

CEFR IN UAE PUBLIC SCHOOLS: PEDAGOGICAL IMPACTS

by

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A thesis presented to the Faculty of the
American University of Sharjah
College of Arts and Sciences
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
of the Degree of

Master of Arts in
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

January 2017

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my most sincere gratitude to my advisor, Professor Al-Issa, for his unwavering support, encouragement and guidance. I am also very grateful to Professor Prescott, Professor El-Sakran, and Professor Badry whose constructive feedback helped me immensely in completing this thesis study. Special thanks go to 119 MAG employees who provided me with the data I needed for this study, either by taking the survey or by attending focus group discussions. I would also like to appreciate the support I received from Mr. Mesanovic when choosing statistical tests.

Dedication

To my family

Abstract

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Dubai used the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* to develop the *English Curriculum Framework (ECF)* in 2011 – a framework that was piloted in 39 Madaras Al Ghad (MAG) Schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) between 2011 and 2015. No study has been published to cast light on the impacts of adopting, adapting and implementing the CEFR in UAE public schools so far. This study attempts to act as a forerunner of such research. It examined 85 teachers', 31 teacher trainers' and 3 MOE administrators' perceptions of how lesson planning, teaching and assessment practices changed after the ECF had been implemented. Quantitative and qualitative data collected from semi-structured questionnaires were cross-checked against qualitative data collected from three focus group discussions. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze quantitative data. Overall, it seems that after the ECF had been implemented, (a) teachers' lesson plans reflected curriculum standards and matched students' needs and interests more often; (b) curriculum strands, *listening, speaking, reading and writing*, especially the first two, were addressed more often; (c) the frequency of teaching *vocabulary* and *pronunciation* increased; (d) teachers' pedagogy became more action-oriented as there was a shift toward communicative, collaborative and self-reflective activities, and (e) instructional and assessment practices became more transparent. However, the participants also reported that they had faced some challenges during the early stages of the ECF implementation. Providing continuous professional development and preparing suitable instructional materials were the two key measures that helped the participants overcome the challenges they had faced. A few barriers persisted throughout the implementation.

Keywords: CEFR, ECF, pedagogy, action-orientated, transparent

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List of Abbreviations

AD	Administrator
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
ECF	English Curriculum Framework
EIL	English as an International Language
ELP	European Language Portfolio
HCT	Higher Colleges of Technology
ILC	Instructional Leadership Coordinator
MAG	Madares Al Ghad (Schools of Tomorrow)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOE	Ministry of Education
T	Teacher
TDS	Teacher Development Specialist
TT	Teacher trainer

Glossary

can-do statement: an approach to describing learning outcomes associated with the Common European Framework [of Reference], which describes the learner's performance or some aspect of it in terms of what the learner is able to do. For example: *The learner can express simple opinions on familiar topics in a familiar context.* (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 66)

competence: knowledge, skills and attitudes (Council of Europe, 2001)

learning outcome: a statement of what is expected that a student will be able to do as a result of a learning activity. Learning outcomes help instructors and course designers to tell students what they are expected to do and what they can hope to gain from following a particular course or programme (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 330). In the *English Curriculum Framework*, the term "standard" has been used instead of "learning outcome" (Rudy et al., 2011, p. 7).

pedagogy: in general terms, pedagogy refers to theories of teaching, curriculum and instruction as well as the ways in which formal teaching and learning in institutional settings such as schools is planned and delivered. In educational theory, pedagogy is usually divided into curriculum, instruction, and evaluation (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 425)

standard: a type of educational aim. Standards specify high targets for learning. Identification of standards seeks to raise levels of learning by specifying expectations for success in different areas of the curriculum. Standards have been developed both for pedagogical purposes, i.e. to assist with professional development and to provide guidance in teaching, as well as for reasons related to curriculum development and accountability, i.e. for administrative purposes (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). In the *English Curriculum Framework*, hence in this publication, "standards" refer to "learning outcomes" (Rudy et al., 2011). They have been articulated in the form of "can-do statements".

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Many language teaching institutions aspire to equip their learners with the knowledge and skills that matter. Very few, however, agree on what matters. In fact, conceptualizing and specifying the knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to successful and effective language learning have challenged language teaching professionals for some time now (Figueras, 2012). This aspiration has not been helped by the variety of indigenous and global languages spoken in most countries and the complexity of the contexts in which such languages are learned. Despite the challenges, the Council of Europe developed *The Common European Framework of Reference for Language: Learning, Teaching and Assessment* (CEFR) in 2001 to respond to this need – a common framework that, according to the Council of Europe, describes what language learners should learn in order to be able to communicate effectively in a range of situations.

The CEFR soon started to spread around the globe. Although the framework was initially meant to be used in Europe, soon after it was published, it gained currency beyond Europe too (Figueras, 2012). Over time, many reported the benefits they had gained from using the CEFR. Nagai and O’Dwyer (2011), for example, described how the European framework had contributed to goal-setting and learner autonomy in the Japanese context. At the same time, others challenged the suitability of the framework both in general (Hu, 2012) and for specific contexts (Pena Dix & Mejia, 2012). Hulstijn (2007) suggested that the framework needed more empirical evidence; Alderson (2007) observed that more research was needed to justify its use for assessment purposes; and Fulcher (2004) aired concerns about its “overtly political aim of encouraging a common view of European Citizenship” (p. 254).

Statement of the Problem

In the UAE, too, the CEFR has influenced the development or alignment of curriculum and assessment policies and/or materials. The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), Zayed University, Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and the Ministry of Education (MOE), to name a few, have relied on the European framework for different curriculum and assessment-related purposes. Little research has been published, however, to cast light on how teaching and learning practices are affected and what challenges persist when this framework is used in the UAE context.

Can this framework be effective in a K-12 context where many educators depend on textbooks to guide, organize and direct their instruction?

The MOE developed the *English Curriculum Framework* (ECF) between 2010 and 2011 to improve the quality of language teaching in UAE public schools. In anticipation for a nationwide implementation, the ECF was piloted in 39 Cycle 2 (Grades 6-9) and Cycle 3 (Grades 10-12) Madares Al Ghad (MAG) public schools between 2011 and 2015. During this time, I contributed to the MAG program as a Regional English Coordinator, facilitating and monitoring instructional and assessment practices in Cycle 2 schools. Many teacher trainers and administrators, including myself, contributed to the implementation of the ECF, observing the challenges and opportunities that emerged and wondering how the ECF would affect teachers' practices. Despite the magnitude of the project, little research was done to identify the impacts of the ECF. The MAG program was phased out in 2015, and so was the ECF. The research of this thesis focuses on the pedagogical impacts of the ECF in the 39 MAG schools where it was implemented to gauge the suitability of such frameworks for the UAE and possibly other similar contexts.

Research Questions

This study examines teachers', teacher trainers' and administrators' perceptions of the pedagogical impacts of the ECF, the first CEFR-based curriculum framework developed by the MOE, on language teaching and assessment practices in 39 Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 MAG schools in the UAE. It examines three categories of pedagogical impacts to respond to the following three research questions:

(1) How, if at all, did the ECF transform teachers' lesson planning practices?

This question is concerned with how teachers set objectives for lesson plans and how often they addressed language-related curriculum components and curriculum strands.

(2) To what extent, if at all, did it contribute to action-orientation?

(3) To what extent, if at all, did it enhance the transparency of teaching and assessment practices?

Significance of the Study

At a local level, education policy makers and many teachers of English could benefit from the findings of this study in at least two ways. Where there is evidence of positive impacts, there will be opportunities to capitalize on them. For example, the

participants' reflections on what transformed their teaching practices when the ECF was implemented can be inspirational for educators and administrators who are coping with similar challenges. Success stories could encourage practitioners to reflect on their practices and possibly try the learning-centered pedagogy that the ECF promoted. The findings could also contribute to future MOE education reforms by informing policy makers about some of the challenges of such endeavors. It is hoped that this awareness will lead to better preparation and implementation of English curriculum frameworks in the UAE and in other similar contexts. In fact, the implementation of a new curriculum framework in UAE public schools, *English as an International Language* (EIL), can considerably benefit from the findings of this study as EIL bears some similarities with the ECF.

At an international level, too, many scholars and institutions who keep tabs on how the CEFR is evolving in different contexts could benefit from the findings of this study. For example, Cambridge English Language Assessment (previously called Cambridge ESOL), in particular, is keen to study the implementation of the CEFR-based curricula around the globe. Professor Milanovic, the previous Chief Executive of Cambridge English Language Assessment and Dr Saville, the Director of Research and Thought Leadership of Cambridge English Language Assessment both showed interest in how the MOE had adapted the CEFR for the UAE K-12 context during the Second International CEFR Conference in the Gulf/MENA Region held at the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) (personal communication, December 15, 2013).

Overview of the Chapters

In Chapter 2, the history of the CEFR is reviewed, the ECF is described, the link between the two is highlighted, and their potential impacts on teaching and learning are discussed. Chapter 3 will outline the methodology of the study, which has both qualitative and quantitative elements. Information about the context, participants and instruments can be found in this chapter. In Chapter 4, the researcher presents the findings of the study, and finally, in Chapter 5, he discusses some of the salient findings, particularly in relation to the research questions of the study and explains possible implications of the findings. The limitations of the study and areas for further research are also addressed in this final chapter.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Brief History of the CEFR

There is historical evidence that the European community needed to rebuild its unity after the Second World War. Although antagonism and lack of trust prevailed amongst European nations during the post-war era (Trim, 2007), as time passed by, some European states felt they should be able to regain their once-strong status through more cultural and political unity. One milestone move was founding the Council of Europe in 1949 – an organization on whose agenda “the maintenance of pluralist parliamentary democracy and the protection of human rights” stood out (p. 5).

Nineteen sixties and seventies were an eventful period for the Council of Europe. The functional-notional approach emerged; the Council of Europe’s Modern Languages Projects were initiated; and an intergovernmental symposium was held in Rüschtikon, Switzerland, which eventually led to a unit-credit scheme for adult language learning (Cambridge ESOL, 2011). This achievement also brought up the idea of describing a threshold level (Bung, 1973). In 1975 and 1977, two foundation stones of the CEFR were laid when van Ek’s Threshold Level and van Ek, Alexander and Fitzpatrick’s Waystage Level were published respectively. Threshold and Waystage were later used in the CEFR as B1 and A2 levels.

Nineteen eighties, according to Cambridge ESOL (2011), marked a change in attitude to language learning and teaching. The communicative approach was established as a result of which productive skills gained more prominence than receptive skills. In the light of this development, as Trim (2007) reminds us, member states started to reform lower-secondary education to make language learning more communication-oriented. This was done under the aegis of the Council of Europe whose projects (a) raised teachers’ awareness of their own language proficiency, (b) enhanced students’ motivation through short-term goal setting and (c) initiated harmony between learning objectives and assessment targets. These three goals still permeate the CEFR.

Substantial convergence in the 1990s paved the way for more serious and official work on the CEFR (Trim, 2007). In 1991, a symposium was held in Rüschtikon. As a result of the deliberations of this symposium, it was decided that language teaching in Europe could benefit from a comprehensive, coherent and

transparent framework of reference. In order for the framework to be comprehensive, it was agreed that it would have to address a wide range of language knowledge and skills, but not be limited to the linguistic dimension of communicative proficiency. Rather, it would need to tap into other dimensions of such proficiency as well, for example, “socio-cultural awareness, imaginative experience, affective relations and learning to learn” (p. 38). Furthermore, there would need to be a series of reference points whereby teachers and learners could measure progress. The transparency of such a framework would be measured by the extent to which its descriptors were clear, explicit and readily available. Such a framework would become coherent if all its components were harmoniously linked and did not contradict each other. Other characteristics of the proposed framework included flexibility, dynamism, and non-dogmatism. The framework was not supposed to prescribe what language learning, teaching and assessment should be like, rather to raise awareness, trigger reflection and pave the way for communication among practitioners (Trim, 2007).

The Rüsclikon symposium also put forward the idea of a complimentary and facilitative document that could supplement the CEFR: The European Language Portfolio (ELP). As Little (2012a) observes, the ELP enables learners to monitor and self-regulate their progress in language use and in their strategic control over the learning process. He adds that using the ELP can activate learners’ metacognition and fostering learner involvement or agency. Trim (2007) points out that the ELP would play an instrumental role in motivating learners and in assisting them not only to record their progress, but also to appreciate a long-lasting language learning experience whose aims and processes were internationally transparent. Since 2011, the ELP has been met with enthusiasm in many European countries. This has led to the development of a range of different portfolios suitable for learners of different ages: young, adolescent and adult (Little & Perclova, 2011). Teachers and teacher trainers (Little & Perclova, 2011) as well as developers (Schneider & Lenz, 2001) have benefited from ELP guides in developing portfolios that suit specific contexts. Such initiatives will probably never end due to the dynamic and evolving nature of language learning needs.

Eventually, the Council of Europe published the CEFR in 2001 in two languages, English and French. According to North (2007), who has been actively

involved in the development of the CEFR, the framework was to achieve three main aims:

- To establish a metalanguage common across educational sectors, national and linguistic boundaries that could be used to talk about objectives and language levels. It was hoped that this would make it easier for practitioners to tell each other and their clientele, what they [wished] to help learners to achieve and how they [attempted] to do so.
- To encourage practitioners in the language field to reflect on their current practice, particularly in relation to learners' practical language learning needs, the setting of suitable objectives and the tracking of learner progress.
- To agree common reference points based on the work on objectives that had taken place in the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Projects since the 1970s. (p. 22)

The Council of Europe (2001) suggests that improvement in language learning and teaching would enhance communication among Europeans paving the way for freer mobility and increasing direct contact among people, who would consequently better understand each other. Another expected impact would be enhancing the "transparency of courses, syllabuses and qualifications" (p. 1) as pointed out by North (2007) above.

Brief Overview of the CEFR

The CEFR comprises of 9 chapters and 4 appendices. Chapter 1 sets out the aims and functions of the framework. Chapter 2 defines the action-oriented approach and discusses different parameters involved in it. These include learners' roles, learners' competences (general and communicative), communication contexts (internal/external), language activities (receptive/productive), language processes, texts (oral/written), domains of language use (personal, public, occupational and academic), tasks and strategies for carrying out tasks. Chapter 2 also refers readers to the CEFR's Appendix B for more in-depth information on how to formulate proficiency level descriptors and scale levels. Chapter 3 introduces common reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2) (Appendix A of this study) and self-assessment grids. It also presents the illustrative descriptors, which have been summarized in common reference levels. Chapter 4 establishes the categories needed for describing language use contexts. These include the four domains of language use mentioned above, situations, themes, tasks, strategies, purposes and texts. Chapter 5 is about learners' competences, both general and communicative. Chapter 6 elaborates on the

processes involved in learning or acquiring a second language and also in becoming a plurilingual. It also discusses pertinent methodological options. In Chapter 7, the roles of different types of tasks are discussed along with a range of parameters that impact the suitability of tasks for different contexts. Chapter 8 deals with curriculum design in linguistically diversified contexts with plurilingual and pluricultural learners. It also sets out some general scenarios for curriculum design. The final chapter, Chapter 9, introduces different types of assessment and, where relevant, highlights how the framework could be used for assessment purposes.

ECF

Rationale. The idea of using an English curriculum framework guided by standards or learning outcomes in UAE public schools gained ground in 2010. The Curriculum Department of the MOE after a few deliberations formed a committee to develop a framework that would improve the quality of teaching English in public schools and support the UAE government in achieving its vision 2021 (Rudy et al., 2011). The committee, Rudy et al., agreed that an internationally accredited curriculum framework would contribute to Emiratis' broadening of their educational, cultural and economic opportunities. The CEFR was a suitable candidate to be used as a reference since the language learning principles that underpinned this European framework were in harmony with the language policies of the UAE (Rudy et al., 2011). Besides, the CEFR had already gained currency in teaching and assessment of foreign languages to the extent that it was no longer considered a framework designed exclusively for the European context (Figueras, 2012). This reassured Rudy et al. of the choice they had made. Nevertheless, the link between the ECF and the CEFR needed to be more explicit. That is why Rudy et al. (2011) affirmed the alignment of the ECF with the CEFR in the following statements:

This document fully embraces the principles of transparency and coherence in language learning found in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF). The CEF has been used as the foundation, key source document and guide to the writing of the English Curriculum Framework (ECF) ... We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the Council of Europe for placing the CEF in the public domain. (p. 2)

While transparency, coherence and alignment with an international framework sounded like moving in the right direction, more needed to be clarified concerning cultural relevance.

Cultural appropriateness. One challenge to overcome was to ascertain the CEFR's cultural appropriateness for the UAE context. Initially, some committee members were rather wary about the relevance or suitability of a European framework for an Emirati context. However, when the CEFR came under close scrutiny, it was agreed that the European framework posed no cultural threat. In fact, the Council of Europe shared many of the values that the Ministry of Education in Dubai sought to promote. For example, according to the Council of Europe, “[a language learner needs to develop] the capacity to fulfill the role of cultural intermediary between one’s own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations” (p. 105). Rudy et al. could not have agreed more. They pointed out in the ECF that the “language learning principles guiding the development of the CEF align with the language policies of the UAE [as] ... language learning is based on ... intercultural communication to ensure successful interaction across cultural boundaries” (p. 8).

Architecture. The ECF describes language teaching and learning using six key terms: *qualification*, *strand*, *standard*, *module*, *task* and *field of application*. This structure has been illustrated in Figure 1. The overarching components of the ECF, i.e. *qualifications*, are the CEFR's proficiency levels: A1, A2, B1 and B2. The *strands* are the four domains of language use, commonly referred to as language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Each *strand* is covered through a number of *standards* (Appendix B). These are mostly the same as CEFR can-do statements or level descriptors. Next are the *modules*. A *module* is “the process used to achieve the standard ... [with] a clear meaning and value within the strand” (Rudy et al. 2011, p. 18). For example, listening standards have three modules: (a) Comprehension of Knowledge and Ideas, (b) Text Types: Analysis, Evaluation and Decision Making and (C) Response. *Tasks* are observable learning activities with a beginning and ending. They are used for instructional and assessment purposes and normally lead to an understanding, performance or product. *Tasks* need to be set in contexts, situations and sometimes authentic texts, all referred to as *fields of application*.

