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Integrating a Global Language Framework into Tertiary Curriculum Reform: Responses of English Language Teachers in Vietnam

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Abstract
As part of the extended National Foreign Languages Project (2008–2035), Vietnam has adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a top-down strategy to enhance the quality of English teaching and learning. This study examines how English teachers responded to this curriculum reform at a Vietnamese university. Using a mixed-methods sequential design, the study collected data through questionnaires with 36 EFL teachers and in-depth interviews with 8. The findings reveal that while teachers are making various efforts to adapt to the CEFR-aligned curriculum, most changes remain limited to coping techniques. Instead of helping students attain the required level of language proficiency, teachers primarily adopt strategies designed to help students pass the compulsory CEFR-aligned exams, viewing this as a necessary teaching adjustment. At the grassroots level, the teachers who have not yet gained ownership of the change and who lack institutional support continue to rely primarily on short-term, situational strategies rather than sustainable approaches to improving students' overall language proficiency. Based on the findings, the article provides implications and recommendations for using the CEFR to set learning outcomes and reform language curriculum, ensuring it serves as a tool for meaningful language development rather than merely an assessment benchmark.

Keywords: CEFR, curriculum reform, EFL teachers, language policy, non-major English students

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Introduction

In Vietnam, despite various attempts to reform the foreign language teaching system, English language education has continued to struggle to keep pace with social needs. To improve foreign language proficiency in its general education system, the Vietnamese government launched the trillion-dollar National Foreign Languages Project 2008–2020, later extended to 2035. This initiative was formalized through three key policy decisions: No. 1400/QĐ-TTg, No. 2080/2017/QĐ-TTg, and No. 2732/QĐ-TTg issued by the Prime Minister (Vietnamese Government, 2008; 2017; 2025).

Within the framework of this initiative, in 2014, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) introduced the national foreign language proficiency framework through Circular No. 01/2014/TT-BGDĐT (MOET, 2014). Officially known as *the six-level framework for foreign language proficiency in Vietnam*, the CEFR-V framework is a close adaptation of the CEFR, consisting of six proficiency levels (Level 1 to Level 6) that correspond to the CEFR A1–C2 scale. As a "borrowed global policy" in Vietnam (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015, p. 610), the CEFR has become a cornerstone of Vietnam's language policy reform and been widely applied to language education, from establishing teacher professional standards, renewing language curriculum, adapting teaching materials, to upgrading language assessment practices and defining student learning outcomes (Le & Pham, 2019).

In a context where an entire education system is based on the CEFR standards, it helps to set out clear expectations of students and provide detailed guidelines for curricula, teaching practice, instruction design, assessment (Richards, 2013), materials development and evaluation (Kamenická et al., 2024). All curriculum domains, including learning outcomes, teaching activities, the choice of teaching materials, and assessment practices, become more closely interdependent (Little, 2006). If coherence is achieved across these domains, implementing the CEFR is more likely to lead to greater consistency and transparency in language education (Bérešová, 2011). On the contrary, if the implementation is imbalanced or addresses only one or some of the curriculum domains, it may generate problems in other domains (Little, 2006). In Vietnam, after two decades of CEFR implementation at the national level, little research has been found on how the teachers, as key stakeholders, respond to such a large-scale application in terms of their choice of teaching materials, their teaching activities, and their classroom assessment. The need for further studies on the adoption of the CEFR in Vietnam, including its successes and limitations, the attitudes and responses of teachers and students, remains important for informing future implementation and practice. This paper reports on such a study by first reviewing the relevant literature, then describing the methodology, and finally presenting and discussing the findings.

Literature Review

The CEFR

In the political and social context of a multicultural and multilingual Europe, the CEFR was developed to help facilitate co-operation, to foster stronger cohesion among its members (Council of Europe, 2001), and to improve the quality of communications. It aimed to provide a shared framework for developing language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, and other related resources across Europe. The CEFR, as its name suggests, is "a descriptive scheme" (Little, 2006, p.167) that is "language independent" (Little, 2006, p.178) and can be adapted for use in different foreign language learning situations. In 2020, the original CEFR (2001)

was further developed with the introduction of the CEFR Companion Volume (CEFRCV). Through its revisions and enhancements, CEFR has become "without doubt a highly significant, if not the most significant, policy text in language education" (Savski & Prabjandee, 2022, p.2).

