

## **Book Review: Using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages<sup>1</sup>**

*Reviewed by*

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[Nagai, N., Birch, G. C., Bower, J. V., & Schmidt, M. G. (2020.) *CEFR-Informed Learning, Teaching and Assessment: A Practical Guide*. Springer.]

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) released in 2001 by the Council of Europe has been globally incorporated into pedagogical practices and implemented to guide language policies in many countries, not only in Europe but also outside of the region, such as Japan and China (Foley, 2019). *CEFR-informed Learning, Teaching and Assessment: A Practical Guide* is a valuable resource as a practical guide on the implementation of a CEFR-based language pedagogy. The book draws on the perspectives of the CEFR practitioners from a non-European country, notably Japan. As stated by the authors who are all based in Japan, the book is intended to assist language teachers in three aspects, namely (i) grasping essential and core concepts of the CEFR, (ii) identifying parts of the CEFR and the CEFR/CV (Companion Volume) as well as other CEFR-related resources and documents relevant for readers' different purposes, and (iii) utilizing the resources for their own needs (Nagai et al., 2020, p. vi).

The book consists of six chapters that are systematically designed to facilitate language practitioners and teachers to broaden their knowledge on how CEFR-related documents are used. In Chapter 1, *The CEFR and Practical Resources*, the philosophy and main ideas of CEFR (2001) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) (2019c) are systematically scrutinized along with a brief description of the impact of CEFR on language education. Furthermore, for the enrichment of the book's readers, the authors have outlined some critical views on the CEFR application in language education. Access to noteworthy sources, literature, and pertinent recommendations are also provided in the very first section of this chapter. Meanwhile, in the second section, the overview of the CEFR and the fundamental concept of the ELP are illuminated briefly. CEFR mapping on language use and competence, both in its implementation and practice, is succinctly portrayed. In a nutshell, this chapter covers some of the major CEFR-related resources and organizes them into five themes. A detailed description of all five themes is successfully delineated in each of the five chapters.

Chapter 2, *Curriculum and course design*, focusses on a discussion on curriculum and course design considering learners' needs and two types of CEFR descriptors, namely Common Reference Levels (A1 through C2) and European Language Portfolio (ELP). In the first descriptor, three holistic scales are presented: the global scale, the self-assessment grid, and the qualitative aspects of spoken language use. The second descriptor consists of various illustrative scales. Identifying and describing the parts of these two CEFR tools are the main phases in curriculum and course design as well as how to use these tools for different purposes. This Chapter also provides detailed steps in setting out the role of CEFR in mapping out students' language use and competence, introducing relevant parts of the CEFR, guiding readers on how to utilize and modify CEFR descriptor scales to fit local needs, and accompanying readers of the book with exercises to design courses.

Chapter 3, *Assessment* lays the role of assessment as it is presented in the CEFR. The authors mostly describe how to design, implement, and evaluate CEFR-informed assessment. They also smoothly summarize key concepts of CEFR-informed assessment in educational assessment to provide the essential conceptual background for readers. A systematic step to conceptualize CEFR-informed assessment, either in summative or formative assessment, is presented in this section. Rubrics form, rating system, and self-assessment training are significant concepts in CEFR-informed assessment. All of these assessments play a

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pivotal role in developing the English language curriculum. This Chapter is very helpful to assist the practitioners who consider themselves ill-equipped in designing, implementing, and evaluating CEFR-Informed assessments.

Chapter 4, *Learner Autonomy and the European Language Portfolio*, focuses on how CEFR promotes autonomous learning which views language learners as social agents in charge of developing their language learning. This Chapter also explores how the European Language Portfolio (ELP) encourages learners to reflect on their learning. At the end of this chapter, the authors provide readers with three case studies dealing with how ELP has evolved and supplemented. It aims to present concrete exercises and step-by-step prototypes for creating and reflecting on an ELP.

Integrating topics such as course design, assessment, and autonomous learning with teaching by giving CEFR-informed tasks are briefly discussed in Chapter 5, titled *Integrating Learning, Teaching, and Assessment*. The tasks provide learners with classroom real-world contexts of language use by dealing with CEFR concepts of domains, situations, conditions, and constraints, and themes.

Chapter 6, *Teacher Autonomy*, focuses on exploring teacher autonomy conceptualization and redefining the teacher autonomy concept. Despite having developed independently of the CEFR, the concept of teacher autonomy is frequently discussed in light of learner autonomy and is seen as a requirement to develop learner autonomy and innovation in CEFR-informed language teaching.

Overall, this work is a strong contribution by providing readers with an in-depth understanding of the CEFR concepts, including its components, purposes, and its application into teaching practices. Different cases in different contexts of CEFR implementation enrich readers' knowledge for both theoretical and practical issues. The book additionally encourages instructors to help students deal with lifelong learning, where they are in charge of their education and teachers serve as pivotal professionals undermining students' autonomy. In a practical dimension, this book is thought-provoking since it provides teachers with didactic competencies and skills to flexibly exploring learners' self-directed learning. The book is suitable to countries where CEFR has been regulated as its language policy.

However, there are several issues with the book that should be considered. The book provides a comprehensive practical guide on the implementation of CEFR in language pedagogy in the context of non-European countries, but it is limited to the context of Japan. For this reason it may not be applicable to other countries with different cultural, social, and political backgrounds. For instance, countries that do not use CEFR as its language policy, like Indonesia, may not find the book useful. In addition to these weaknesses, it does not cover oral proficiency. It tends to have limited insights into how a test can be practically implemented for Asian Non-English-speaking countries (Dinh et al., 2021). Moreover, the Reference Levels of the CEFR are developed by focusing on European languages, it will be challenging for non-European language teachers and practitioners to introduce or implement a CEFR-based language pedagogy. For instance, the CEFR suggests the use of a communication every day. However, this daily use of English may not be achieved since countries like Japan and Indonesia have not made the language as an official or daily language for communication. The book would be better if it included scholarly perspectives of other non-European countries like Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries.

Despite these shortcomings, the book is useful for CEFR researchers, scholars, and practitioners worldwide. In particular, those in the countries where CEFR is officially used as their language policy. It is a must-read to those within the fields of language education, assessment, policy, and curriculum.

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