach to conducting training (Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013). For example, training using the cascade training method throughout the process of introducing and implementing the CEFR has been shown to be ineffective (Aziz et al., 2018; Yin & Ahmad, 2021). Yin and Ahmad reported cases in which district trainers were perceived as incompetent due to insufficient curriculum knowledge, partly resulting from gaps in the training they had received. Consequently, inaccurate information was then conveyed to the teachers in the local districts. In this case, an online platform could communicate the information related to the CEFR evenly to all teachers (Aziz et al., 2018) and suit teachers' flexibility and convenience (Sakulprasertsri et al., 2021).

Issues affecting rural primary school teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in the implementation of the CEFR

Apart from issues related to training, respondents were also found to have difficulty with the teaching materials provided by the MOE. The prescribed materials were all imported from the international publishers and not specifically designed for Malaysian students. This utilisation of teaching materials from other cultures conflicts with the findings of many research and theory-driven practices, i.e., materials should be based on the context of learning-teaching and teachers' and students' needs (Daghigh & Rahim, 2021; Ulla & Perales, 2021). Much research has suggested that language learning materials should follow local criteria specific to a particular learning context (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017) so that students could respond "personally to a text", develop "a related text themselves", make "discoveries about how language was used in the core text", and then revise "their own text" (Tomlinson, 2020, p. 7). Furthermore, students' motivation levels could be boosted with authentic materials that contain local cultures and knowledge with which students could easily identify and associate (Zohoorian, 2015). The decision to prescribe imported textbooks to local students was made by the MOE and was then followed by the adaption of the CEFR material to the courses for English language teachers (Afip et al., 2019). The courses, however, failed to reach the target as teachers were not given full autonomy by school inspectors to adapt the material to their respective classrooms (Aziz et al., 2018). This shows a gap between theory and practice (what the teachers were taught during the courses and what at they were allowed to do in their classroom).

Finally, respondents pointed out assessment was one of the challenges in the newly implemented curriculum. The CEFR-aligned syllabus brought changes in assessment, from traditional assessment to school-based assessment (SBA), which shifted the traditional stance of assessment of learning to assessment for learning. Sidhu et al. (2018) reported similar issues where teachers were found to have little understanding of SBA, the core element in the new curriculum. In fact, they also possessed little knowledge of the revised English language curriculum. The reasons cited were time constraints, classroom enrolment, heavy workloads, and a lack of training, making it difficult for them to cope with the changes. The original

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idea of introducing SBA was to lessen students' pressure in high-stakes testing (Ho, 2013), but the situation was not ideal for teachers burdened with unnecessary heavy workloads. In Malaysia, teachers do not only have to teach, but also have non-teaching assignments, such as overseeing school canteen operations, managing textbooks, and ensuring school cleanliness, apart from participating in committee boards for special events (Krishnan & Gan, 2022). These additional tasks leave them with a minimum of hours to spend on attending professional development training.

The findings of the current paper highlight three main issues; training, teaching material, and assessment that could affect TSEB in the implementation of the CEFR despite the high score of the overall TSEB among rural primary school English language teachers. This would help stakeholders understand that Malaysian TSEB could be improved if the three main issues were properly addressed. The present study offers new insights into the rural school context, covering gaps from the previous literature (Sidhu et al., 2018; Yin & Ahmad, 2021).

Conclusion

This study studied the teachers' sense of efficacy scale (TSEB) in relation to a newly implemented educational policy in which the English language curriculum in Malaysia was aligned to an international standard, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The English language teachers in this study, who were directly involved with the new policy, reported high self-efficacy beliefs in implementing the educational reform. One finding based on the interviews that is worth highlighting is that English language teachers in rural areas still had problems with training, teaching materials, and assessment regarding CEFR, despite the fact there was no relationship between TSEB and frequency of training reported in the quantitative data.

Based on the three main issues derived from the thematic analysis, there are two recommendations that may be of relevance for future improvement. First, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education review the existing training approach. As many teachers were not given the opportunity to attend any of the CEFR training, they showed less TSEB on implementing the new curriculum. Perhaps online professional development should be considered in the future. It could be a far more effective medium for conducting teachers' training, especially with the aspect of teachers' engagement and satisfaction (Sakulprasertsri et al., 2021) and gaining relevant competency skills (Kabilan, 2005).

Second, greater autonomy should be granted to teachers in terms of curriculum development (teaching methods) and materials selection, so that they could actively involve learners in the material selection and development process. This could increase TSEB and simultaneously bring enjoyment to students in the language learning process. However, larger issues with teachers' workloads should first be resolved so that teachers could commit themselves to teaching-related responsibilities. In solving such problems, more teachers could be recruited and serve according to their field of expertise, not untrained teachers. In this study, researchers identified teachers who never specialised in English, yet had to teach the subject due to the lack of English language teachers available.

With the above two recommendations, it is hoped that the Ministry of Education could provide more autonomy to teachers in aspects of professional development and materials selection without putting an extra burden on them with non-teaching workloads. Teachers' autonomy is required because they are the ones who implement the national educational policy, and most importantly, they those who are aware of the classroom situations and know their students best. Once teachers are granted more power related to teaching practices, TSEB could be positively affected, and eventually, better language teaching and learning experiences in the classroom could also be provided, especially in the CEFR-aligned curriculum.