As one of the most influential documents in the field of language teaching and learning in the last decade (Bérešová, 2011; Little, 2007; 2011), the CEFR has been adopted widely beyond Europe, gaining attraction in various regions worldwide (Ahmad Afip et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2017). The spread of this framework beyond European borders can be attributed to its adoption by various governments, which use it as a tool for setting educational objectives and evaluation, as well as by the ELT business, particularly for aligning test scores and developing English language proficiency materials such as textbooks and coursebooks (Savski & Prabjandee, 2022). In Asia, adopting the CEFR is often regarded as a strategic initiative to improve national English proficiency, which is seen as a prerequisite for continued economic and political growth (Savski, 2020) and as a tool for English language education reform across the Asia-Pacific region, including in China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Thailand (Hu & McKay, 2012; Kaowiwattanakul, 2025; O'Dwyer et al., 2017). Its adoption is particularly evident in curriculum reform as well as in the development of teaching materials and language assessment (De Boer, 2017; Kodate, 2017; Pham, 2017). It has also been strongly recommended for foreign language education in higher education contexts (Jeevarajathy & Hem, 2026), and, as such, has been described as a "prime example of a globalized language policy" (Savski, 2020, p. 3).

Despite its widespread adoption, several recommendations and cautions have been provided concerning the application of the framework. It is claimed to provide neither "ready-made solutions" to every context (Çaatay & Gürocak, 2016, p. 706), nor instructions on "what to do, or how to do it". As Jones and Saville (2009) suggested, the key principle to keep in mind is the need for adaptation, and the CEFR should serve as a reference rather than a rigid tool for enforcing uniformity in diverse educational contexts. Despite these recommendations, our understanding of the framework remains a mere starting point, and it should be carefully contextualized to effectively support teaching and learning practices (Savski & Prabjandee, 2022). As shown in Hamid et al.'s (2024) review of studies on CEFR implementation across different settings between 2017 and 2023, stakeholders, including teachers, has been provided insufficient training regarding CEFR conceptions and the contextualization of the framework. With Asia emerging as the region with the highest number of CEFR adopters, the framework's growing influence in the region is unsurprising; therefore, research on its practical implementation remains in high demand (Runnels & Runnels, 2017).

The Adoption of the CEFR in English Language Education in Vietnam

In Vietnam, with the adoption of the CEFR, which is seen as a "socially constituted phenomenon" (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020, p.1), the National Foreign Languages Project aims to reform and modernize various aspects of foreign language teaching and learning within the national education system. The implementation of the CEFR in Vietnam is therefore intended to drive positive change in English language education. Since the launch of this national project, research on the adoption of the CEFR in Vietnam has explored its various aspects and perspectives. These studies involve examining the application of the framework from an administrative standpoint (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015), teachers' and students' perceptions of the MOET's requirement that EFL teacher trainees attain CEFR C1 proficiency for graduation (Nguyen et al., 2025), the perspectives of English teachers and students regarding the requirement for non-English

majors to achieve CEFR B1 as a graduation prerequisite (Le & Pham, 2019; Nguyen, 2023). Further studies have focused on teachers' involvement in the CEFR-based curriculum renewal process (Le, 2023; Pham, 2017) and the application of the CEFR in training EFL teachers' language proficiency (Pham, 2017).