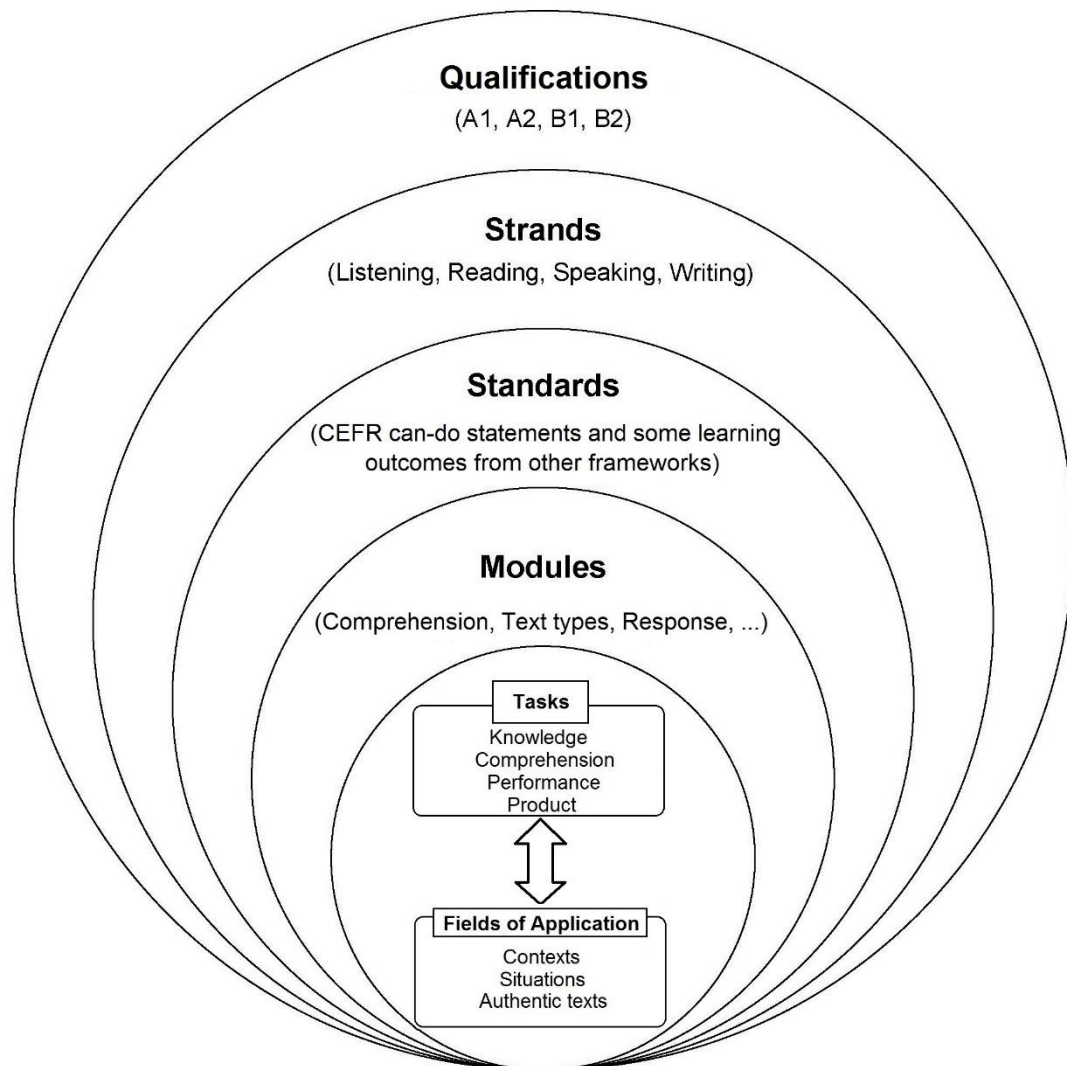


Figure 1. The English Curriculum Framework architecture

Potential Pedagogical Impacts of the ECF

Lesson planning.

Setting objectives. The first pedagogical impact of a new curriculum framework can be felt during the lesson planning stage. Broadly speaking, three different approaches can be identified depending on the language teaching and learning context. Convincingly, the most effective approach according to Anderson (2014) and Richards and Bohlke (2011) is considering students' needs and interests. This approach makes the learning process student-centered from the outset. On the other hand, a second approach is to set objectives according to instructional materials, namely textbooks. As Ellis points out, in some contexts, the textbook is also the curriculum (2004)! Teachers in such contexts may either teach the textbook page by page or minimally adapt it and / or supplement it to make lessons more meaningful

and relevant to learners. In either case, the objectives are articulated, if at all, *after* the material has been identified. The textbook could also organize instruction and even manage teachers' time. Some teachers like this approach because it saves much of their time as they do not have to analyze students' needs; students need only to cover the textbook! Teachers do save time this way, but at the expense of student learning during the teaching stage as instructional materials may not be fully relevant to students' needs and interests (Paik, 2015). As Richards and Bohlke (2011) point out, this approach is sometimes the most effective option because the teachers' proficiency in the target language, their ability to produce professionally designed instructional materials and their access to additional resources is limited.

There is a third approach for setting objectives. In some educational contexts, policy makers put textbooks on the periphery in favor of learning outcomes or standards (Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011). This model of education, also referred to as standards-based education, has been popular with policy makers and administrators in larger educational institutions (Kibler, Valdes & Valqui, 2014), especially when such institutions are state-funded. Standards-based education particularly appeals to administrators who are concerned with tracking students' progress (McKay, 2006) or ensuring teacher accountability (Hamilton, Stecher & Yuan, 2012). In such contexts, planning lessons with only loose links to curriculum standards is frowned upon. When a curriculum framework is rigorously implemented, teaching practices are affected considerably. This is because curriculum and pedagogy can interact in multiple ways (Troman & Jeffrey, 2011). As Richards (2001) points out, curriculum changes may influence teachers' practices, and pedagogy by changing their values and beliefs about teaching.

Since the CEFR was published, its can-do statements have been used by many for the articulation of curriculum learning outcomes, lesson objectives and assessment purposes. Cambridge ESOL (now Cambridge English Language Assessment), for example, advocate this when they point out that the CEFR can-do statements could be used at the classroom level to identify students' strengths and weaknesses (2011). Likewise, North (2014a) observes that both curriculum writers and classroom teachers could use the CEFR in syllabi and weekly plans to set objectives for instructional and assessment opportunities. This would allow teachers to plan lessons to address learners' needs instead of spending time on what they have already learned or are not

ready to learn yet. Richards (2013) describes the CEFR as a framework with a *backward design* and adds that if properly implemented, this design includes the following 7 steps:

- Step 1: diagnosis of needs
 - Step 2: formulation of objectives
 - Step 3: selection of content
 - Step 4: organization of content
 - Step 5: selection of learning experiences
 - Step 6: organization of learning experiences
 - Step 7: determination of what to evaluate and of the ways of doing it
- Taba (1962), as cited in Richards (2013, p. 21)

This approach to planning and delivering instructions is different from the traditional textbook-based approach. It allows teachers some flexibility in choosing outcomes and selecting or designing instructional materials. This way, lesson planning should include a needs analysis stage within a framework that outlines “legitimate” outcomes.

In practice, the three approaches mentioned above could co-exist. Teachers could identify students’ needs most often within the parameters of a curriculum framework and rely on a textbook that has been closely mapped onto the framework. However, using supplementary or self-developed materials is usually unavoidable as textbooks, students’ needs and interests and curriculum frameworks almost never fully overlap. As North (2014b) explains, teachers should go beyond the activities that textbooks offer and develop or locate additional or supplementary tasks or materials so that they can substantially address all the required learning outcomes.

Including a variety of tasks. Tasks are a major component of lesson plans. As Baralt, Gilabert and Robinson (2014) point out, research has consistently shown that tasks need to be varied and appropriately sequenced in order for effective language learning to take place. Likewise, Trim (2012) and Nation (1996) explain that the four skills *listening, speaking, reading* and *writing* should normally be taught in balance. Historically speaking, however, the types of tasks that applied linguists have recommended to be used in language classes have depended on their understanding of the types of knowledge and skills involved in communication via language. This has often been referred to as communicative competence.

Theoretical models that present different types knowledge that contribute to communicative competence have been revisited several times over the past four

decades and each time, more light has been shed on newer dimensions of this competence. As early as 1980, Canale and Swain and later Canale (1983) conceptualized that communicative competence comprised of four components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. This conception was further specified by Bachman and Palmer (1996) to characterize real life communication as clearly and extensively as possible. The CEFR presents a view that is not limited to communicative competence. In this view, the language user or learner needs to activate or draw on two broad categories of competences when carrying out tasks: general competences and communicative language competences. Figure 2 illustrates what sub-components each of these broad categories have and what they lead to. The CEFR operationalizes the competences above through progressively challenging can-do statements that fall under six proficiency levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2.

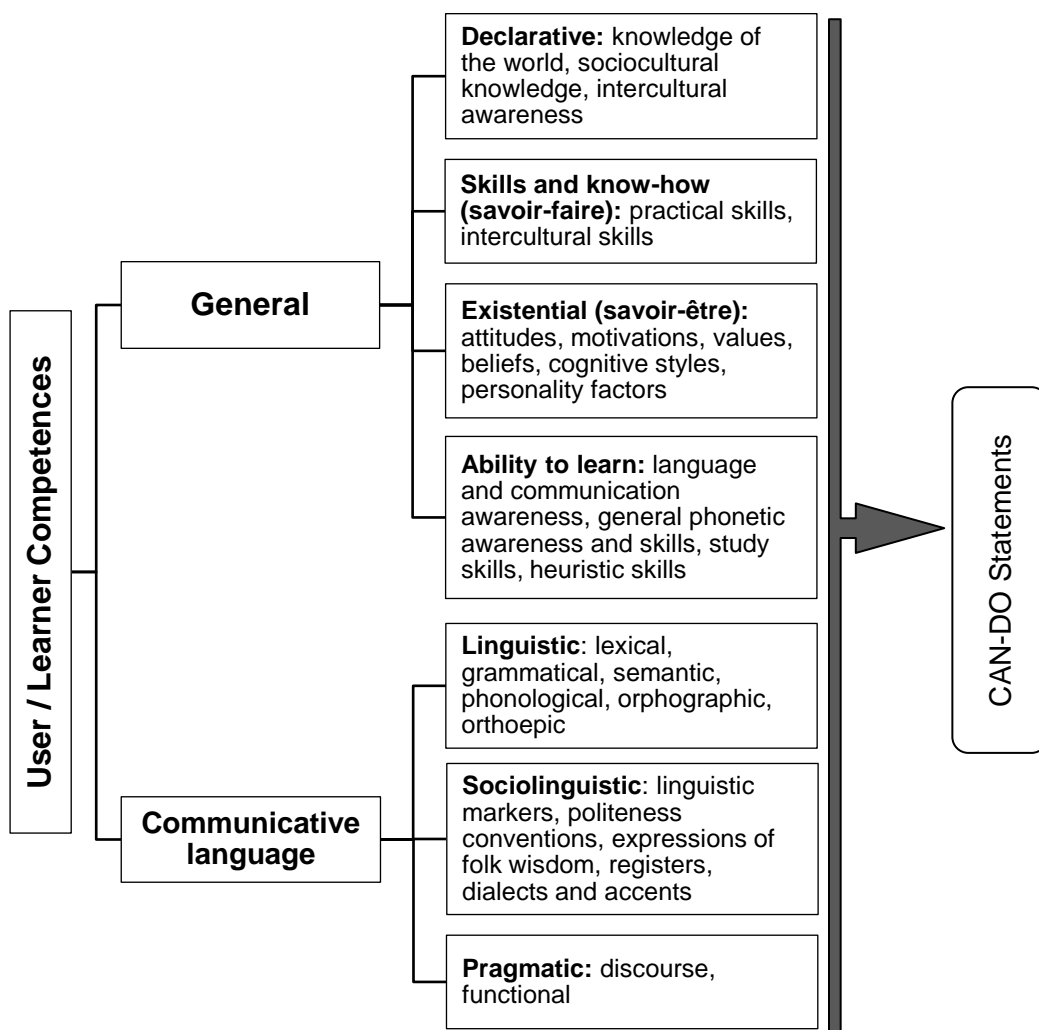


Figure 2. CEFR's overview of the language user / learner competences

As Kumaravadivelu (2006) points out, effective language instruction should provide learners with opportunities to activate language-related competences in receptive and productive skills, such as listening, reading, speaking and writing. Because the CEFR is not language-specific, it does not specify language-related content such as grammatical structures, lexical items and phonological rules. Consequently, the use of this general framework without additional documents that specify language-specific grammatical, lexical, and phonological outcomes could become problematic (Figueras, 2012). That is why other projects, such as the English Profile (Richards, 2013) and the European Language Portfolio (Little, 2012b) have attempted to bridge this gap by further specifying language-specific components. It is generally agreed that more specificity in defining tasks and wider and more frequent coverage of different types of tasks is conducive to better attainment and development of the knowledge and skills targeted.

Action-orientation. The CEFR recommends an action-oriented approach to teaching. Perhaps the most frequently quoted and notoriously difficult paragraph to understand in the entire CEFR, which attempts to clarify language use within an action-oriented approach, is the following quotation:

Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences. (p. 9)

Based on the quotation above, a few conditions should be met before one can claim one's approach is action-oriented. First, language learners should act both as individuals and as social agents. Second, they should call on both their general and communicative competences. Third, they should engage in different activities in various contexts and under various conditions. Fourth, they should face constraints when carrying out tasks. Fifth, reception, performance and production should co-exist. Sixth, tasks should be set in different domains of language use. Seventh, the execution of tasks should entail the activation of appropriate strategies; and, eighth, learners

should monitor their performance to either reinforce or modify their competences. With so many conditions to meet, action-orientation may not prove practical in educational contexts where more traditional and teacher-centered models of education are in place.

A few scholars have attempted to further clarify action-orientation for language teaching purposes. In Canada, for example, where the plurilingual values promoted by the CEFR have appealed to some ministries of education, such as the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (Wernicke & Bournot-Trites, 2011), Piccardo (2014) has developed a 55-page guide to help professionals better understand the CEFR's action-oriented approach. According to Piccardo, teachers can operationalize action-orientation by (a) ensuring that students communicate and perform speech acts in the classroom and in other social contexts, (b) creating real-life situations, (c) giving priority to authentic materials, (d) allowing students to negotiate meaning, (e) promoting learner autonomy, (f) fostering a learner-centered environment, (g) raising students' awareness about learning outcomes, their strengths and their constraints or limitations, (h) making tasks purposeful, (i) creating a context for teaching language, especially a social one, (j) getting learners to reflect on language use and possibly discover the rules, (k) developing communication strategies that can be transferred from one context or situation to another, (l) transferring responsibility to the learner, (m) including a variety of receptive, productive, interactive and possibly mediatory activities and (n) developing learners' intercultural awareness through plurilingualism.

The characteristics mentioned above are not unique to the CEFR's action-oriented approach. Rather, as Piccardo points out, they encompass and build on many of the principles of the communicative approach. However, when an action-oriented approach is adopted, "the communicative approach ... [is] completed by a focus on action. The activities performed by the learner/social agent take place in specific situations and for a specific reason. They are not simply a pretext for communication" (p. 19). This is not a complete departure from the communicative approach; it is a shift from an emphasis on communication to an emphasis on action. The characteristics of this approach also bear similarities to Kumaravadivelu's (2006) post-method pedagogy, which is built on ten macro-strategies that educators can employ to develop their own context-specific micro-strategies. Noticeable

resemblances between the characteristics of the action-oriented approach and Kumaravadivelu's macro-strategies (p. 201) have been presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Post-Method Macro-Strategies and the Characteristics of Action-Orientation

Post-method macro-strategy	Action-orientation characteristic
1. Maximize learning opportunities	▪ Engage learners in different activities in various contexts and under various conditions.
2. Facilitate negotiated interaction	▪ Allow learners to negotiate meaning.
3. Minimize perceptual mismatches	▪ Raise students' awareness about their goals, strengths and constraints or limitations.
4. Activate intuitive heuristics	▪ Get learners to reflect on language use and discover the rules.
5. Foster language awareness	▪ Ditto
6. Contextualize linguistic input	▪ Create a context for teaching language, especially a social one.
7. Integrate language skills	▪ Include a variety of receptive, productive, interactive and possibly mediatory tasks.
8. Promote learner autonomy	▪ Transfer responsibility to the learner.
9. Ensure social relevance	▪ Develop learners' intercultural awareness through plurilingualism.
10. Raise cultural consciousness	▪ Ditto

An emphasis on authentic and meaningful communication and learning autonomy have been deemed conducive to action-orientation by some CEFR authors as well. North (2008) suggests that action-orientation can be promoted through meaningful tasks that are linked to real-life situations and texts. He emphasizes that the framework encourages practitioners to treat learners as social agents who accomplish tasks through meaningful communication and hence develop their communicative competence and performance. Little (2012a) points out that promoting reflective learning and learner autonomy, for example, by utilizing language portfolios, is a key step in occasioning action-orientation.

Transparency. Transparency of practices, especially as far as educational decision making is concerned, has been a matter of some debate. Some see it as a superficial measure used by administrators just for the records (Koyama & Kania, 2016) and some see little educational value in it (Allais, 2012), especially when ambiguous learning outcomes are shared among stakeholders as an indicator of transparency (Allais, 2014). Nevertheless, the demand for more transparency is felt in many contexts (UNESCO, 2014), and effective transparency of learning outcomes

and assessment practices is generally regarded as an effective strategy (McNair, 2016) that can minimize what Kumaravadivelu (2006) regards as evaluative and pedagogic perceptual mismatches.

Making sense of achievement results. A prevailing issue in the field of language teaching and assessment has been minimizing what Kumaravadivelu (2006) refers to as “evaluative perceptual mismatches” (p. 203). It is generally agreed that if teachers understand what assessment results mean, they can minimize evaluative perceptual mismatches and enhance the transparency of assessment practices (Coombe, 2012). This happens when teachers, or the educational institution, communicate this knowledge to others stakeholders involved. However, one major hurdle to overcome is developing clear and unambiguous learning outcomes since different interpretations of such statements would only result in more discrepancies (Allais, 2014). Often, the results of using CEFR can-do statements to make practices transparent has depended on the context where they have been used. While CEFR level descriptors have contributed to the transparency of teaching and assessment practices in Japan, for example (O'Dwyer, 2011), some descriptors have not been precise enough to be used for assessment purposes in other contexts (Figueras, 2007). Nevertheless, North (2014a) hopes that the English Profile Project will hopefully bring more precision to some of these can-do statements or level descriptors.