Since this study is based on a small number of teachers from rural primary schools, future studies should investigate larger numbers of teachers from both urban and rural schools in different countries where the CEFR has been adopted in the national curriculum. A comparison of the sociological differences of these teachers combined with an analysis of the ranges of experience may also provide different perspectives since novice and experienced teachers from different localities may have different strategies for dealing with self-efficacy beliefs. Comparing the experiences of teachers from different countries would also be beneficial in gaining an overall understanding of TSEB in the context of teaching English in the CEFR environment. Findings from all these suggested studies would guide educational authorities to develop policies and design appropriate educational strategies to ensure effective teaching and learning of English in a CEFR-based curriculum.

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Appendix 1

Letter of Informed Consent (LIC)

I willingly agree to participate in the research, "**Teachers' Self-efficacy Beliefs in the Adoption of CEFR**" that is conducted by _____. I understand that the aim of this research is understand my self-efficacy in adapting CEFR in my teaching of English.

I understand that data collected from me is anonymous and confidential. A pseudonym will be used at all phases of the research, including the write-up. No one will have access to the code name, except the researcher and me. Again, pseudonym will be used if the results of the present study are published or reported at professional meetings and conferences, unless permitted otherwise by myself in a written consent.

Thus, I give my consent for the data to be shared in publications or/and conferences and meetings even if the content of the data would expose my identify. If I feel uncomfortable with the above at any point of time during the project and research, I will inform the researchers and using my prerogative, I will decide either to withdraw from the project and research entirely OR, have the specific data expunged and not to be used at all.

In no way will my above decision on whether to participate (or not) in the research project or continue (or not) with the research OR have the specific data expunged, affect me as a teacher.

Please write your name using **CAPITAL LETTERS** (All Caps), which also means that you have read and understood the contents of LIC, and you agree to voluntary participation in this research	
Name:	
Date:	

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Appendix 2

Questionnaire on Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs in the Adoption of CEFR

Instruction: Read the following questions carefully and indicate (/) in the space provided according to the given scales.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Very little	Moderately	Quite a bit	A great deal

No.	**To what extent are you able to carry out the following meaningfully (in terms of teaching and learning English using the CEFR-aligned English syllabus)?**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	Get through the most difficult students.					
2	Help your students think critically.					
3	Control disruptive behavior.					
4	Motivate students who show low interest.					
5	Make your expectations clear about student behavior.					
6	Get students to believe they can do well.					
7	Respond to difficult questions from your students.					
8	Establish routines to keep activities running smoothly.					
9	Help your students value learning.					
10	Assess student comprehension of what you have taught.					
11	Craft good questions for your students.					
12	Foster student creativity.					
13	Get students to follow classroom rules.					
14	Improve the understanding of a student who is failing.					
15	Calm a student who is disruptive or noisy.					
16	Establish a classroom management system.					
17	Adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students.					
18	Use a variety of assessment strategies.					
19	Keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson.					
20	Provide alternative explanation or example when students are confused.					
21	Respond to disobedient students.					
22	Assist families in helping their children do well in school.					
23	Implement alternative strategies in your classroom					
24	Provide appropriate challenges for very capable students.					

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Appendix 3

Interview Questions

Section A: Background Information (Warm-up)

- Can you briefly describe your teaching experience, especially in rural primary schools?
- How long have you been teaching English under the CEFR-aligned syllabus?
- What kind of CEFR-related training have you attended so far?

Section B: Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs (RQ1)

(Focus: confidence, capability, and perceived competence)

- How confident do you feel in implementing the CEFR-aligned syllabus in your classroom? Why?
- Which aspects of the CEFR-aligned syllabus do you feel most confident teaching (e.g., speaking, writing)?
- Which aspects do you find most challenging, and how do they affect your confidence?
- How do you usually handle difficulties when implementing CEFR-based activities?
- Can you describe a situation where you felt successful in teaching using the CEFR approach?
- Can you share a situation where you felt less confident or struggled?

Section C: Training and Self-Efficacy (RQ2)

(Focus: link between training and confidence)

- What types of CEFR-related training have you attended (e.g., workshops, courses, briefings)?
- How frequently have you attended such training sessions?
- In what ways have these trainings influenced your confidence in implementing the CEFR syllabus?
- Which aspects of the training did you find most useful or practical?
- Do you feel that attending more training improves your teaching confidence? Why or why not?
- Are there any gaps in the training that you think need to be addressed?

Section D: Factors Affecting Self-Efficacy (RQ3)

(Focus: internal and external influences)

- What challenges do you face when implementing the CEFR-aligned syllabus in a rural school context?
- How do your students' proficiency levels affect your confidence in teaching?
- In what ways do school facilities or resources influence your teaching and confidence?
- How does administrative workload impact your ability to implement CEFR effectively?
- What kind of support (e.g., from school leaders, colleagues, MoE) do you receive, and how does it affect your confidence?
- How do textbook suitability and materials influence your confidence in teaching?
- Are there any personal factors (e.g., experience, beliefs, motivation) that affect your confidence?

Section E: Suggestions and Closing

(Adds depth and practical implications)

- What support would help improve your confidence in implementing the CEFR syllabus?
- What changes would you suggest for training programmes?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with CEFR implementation?

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