Based mainly on research on teachers and learners' perceptions, the borrowing and adoption of the CEFR in Vietnam has been subject to public criticism (Nguyen, 2024) and described as "over-ambitious" (Nguyen et al., 2024, p. 223), "unachievable" (Ngo, 2019, p. 117), and "passive" (Nguyen et al., 2025, p. 18) due to enormous challenges on the implementation level. Despite widespread skepticism and public criticism, some scholars have argued that this CEFR-based initiative has triggered "wide alerts", "raised critical awareness" among key stakeholders (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015, p. 65), and the adoption of this policy is believed to have the potential to drive a comprehensive reform of English language education, fundamentally transforming how EFL teachers and learners engage in their daily practices (Nguyen et al., 2024). Most recently, based on a study examining the perceptions of EFL teacher trainers and trainees, Nguyen et al. (2025) suggest that the adoption of the CEFR in Vietnam is feasible, provided that the framework is appropriately adapted to accommodate the country's political and socio-cultural context (p. 18). In educational innovation, teachers play a crucial role as the primary implementers of reform (Waters, 2009, p.461). However, in these reform processes, teachers tend to be involved only in the post-implementation stage of a new curriculum, rather than in the curriculum development process itself (Al-Kasi, 2021). Therefore, understanding both teachers' perspectives and actions during implementation is essential to explaining the success or failure of educational reform. Nevertheless, after 2 decades of the large-scale CEFR adoption in Vietnam, research on how teachers actually implement the framework in practice - particularly in relation to CEFR-based curriculum reform remains scarce. This study, therefore, aims to address the following research question: *How do EFL teachers respond to the adoption of a CEFR-based curriculum in terms of their teaching activities, instructional materials, and assessment practice?*

Method

Participants

Given the relatively small number of the teaching staff, a census approach was adopted. All eligible teachers, which invloved 45 non-native English teachers from a university where the CEFR-aligned curriculum for non-major students began its renewal process in 2014, were invited to participate. 36 completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 80%. As the study aims to explore teachers' perceptions within this specific context rather than to generalize to a broader population, and as the quantitative data were used solely for descriptive statistical analysis and then triangulated with the qualitative findings, this sample was considered adequate to address the research objectives. All teacher participants are Vietnamese, having postgraduate degrees in English language education, and ranging between 6 and 26 years of experience teaching English to non-English-major students. Eight of them took part in in-depth interviews. All participation was anonymous. As the data showed repetition of stories between participants after eight interviews, the researchers stopped recruiting new participants for the study because the data reached the "saturation point" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Data Collection

To gain an in-depth understanding of what the teachers do before and during the process of the

CEFR-aligned curriculum renewal and implementation, the study adopted the mixed-method model suggested by Creswell and Clark (2007), which provides rich opportunities to describe, explore, and interpret responses and to consider this target phenomenon from different angles (Dörnyei, 2007, p.164). It is a two-phase, sequential, exploratory design which starts with quantitative data collection and analysis. Based on the initial findings of the quantitative phase, the researcher can identify issues that need additional exploration and use these findings to develop the qualitative phase (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The purpose is to use qualitative results to assist in interpreting the findings of the quantitative phase.

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to all participants to obtain quantitative data. Both top-down and bottom-up approaches were used to formulate the 22-item questionnaire. Drawing on the literature on the impact of the CEFR, three clusters were identified: teachers' teaching activities, teaching materials, and classroom assessment practices. Two experts in TESOL and CEFR implementation in Vietnam reviewed the questionnaire for relevance, representativeness, and appropriateness. Based on their feedback, unclear and redundant items were removed from the questionnaire. The revised version was subsequently piloted with a small group of teachers, and minor revisions were made. The official questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first five items collected demographic information about the teachers. The main section included twenty-two items examining teachers' responses to the implementation of the CEFR for non-major students. Items for these clusters were ordered randomly within the questionnaire to avoid potentially biased responses (Bhandari, 2022).

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The pilot study yielded an overall Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .73$, exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). However, the reliability of the individual clusters was not yet adequate and required further refinement. Item-deleted Cronbach's alpha analyses identified problematic items (3, 9, 17, 18a), many of which were negatively worded, suggesting issues with item wording. Based on participants' feedback after questionnaire completion, these items were revised for clarity. In the main study, Cronbach's alpha values for both the overall questionnaire ($\alpha = .82$) and each cluster ($\alpha = .78$; .85; and .71 respectively) exceeded the recommended threshold of .70, indicating good internal consistency.