Interpreting learning outcomes correctly is one thing, being able to use them in national assessments, something else. Mehren (1984) and, more recently, Roy (2016) point out that mismatches between curriculum and assessment exist, rendering the latter invalid. While Mehren challenges the validity of standardized tests used for assessing students' achievement who have covered local curricula, Roy discusses how communicative language teaching in Bangladesh has been ineffective because of a mismatch between curriculum and assessment. This can particularly be an issue in secondary schools where, according to Buyukduman (2014), students' results in national tests impact their admission to post-secondary education.

Furthermore, there is the issue of interpreting assessment results across different educational institutions. Before the CEFR was developed, the need for transparency and coherence was strongly felt in Europe where educational and occupational mobility needed to be facilitated. Would 18 out of 20, reported by one institution, mean B⁺, A or A⁺ in another? What does “Good” mean? North (2007)

explains that in the absence of a common framework, interpreting results reported by different institutions would entail familiarity with a range of different systems, which defies practicality. North (2014c) believes that the CEFR has addressed this “Tower of Babel” issue to an acceptable extent, but he also adds that “operationalising ... [the CEFR descriptors] into a specification for a test task requires a process of interpretation that is not always straightforward (p. 230).

How to enhance transparency. Both the Council of Europe (2001) and the UAE Ministry of Education have clearly highlighted the importance of transparency in teaching, learning and assessment (Rudy et al., 2011). Multiple strategies have been conceived of to promote transparency, especially communicating clear learning outcomes for facilitating and assessing learning. The use of can-do statements has been recommended by both institutions to enhance the transparency of learning outcomes and assessment methods. An instrument to operationalize this has been the language portfolio. As Kuhn and Langer (2012) explain, the reporting function of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) paves the way for transparency, particularly, when students move from one institution to another. With a language portfolio, it is possible to review what learning experiences the learner has gone through and what achievements they have made. Likewise, Fernandez (2014) champions the idea of using portfolios in general and the ELP in particular as portfolios make the learning and assessment processes transparent. This way, students know from the outset what they are supposed to learn and how they will be assessed.

Reported Impacts and Caveats of Using the CEFR

Impacts. Many researchers have reported CEFR impacts on language teaching, learning and assessment. In Central and Easter Europe, as Béréšová (2011) reports, the framework has influenced language curricula, assessment and teachers’ pedagogy, allowing language learning to go beyond language-related competences. Castellotti (2012) comments that traditionally, language learning in France has focused on developing students’ metalinguistic knowledge rather than their ability to use the target language. The CEFR has started to change this by encouraging language learning for communicative purposes. Goullier (2012) states that policy makers in the Ministry of Education in France attach considerable importance to the CEFR in order to establish coherence between regulations and pedagogy. He also highlights one of the by-products of using the CEFR: “a common discourse for all teachers of all

languages” (p. 43). According to Porto (2012), in the Argentine context, where a range of immigrant and indigenous languages co-exist, the CEFR has promoted mutual understanding and cooperation among practitioners in ways that resemble what the framework has done in Europe. However, in the Japanese context, where language education is influenced by other geopolitical factors, only some of the anticipated impacts of the CEFR have been observed. Plurilingualism, for example, which the CEFR has pursued in Europe, has not materialized in Japan, whereas better transparency, more meaningful communication and student-centered instruction have (Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011).

Caveats. The authors of the CEFR state that the framework was meant to be as broad and comprehensive as possible so that it could be used by a wide range of different groups in a wide range of contexts. Two limitations are attached to this broadness and comprehensiveness: need for adaptation and expansion of the can-do statements to suit the specific contexts (Council of Europe, 2001; North, 2014a) and ideological issues associated with trends towards harmonization and conformity (Fulcher, 2004; Hu, 2012).

Need for adaptation and expansion. According to most experts, CEFR level descriptors need to be adapted before being used as goals or objectives in syllabi or lesson plans. The Council of Europe (2001) acknowledges such a need and encourages CEFR users to refine and adapt the descriptors to suit their own local contexts. Richards (2013), too, points out that the descriptors need to be adapted but more importantly expanded locally to meet the requirements for a syllabus. In a similar vein, Figueras (2007) explains that CEFR descriptors “need to be expressed in language-specific functional, linguistic, and socio-cultural exponents” (p. 674). This is because the CEFR is not language specific. The same framework can be used by English, French, German, Spanish and other language professionals. Experts in every language have developed their own linguistic components such as vocabulary and grammar, when adapting the framework for their target language. Figueras (2012) also adds that the need for such elaborations has started to be addressed in the ELP project. Many portfolio samples for various languages have so far been submitted to and reviewed by the Council of Europe. A list of portfolios developed by different countries and for different languages can be reached on this Council of Europe

webpage: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/accredited-and-registered-models-by-countrymodeles-ccredites-ou-enregistres-par-pays> .

Ideological issues. Some educators deem the CEFR inappropriate for certain contexts. Hu (2012) is skeptical about the influence the CEFR might have on language education in Germany. She holds that the values promoted by the CEFR will lead to a “desire for affirmation”, which could minimize creativity and impose conformity – not exactly the values educators should pursue, in her opinion (p.72). Likewise, Fulcher (2004) is concerned why one should want to promote harmonization as opposed to diversity. He notes, “[Harmonization] ... may lead to further political unification by stealth, irrespective of whether the framework is a suitable tool for this purpose or not” (p. 264). Some experts comment that using a European framework of reference beyond Europe could potentially be problematic. For example, de Mejia (2012) points out that the CEFR was resisted in Columbia as would have any other framework developed by foreigners. Socio-cultural factors, she adds, are the main category of factors that make foreign frameworks unsuitable for the Columbian context. Elsewhere, both Pena Dix and de Mejia (2012) admit that policy making based on an “alien model” would only lead to tensions (p. 147). However, regardless of the tensions and resistance, the CEFR has continued to spread (Figueras, 2012).

Teacher buy-in. Implementing new curricula without teachers’ support is an uphill battle. A few years after the implementation of the CEFR in Canada, the stakeholders met in 2011 to discuss and assess its progress. One of the findings was the importance of teacher buy-in. Turnbull (2011) points out that in order to have teachers on board they should “see the value added” and that the paradigm shift without “time, resources and expertise” is impractical (p. 15). Therefore, instant success in implementing the CEFR is not realistic.

CEFR in the UAE

If the suitability of certain aspects of a European framework has been challenged in some contexts such as Columbia and Japan (Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011) and its potential ideological impacts have been deemed inappropriate for Germany (Hu, 2012), how could it be suitable for the UAE context? In the UAE, the MOE and the HCT, in particular, have been keen on adapting and employing the CEFR for teaching and assessing English in K-12 and post-secondary education, respectively.

The CEFR's global scales (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2) and famous can-do statements prevail in MOE's ECF, and the HCT's curriculum for the Foundations English (Gitsaki, 2013). Furthermore, the HCT has worked closely with Cambridge English Language Assessment to raise awareness about the CEFR in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) (HCT, 2011). Two biennial conferences have been held in the HCT since 2011, with speakers from Cambridge English Language Assessment, the HCT and the MOE to share CEFR-related perspectives, expertise and experiences and to discuss how the European framework has been localized for the UAE context.

Conclusion

The CEFR seems to have been both a popular and a controversial framework of reference in and beyond Europe. At first glance, the framework seems to offer what most policy makers and language teaching professionals are after. It appears to be a framework that lays the groundwork for globalization in language teaching and assessment. It also shows potential for enhancing students' ability to use English for communicative purposes and possibly pave the way for learner autonomy and transparency of syllabi if its can-do statements are appropriately adapted and introduced. Nevertheless, such ambitions do not seem to have been realized in all contexts. Some have expressed ideological concerns about the use of one framework across the globe. Some have deemed it inappropriate, and some have resisted it. The case of the UAE remains to be further investigated.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This study examines the perceptions of the educators who used the ECF – a curriculum framework that the MOE developed and aligned with the CEFR. It seeks to find out if the benefits and challenges of implementing the framework between 2011 and 2015 improved lesson planning, some aspects of action-orientation, and the transparency of teaching and assessment practices. It also explores some of the possible challenges that the participants were faced with when they planned and taught lessons according to the ECF learning outcomes. Campbell, Huxman and Burkholder (2015) recommend that research questions could also match the circumstances. Therefore, in the light of the reviewed literature and given the board nature of lesson planning, action-orientation and transparency, the researcher further broke down each of the three research questions of this study, outlined on page 12, so that the findings will be more relevant to the circumstances of implementing the ECF. The focused questions are listed in Table 2. These questions informed the study instruments: questionnaires and focus group discussion questions.

Table 2

Study Questions and Research Focal Points

Focused question	Research focus
To what extent were lesson objectives informed by textbooks, students' needs and interests, curriculum standards, or other factors?	Lesson planning (setting objectives)
How frequently did lessons address, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation? In the context of this study grammar means syntax and morphology.	Lesson planning (task types)
How frequently did they address, curriculum strands: listening, reading, speaking and writing?	Lesson planning (task types)
To what extent did they foster meaningful oral interaction with classmates, for example, through group discussions, collaborative project work?	Action-orientation
To what extent did they address oral reception and production, for example, through presentations and storytelling?	Action-orientation
How familiar were students with learning outcomes?	Transparency & action-orientation
How often were assessment tasks aligned with the learning outcomes?	Transparency
Did the students keep track of their own learning, for example, by using a portfolio?	Transparency & action-orientation

Context

The study was set in the context of 39 Cycle 2 (Grades 6-9) and Cycle 3 (Grades 10-12) MAG schools located in six UAE emirates: Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah, and Fujairah. MAG was an education reform program that spanned August 2007 to July 2015. Most MAG schools had additional staff members, who facilitated ongoing professional development and operationalized curriculum and assessment policies that were usually centrally decided. The school-based staff were Teacher Development Specialists (TDSs) and Instructional Leadership Coordinators (ILCs), all referred to as teacher trainers in this study. The great majority of students in MAG schools were Emirati and almost all the students, like their teachers, spoke Arabic as their L1.

The ECF was the first curriculum framework that the MOE developed. It was piloted in MAG schools, where the idea of teaching to measurable learning outcomes had already been introduced (Badry, 2015), and both western and Arab teacher trainers were present to help with the implementation. Since 2007, the services of a group of western and Arab teacher trainers had been engaged to make teaching practices as student-centered as possible. The committee who authored the ECF comprised mainly of MAG staff, so it made absolute sense to pilot the framework with their support for training and implementation purposes.

Participants

Different measures were taken in this study to enhance the reliability and credibility of the findings. The first measure was data triangulation. As Burns (2010) suggests using different methods for collecting data and relying on more than one source will allow the researcher to compare and crosscheck findings and preclude or minimize false judgments. To address this matter, the data for this study was collected from three different sources: (a) MAG English teachers, (b) teacher trainers and (c) MOE administrators.

The first group of participants comprised of 234 teachers, 106 of the whom taught in Cycle 2 school and 128 in Cycle 3. Out of the 234 teachers, 85 (36.3%) responded to the survey of this study and 5 participated in a focus group discussion. The participants had all used the ECF between 2 to 4 years, except for 1 teacher in each Cycle who had used the ECF for 1 year only. MAG teachers spoke English as a Foreign or Second language.

The second group of participants were school-level teacher trainers who had closely worked with English teachers during the implementation of the ECF. A total of 49 teacher trainers were invited to take part in the study, 31 (63.2%) of whom participated. The teacher trainers include Teacher Development Specialists (TDSs) and Instructional Leadership Coordinators (ILCs). Teacher trainers had mostly used the ECF for either 3 or 4 years. They came from a range of different countries, such as South Africa, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Turkey, etc. (personal knowledge).

The third group of the participants were three Arab MOE administrators who had overseen the implementation of the ECF in MAG schools for at least four years. All the three administrators had worked in the MAG program ever since it started in 2007. They also had extensive years of experience working with the other two groups of participants.

Instruments

Questionnaires.

Development process. The main instruments for collecting data in this study were two questionnaires: the teachers' questionnaire (Appendix C) and the teacher trainers' and administrators' questionnaire (Appendix D). When surveying relatively large groups, as is the case in this study, using questionnaires ensures practicality (Burns, 2010) and efficiency (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). The researcher ensured that the questions in the two questionnaires, were parallel. This made results comparable. For example, if question 7b in the teachers' questionnaire (Appendix C), asks teachers to comment on how frequently they had taught grammar before the ECF, question 7b in the teacher trainers' and administrators' questionnaire (Appendix D) asked the participants the same question. Parallel questions facilitated the comparison of the collected data.

The questionnaires of this study collected factual, behavioral and attitudinal data. The factual data included gender, teaching experience, number of years using the ECF and the amount of training support English teachers had received when using the ECF. Although this category of data was not primarily used for investigating correlations in this study, when data was aggregated, some patterns were expected to emerge, for example, between the amount of training support received and the approach to lesson planning. The behavioral and attitudinal data were meant to elicit

data on how teaching practices prior to and post the implementation of the ECF might have been different.

Three question formats were used in the questionnaire to elicit different types of data. As Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) point out, researchers do not have to limit themselves to one question format. Each format lends itself to a particular response type that could possibly lead to triangulation. The majority of the questions in this study were closed-ended, either rating scale or multiple choice, to preclude non-response associated with long surveys and to facilitate data analysis. Questions 18 to 20 were open-ended in order for the participants to be able to expand on their answers and provide qualitative data. The type of responses that the questions were supposed to elicit were mostly determined a priori. However, the open-ended questions were meant to elicit data that would allow the researcher to further explore the topic a posteriori. As can be seen in Table 3, except for the first 5 questions that mainly elicited demographic data, the rest of the questions collected data either in response to research questions 1-3 or for further exploration of the research topic.

Table 3

Survey Questions and Purposes

#	Question	Type; purpose	
1	Gender	Factual; demographic	
2	Teaching experience (years)	Factual; demographic	
3	Number of years using the ECF	Factual; demographic	
4	The Cycle the respondent has worked in	Factual; demographic	
5	[Teachers:] The extent to which teachers benefitted from professional development	Factual and attitudinal	
	[Teacher trainers' / administrators'] Position(s)	Factual; demographic	
Pre-ECF	Post-ECF		
6 a-d	12a-d	The extent to which the objectives of lesson plans were informed / influenced by textbooks, students' needs and interests, the curriculum framework, or other factors	Behavioral; lesson planning practices; setting objectives
7 a-c	13a-c	The extent to which vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation were addressed	Behavioral; lesson planning practices; three linguistic components

(table continues)

#		Question	Type; purpose
Pre-ECF	Post-ECF		
7 d-g	13d-g	The extent to which the four ECF strands (listening, reading, speaking and writing) were addressed	Behavioral; lesson planning practices; coverage of four curriculum strands
7 h	13 h	The extent to which other components were addressed	Behavioral; lesson planning practices; coverage of other tasks
8 a-e	14a-e	Impact on oral interaction with classmates, group discussions, collaborative project work, presentational tasks and storytelling	Behavioral; a few dimensions of action-orientation
9	15	Students' familiarity with learning outcomes	Behavioral; transparency
10	16	Alignment of assessment with learning outcomes	Behavioral; transparency
11	17	Enabling students to use learning outcomes to keep track of their own learning	Behavioral; transparency and action-orientation
	18	Other impacts	Factual / behavioral / attitudinal; exploring other impacts
	19	Further comments	Factual / behavioral / attitudinal; exploring other factors or impacts
	20	[Teachers:] Comparison between Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 in terms of ECF impacts	Factual / behavioral / attitudinal; exploring other factors

Note. ECF = English Curriculum Framework.

Procedure. The questionnaires were piloted before the study was conducted. As Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) recommend, piloting a questionnaire before conducting the survey helps improve the questions and measure how much time respondents would need to complete it. Piloting the first draft of the questionnaire allowed the researcher of this study to gauge the amount of time the participants needed to complete it – roughly ten minutes. The feedback collected from the pilot group also led to adding the option “other (please specify)” to some of the questions.

The questionnaires were hosted on Survey Monkey[®] for practicality and confidentiality reasons. The 39 schools concerned with this study were geographically spread over six different Emirates. This spread would have made data collection

costly and time consuming if a printed format had been used. As Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) point out, researchers who use emails to conduct surveys save more time and money, but the drawback might be higher non-response rates. Therefore, to minimize the non-response risk, instead of contacting a randomly selected group of participants, the researcher included *all* the participants in the study. The mailing lists were accurate because they had been previously used several times for work-related purposes, so no participant was excluded.

The second advantage of emailing the electronic version of the survey, hosted on Survey Monkey[®], was maintaining the respondents' anonymity. As Wealleans (2003) explains, "One of the prime barriers to answering survey questions, or at least answering them honestly, is the fear of incrimination" (p. 64). This fear can lead to dishonest responses that can contaminate findings. Therefore, electronic questionnaires with no questions that would help identify the respondent were deemed the most suitable for this study. The participants responded to questions either by clicking in circles or boxes or by typing their answers.

Having previously worked for MAG as a Regional English Coordinator, the researcher had kept up-to-date records of MAG employees' emails, even of those who had left the program. The contact lists had been successfully used for communicating with the participants on a regular basis. The electronic method of data collection had proven to be the most practical, fastest and most convenient method, not to mention the least threatening.

The participants were given ample time to take the survey at their convenience. After the first week, approximately 40 participants had taken part in the study. In an attempt to collect more data, a gentle reminder was emailed to the participants, thanking the ones who had already responded and encouraging others to respond before the survey link expired. This second attempt resulted in a larger number of responses. A total of 129 teachers, teacher trainers and administrators had participated in the study before the survey links were closed 4 weeks later.

Focus group discussions.

Rationale. As Burns (2010) explains, using more than one instrument for collecting data enhances the reliability of the findings. Therefore, in this study three focus group discussions were conducted as a second instrument. The researcher preferred focus group discussions to one-on-one interviews for two reasons. First,

focus groups can be more effective than one-on-one interviews as Krueger and Casey (2000) explain, because they do not put participants on the spot as much as one-on-one interviews do. Less anxiety improves the validity of the data. Furthermore, in a focus group discussion, what one participant says might trigger ideas for others and generate more discussion and data for analysis (Burns, 2010).

Procedure. The focus group participants were sampled by convenience. Although all the participants had been encouraged to volunteer for focus group discussions when they were completing the online questionnaires, no one did. As a result, the researcher resorted to sampling by convenience. Potential participants, whose places of work were conveniently located in or near Dubai were contacted by email and three focus groups were arranged: (a) five MOE English teachers, (b) three teacher trainers and (c) three MOE administrators. It is worth mentioning that seven teachers and five teacher trainers had initially agreed to take part, but two candidates from each group sent apology messages just before the discussions started as they had been charged with unanticipated tasks at work. As for the third group, there were only three administrators in total.

The focus group discussions were moderated by the researcher himself. Initially, the participants read and signed the consent forms (Appendix E). The researcher also signed the same form and gave the participants a copy for their reference. Then the researcher started the discussion by giving a brief introduction to clarify the purpose of the discussion and assuring the participants of anonymity (Appendix F). The participants were also informed that they could opt out or choose not to respond to some or all of the questions. Due to the small number of the participants, note taking for identifying the participants was not deemed necessary but using two recording devices was. This ensured higher sound quality for more accurate transcription. During the discussions, the priority was given to what the participants had to say naturally. As long as digressions were relevant to the ECF or teachers' pedagogy, they were not discouraged. However, the researcher, sometimes referred to his focus group questions (Appendix F) to collect data that could later be used for triangulation. Later, the participants of each group received a copy of the discussion summary and were asked for feedback, especially if they thought the conclusions drawn did not match the comments made. No one expressed any disagreement.

Data Analysis Methods

Surveys. The participants' responses to the survey questions of this study were analyzed quantitatively and quantitatively.

Quantitative analysis with descriptive statistics. Questions 6 to 17 of the questionnaires lent themselves to quantitative analysis. The data collected from these questions were ordinal variables such as *never*, *sometimes*, *often*, *usually* and *always* or discrete variables, *yes* and *no*. As Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) recommend, descriptive statistics is a valid technique for summarizing and describing such data. More specifically, the authors recommend that researchers present such data categorically and if possible provide the median, too. Furthermore, Drossis, Margetis and Stephanidis (2016) and Mertens (2010) suggest cross-tabs for displaying categorical data as they simplify the comparison between two sets of data. This way, readers do not have to go back and forth between tables to find the values they need for making comparisons between pre-ECF and post-ECF data.

Quantitative analysis with inferential statistics. To determine whether or not the changes between pre- and post-ECF proportions of frequent (*often*, *usually* and *always*) or very frequent (*usually* and *always*) practices were statistically significant, a two(-sample) proportion test was conducted in Minitab[®] with each set of pre- and post-ECF data. Typically, two-sample proportion tests can characterize the statistical significance of the differences in mean values between two independent proportions and return a *p* value that can be used to reject a null hypothesis (Acock, 2008). This technique is often used with ordinal and discrete or categorical data such as frequency counts in this study. The null hypothesis that the study attempted to or failed to reject was that there was no difference between the pre-ECF and post-ECF proportions of frequent or very frequent practices. The confidence level was set at 95%. As an example, with the confidence level of 95% (0.95), if 39 out of 82 teachers reported that they had taught vocabulary very frequently (*usually* and *always*) before the ECF, and 59 out of 82 teachers reported very frequent teaching of vocabulary during the post-ECF period, a two(-sample) proportion test in Minitab[®] returns a *p* value of 0.001. This value is smaller than α (i.e. $1 - 0.95 = 0.05$), therefore, it can be inferred that the difference between the pre-ECF and post-ECF proportions of very frequent (*usually* + *always*) teaching of vocabulary is statistically significant. The steps for

performing a two-proportion test in Minitab® 17.3.1 and a sample generated report can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Steps for Performing a 2-Proportion Test in Minitab®

Steps	Minitab® report			
> Stat Menu	Sample	X	N	Sample p
> Basic Statistics	1	39	82	0.475610
> 2 proportions	2	59	82	0.719512
> Drop down menu				
> Summarized data	Difference =		p (1) - p (2)	
> Options	Estimate for difference:		-0.243902	
> Confidence level = 95.0	95% CI for difference:		(-0.389293, -0.0985123)	
> Hypothesized difference = 0.0	Test for difference = 0 (vs ≠ 0):			
> Alternative hypothesis: "Difference ≠ hypothesized difference"	Z = -3.29			p value = 0.001
> Test method: "Estimate the proportions separately"				
> OK				
> Sample 1 number of events = 39				
> Sample 1 number of trials = 82				
> Sample 2 number of events = 59				
> Sample 2 number of trials = 82				
> OK.				

Qualitative analysis. Questions 18 to 20 of the questionnaires generated a considerable amount of responses which were analyzed in a qualitative fashion. As Burns (2010) points out, two types of coding can be performed on qualitative data – deductive and inductive. Inductive coding involves scanning the data over and over again until themes emerge. Burns, refers to this as an “emic approach” (p.107). The deductive approach on the other hand is guided by previously-made assumptions, for example, based on the initial research questions. In this study, the priority was given to deductive coding. The researcher looked for statements that could potentially describe how lesson planning practices had been transformed, how the nature of tasks in the classroom had changed, and whether students or even parents had become more aware of learning outcomes. Later, other themes emerged. These were challenges, solutions, opportunities and frustrations. This data was then crosschecked with the triangulated findings of closed-ended questions to support or questions the validity of the initial findings and / or ever to offer an explanation for the divergence.

Focus group discussions. Having transcribed the recordings of the focus group discussions. The researcher used the procedures outlined above to code and analyze the transcripts. The transcripts were initially analyzed to address the three a priori codes based on research questions of the study: lesson planning, action-

orientation and transparency. Then, additional themes were identified and analyzed as they emerged. The themes that emerged from focus group discussions overlapped with the ones that had been spotted in the data collected from the questionnaires. However, some additional themes emerged, too. For example, diversity of practices from one school to another. Eventually, the data collected from the three focus group discussions, conducted with teachers, teacher trainers and coordinators, were cross-checked, where possible, and unanticipated findings were also reported.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study examined 85 teachers', 31 school-based teacher trainers' and 3 MOE administrators' perceptions about lesson planning, teaching and assessment practices in 39 MAG schools prior to and after the implementation of the ECF. In the study, two questionnaires and three focus groups discussions were used to collect data in response to the following three questions: (a) How did the ECF, if at all, transform teachers' lesson planning practices? (b) To what extent, if at all, did it contribute to action-orientation? And (c) To what extent, if at all, did it enhance the transparency of teaching and assessment practices? Quantitative and qualitative survey results are presented in this chapter and where possible compared with qualitative data collected from focus group discussions. The participants' demographics have been summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Demographic Data Collected From the Participants

Participant	N	Gender ratio	Teaching experience (years)	Experience using the ECF (years)
Teachers	85	Male: 41 Female: 42 Skipped: 2	Average: 18 Range: 3 – 33	Average: 3.4 Range: 1-4
Teacher trainers	31	Male: 13 Female: 18	Average: 21.7 Range: 16 – 30	Average: 3.7 Range: 2-4
Administrators	3	Male: 2 Female: 1	Average: 24.6 Range: 16 – 30	4

Lesson Planning Practices

Three dimensions of lesson planning were investigated in this study: (a) what informed lesson objectives before and after the implementation of the ECF (b) how often curriculum strands, i.e. *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing* were addressed and (c) how often three linguistic components, *vocabulary, grammar* and *pronunciation* were covered. The results follow.

Setting objectives. Questions 6 and 12 of the teachers' questionnaire (Appendices C) examined their priorities when setting lesson objectives: textbooks, students' needs and interests or curriculum standards. Comparing frequent (*often, usually* and *always*) practices of pre- and post-ECF periods revealed that before the ECF had been implemented, most teachers' priority had been addressing textbooks. As can be seen in Table 6, a total of 87% of teachers had *often* (21%), *usually* (42%)

or *always* (23%) set objectives to address textbooks. However, after the ECF a total of 68% of teachers had *often* (20%), *usually* (22%) or *always* (26%) done so. On the other hand, an increase was reported in addressing students' needs and interests. While 65% of teachers had *often* (25%), *usually* (25%) or *always* (15%) addressed students' needs and interests before the ECF, this rate increased to 82% for the post-ECF period. The rates for addressing curriculum standards characterized a similar trend. 95% of teachers reported that they had *often* (20%), *usually* (22%) or *always* (53%) addressed curriculum standards in their lessons during the post-ECF period as opposed to 71% during the pre-ECF period. It is also worth mentioning that the identified changes were statistically significant. With a confidence level of 95%, the two-sample proportion test of *often*, *usually* and *always* for pre- and post-ECF periods returned values smaller than $\alpha = 0.05$, suggesting a significant difference between pre- and post-ECF proportions of frequent practices.

Table 6

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Own Priorities for Setting Lesson Objectives

Variable	Textbooks (N=81)		Students' needs and interests (N=79)		Curriculum standards (N=81)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	23%	26%	15%	34%	22%	53%
Usually	42%	22%	25%	29%	30%	22%
Often	21%	20%	25%	19%	19%	20%
Sometimes	12%	22%	32%	14%	23%	5%
Never	1%	10%	3%	4%	6%	0%
Median	Usually	Often	Often	Usually	Usually	Always
<i>p</i> value	0.004		0.016		0.000	

Note. A 2-proportion test in Minitab® computed *p* values by comparing pre- and post-ECF proportions of *often*, *usually* and *always*, where $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Teacher trainers reported similar trends, albeit with more intensity. As can be seen in Table 7, they stated that before the ECF 84% of teachers had *often* (16%), *usually* (36%) or *always* (32%) set objectives based on textbooks. This rate was smaller for the post-ECF period: 56%. The increase that teachers reported in how often they had addressed students' needs after the ECF was also reflected in teacher trainers' responses. While students' needs and interests had been addressed less often during the pre-ECF period, after the ECF this trend had changed. Teacher trainers reported that only 21% of teachers had *always* (0%), *usually* (8%) or *often* (13%) addressed students' needs before the ECF, but their rating of the same practice for the post-ECF period was 58%. Finally, teacher trainers' perception of lesson planning

according to learning outcomes reflected a more dramatic change. This can be seen in the median which leapt from “sometimes” for the pre-ECF period to “always” for the post-ECF period. The *p* values, too, characterized statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-ECF periods. They were all smaller than α (0.05).

Table 7

Teacher Trainers’ Ratings of Teachers’ Priorities for Setting Lesson Objectives

Variable	Textbooks (N=25)		Students’ needs and interests (N=24)		Curriculum standards (N=26)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	32%	20%	0%	8%	0%	65%
Usually	36%	28%	8%	33%	19%	23%
Often	16%	8%	13%	17%	15%	0%
Sometimes	8%	28%	58%	33%	15%	4%
Never	8%	16%	21%	8%	50%	8%
Median	Usually	Often	Sometimes	Often	Sometimes	Always
<i>p</i> value	0.023		0.004		0.000	

Note. A 2-proportion test in Minitab® computed *p* values by comparing pre- and post-ECF proportions of *often*, *usually* and *always*, where $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Responses collected from the third group of the participants, the administrators, largely confirmed the trends identified in the responses of the other two groups – teachers and teacher trainers. All the three administrators reported that after the ECF, curriculum standards and students’ needs and interests had been addressed more often in lesson plans, especially the former. However, a decrease in using textbooks for setting lesson objectives was not unanimously agreed upon. Two of the administrators reported a decrease in teachers’ reliance on textbooks for this purpose, whereas the third one reported an increase. The administrators’ responses can be found in Table 8.

Table 8

Administrators’ Ratings of Teachers’ Priorities for Setting Lesson Objectives

Variable	Textbooks		Students’ needs and interests		Curriculum standards	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	0	0	0	0	0	1
Usually	0	1	0	0	0	1
Often	2	0	0	1	0	1
Sometimes	1	1	1	2	1	0
Never	0	1	2	0	2	0

Note. N = 3.

When individual participant’s responses were examined one by one, similar findings emerged. Table 9 presents a summary of how many teachers, teacher trainers

and administrators reported a rise, no change (N/C) or a fall in setting objectives based on textbooks, students' needs and interests and curriculum standards. The participants who reported (a) a fall in using textbooks, (b) a rise in addressing students' needs and interests and (c) an increase in focusing on curriculum standards outnumbered the other two groups who reported either no change or the opposite trends.

Table 9

Changes in Priorities for Lesson Objectives According to All the Participants

	Textbooks				Students' needs and interests				Curriculum standards			
	Rise	N/C	Fall	N	Rise	N/C	Fall	N	Rise	N/C	Fall	N
Ts	27%	30%	43%	81	51%	32%	18%	79	54%	35%	11%	81
TTs	32%	8%	60%	25	63%	21%	17%	24	88%	4%	8%	26
ADs	1	0	2	3	3	0	0	3	3	0	0	3

Note. N/C = No change, Ts = Teachers, TTs = Teacher trainers, ADs= Administrators

It is not difficult to notice the disagreements that lurked beneath the surface of the general trends described above. Approximately 30% of the participants reported an increase in textbook-based objectives. 17-18% of teachers and teacher trainers observed a drop in addressing students' needs and interests and 8-11% of both groups stated that they had used curriculum standards less often when setting lesson objectives. Some disagreements were also observed during focus group discussions. A Cycle 3 male teacher trainer stated that in one of his schools, teachers had never planned lessons before the ECF and that when the ECF was implemented, they still depended on teacher trainers to plan lessons *for* them. The two female teacher trainers, however, described a different scenario. One described her teachers as "creative" and "open to new ideas." Likewise, the other pointed out that the ECF was a flexible framework which had liberated teachers. It also came to light that students in Cycle 3 always had a core textbook to cover. The male teacher trainer commented, "Cycle 3 never left the textbooks even though we used top standards-based lessons. There was always a tension because the parents expected their children to ... [cover the book] page by page". Similarly, during another focus group discussion in a Cycle 2 Boys' School, it became evident that some administrators' initial plan to completely abandon core textbooks had caused a lot of controversy and dissatisfaction. One teacher said, "They (the parents) didn't understand why we were doing this. They needed some books ... and that was a big issue for us." To solve such problems, this

teacher added “... later administrators reintroduced books and we had a curriculum to, to go with it.”

No core textbooks in Cycle 2 just after implementing the ECF seemed to have taken its toll on some teacher trainers’ time as well. The female teacher trainer commented, “We spent lots of time scanning ... different resources to locate what is appropriate for each standard.” MOE administrators explained that they had used textbooks even before the ECF, but that they had been selective in what to teach. Comments relevant to using textbooks that were captured during the three focus group discussions have been summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

Focus Group Members’ Comments About Textbooks and/or Other Instructional Materials

Group	Comments
Ts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ... when we go back to the students and the mentality of the parents, those students used to study textbooks ... ▪ They didn’t understand why we were doing this. They needed some books. They needed some, er ..., something to rely on and that was a big issue for us. ▪ I think later administrators reintroduced books, and we had a curriculum to, to go with it.
TTs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cycle 3 never left the textbook even though we used top standards-based lessons. ▪ But the situation was different in my school. My teachers were very creative. We ... used different resources, different materials and ... ▪ We spent lots of time scanning ... different resources to locate what is appropriate for each standard.
ADs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ [Before the ECF] there was no training received by teachers ... to make this shift from a curriculum, which is limited to textbook, to an open curriculum, driven by standards ... No training, real training happened. That’s why as [deleted name] said, the real tangible things we can observe was after adopting the ECF because a lot of training was delivered. ▪ In Cycle 3, we were driven <i>thematically</i> by the textbooks. It doesn’t mean we used only textbooks.

Note. Ts = Teachers, TTs = Teacher trainers, ADs = Administrators

Teachers’ and teacher trainers’ responses to open-ended survey questions led to the following nine categories of responses pertinent to lesson planning practices. According to these two groups, using the ECF had (a) raised teachers’ awareness of their aims and practices, (b) made lesson plans more effective, (c) reinforced using a variety of resources to cater to students’ learning styles, (d) led to the alignment of lesson objectives with curriculum standards, (e) made lesson plans more relevant to students’ levels, needs and interests, (f) made lessons more goal-oriented, (g) further familiarized teachers with the curriculum framework, (h) enabled teachers to analyze standards and tasks in terms of their different components: knowledge,

comprehension, performance and product and (i) facilitated differentiation of instruction. The responses have been summarized in Table 11.

Table 11

Teachers' and Teacher Trainers' Comments Concerning Lesson Planning Practices

- T-10: There were so many ... resources that teachers could use according to each standard.
- T-84: I sometimes set some goals from my own according to ... points that needed reinforcement.
- T-21: I started to plan my lessons according to my students' needs not their textbooks.
- T-32: It helped me in developing a plan that is designed to meet the needs of my students.
- T-35: ... planned objectives caring about differentiation and students learning styles which help in planning units and lessons.
- T-36: Taking students need into account ...
- T-39: The lesson plans have been modified based on the real level of students.
- T-44: It helped me a lot in setting objectives, lesson planning, ...
- T-46: It helps me ... to set my objectives according to students' needs and how to introduce my lesson in creative way.
- T-55: I paid more attention to my students' needs.
- T-60: ... I could differentiate tasks easily because I knew what different students required.
- T-61: (1) ... to plan my lesson based on the standards. (2). New way in planning based not only on the curriculum but on students' needs.
- T-71: Focus on the learning outcomes.
- T-73: It assisted me and directed me into the correct planning organizing the objectives
- T-74: Yes, definitely. It drew the track for me on which I could go with my students to reach the learning goals.
- T-79: I have become more specific regarding the expected outcomes from my students ...
- T-84: It helped me plan more accurately ...
- TT-2: Raised awareness of lesson outcomes / aims ...
- TT-4: They (teachers) planned more effectively.
- TT-6: [allowed] teachers to teach from an array of sources to address different learning styles and needs.
- TT-9: ... started to work harder towards the attainment of the set standards and outcomes.
- TT-11: Teaching according to students' academic level.
- TT-12: ... planning their lessons effectively.
- TT-13: ... started with the outcomes in mind, and this resulted in well- developed plans.
- TT-14: Teachers were forced to consider the level and interest of the students.
- TT-15: Teachers became aware of the importance of aligning their lesson objectives and learning outcome with the standards using [a] backward planning design.
- TT-19: ECF made teachers more aware of differentiated learning.
- TT-20: After ECF teachers ... focused on clearly set learning outcomes.
- TT-25: Teachers were able to identify the teaching and learning components of a standard ...