Table 1. *Structure of the questionnaire*

No.	Clusters	Items
1	Teaching activities	3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17
2	Teaching materials	2, 16, 18a, 18b, 18c, 19a, 19b
3	Classroom assessment practice	1, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13

A semi-structured interview was conducted to collect follow-up qualitative data for the study. Issues identified from the quantitative data provided the basis for more in-depth exploration. The interview protocol contained three parts: a preamble, interview segment questions, and closing. The main section included five main questions and follow-up ones exploring teachers' responses in implementing the CEFR-aligned curriculum. These questions were twofold. Firstly, they focused on the "what" and were developed in line with the three clusters from the questionnaire. The main aim was to verify the findings from the survey questionnaire and enhance the validity of the results. Part of the interview also concerned the "how" and the "why". The closing part

encouraged teacher participants to reflect on whatever they felt insufficient during the interview.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative findings were analyzed separately using different techniques. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were first analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics including the mean scores and standard deviations of each item were generated. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded and themed. To ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative data, the interviewed teachers were invited to review and confirmed that the transcripts and the preliminary interpretation reflected their views and experiences accurately. The themes were also discussed with a peer to provide an independent perspective and reduce potential researcher bias. After the analysis and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data, an integration of both groups of data was made. The findings are presented in relation to the research question, the sub-clusters of the questionnaire, and the emerging themes from the interview data.

Results

Table 2 presents the quantitative findings from the questionnaire. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). Mean scores were interpreted as follows: 1.00-1.80 = Never, 1.81-2.60 = Rarely, 2.61-3.40 = Sometimes, 3.41-4.20 = Often, and 4.21-5.00 = Always (Boone & Boone, 2012).

Table 2. *EFL teachers' reported responses to the CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation*

No	Items		Mean	Std. D
Teaching activities			3.78	.38
1	3	I design my teaching activities with reference to the CEFR descriptors.	3.64	.80
2	4	I refer to the CEFR descriptors when providing feedback on my students' performance.	3.33	.83
3	8	I emphasize the importance of learner autonomy in my teaching.	4.06	.98
4	10	My teaching activities focus on preparing students to pass their exams.	3.69	1.12
5	12	My teaching activities are strongly influenced by the required A1-B1 learning outcomes.	4.00	1.01
6	14	I encourage my students to use the CEFR to evaluate their own competency.	3.64	.68
7	15	My teaching activities have become test-oriented.	3.86	.68
8	17	I teach my students strategies for succeeding in CEFR-aligned tests.	4.06	.72
Teaching materials			3.90	.47
9	2	I incorporate CEFR practice tests into my teaching materials.	3.94	.89
11	16	I adapt the textbook's themes and topics to align with the CEFR B1 domains.	3.97	1.08

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10	18a	When adapting teaching materials, I incorporate supplementary materials aligned with the CEFR levels of proficiency.	4.06	.63
12	18b	When adapting teaching materials, I adapt the textbook's exercises and tasks to align with the CEFR levels of proficiency.	4.08	.69
13	18c	When adapting teaching materials, I prioritize textbook sections that align with the CEFR.	3.94	.83
14	19a	When adapting the teaching materials, I consult with colleagues when making adaptations.	3.50	.94
15	19b	When adapting the teaching materials, I explain the reasons for adaptations to my students.	3.78	.90
Classroom assessment			3.96	.42
16	1	I use classroom assessment to prepare students for CEFR-aligned tests.	3.89	.62
17	5	My classroom assessment is primarily used for evaluation, such as assigning grades and marks.	3.94	.75
18	6	My classroom assessment is designed with reference to the CEFR.	3.94	.79
19	7	My assessment practice includes all four language skills.	4.00	.68
20	9	In my class, I use assessment results to enhance students' language proficiency.	3.78	.76
21	11	I encourage my students to use CEFR-aligned tests for self-assessment.	4.14	.59
22	13	I incorporate CEFR-aligned tests into formative assessment.	4.06	.72

As shown in Table 2, the Mean values of the three clusters regarding EFL teachers' responses to the CEFR-aligned curriculum renewal range from 3.78 to 3.96, corresponding to the response category "Often". This indicates teachers' consistent effort to implement reforms in their classroom. A closer examination of the individual questionnaire items showed variation in the mean scores across the 22 items. Items 11 and 18b obtained the highest mean scores (M=4.14 and M=4.08, respectively). Items 8, 13, 17, and 18a followed, each with a mean score of 4.06. All of these items remained within the "Often" category but approached the "Always" one. By contrast, Items 3, 14, and 19a received lower mean scores (M=3.64, 3.64, and 3.50, respectively), although they were still within the "Often" category. Item 4 recorded the lowest mean score (M=3.33), corresponding to the "Sometimes" category. The next section presents a detailed discussion of the findings for each cluster, including teaching adjustment, materials adaptation, and assessment reform, integrating insights from the interview data.