Note. T = Teacher, TT = Teacher trainer

Language-related tasks. Questions 7 and 13 of the questionnaires also examined whether pre- and post-ECF teaching of lexical, syntactical, morphological and phonological dimensions of language as system were different. MOE teachers typically refer to lexis as *vocabulary*, syntax and morphology as *grammar* and phonology as *pronunciation*. They rated how often they had included tasks to address these three components prior to and after the implementation of the ECF. The results, displayed in Table 12, show an increase in the frequency of vocabulary and pronunciation tasks. The teachers who taught vocabulary frequently (*often, usually and always*) after the ECF comprised 96% of the group, whereas before the ECF they accounted for 74% of it. Similarly, 59% of the teachers reported that they had addressed pronunciation frequently before the ECF as opposed to 83% after the ECF. The differences in teaching grammar were not as significant, however. 79% of teachers reported frequent (*often, usually and always*) teaching of grammar prior to the ECF implementation as opposed to 88% after it. The uncertainty about the significance of changes in teaching grammar was also observed when a *p* value of 0.095 was computed in Minitab[®]. The difference between pre-ECF and post-ECF proportions of frequent (*often, usually and always*) teaching of grammar was statistically insignificant. Overall, the pre-ECF frequency of vocabulary and grammar tasks seem acceptable, but pronunciation seems to have needed further practice with only 58% of teachers teaching it frequently enough before the ECF – a weakness that had been accommodated after the ECF.

Table 12

Teachers' Ratings of Task Frequencies: Vocabulary, Grammar and Pronunciation

Variable	Vocabulary		Grammar		Pronunciation	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	12%	27%	17%	17%	5%	20%
Usually	36%	45%	30%	43%	19%	40%
Often	26%	24%	32%	29%	35%	23%
Sometimes	26%	4%	20%	12%	35%	15%
Never	0%	0%	1%	0%	7%	1%
Median	Often	Usually	Often	Usually	Often	Usually
<i>p</i> value	0.000		0.095		0.000	

Notes. N = 84. A 2-proportion test in Minitab[®] computed *p* values by comparing pre- and post-ECF proportions of *often, usually and always*, where *p*<0.05 was considered statistically significant. Changes in teaching grammar were not statistically significant (0.095>0.05).

Teacher trainers, who also commented on the frequency of pre- and post-ECF vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation tasks, reported more frequent teaching of all

the three components. The data collected from this group, summarized in Table 13, illustrates that an overwhelming majority of teacher trainers believed that vocabulary (100%), grammar (100%) and pronunciation (97%) had been taught frequently (*often*, *usually* and *always*) after the ECF implementation. The frequent teaching rates of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation for the pre-ECF stage were 61%, 71% and 32% respectively. It can be noticed, however, that teachers and teacher trainers did not fully agree about the frequency of grammar tasks. While the former group was indecisive, the latter felt grammar had been taught more. This is also evident in the *p* values. A very strong statistical significance can be inferred from the *p* values, which are all smaller than 0.001.

Table 13

Teacher Trainers' Ratings of Task Frequencies: Vocabulary, Grammar and Pronunciation

Variable	Vocabulary		Grammar		Pronunciation	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	3%	58%	10%	32%	0%	29%
Usually	29%	29%	29%	42%	10%	29%
Often	29%	13%	32%	26%	23%	39%
Sometimes	39%	0%	29%	0%	35%	3%
Never	0%	0%	0%	0%	32%	0%
Median	Often	Always	Often	Usually	Sometimes	Usually
<i>p</i> value	0.000		0.000		0.000	

Notes. N = 31. A 2-proportion test in Minitab® computed *p* values by comparing pre- and post-ECF proportions of *often*, *usually* and *always*, where $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

The third group of participants who rated the frequency of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation tasks, as per their own perceptions, were MOE administrators. As can be seen in Table 14, one administrator reported a moderate increase in the frequency of vocabulary tasks, while the other reported no change. Conversely, while one administrator reported no change in grammar, the other reported a decrease. Both administrators, however, agreed that pronunciation tasks had been taught more often after the ECF had been implemented.

Table 14

Administrators' Ratings of Task Frequencies: Vocabulary, Grammar and Pronunciation

Component	Ratings	
	Before	After
Vocabulary	Often (x1), Usually (x1)	Usually (x2)
Grammar	Usually (x2)	Often (x1), Usually (x1)
Pronunciation	Sometimes (x2)	Often (x1), Usually (x1)

Note. N = 2.

Curriculum strands. The other dimension of lesson planning and teaching that this study sought to investigate was the frequency of strand-related tasks: *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing*. In response to questions 7 and 13 of the questionnaire, the teachers reported how often they had included tasks pertinent to the four strands before and after the implementation of the ECF. Overall, considerable increases were observed in teaching *listening* and *speaking* and moderate increases in teaching *reading* and *writing*. As can be seen in Table 15, before the ECF, only 29% of teachers had taught *listening* very frequently (23% *usually* and 6% *always*). Contrariwise, after the ECF, 76% of them taught listening very frequently (39% *usually* and 37% *always*). Similarly, very frequent teaching of *speaking* was reported by 28% of teachers before the ECF as opposed to 74% after the ECF. *Reading* and *writing* improved too, albeit not as considerably as the other two strands. While 47% of teachers reported that they had taught reading very frequently (*usually* and *always*) before the ECF, the post-ECF rate for very frequent teaching of reading stood at 82%. Likewise, 37% of teachers had taught *writing* very frequently before the ECF as opposed to 75% after the ECF. Two-sample proportion tests that compared pre- and post-ECF proportions of very frequent (*usually* and *always*) practices all resulted in *p* values smaller than 0.001, hence statistically significant differences between pre- and post-ECF conditions.

Table 15

Teachers' Ratings of Task Frequencies: Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing

Variable	Listening (N=84)		Reading (N=84)		Speaking (N=82)		Writing (N=84)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	6%	37%	17%	43%	12%	40%	13%	31%
Usually	23%	39%	30%	39%	16%	34%	24%	44%
Often	30%	20%	26%	14%	24%	21%	29%	15%
Sometimes	40%	4%	27%	4%	40%	5%	35%	10%
Never	1%	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%
Median	Often	Usually	Often	Usually	Often	Usually	Often	Usually
<i>p</i> value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note. A 2-proportion test in Minitab® computed *p* values by comparing pre- and post-ECF proportions of *usually* and *always*, where $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Another method to examine changes in how frequently the four strands had been taught before and after the ECF was inspecting teachers' pre- and post-ECF records one by one and determining if individual teachers had taught each strand more or less often after the ECF. This method also pointed to similar findings. The teachers who reported more frequent teaching of *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing* comprised 76%, 64%, 70% and 62% of the entire group respectively. Contrariwise,

13%, 21%, 20% and 24% of teachers reported a regression in the frequency of their *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing* tasks respectively.

Teacher trainers' responses to questions 7 and 14 of their questionnaire, generated relatively similar results. The reported frequencies, presented in Table 16, show that all the four strands, *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing*, had been taught more often after the ECF had been implemented. While only 9%, 22%, 6% and 21% of teacher trainers reported very frequent (*usually* and *always*) teaching of *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing* for the pre-ECF period, the post-ECF statistics of teaching the same strands stood at 94%, 93%, 87% and 90% respectively. Only 1 (3%) teacher trainer, believed that writing still needed to have been taught more often as it had been taught only *sometimes* after the ECF was implemented.

Visible increases can also be spotted in pre- and post-ECF medians. *Listening, speaking* and *writing* medians had increased three levels from *sometimes* to *always* after the ECF had been implemented. The median of *reading* had increased two levels from *often* to *always*. Furthermore, based on the *p* values, which are all smaller than 0.05, it can be inferred that the post-ECF proportions of *usually* and *always* were significantly larger than pre-ECF proportions of the same.

Table 16

Teacher Trainers' Ratings of Task Frequencies: Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing

Variable	Listening (N=31)		Reading (N=31)		Speaking (N=31)		Writing (N=29)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	3%	68%	6%	74%	3%	58%	7%	62%
Usually	6%	26%	16%	19%	3%	29%	14%	28%
Often	29%	6%	32%	6%	16%	13%	24%	7%
Sometimes	55%	0%	42%	0%	68%	0%	55%	3%
Never	6%	0%	3%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Median	Sometimes	Always	Often	Always	Sometimes	Always	Sometimes	Always
<i>p</i> value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note. A 2-proportion test in Minitab® computed *p* values by comparing pre- and post-ECF proportions of *usually* and *always*, where $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

The administrators generally agreed with the teachers and teacher trainers in that after the implementation of the ECF the four strands, *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing* had been covered more often. The responses provided by two of the three administrators have been displayed in Table 17. The third administrator had skipped post-ECF questions discussed here, therefore, his/her pre-ECF responses were not included in the table. As can be seen in Table 17, according to the administrators, all the four strands had been taught either *sometimes* or *often* before the ECF had been

implemented. On the other hand, after the ECF, the frequency of *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing* tasks were rated as *usually* or *always*.

Table 17

Administrators' Ratings of Task Frequencies: Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing

Component	Rating	
	Before	After
Listening	Sometimes (x1), Often (x1)	Usually (x1), Always (x1)
Reading	Sometimes (x1), Often (x1)	Usually (x1), Always (x1)
Speaking	Sometimes (x1), Often (x1)	Usually (x1), Always (x1)
Writing	Sometimes (x1), Often (x1)	Always (x2)

Note. N = 2.

The qualitative data collected from focus group discussions and open-ended survey questions, yielded results in favor of a change in teaching the ECF strands: *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing*. The comments collected from the surveys indicate that teachers were aware of the emphasis that the ECF had laid on language skills. Some respondents pointed out that grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and content knowledge had been incorporated into the four strands instead of being taught in isolation. One participant noted that grammar had been treated as peripheral. The most relevant comments concerning the linguistic components of the ECF and the four curriculum strands can be found in Table 18.

Table 18

Comments Concerning Language-Related and Strand-Related Tasks

<i>Surveys</i>
<p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ECF brought a lot of changes in dealing with the four main skills and other subskills. ▪ Of course, ECF develops students' speaking and writing. ▪ I learned a variety of strategies to teach writing, reading and speaking. ▪ I was able to develop their (students') pronunciation and reading. <p>Teacher trainers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes. Teachers taught skills rather than content. ▪ ... [before the ECF] ... vocabulary was taught out of context ...
<i>Focus Group Discussions</i>
<p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I think before using the CEFR, teachers focused only on ... vocab and the grammar ... but when we used the CEFR, ... [the] teacher changed his mind using standards, focused on students, using [the] communicative approach - four skills ... ▪ When the ECF was introduced, students practiced skills, especially productive skills. ▪ They practiced every time, skills, which is speaking, writing ... ▪ ... with the ECF we were skill-focused, not content focused. ▪ ... [ECF] depends on teaching the four skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking. <p>Teacher trainers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The ECF ... wasn't so precise in terms of, you know, points of grammar, but [it was] in terms of, you know, the four English skills and how they can perform in that. Grammar was sort of baked in, I guess.

Action-Orientation

The second research question of this study was concerned with action-orientation. In order to examine to what extent teaching practices prior to and post the

implementation of the ECF might have contributed to action-orientation, questions 8 and 14 of the questionnaires (Appendices C and D) asked the participants to rate the frequency of five pre- and post-ECF categories of tasks that characterize some dimensions of action orientation: (a) oral interaction with classmates, (b) group discussions, (c) collaborative project work, (d) presentations and (e) storytelling. By and large, all the three groups of participants reported increases in the frequency of all the task types. The reported changes between pre-ECF and post-ECF data provided by teachers ranged from moderate to strong as described below.

Teachers' perceptions about the pre-ECF period was marked by a modest number of communicative, collaborative, interactive and task-based activities. A close look at teachers' responses to questions 8 and 14 of the questionnaire, summarized in Table 19, makes it clear that before the ECF a sizeable proportion of teachers either *never* or only *sometimes* included tasks that were conducive to action-orientation. The percentage of teachers who had *often*, *usually* or *always* promoted action-oriented tasks such as oral interaction with peers (42%), group discussions (52%), collaborative projects (36%), presentations (30%) and storytelling (27%) were not frequent enough. However, according to teachers, during the post-ECF stage, such tasks had been incorporated into lessons more often. Teacher reported more frequent oral interaction (94%), discussions (90%), collaborative projects (93%), student presentations (87%) and storytelling (77%). The improvement was also evident in post-ECF medians, which increased by one to two levels. The *p* values for all the categories were statistically significant at 0.000.

Table 19

Teachers' Ratings of Action-Oriented Tasks

Variable	Oral interaction with peers (N=83)		Group discussions (N=83)		Collaborative project work (N=81)		Presentations (N=83)		Storytelling (N=83)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	7%	41%	13%	49%	9%	38%	5%	36%	6%	25%
Usually	12%	41%	10%	24%	12%	36%	12%	28%	8%	34%
Often	23%	12%	29%	17%	15%	19%	13%	23%	13%	18%
Sometimes	53%	6%	37%	10%	40%	7%	49%	13%	51%	22%
Never	5%	0%	11%	0%	25%	0%	20%	0%	22%	1%
Median	S	U	O	U	S	U	S	U	S	U
<i>p</i> value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Notes. S = Sometimes, O = Often, U = Usually. A 2-proportion test in Minitab[®] computed *p* values by comparing pre- and post-ECF proportions of *often*, *usually* and *always*, where *p*<0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Teacher trainers' ratings of the tasks that were deemed conducive to action-orientation yielded similar overall results but at higher rates. As displayed in Table 20, 87-97% of the respondents, from among 30 teacher trainers, rated post-ECF frequency of the selected tasks as frequent (*often, usually* and *always*). However, they rated pre-ECF cumulative frequencies of *never* and *sometimes* somehow differently from the teachers. A larger proportion of teacher trainers (80-90%) reported that before the ECF teachers had either never or only sometimes included tasks conducive to action-orientation. While the post-ECF stage medians of teachers' data were "usually". The same measure of central tendency in teacher trainers' data was "always". As can be expected, the *p* values computed in Minitab® again marked statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-ECF action-oriented practices.

Table 20

Teacher Trainers' Ratings of Action-Oriented Tasks

Variable	Oral interaction with peers		Group discussions		Collaborative project work		Presentations		Storytelling	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	3%	63%	7%	57%	3%	40%	3%	33%	3%	20%
Usually	3%	23%	0%	33%	3%	33%	7%	40%	3%	37%
Often	7%	10%	3%	3%	10%	23%	10%	20%	7%	30%
Sometimes	73%	3%	67%	3%	57%	0%	50%	7%	43%	7%
Never	13%	0%	23%	3%	27%	3%	30%	0%	43%	7%
Median	S	A	S	A	S	A	S	A	S	A
<i>p</i> value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Notes. N = 30, S = Sometimes, A = Always.

A 2-proportion test in Minitab® computed *p* values by comparing pre- and post-ECF proportions of often, usually and always, where $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Administrators' responses to questions 8 and 14 of the questionnaires generally confirmed the findings of the data collected from the first two groups of the participants. As can be seen in Table 21, for the majority of post-ECF action-oriented tasks, the administrators selected *often, usually* and *always*. The opposite can be said about the pre-ECF period. The only exception was one administrator's rating of group discussions. This participant reported that prior to the ECF, students had *usually* been engaged in group discussions, but after the ECF they had done so only *sometimes*. However, overall, the administrators reported more frequent inclusion of action-oriented tasks for the post-ECF period.

Table 21

Administrators' Ratings of Action-Oriented Tasks

Variable	Oral interaction with peers		Group discussions		Collaborative project work		Presentations		Storytelling	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Usually	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Often	2	2	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1
Sometimes	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	2
Never	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	0

Note. N = 3.

An enhanced focus on communication was also reported by teachers and teacher trainers in focus groups discussions and open-ended survey questions. During the focus group discussion with teachers, when teachers were asked “Did you notice anything that the ECF emphasized students had to learn?”, one teacher commented, “I think basic communicative skills because they (students) were not able to say a word in speaking in a situation, but they learned to say something in the ..., you know, when they are in the airport, in the restaurant or so ...” Another teacher said, “When we used the CEFR, ... the teacher changed his mind, using standards, focused on student, using the communicative approach.” Likewise, in another focus group discussion, one teacher trainer expressed her satisfaction with the approach adopted. Another had observed that there had been “... more of a communicative focus” and that “[teachers] began to see that students responded better to doing things rather than just sitting and listening, [which] ... changed ... their classroom practices, their collaborative and cooperative setups, where there is a communicative focus rather than you all just sit and listen.” Similarly, in response to question 19 of the survey, a teacher commented, “The class procedures have become more communicative as well. The aims were to teach *English* not *about* English.” Another teacher noted, “I focused more on communicative tasks, collaborative projects and oral interaction.” Some teacher trainers also observed that even teachers themselves had benefited from the action-oriented approach. One pointed out that the “teachers were enjoying this communicative approach and the students' engagement.”

Transparency

The third and final concern of this thesis research was examining whether the ECF enhanced the transparency of teaching and assessment practices and, if so, to

what extent. Questions 9, 10, 11, 15, 16 and 17 of the questionnaires (Appendices C and D) collected data relevant to three aspects of transparency in teaching and assessment practices: (a) students' familiarity with the standards or can-do statements, (b) the extent to which assessments were aligned with the learning outcomes and (c) whether students kept track of their own learning using curriculum standards. According to all the three groups of participants, transparency of teaching and assessment practices during the post-ECF period was more enhanced than it had been during the pre-ECF stage.

In response to questions 9 and 15 of the questionnaire, which examined how familiar students had been with the can-do statements, the majority of the teachers, teacher trainers and administrators reported that before the ECF, students had either not been familiar with can-do statements, or that their familiarity had been very limited. 81% of teachers, 97% of teacher trainers and both administrators reported that before the ECF, students had been either *not familiar* or *rather familiar* with can-do statements. Conversely, after the ECF had been introduced, according to the participants, students' familiarity with the can-do statements had been boosted significantly. One administrator's response to question 11 was not included as he had skipped question 17. The data collected about this dimension of transparency has been summarized in Table 22.

Table 22

Students' Familiarity With the ECF Standards (Learning Outcomes)

Variable	Teachers (N=85)		Teacher Trainers (N=31)		Administrators (N=2)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Very well familiar	0%	13%	0%	0%	0	0
Well familiar	1%	35%	0%	19%	0	0
Familiar	18%	35%	3%	61%	0	1
Rather familiar	35%	15%	0%	10%	0	1
Not familiar	46%	1%	97%	10%	2	0
Median	RF	F	NF	F		

Note. RF = Rather familiar, F = Familiar and NF = Not familiar

The other dimension of transparency was the alignment of assessment practices with can-do statements. Questions 10 and 16 of the questionnaires asked the participants to comment on how frequently students had been assessed according to standards. All the three groups of the participants unanimously agreed that post-ECF assessments had been more frequently aligned with standards than pre-ECF ones. While 76% of teachers, 87% of teacher trainers and both administrators believed that

pre-ECF assessments had either *never* or only *sometimes* matched standards, 98% of teachers, 97% of teacher trainers and both administrators reported that post-ECF assessments had been *often*, *usually* or *always* based on standards. A jump from *sometimes* to *always* and *never* to *always* in teachers' and teacher trainers' medians, respectively, also indicates that both groups have reported considerably higher rates of standards-based assessment for the post-ECF period.

Table 23

Alignment of Assessments With the ECF Standards (Learning Outcomes)

Variable	Teachers (N=84)		Teacher Trainers (N=31)		Administrators (N=2)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Always	2%	54%	0%	87%	0	0
Usually	6%	29%	6%	10%	0	1
Often	15%	15%	6%	0%	0	1
Sometimes	33%	2%	16%	3%	2	0
Never	43%	0%	71%	0%	0	0
Median	Sometimes	Always	Never	Always		

A third indicator of transparency, which is also conducive to action-orientation, is students' involvement in self-assessment tasks. As students collect and present evidence to demonstrate their different abilities that are mostly linked to can-do statements, they become more familiar with what their strengths and weaknesses are. One strategy to operationalize this is using language portfolios, which was addressed by questions 11 and 17 of the questionnaires. When teachers', teacher trainers' and administrators' responses to these two questions were examined, a considerable increase in students' keeping track of their own learning was revealed. While 63% of teachers and 83% of teacher trainers reported that students had not kept track of their own learning before the ECF, their perceptions of the post-ECF period was marked by the opposite trend. 94% of teachers and 97% of teacher trainers stated that after the ECF, students *had* kept track of their own learning, for example, by using portfolios. The administrators' views about the post-ECF period were similar to those of the other two groups. All the three administrators agreed that students had used portfolios to keep track of their own learning during the post-ECF period. However, while one administrator agreed with teachers and teacher trainers that students had not kept track of their own learning before the ECF, the other two thought they had.

The qualitative data collected from the questionnaires' open-ended questions and the coded transcripts of the focus groups discussions shed more light on the level of transparency achieved and the challenges involved. Broadly speaking, the participants' comments revealed that (a) students became more aware of what they were supposed to learn; (b) the alignment of assessments with the learning outcomes or can-do statements reached an acceptable level; and (c) students' use of portfolios helped systematize their keeping track of their achievements and next steps. The challenges that were reported pointed to a strong need for disambiguating the can-do statements, especially during the early stages of the implementation, and resolving institutional constraints for designing relevant assessments.

To make teaching and learning practices more transparent teachers shared some of the strategies that they had employed to raise students' awareness of the learning outcomes. One teacher pointed out that the idea of raising students' awareness of what they were learning had been practiced since 2006 when students had their own files for keeping track of their achievements. Another teacher explained that students had used their notebooks to keep track of what they were learning. These were the only two comments about the pre-ECF period. After the ECF, as one teacher points out, using portfolios became more consistent, "a habitual action". Another teacher commented, however, that not all students had engaged in completing portfolios and one teacher was concerned about the quality and tidiness of the portfolios. Another teacher revealed a different strategy – "showing the standards on the wall as a wall chart". When asked if parents had benefited from such initiatives, one teacher noted that only a few had.

Teacher trainers' and administrators' comments were also generally positive. One trainer said that she had written learning outcomes on the board and encouraged teachers and students to reflect on the extent to which they had achieved them by the end of the lesson. This had raised students' awareness of their progress, she added. As one administrator pointed out "[the] portfolios were the main key document, which helped the learners and their parents" keep track of what teachers taught. After using the portfolios, they had become aware of their abilities, he added. One of the teacher trainers was not convinced that parents had benefited from an enhanced awareness about the learning outcomes. He said, "In boys' schools, parents ... cared about the marks [their children had] got, not the learning outcomes. So, it wasn't

about what can they do or how are they developing. It was ‘Why do they have this mark?’” Another teacher trainer, on the other hand, explained that some parents had shown “interest in reading [the] letters” she had sent them at the beginning of each trimester informing them about what students were learning. Finally, one teacher trainer said that the “I can” statements in language portfolios had improved learner autonomy, “so they were more in charge of their own learning.”

Comments concerning assessment practices differed depending on the Cycle the participants worked in. Cycle 2 schools had been given more freedom in designing and using their own tests. This, according to administrators and teacher trainers, had paved the way for aligning assessment practices and materials with the ECF standards. Cycle 3, however, had not always had this privilege. As one administrator recalled, “the assessment specifications were imposed ... by the assessment department”. When Cycle 3 had been given more freedom, they had been able to develop differentiated assessment tasks in mixed-ability classes. However, the one-size-fits-all assessment scheme of the MOE did not accommodate such innovative practices.

A major stumbling block to making practices transparent, according to the participants, had been the ambiguity of can-do statements. This was brought up in all the three focus group discussions. One teacher commented that even administrators had not fully understood the statements. Another teacher added that it took two years until they had a clear idea as to what the learning outcomes meant, “At the beginning ... it was ambiguous, but after two years, and like this, it was clear.” Even teacher trainers had suffered. One teacher trainer noted, “It took us a while to understand ... it.” Another added, “[It] took me a lot of time, hours and hours at the beginning, just to understand how to match the resources ... with the standards.” One administrator pointed out that the learning outcomes were clarified when they were deconstructed and further broken down so that they could be better used in lesson plans. Further comments relevant to transparency can be found in Appendix G.

A Posteriori Findings

Training and professional development. The importance of professional development was a recurring theme in the qualitative data collected from questionnaires and focus groups discussions. One administrator, in particular, explained that the ECF was a “framework that encompassed” all the changes, but the

changes should not be attributed to it. He attributed the changes to professional development and “training teachers on cutting-edge pedagogy”, instead. Another administrator, on the other hand, pointed out that some changes were the impact of the ECF, for example, students’ basic interpersonal communicative skills. He said, “I agree that the ECF impacted the performance of the students, and, to some extent, it improved their speaking skill. This was observed not only by us, as you know, the people in charge of the program, but also from the feedback that we got from the schools.” Likewise, the teacher trainers believed that professional development had played an important role throughout the implementation stage. “I remember that we had to prepare a lot of training for the teachers to introduce the idea to them and the way to implement [it] in the classroom” one teacher trainer said. Teachers, too, noted that professional development had helped them better understand what learning outcomes meant.

The training was not limited to teachers only. One of the teacher trainers recalled, “We had a lot of training ourselves.” Likewise, the administrators recounted on a three-week training course that they, along with some teacher trainers and teachers, had completed with Professor O’Sullivan to improve their knowledge and skills in test item writing. In addition to periodic training sessions, one administrator pointed out that school-based teacher trainers “who were doing the professional development on a daily basis ... actually made the products.”

One framework, multiple implementations. An interesting yet not totally puzzling finding was that one framework had led to somehow different degrees or forms of implementation. Firstly, the two cycles had faced different constraints. Cycle 3 had needed to take cognizance of the MOE assessment specifications while addressing the ECF standards. Preparing students for an exit exam whose content and measurement criteria did not completely reflect what students were learning in Cycle 3 MAG schools had been a challenge for teachers, teacher trainers and administrators. Although they had managed to identify overlaps between the ECF standards and the MOE test specifications, the differences between the two had interfered with smooth planning, teaching and assessment practices. One teacher trainer explained that in the final year of MAG, continuous assessments that had been aligned with the ECF for three years “were dropped in favor of the old versions of zone-based assessments.”

Cycle 2 had faced a different issue. They had been allowed to design their own assessments more flexibly, but they had struggled with the shortage of human resources. While each Cycle 3 school had benefitted from the services of two teacher trainers, in Cycle 2, on average, there had been one teacher trainer per school. One Cycle 2 school had not had a teacher trainer for three years and two others had relied on one trainer only.

The second cause for various implementations had been school-level factors. One factor had been school-level priorities. In Grade 12, for example, the focus had been preparing students for the *Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA)* as students' performance in this test would impact their eligibility for direct entry into tertiary education (MOE-Higher Education Affairs, 2013). Another factor had been stakeholders' amenability that varied from school to school. One administrator, for example, pointed out that school-level teacher trainers' "different attitudes, different abilities [and] different competencies" had led to various degrees and forms of implementations. Another administrator concurred when he/she attributed the degree of the implementation to the extent to which teacher trainers had understood the "spirit" of the framework. Teacher trainers, similarly, attributed the variability to the extent to which teachers responded to change, reform and creativity. Teachers' priorities, as teacher trainers explained, were different from school to school. While some had appreciated the flexibility that the ECF had offered, others had asked for ready-made materials and lesson plans, and still others simply had wanted to do what they had been used to.

Resources. Teachers, teacher trainers and administrators cast light on yet one final challenge – instructional materials. The can-do statements would not have meant much without instructional materials. In the first year of the ECF implementation, Cycle 2 had attempted to design instructional materials in-house or use a variety of teaching materials from different sources. Students in this Cycle, had not had textbooks for one year; they had had files with worksheets and printed materials. Two teacher trainers complained that having to design and look for materials on a daily basis had been very time consuming. One teacher trainer said, "We spent lots of time ... locating what was appropriate for each standard in order to be able to fulfill it." When they were asked how long it had taken them to create their pool of resources, they said "in the third year." Another teacher trainer said that teachers "were

intimidated by the effort of having to search for [resources]. We provided them with an online library ... so, that freed them up.” Even when students did have textbooks some problems still persisted. The books needed to be constantly supplemented to address curriculum learning outcomes adequately.

Sustainability. In two of the three focus group discussions, a few points were made about ongoing changes in the system and the need for more sustainable support. Teachers wondered why the ECF had been put aside and a new framework, *English as an International Language (EIL)*, had replaced it. They felt the ECF levels better matched student abilities and that the ECF could have been built on instead of replaced. One teacher trainer agreed with the teachers when he said, “I thought that the ECF was effective. I don’t know why it was replaced with the EIL. I think it could have been used even today.” The other recommendation was the sustainability of support offered by the MOE. Teachers felt that the MOE initially had supported them when they had needed resources and professional development, but later they had reduced the support.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This study examined the perceptions of 85 teachers, 31 teacher trainers and 3 MOE administrators, who used the ECF, a CEFR-based curriculum framework, for approximately four years in 39 MAG schools. It sought to answer three main questions: (a) How, if at all, did the ECF transform teachers' lesson planning practices? (b) To what extent, if at all, did the ECF contribute to action-orientation? And (c) To what extent, if at all, did the ECF enhance the transparency of teaching and assessment practices? The study relied on primary data, which were collected using two semi-structured questionnaires and three focus group discussions with teachers, teacher trainers and administrators. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data, the findings of which were presented in Chapter 4, points pertinent to the three research questions of this study are discussed below. The points discussed do not proclaim causality, nor do they make global generalizations. Nevertheless, practitioners and policy makers may take into account some of the challenges and opportunities that are discussed if they are planning to engage in a similar endeavor.

Lesson Planning

Setting objectives. Using a framework that demanded explicit awareness of learning outcomes for lesson planning posed a few challenges to teachers, teacher trainers and administrators as soon as the ECF was implemented. Frustrations were observed and a great deal of time was needed to plan lessons that addressed students' needs and interests within a standards-based framework that expected teachers to go beyond the textbook. The broad or ambiguous nature of some can-do statements and lack of resources that had already been mapped onto the framework stood out as the major initial challenges. MAG schools, however, recovered from the setback by taking a few measures. They mapped a range of different instructional materials onto the framework, and created an online platform which was used for lesson planning purposes. This measure saved teachers and teacher trainers' time considerably. To help clarify what learning outcomes meant, teacher trainers deconstructed them. Moreover, a significant amount of professional development was planned and delivered, which helped the MAG staff share a better understanding of what the statements meant and how they could be achieved. Nevertheless, it took more than a year before some teachers were able to plan standards-based lessons on their own. In the end, more teachers set objectives to address students' needs and interests, and, of

course, curriculum standards. Some teachers felt liberated and enjoyed the flexibility that the new system offered. A few remained dependent on teacher trainers throughout the project.

The challenges and opportunities mentioned above have implications for policy makers in similar contexts. They should consider what their teachers' priorities for lesson planning are. If teachers have never planned standards-based lessons, policy makers should take into account the practicality of asking teachers to plan lessons purely based on learning outcomes. If teachers' main priority has been to cover the textbook and care less about students' needs and interests, then the textbook has been the curriculum (Ellis, 2004) and the implementation of a framework which seeks to focus teachers' attention on students' needs and interests will pose some challenges. To overcome the challenges and focus education on what matters, i.e. students' needs and interests (Anderson, 2014; Richards and Bohlke 2011), extensive on-going profession development should precede the implementation phase and definitely continue afterwards. This demands expertise and takes time (Turnbull, 2011). A rich collection of instructional materials that have already been mapped onto learning outcomes is a must, and so is sufficient clarification of learning outcomes (Figueras, 2012; Richards, 2013).

Language-related components and curriculum strands. Based on the findings of this study, it appears that after the ECF was introduced, most language-related and strand-related tasks were more frequently incorporated into lessons than they had before. These were vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, reading, speaking and writing tasks. This could mean either a larger number of activities or more integration of linguistic components and curriculum strands in almost every lesson, a change in line with two of Kumaravadivelu's macro-strategies (2006): "maximize learning opportunities" and "integrate language skills" (p.201). It can also be concluded that, despite the challenges, a curriculum framework can influence teaching practices (Richards, 2001; Troman & Jeffrey, 2011) provided that sufficient training and instructional materials are provided too (Turnbull, 2011) as the case was in the context of this study.

It is worth mentioning, however, that a change in the frequency of grammar tasks could not be established as the participants reported contradictory frequencies, and the increase reported by teachers was not statistically significant. This was

expected for two reasons. First, before the ECF, many teachers had covered this linguistic component sufficiently, therefore, the ECF did not aim to introduce more grammar activities. Second, when the ECF was implemented, grammar was possibly integrated into writing and speaking strands rather than being taught discretely. This is how Rudy et al. (2011) address grammar in the ECF. It is also what Trim recommends: “[Grammar is] a means to construct and convey meaning [rather than] a systematic body of rules to be learned” (2012, p. 17).

Action-Orientation

After the ECF was implemented, language learning became more action-oriented. Students in many, if not all, MAG classrooms engaged in (a) oral interaction with classmates, (b) group discussions, (c) collaborative project work, (d) presentations, (e) storytelling and (f) portfolio work *more often*. Teachers employed these tasks to engage students in different modes of communication – reception, production and interaction – and to foster purposeful action and interaction. By negotiating meaning collaboratively, having a purpose for communication, interacting in different modes and reflecting on achievements and constraints, students in this study met many of the characteristics of action-oriented language learning described by Piccardo (2014), North (2008) and Little (2012a). This meant going beyond linguistic competences and tapping into a range of other competences through tasks that simulated real-life interaction. It is hoped that such an approach will equip learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they need to act as social agents (Council of Europe, 2001).

It should be noted, however, that policy makers and educators need to take into account three considerations when planning to implement the CEFR’s action-oriented approach. First, CEFR can-do statements need to be adapted and expanded on before they are used as learning outcomes. Rudy et al. (2011) did so, to some extent, by making the statements more suitable for the UAE K-12 context. Despite this, the need for further specification and clarification was a concern during the early stages of the ECF implementation as anticipated by Figueras (2012). Teachers needed support to be able to understand and use learning outcomes in a meaningful way – a setback that MAG staff recovered from by deconstructing learning outcomes and providing professional development. Nevertheless, some teachers continued to favor their old way of teaching, which made success rate vary from school to school in the

same fashion that CEFR's success rate has varied from context to context as discussed in Chapter 2. Finally, the use of portfolios stood out as a facilitative factor, as Trims (2007) and Little (2012b) pointed out. Portfolios helped the teachers and learners who used them better organize and track achievements. It can, therefore, be concluded that the Council of Europe's (2001, pp. 101-130) model of the user or learner competences, which permeates the can-do statements of the ECF, can trigger action-oriented planning, teaching and assessment, but effective implementation of the framework depends on many factors such as (a) the suitability and user-friendliness of the curriculum learning outcomes, (b) educators' competencies and amenability (Turnbull, 2011) and (c) the availability of resources, such as instructional materials, portfolios and time.

Transparency

The final concern of this study was the impact of the ECF on the transparency of instructional and assessment practices. When the ECF was implemented, it was assumed that using learning outcomes would enhance transparency provided that (a) students became familiar with the learning outcomes; (b) all the stakeholders had the same understanding of the learning outcomes; and (c) the learning outcomes were used both for instructional and assessment purposes. Although post-ECF conditions were visibly more transparent than pre-ECF ones, enhancing transparency was not a straightforward process and a few challenges needed to be overcome. One stumbling block was the ambiguity of learning outcomes – a concern put forward by Allais (2014). Only when this issue was resolved were teachers, learners and test item writer able to use the learning outcomes effectively. The second challenge was lack of expertise – a concern that Turnbull (2011) mentioned in his report about the implementation of the CEFR in the Canadian context. In the context of this study, even teacher trainers and administrators felt the need for more expertise in using the framework for developing valid and reliable assessment materials. Such challenges could also be attributed to the general and broad nature of CEFR descriptors, confirming Figueras's (2007; 2012) observation about the need for specificity and clarity in articulating descriptors for assessment purposes. Professional development and deconstructing learning outcomes into more manageable and achievable learning objectives facilitated the transparency of assessment practices. Furthermore, language portfolios, as mentioned earlier, played a key role in familiarizing students with the

learning outcomes, hence further contributing to transparency. At the end, many students were able to use “I can” statements and show evidence of their own learning in their portfolios. Furthermore, some schools informed parents of what their children were learning. However, it is not clear, if these parents benefitted from the newsletters they received.

A final point relevant to transparency is institutional barriers. Although assessment tasks were aligned with the learning outcomes in most MAG schools in this study, at some point, maintaining a complete alignment between instruction and assessment became problematic in Cycle 3. This was when the MOE mandated that all public schools, MAG and non-MAG, follow the same assessment specifications. These specifications were better suited to non-MAG schools – a constraint for MAG test-item writers as they sought to reach a compromise between MOE-mandated test specifications and the ECF learning outcomes. The possibility of mismatches between curriculum and assessment is not a new phenomenon as Mehren (1984), Buyukurman (2014) and Roy (2016) have reported.