Greater Concern for Time Distribution over Methodological Change in Teaching

Regarding teachers' responses to the new curriculum in their teaching activities, the Mean value of 3.78 for the entire cluster indicates that teachers deliberately modified their teaching activities in response to the required B1 learning outcomes. In particular, teaching students test-taking strategies for CEFR-aligned assessment and emphasizing self-learning were the two most commonly practiced activities. This is reflected in the highest mean values of the entire cluster, both at 4.06. In addition, their teaching is reported to be frequently modified in accordance with

the required A1-B1 learning outcomes (M=4.00). Activities applied least frequently include using the CEFR descriptors to provide feedback, letting students evaluate their language competency, and developing appropriate teaching activities (3.33, 3.64, and 3.64 respectively).

Interview data revealed similar findings. The participants made efforts to adjust their teaching practice in response to the implementation of the CEFR-based curriculum. However, their explanations indicated that teachers did not substantially modify their teaching methods and techniques. Rather than developing students' overall language proficiency, teachers focused primarily on preparing them to pass CEFR-aligned tests. This is evident in the representative explanation provided by a participant:

> *I have made different adjustments to my teaching. For example, I now teach more speaking tasks than I used to. I give as much time to teaching speaking skills as to teaching other skills because now all four skills are assessed equally. […] I also spend more time on coursebook tasks that closely resemble those featured in the test.*

The participant clearly demonstrated that her teaching adjustments primarily involved prioritizing tasks similar to test formats, dedicating more time to teaching speaking than before. This suggests that the teachers placed greater emphasis on equal teaching time distribution rather than pedagogical change. They acknowledged that teaching test-taking strategies was necessary given the renewed curriculum, the limited timeframe, and students' low entry-level proficiency. Meanwhile, little attention was given to the use of the CEFR can-do descriptors to enhance students' overall language proficiency.

As seen above, the questionnaire data indicate that teachers affirmed their emphasis on promoting learner autonomy in their teaching. All eight interviewed teachers also reported that an inadequate timetable and limited classroom hours diminished their instructional roles while increasing the importance of students' self-learning. Students' achievements, therefore, "*depended much more on their autonomous learning*", as one teacher commented. They added that during their teaching, they frequently directed their students to two learning sources for students' self-study. The first one is the official software and online websites for out-of-class learning. The second source was extra CEFR-aligned practice tests (e.g., KET and PET) introduced and combined by the teachers in their teaching. This strategy was used to deal with the limited teacher-led hours and aid the development of learner autonomy in language learning at the same time.

Prioritizing Test-oriented Materials and Making Test-like Resources Accessible

On average, the Mean value of the teaching materials cluster was 3.90 on the five-point Likert scale. All items yielded mean scores ranging from 3.50 to 4.08, indicating that these practices were implemented often. The high Mean score indicates that the teachers often make some adaptations to their teaching materials and apply other modification techniques as well. The interviewed participants also reported that they frequently adapted their teaching materials using different techniques.

In particular, the two most frequently implemented activities included adapting the textbook's exercises and tasks to make them relevant to the CEFR-A1, A2 and B1 levels (Mean = 4.08), and bringing into the class more supplementary materials aligned with the CEFR (Mean = 4.06). Other strategies claimed to be employed often were using CEFR-based practice tests as part of the teaching materials (Mean = 3.94), prioritizing use of those parts of the textbook aligned with the CEFR (Mean = 3.94), and modifying the textbook's themes and topics to align with the CEFR domains (Mean = 3.97). Finally, item 19a regarding discussion with colleagues during the

implementation process attained the lowest value of 3.50, indicating that teachers collaborated, cooperated with, and informed each other least frequently.