Based on the points mentioned above, it can be argued that using a curriculum framework can enhance transparency on a few conditions. First, learning outcomes should be clear and specific. CEFR level-descriptors need clarification and specification before they can enhance transparency for assessment purposes. Second, students should become familiar with learning outcomes. Language portfolios can be an effective tool for raising students’ awareness of learning outcomes, their strengths and next steps. Third, assessment tasks should be aligned with instructional practices. When such conditions are met, some of the perceptual mismatches between learners and educational institutions are minimized (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and transparency is enhanced.

Summary

This study examined 129 teachers’, teacher trainers’ and administrators’ perceptions of how lesson planning, teaching and assessment practices in 39 MAG schools changed after the MOE implemented a CEFR-based curriculum framework – the ECF. The four-year-long endeavor, which can be described as a paradigm shift, posed numerous challenges that generated a significant amount of collaboration, and professional development among practitioners in an attempt to overcome the barriers they had faced. A large range of resources, time and expertise was needed before

meaningful changes were observed. The impact differed from school to school, and it depended on teacher buy-in, professional development and the availability of resources. In the end, there was evidence that many of the participants appreciated a more modern approach to teaching English, which had made planning and teaching more focused on students' needs and interests and curriculum standards. The CEFR can-do statements, which had initially been too broad and ambiguous, eventually paved the way for more communicative and action-oriented tasks when they were further clarified and specified. They also raised students' awareness of learning outcomes and triggered their involvement in self-assessment, especially when students used language portfolios. Although practices were acceptably transparent after the ECF was implemented, more meaningful transparency could have been achieved if institutional barriers had not existed and all assessments could have been fully aligned with curriculum learning outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

This study had four limitations. Firstly, it relied on the participants' perceptions only. Generally speaking, relying only on participants' perceptions may not lead to very credible findings. The findings of the study would have been more reliable if the researcher had triangulated the data informed by perceptions with other types of data, for example, observations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Secondly, the researcher, for the reasons mentioned in Chapter 2, did not use a systematic sampling method. In other words, the sample size was based on voluntary response. It is not clear if the 85 out of 234 teachers who took the online survey were representative of the wider population (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). However, no particular patterns were identified between early and late responses, which possibly counterbalances this weakness. Thirdly, the researcher of this study had been personally involved in the authoring and implementation of the ECF, which can be construed as researcher bias. Finally, the results of the study would have been more credible if more than one investigator had been involved in collecting and analyzing data.

Areas for Further Research

This study only scratched the surface of the pedagogical impacts of the CEFR. It mainly focused on "what" and "how often". Future research studies on the ECF or other CEFR-based curriculum frameworks will be more informative if they also

respond to questions “how well” and “why”. Responses to such questions will be more meaningful if data about students’ performance is also included. One option could be comparing two cohorts’ pre- and post-ECF assessment results. More research is also needed on how successful CEFR-based curricula are in promoting a wider range of competences than this study discussed, for example, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, not to mention general competences. Learner autonomy is another area to consider for investigation in contexts where the CEFR and language portfolios co-exist. It would be interesting to examine the challenges that learners’ self-assessment might pose when the results of such assessments differ from those of teachers. Finally, more statistical analyses could be employed in future studies to examine how balanced the teaching of different competences are, for example, by using an F-test that measures the variability of pre- and post-implementation frequencies.

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Appendix A

CEFR's Common Reference Levels: Global Scale

Proficient user	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent user	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic user	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Council of Europe (2001, p. 24)

Appendix B

ECF Standards (Learning Outcomes), A1-B2

A1 – Listening

<i>Code</i>	<i>Descriptor</i>
L.A1.1	Understand clear, slow, repeated speech and expressions aimed at the satisfaction of simple needs of a concrete type
L.A1.2	Follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses to assimilate meaning
L.A1.3	Understand how words and phrases supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song
L.A1.4	Understand introductions, basic greeting and leave taking expressions
L.A1.5	Understand short simple directions and instructions addressed carefully and slowly
L.A1.6	Understand simple direct questions spoken very slowly and clearly in direct non-idiomatic speech on personal details
L.A1.7	Give people things when asked
L.A1.8	Handle numbers, quantities, cost and time accurately

A1 – Reading

R.A1.1	Recognize familiar names, words and very basic phrases on simple notices in the most common everyday situations.
R.A1.2	Recognize words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.
R.A1.3	Understand simple, mainly isolated phrases about people and places.
R.A1.4	Understand short, simple texts, one phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words, basic phrases with rereading.
R.A1.5	Understand the organization and basic features of different types of text.
R.A1.6	Recognize similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic with prompting and support.
R.A1.7	Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in familiar stories.
R.A1.8	Understand short, simple messages on e.g. postcards, posters, signs.
R.A1.9	Follow short, simple written directions.
R.A1.10	Understand the content of simple informational material, short simple descriptions, especially with visual support.
R.A1.11	Recognize the relationships between illustrations and the text in print and other media.

A1 - Speaking

S.A1.1	Make an introduction and use basic greeting and leave taking expressions.
S.A1.2	Use familiar everyday expressions.

- S.A1.3 Produce simple mainly isolated, basic phrases about people and places.
- S.A1.4 Describe yourself, what you do and where you live.
- S.A1.5 Ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements on familiar topics.
- S.A1.6 Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
- S.A1.7 Ask for clarification and or repetition when words, phrases, sentences, or topics are not understood.
- S.A1.8 Introduce yourself and others, ask and answer questions about personal details, things etc.
- S.A1.9 Read out loud a very short rehearsed statement -e.g. to introduce a speaker.
- S.A1.10 Ask how people are and react to news.

A1 – Writing

- W.A1.1 Copy out single words and short texts presented in standard printed format.
- W.A1.2 Write numbers and dates, name, address, age, date of birth, such as on a registration form.
- W.A1.3 Write simple isolated phrases and sentences.
- W.A1.4 Link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like "and" or "then".
- W.A1.5 Write a short simple text.
- W.A1.6 Write simple phrases and sentences about themselves and imaginary people, where they live and what they do.
- W.A1.7 Ask for or pass on personal details in written form.

A2 – Listening

- L.A2.1 Understand essential information in short, spoken or recorded passages on everyday matters, delivered slowly and clearly
- L.A2.2 Determine the main ideas and supporting details of visual and quantitative information presented in diverse media and formats
- L.A2.3 Understand simple directions for how to get around by walking or using public transportation
- L.A2.4 Catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements
- L.A2.5 Respond to specific questions or comments that contribute to the discussion, or clarify or follow up on information and link to the remarks of others
- L.A2.6 Understand phrases and expressions on basic personal, family, shopping, geography, and employment information
- L.A2.7 Identify the topic of discussion when it is conducted slowly and clearly
- L.A2.8 Understand changes of topic of different items and form an idea of the main content

- L.A2.9 Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points.

A2 - Reading

- R.A2.1 Understand simple written messages from friends e.g. when to meet for football/ shopping.
- R.A2.2 Understand everyday signs and notices: streets, restaurants, railway stations, directions, instructions, warnings and regulations.
- R.A2.3 Understand very short, simple texts: advertisements, menus, timetables and short simple personal letters.
- R.A2.4 Understand short narratives about everyday things if the text is written in simple language.
- R.A2.5 Find specific information in simple material such as advertisements, menus, timetables and short simple letters.
- R.A2.6 Understand feedback messages or simple help indications in computer programs.
- R.A2.7 Find specific information in lists and isolate the information required
- R.A2.8 Recognize various text features used to locate key facts or information in a text.
- R.A2.9 Identify specific information in simple letters, brochures and short newspaper articles describing events.
- R.A2.10 Understand simple instructions on equipment encountered in everyday life - such as the public telephone.
- R.A2.11 Describe the overall structure of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.
- R.A2.12 Find the most important information on leisure activities, exhibitions, etc. in information leaflets.
- R.A2.13 Identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.
- R.A2.14 Identify important information in clearly structured, illustrated text or print media.
- R.A2.15 Understand basic types of standard routine letters and faxes on familiar topics.
- R.A2.16 Skim small advertisements in newspapers, locate the headings, columns, identify most important information.
- R.A2.17 Use text features and search tools (e.g., key words, sidebars, hyperlinks) to locate information relevant to a given topic efficiently.
- R.A2.18 Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.
- R.A2.19 Read information from multiple print or digital sources, to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

A2 – Speaking

- S.A2.1 Establish social contact, using simple everyday polite forms of greeting, introductions, feelings, address and expressions of thanks.
- S.A2.2 State frequently used expressions.
- S.A2.3 Make a short conversation with help from the other person if necessary.
- S.A2.4 Answer straightforward follow up questions (repeated if necessary) with some help formulating the reply.
- S.A2.5 Discuss everyday practical issues in a simple way.
- S.A2.6 Give a simple description or presentation as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.
- S.A2.7 Tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points.
- S.A2.8 Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.
- S.A2.9 Give short, basic descriptions of events and activities.
- S.A2.10 Discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet.
- S.A2.11 Describe people, family, places, living conditions, hobbies, sports, school and possessions in simple terms.
- S.A2.12 Discuss what to do in the evening, at the weekend.
- S.A2.13 Communicate simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters, to do with free time.
- S.A2.14 Make and respond to invitations, suggestions and apologies.
- S.A2.15 Use simple descriptive language to make brief statements about and compare objects and possessions.
- S.A2.16 Explain likes or dislikes about something.
- S.A2.17 Describe plans and arrangements, habits and routines, past activities and personal experiences.
- S.A2.18 Deliver very short, rehearsed announcements.
- S.A2.19 Give a short, rehearsed, basic presentation on a familiar subject.
- S.A2.20 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.
- S.A2.21 Give short rehearsed presentations on everyday life, briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions.
- S.A2.22 Answer a limited number of straightforward follow up questions from an audience.
- S.A2.23 Ask and answer questions to exchange ideas and information, clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a familiar topic or issue in predictable everyday situations.
- S.A2.24 Agree and/or disagree with others.
- S.A2.25 Review key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

A2 - Writing

- W.A2.1 Write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like "and", "but" and "because" in order to tell a story or describe things.
- W.A2.2 Write narratives which recount a well elaborated event or short sequence of events.
- W.A2.3 Write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences.
- W.A2.4 Write a short, simple message with repetition and reformulation.
- W.A2.5 Write a series of simple phrases and sentences related to family, living conditions, school, and vacations.
- W.A2.6 Write projects using research skills and strategies
- W.A2.7 Write short simple notes, messages and personal letters expressing thanks, etc.
- W.A2.8 Write about everyday aspects of environment, people, places, and study in linked sentences.
- W.A2.9 Write short, simple real or imaginary biographies and simple poems about people.

B1 – Listening

- L.B1.1 Understand the main points on familiar matters regularly encountered in school, leisure, including short narratives
- L.B1.2 Understand the main points of radio news, simple recorded material on familiar subjects delivered slowly and clearly
- L.B1.3 Follow the outline of straightforward short talks on familiar topics
- L.B1.4 Understand straightforward factual information about everyday topics, identifying general and specific details
- L.B1.5 Understand a report on a topic, text or opinion, logically sequenced with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details that support main ideas or themes spoken at an understandable pace
- L.B1.6 Follow a lecture or talk provided the subject matter is familiar, the presentation straightforward and clearly structured
- L.B1.7 Understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for everyday equipment
- L.B1.8 Understand the content of spoken, recorded or broadcast audio material on topics of personal interest
- L.B1.9 Follow the main points of extended discussion
- L.B1.10 Understand the key ideas and perspectives expressed through reflection and paraphrasing.
- L.B1.11 Follow detailed directions

B1 – Reading

- R.B1.1 Read straightforward factual texts on interesting subjects with a satisfactory level of comprehension.

- R.B1.2 Understand the most important information in short simple everyday information brochures.
- R.B1.3 Understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday language.
- R.B1.4 Understand the main points in short newspaper articles about current and familiar topics.
- R.B1.5 Understand clearly written, straightforward instructions for a piece of equipment.
- R.B1.6 Read columns or interviews in newspapers or magazines on current topics / events, understand the overall meaning.
- R.B1.7 Recognize significant points in straightforward newspaper articles on familiar topics.
- R.B1.8 Find and understand relevant information in everyday material, such as letters, brochures, short official documents.
- R.B1.9 Understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.
- R.B1.10 Understand simple messages and standard letters.
- R.B1.11 Understand the plot of a clearly structured story, recognize important events and what is significant about them.
- R.B1.12 Understand multiple versions of the same text or story through comparison of characters, setting, actions and points of view.
- R.B1.13 Understand how a personal point of view differs from that of the author of a text.
- R.B1.14 Understand central message, lesson, or moral conveyed in stories, fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures.
- R.B1.15 Analyze how structure and order of events (e.g., parallel plots), time manipulation (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.
- R.B1.16 Recognize the main points of an argument.
- R.B1.17 Evaluate arguments and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.
- R.B1.18 Identify the main conclusions in clearly signalled argumentative text assessing whether reasoning is valid, evidence is relevant and sufficient, and identify false statements or fallacious reasoning.
- R.B1.19 Skim short texts and find relevant facts and information.
- R.B1.20 Scan texts in order to locate and gather information in order to complete a specific task.

B1 – Speaking

- S.B1.1 Give straightforward descriptions on a variety of familiar topics.
- S.B1.2 Interact in structured situations with short conversations, with help if necessary.
- S.B1.3 Use simple language to deal with most situations likely to arise.

- S.B1.4 Deliver short, rehearsed announcements on a topic pertinent to everyday life.
- S.B1.5 Communicate simple, routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information.
- S.B1.6 Fluently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points.
- S.B1.7 Describe hopes, dreams, ambitions and events, real or imagined.
- S.B1.8 Take part in routine discussion of familiar subjects, exchange factual information, receive instructions, discuss solutions.
- S.B1.10 Give a straightforward presentation on a familiar topic with main points explained with reasonable precision.
- S.B1.11 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples.
- S.B1.12 Answer follow up questions asking for repetition if the speech is rapid.
- S.B1.13 Fluently describe a variety of subjects as a linear sequence of points.
- S.B1.14 Describe how to do something giving detailed instructions.
- S.B1.15 Maintain a conversation or discussion with limited difficulty.
- S.B1.16 Enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics express personal opinions and exchange information.
- S.B1.17 Give detailed accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions.
- S.B1.18 Narrate a story and relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions.
- S.B1.19 Engage in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners asking questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, link their comments to the remarks of others, and explain their own ideas.
- S.B1.19 Relate details of unpredictable occurrences, e.g. an accident.
- S.B1.20 Give brief comments on the views of others.
- S.B1.21 Summarize and explain how the points a speaker makes are supported by reasons and evidence.
- S.B1.22 Explain why something is a problem.
- S.B1.23 Express and respond to feelings such as surprise, happiness, sadness, interest and indifference.
- S.B1.24 Express belief, opinion, agreement and disagreement politely.
- S.B1.25 Give or ask for personal views and opinions when discussing topics of interest.
- S.B1.26 Express opinions, reactions and solutions to problems or questions of where to go, what to do, how to organize events.
- S.B1.27 Briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions.
- S.B1.28 Give a point of view clearly but not at the level of debate.
- S.B1.29 Express thoughts about abstract or cultural topics such as music or films.

- S.B1.30 Compare and contrast alternatives, discussing what to do, where to go, which to choose, etc.
- S.B1.31 Develop an argument well enough to be followed without difficulty.

B1 – Writing

- W.B1.1 Write straightforward connected texts on familiar subjects by linking shorter discreet elements into a linear sequence.
- W.B1.2 Write notes conveying simple information to friends, retail workers, teachers etc., getting across important points.
- W.B1.3 Write a description of an event, a recent trip - real or imagined.
- W.B1.4 Write straightforward, detailed descriptions on a range of familiar subjects.
- W.B1.5 Write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text.
- W.B1.6 Write short, simple essays or stories on topics of interest.
- W.B1.7 Take notes as a list of key points during delivered lectures on familiar topics using simple language.
- W.B1.8 Paraphrase short written passages in a simple fashion using the original text wording and ordering.
- W.B1.9 Collate short pieces of information from several sources and summarize them.
- W.B1.10 Summarize, report and give an opinion using factual information on routine and non-routine matters.
- W.B1.11 Write opinion pieces supporting a point of view with reasons, introduction, opinions, with concluding statements.
- W.B1.12 Write personal letters, messages, notes asking for or conveying information of immediate relevance, getting the point across.
- W.B1.13 Write personal letters describing experiences, news, events and expressing thoughts and ideas in detail (music, poems...)
- W.B1.14 Write very brief reports in a standard format, passing on routine factual information and stating reasons for actions.
- W.B1.15 Convey information and ideas on abstract and concrete topics, check information, ask about and explain problems.
- W.B1.16 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

B2 – Listening

- L.B2.1 Understand announcements and messages on concrete and abstract topics spoken at normal speed
- L.B2.2 Understand the main ideas of complex speech on concrete and abstract topics including technical discussions
- L.B2.3 Understand questions posed to elicit elaboration, reflection on ideas, questions, comments and observations

- L.B2.4 Understand live or broadcast language on familiar and unfamiliar topics
- L.B2.5 Understand spoken, recorded or broadcast audio material and identify the speaker's mood, tone, etc.
- L.B2.6 Understand recordings and identify speaker viewpoints, attitudes and information content.
- L.B2.7 Understand a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- L.B2.8 Understand new information expressed by others to qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence.
- L.B2.9 Understand a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.
- L.B2.10 Follow extended speech with explicit markers of complex arguments on familiar topics.
- L.B2.11 Keep up with an animated conversation between speakers.
- L.B2.12 Understand perspectives, summarized points of agreement and disagreement, qualifications, justifications, and new connections in light of evidence and reasoning presented.
- L.B2.13 Follow lectures, talks and reports which are propositionally and linguistically complex.
- L.B2.14 Understand and evaluate the credibility and accuracy of each source used in speeches, presentations
- L.B2.15 Understand information to make informed decisions, solve problems, evaluate credibility and accuracy of data.
- L.B2.16 Understand diverse perspectives, comments, claims, and evidence made on an issue to resolve contradictions, determine additional information required to complete the investigation.
- L.B2.17 Understand discussions for decision making that question reasons, evidence, and positions to clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions, promote divergent and creative perspectives to ensure a full hearing

B2 – Reading

- R.B2.1 Read letters on interesting topics and grasp the most important facts.
- R.B2.2 Read reviews of films, theatre, books, concerts and summarize the main points.
- R.B2.3 Read contemporary articles and reports in which the writers adopt particular stances or viewpoints.
- R.B2.4 Read independently, adapting to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources.
- R.B2.5 Obtain information, ideas and opinions from subject area sources.
- R.B2.6 Understand development of plots, motives, actions and characters with possible consequences.

- R.B2.7 Identify the content, relevance and significance of news items, articles and reports on a range of topics.
- R.B2.8 Read correspondence relating to courses taken and readily grasp the essential meaning.
- R.B2.9 Understand the main ideas of complex text on concrete and abstract topics including technical discussions.
- R.B2.10 Read manuals, find and understand explanations and help for specific problems.
- R.B2.11 Understand lengthy, complex instructions including details on conditions and warnings, rereading of difficult sections.
- R.B2.12 Scan long and complicated texts, locating relevant details.
- R.B2.13 Understand contemporary literary prose.

B2 – Speaking

- S.B2.1 Deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken.
- S.B2.2 Engage in extended conversation on general topics in clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment.
- S.B2.3 Pass on detailed information reliably.
- S.B2.5 Give a clear detailed description of how to carry out a procedure.
- S.B2.6 Give clear, systematic descriptions, presentations and arguments with reasons for /against a point of view, advantages / disadvantages of various options, highlighting significant points and detail.
- S.B2.7 Actively discuss issues with the offering of ideas, points of view, evaluations, alternative proposals and suggestions.
- S.B2.8 Take a series of follow up questions from the audience with fluency and spontaneity.
- S.B2.9 Convey degrees of emotion and highlight the personal significance of events and experiences.
- S.B2.10 Participate actively in routine and nonroutine formal discussion.
- S.B2.11 Synthesize and report information and arguments from a number of sources.
- S.B2.12 Highlight the personal significance of events and experiences, support views with relevant explanations and arguments.
- S.B2.13 Speak fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, academic, vocational or leisure topics.
- S.B2.14 Express ideas and opinions with precision, and present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly.
- S.B2.15 Speak with clear, natural, pronunciation and intonation.
- S.B2.16 Deliver announcements on general topics with clarity, fluency and spontaneity.
- S.B2.17 Depart spontaneously from prepared text; respond to points raised by the audience, show fluency and ease of expression.

S.B2.18 Keep up an animated discussion between speakers.

S.B2.4. Explain a problem which has arisen.

B2 – Writing

W.B2.1 Take lecture notes with important points recorded.

W.B2.2 Summarize news items, interviews or documentaries containing opinions, argument and discussion.

W.B2.3 Summarize fact/fiction texts, commenting on and discussing contrasting points of view and the main themes.

W.B2.4 Express news and views effectively in writing and relate to those of others.

W.B2.5 Write clear detailed descriptions of real or imaginary events and experiences with clear connected ideas.

W.B2.6 Write letters conveying degrees of emotion, highlighting personal significance of events, commenting on news and views

W.B2.7 Write an essay or report developing an argument systematically, for/against, dis- and advantages, options and details

W.B2.8 Review a book or play.

W.B2.9 Evaluate different ideas or solutions to a problem highlighting significant points.

W.B2.10 Write clear, detailed texts, synthesizing and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources

W.B2.11 Write in different text types.

Appendix C

Teachers' Questionnaire

1. Gender Male Female
2. Teaching experience (years) _____
3. Number of years using the ECF _____
4. To what extent did you benefit from a TDS/ILC's support when learning to use the ECF?
(1= not at all, ... 5=to a great extent) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
5. Cycles you have taught in ① ② ③
6. Before using the ECF, how did you set your objectives when planning lessons?
 - a. I used the coursebook to set objectives.
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - b. I set the objectives myself based on the students' needs and interests.
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - c. I used learning outcomes taken from a curriculum framework.
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - d. Other (please specify)

7. Before the ECF, how often did the students develop the following:
 - a. Knowledge of vocabulary
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - b. Knowledge of grammar
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - c. Knowledge of pronunciation
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - d. Listening skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - e. Reading skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - f. Speaking skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - g. Writing skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

h. Other (please specify)

8. Before the ECF, how often did the students do the following in English:

a. Oral interaction with classmates

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

b. Group discussion

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

c. Collaborative project work

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

d. Presentation

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

e. Storytelling

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

9. Before the ECF, how familiar were the students with standards (learning outcomes / can-do statements)?

- Not familiar
- Rather familiar
- Familiar
- Well familiar
- Very well familiar

10. Before the ECF, how often were the students assessed according to standards?

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

11. Before the ECF, did the students keep track of their own learning, for example in a portfolio?

- Yes
 - No
 - Other (please specify)
-

12. After using the ECF, how did you set your objectives when planning lessons?

a. I used the coursebook to set objectives.

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

b. I set the objectives myself based on the students' needs and interests.

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

c. I used learning outcomes taken from a curriculum framework.

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

d. Other (please specify)

13. After the ECF, how often did the students develop the following:

a. Knowledge of vocabulary

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

b. Knowledge of grammar

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

c. Knowledge of pronunciation

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

d. Listening skills

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

e. Reading skills

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

f. Speaking skills

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

g. Writing skills

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

h. Other (please specify)

14. After the ECF, how often did the students do the following in English:

a. Oral interaction with classmates

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

b. Group discussions

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

c. Collaborative project work

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

d. Presentations

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

e. Storytelling

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

15. After the ECF, how familiar were the students with standards (learning outcomes / can-do statements)?

- Not familiar
- Rather familiar
- Familiar
- Well familiar
- Very well familiar

16. After the ECF, how often were the students assessed according to standards?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Usually
- Always

17. After the ECF, did the students keep track of their own learning, for example in a portfolio?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

18. Did the ECF bring about any (other) changes in your practices? (Please explain.)

19. If you have any further comments about the ECF, please explain.

20. If you have used the ECF in more than one cycle, how did your experience differ from one cycle to another?

If you are interested in attending a group discussion on the impacts of the ECF, please contact Seyed-Reza Hosseinifar by email: hosseinifar@hotmail.com.

THANK YOU

Appendix D

Teacher Trainers' and Administrators' Questionnaire

1. Gender Male Female
2. Teaching experience (years) _____
3. Number of years using the ECF _____
4. Position: _____
5. Cycles your teachers have worked in ① ② ③
6. Before using the ECF, how did your teachers set their objectives when planning lessons?
 - a. They used the coursebook to set objectives.
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - b. They set the objectives themselves based on the students' needs and interests.
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - c. They used learning outcomes taken from a curriculum framework.
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - d. Other (please specify)

7. Before the ECF, how often did the students develop the following:
 - a. Knowledge of vocabulary
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - b. Knowledge of grammar
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - c. Knowledge of pronunciation
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - d. Listening skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - e. Reading skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - f. Speaking skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
 - g. Writing skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

h. Other (please specify)

8. Before the ECF, how often did the students do the following in English:

a. Oral interaction with classmates

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

b. Group discussions

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

c. Collaborative project work

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

d. Presentations

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

e. Storytelling

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

9. Before the ECF, how familiar were the students with standards (learning outcomes / can-do statements)?

- Not familiar
- Rather familiar
- Familiar
- Well familiar
- Very well familiar

10. Before the ECF, how often were the students assessed according to standards?

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

11. Before the ECF, did the students keep track of their own learning, for example in a portfolio?

- Yes
 - No
 - Other (please specify)
-

12. After using the ECF, how did your teachers set their objectives when planning lessons?

a. They used the coursebook to set objectives.

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

b. They set the objectives themselves based on the students' needs and interests.

Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

- c. They used learning outcomes taken from a curriculum framework.
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- d. Other (please specify)
-

13. After the ECF, how often did the students develop the following:

- a. Knowledge of vocabulary
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- b. Knowledge of grammar
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- c. Knowledge of pronunciation
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- d. Listening skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- e. Reading skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- f. Speaking skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- g. Writing skills
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- h. Other (please specify)
-

14. After the ECF, how often did the students do the following in English:

- a. Oral interaction with classmates
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- b. Group discussions
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- c. Collaborative project work
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- d. Presentations
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always
- e. Storytelling
 Never Sometimes Often Usually Always

15. After the ECF, how familiar were the students with standards (learning outcomes / can-do statements)?

- Not familiar
- Rather familiar
- Familiar
- Well familiar
- Very well familiar

16. After the ECF, how often were the students assessed according to standards?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Usually
- Always

17. After the ECF, did the students keep track of their own learning, for example, in a portfolio?

- Yes
 - No
 - Other (please specify)
-

18. Did the ECF bring about any (other) changes in your teachers' practices? (Please explain.)

19. If your teachers have any further comments about the ECF, please explain.

If you are interested in attending a group discussion on the impacts of the ECF, please contact Seyed-Reza Hosseinifar by email: hosseinifar@hotmail.com.

THANK YOU

Appendix E

Focus Group Consent Form

Research informed consent

Title of research: CEFR in UAE Public Schools: Pedagogical Impacts
Seyed-Reza Hosseinifar a previous employee of the Ministry of Education
(Telephone: 042591738 / 0505269846) is conducting research on the topic
mentioned above.

The aim of the research is to investigate the pedagogical impacts of the English
Curriculum Framework, which was based on the Common European Framework of
Reference (CEFR).

If you agree to participate in this study, you will join a focus group interview to
discuss the potential pedagogical impacts of the ECF. The discussion will be audio-
recorded. **THE RECORDING AND THE NOTES I TAKE DURING THE
DISCUSSION WILL BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL AND USED AS
INFORMATION FOR THIS RESEARCH ONLY.**

Your participation in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.
You do not have to give a reason for withdrawing from the research and there will
be no negative consequences if you decide to withdraw. Before the final report is
prepared, I will send you a summary of what I have written about the discussion
and will ask you to comment on any descriptions or interpretations that you believe
are inaccurate or mistaken.

When I report on the research, I will ensure that you are not identified. No
reference to personal names will be used. I am the only person who will have
access to the data collected for the research. The data I use will be for illustration
only. If you wish to have a copy of the final report sent, I will be able to
accommodate your request.

Participant consent

The participant has been given a signed copy of this form to keep.

I agree to participate in this research.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the American University of
Sharjah Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints
or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you
may contact the researcher's thesis adviser, Professor Ahmad Al-Issa (Telephone:
06 515 2723, Email: aissa@aus.edu).

Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you
will be informed of the outcome.

Name of researcher: Seyed-Reza Hosseinifar

Date: _____

Adapted from Burns (2010, p.49)

Appendix F

Focus Group Discussion Introduction and Possible Questions

Introduction

Welcome. Thanks for agreeing to be part of the focus group. I appreciate your willingness to participate. I am conducting this focus group discussion to collect data for my MA thesis, as you know. We are going to have this discussion is to examine pedagogical practices before and after the ECF. I need your input and want you to share your honest and open thoughts with me.

Ground Rules

1. I want you to do the talking. I would like everyone to participate.
2. there are no right or wrong answers. everyone's experiences and opinions are important. speak up whether you agree or disagree. I want to hear a wide range of opinions.
3. what is said in this room stays here. feel comfortable sharing sensitive issues if you feel you have to.
4. I will be tape recording the group discussion. I want to capture everything you have to say. I don't identify anyone by name in my report. you will remain anonymous.

Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. Do you remember when the ECF was introduced?
2. How did you feel about having to plan and teach to standards?
3. Were there any problems? How were they solved? Did any of the problems persist?
4. How did the ECF change the way you planned lessons?
5. How did the ECF change the way you taught?
6. Did you notice anything that the ECF emphasized students had to learn – but which you previously did not have to address?
7. Did the students have to interact more or less in English when the ECF was introduced? Why?
8. To what extent were the students aware of the ECF standards/learning outcomes?
9. Did they have portfolios? If yes, what was kept in them?
10. Did parents know what their children were learning?
11. Did you assess and report student achievement according to ECF standards? Was this helpful?
12. Was there proper training before you used the ECF?
13. What were some of the challenges that faced the ECF?
14. Do you have any other comments?

Introduction and ground rules adapted from Elliot and Associates (2005) retrieved from https://assessment.trinity.duke.edu/documents/How_to_Conduct_a_Focus_Group.pdf

Appendix G

Qualitative Data Concerning Transparency

Teachers' (T) responses to open-ended survey questions

Question 11.

Before the ECF, did the students keep track of their own learning, for example in a portfolio? Other (please specify)

Responses.

T-10. Students have had their own ones since 2006.

T-11. Notebooks.

T-66. It depends on the teacher's comments as well.

Question 17.

After the ECF, did the students keep track of their own learning, for example in a portfolio? Other (please specify)

Responses.

T-10. It was a habitual action.

T-66. As they mark the standard they reach.

T-84. But not all of them.

Question 18.

Did the ECF bring about any (other) changes in your practices? (Please explain.)

Response.

T-74. Yes, definitely. It drew the track for me on which I could go with my students to reach the learning goals.

Question 19.

If you have any further comments about the ECF, please explain.

Responses.

T-30. It encouraged students to get familiarized with the language acquisition skills which seemed supportive in many aspects.

T-66. It helps in developing the students progress

Teacher Trainers' (TT) Responses to Open-Ended Survey Questions

Question 11.

Before the ECF, did the students keep track of their own learning, for example in a portfolio? Other (please specify)

Responses.

TT-14. They (students) never saw rubrics or criteria for marking either.

TT-27. Occasionally students would have folders which contained some work samples. It was no more than a compilation of worksheets.

Question 18.

Did the ECF bring about any (other) changes in your practices? (Please explain.)

Responses.

TT-2. Raised awareness of lesson outcomes / aims / input and output.

TT-3. More professionalism and accountability.

TT-7. The ECF forced teacher to be more consistent and transparent in their approach.

TT-9. Some teachers started to work harder towards the attainment of the set standards and outcomes. Learning and assessment became more meaningful for both teachers and students.

TT-11. Teaching according to students' academic level, not teaching what students already know; building on prior knowledge

TT-12. Teachers became more aware of their teaching practices through aligning tasks to standards and through planning their lessons effectively.

TT-16. Teachers were not teaching to the test. they were now teaching to students' proficiency levels and taking them to the next level

TT-18. Teachers became more responsible in regards to teaching practices and techniques.

TT-21. Teachers used standards and standard based assessments for the first time. Teachers become aware of differentiating tasks according to students' proficiency levels. Projects, self-evaluation, collaborative learning become a routine in the classrooms.

TT-27. Teachers started to take a more evidence-based approach in their teaching and tracking of Ss' progress. Teaching and assessing against standards helped them to make better informed decisions.

TT-28. Yes, both assessment for learning and assessment of learning were conducted more effectively.

TT-11. Focus was on student learning rather than teaching; students took ownership of their learning process.

TT-19. ECF made teachers more aware of how to reach goals (CAN DOs) for each student.

Question 19.

If you have any further comments about the ECF, please explain.

Response.

TT-25. Suggest a review of standards for clarity and refinement.

Comments Captured from the Discussion with Teachers

- It was ambiguous for the leaders.
- At the beginning ... it was ambiguous, but after two years, and like this, it was clear.
- In some lessons, we were writing the objective, and the standard also, and we were showing the standards on the wall as a wall chart.
- Every student has a portfolio.
- Not all the students conducted a very tidy and neat portfolio.
- Well, the standards were there on every page; every assessment has the standard written, either below or up; the standard is there and then the test itself or the assessment itself depends on the standard.

Comments Captured from the Discussion with Teacher Trainers

- [Using can-do statements] it's a continuation [of what MAG had already started] specifically for students to raise their awareness of the learning outcomes and achieving ...
- ... and it took us a while to understand what it would take us to get that into practical steps – something to be taught inside the classroom. So standards were just too industrial, as an expression or as a notion, far away from what we were used to inside the school.
- ... took me a lot of time, hour and hours at the beginning, just to understand how to match the resources with the learning outcomes.
- We used to write the learning outcomes on the board and I used to design for the teachers a reflection [task] by the end of the lesson that the students ticked what they achieved by the end of the lesson. So, the students were aware ...

where did they start at the beginning of the lesson and where did they reach by the end of the lesson.

- Were parents aware? No. In my school, no.
- We tried to raise their awareness with the letters we sent often with the learning outcomes targeted, the standards targeted at the beginning of each trimester. We used to send them those letters.
- Well it did give them at least some idea of what needs to be covered or I should be worried if my kid cannot do this or cannot do that. For some aware parents who take interest in reading letters.
- Well, in Boys' schools, parents ... cared about the mark they (their children) got. So it wasn't about what can they do or how are they developing. It was "Why do they have this mark?"
- Assessment was fully aligned with the learning outcomes.
- We used portfolios. In the portfolios we used I CAN the lists. I can do so and so.
- It did improve students' autonomy. So they were more in charge of their own learning.

Comments Captured from the Discussion with MOE Administrators

- We trained teachers how to read standards, how to unpack it, how to break them down.
- [Understanding standards in different ways] is positive in one sense. That they ensure equity in all the schools in terms of what is being given, but in terms of how things are being implemented it's not always positive.
- They shifted from a very traditional method of assessing students toward having an overall tool for measurement, which is the standard so that when they construct their exams or tests, they consider ... the standard rather than the ordinary and the conventional method of assessing.
- We're moving to assess performance. This is at the core of the ECF you see.
- The assessment specifications were imposed on us by the assessment department. Maybe this is more felt in Cycle 3 than in Cycle 2 because in Cycle 2 you have more freedom, OK, to do what you want.

- You put students ... on a path of learning that they challenge only themselves; each student is challenging only himself and this is the spirit ..., at certain times we made three assessments [based on the four levels]: A1, A2, B1, B2.
- But they were not really, I would say, absorbed, understood clearly by the teachers. There was a kind of chaos in trying to turn them into tangible learning outcomes or say something that can be measurable. So, people were fighting at the very early stage because the concept was not clear enough for them maybe they didn't have enough training but we started thinking of the ECF.
- People understood the same descriptor from different perspectives.
- I think unfortunately like in every project that you roll out in more than one location and where you have to work with different attitudes, different abilities different competencies. This is always, ... it depends on all those skills that I mentioned of the team working, so in some areas we had a very regular communication. We had students aware of the learning that was happening; parents aware of their children's learning but in some other locations it would be a different image.
- The portfolios were the main key document which would have helped the learners and their parents. They see where they are.

Vita

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