In addition, the teacher participants believed the currently assigned textbooks are not compatible or well aligned with CEFR outcomes. They also reported time constraints as a challenge to CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation. However, teacher feedback on the materials themselves shows a greater and almost constant concern with how to deliver the materials within the limited timeframe rather than on how to make effective use of the prescribed materials, as indicated in the following account by a participant:

> *We can't cover all the coursebook content within 105 hours. There are too many tasks and activities, so we often have to select the most important parts [those that are not too time-consuming, similar to test tasks, and engaging] while sacrificing others. Given the varying proficiency levels of our students, covering all the material within the limited teaching time feels like an "impossible mission". […] In some lessons, I feel like I'm rushing through sections rather than truly teaching. I believe we need more time to teach effectively.*

While teachers consistently expressed the need for increased teaching hours, they showed less concern about evaluating materials, adapting and prioritizing sections, or selecting the tasks and topics most useful in supporting student acquisition of the required level of proficiency than about the time constraints imposed. The modifications were said to have been made with reference to students' levels of proficiency, students' interests and especially, the A1-B1 outcomes. The findings presented above confirm that the strong impact of the CEFR-aligned learning outcomes may result in EFL teachers teaching the textbook "as if it were a test book" (Prodomou, 1995) and using extra "test books" as supplementary textbooks.

Investing more in Summative than Formative Assessment

Overall, classroom assessment renewal accounts for the high Mean value of 3.96, showing that participant teachers frequently modified assessment activities. In particular, all items related to CEFR-aligned assessment practices recieved mean scores ranging from 3.78 to 4.14, corresponding to the response category "Often". Compared with the other two clusters, the mean scores in this cluster were relatively homogeneous, indicating a more consistent pattern of implementation across assessment practices. It is noted that among different assessment practices, using CEFR-aligned tests for students' self-assessment (Mean = 4.14), applying CEFR-aligned tests in formative assessment (Mean = 4.06), and combining all four skills in the classroom assessment practice (Mean = 4.00) were applied most frequently by the participants, resulting in a Mean approaching the "*Always*" category. The small S.D values, ranging from .59 to .79, indicate the consistency of the teachers' choices. Meanwhile, using assessment to develop students' proficiency achieved the lowest mean value of 3.78, confirming the "coping strategies" participant teachers applied in their assessment, similar to what they have done to their teaching activities.

In accordance with the analysis results of the questionnaire data, the interview data show teachers' great focus on renewing classroom assessment practices. However, the assessment renewal, as described by teachers, was confined to an increase in the number of CEFR-aligned tests and exercises. The teachers reported they not only "*prepared extra exercises and review materials in the CEFR-aligned test format*" but also "*redesigned midterm tests and other summative assessment tasks so that they became CEFR-aligned"*. The ultimate goal is to help students become familiar with the formats, perform better on exams, and meet the required learning outcomes, rather than use the Can-do descriptors of the CEFR as a language proficiency scale to

support the development of students' language proficiency. Explanations for teacher choices can be attributed to time constraints and students' low language proficiency compared to the required language learning outcomes. Teachers' solutions are thus temporary and can address the surface level rather than fundamentally change the root causes of the issues. What the teachers have tried to do through their assessment practices may increase the number of non-major students passing the required CEFR-aligned examinations. However, improving students' language proficiency over the long-term is much harder to achieve. The use of the CEFR to improve formative assessment and inform students' learning process was not reported in the interview data.

The interviewed teachers requested more training on the use of the CEFR for formative assessment renewal. As shared by a teacher:

> *I've attended several university training workshops with experts from Europe on the CEFR and its applications. These sessions have helped me better understand A1, A2, and B1 proficiency levels and how the CEFR can be used to design tests. The training has been very useful, but I'm still unsure how to apply the CEFR for formative assessment beyond asking my students to review the descriptors and assess whether they can do things as described in the descriptors. We need more specialized training on this.*

This shows that despite the potential usefulness of the CEFR for formative assessment, at the implementation level of the CEFR-aligned curriculum, it is easy for summative assessment to be prioritized from both the system's perspective (as reflected in the limited training provided to teachers on how to apply the framework to improve formative assessment) and the teachers' perspective.

Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that the teachers made considerable efforts to adapt their teaching to the requirements of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. Across the three dimensions investigated, they reported making frequent adjustments to their teaching activities, adapting instructional materials, and modifying assessment practices. However, these adaptations were largely directed towards meeting the immediate demands of curriculum implementation rather than systematically supporting students' language proficiency development. Specifically, after an extended period of CEFR implementation in Vietnam, obtained data show that participants still maintain a strong focus on testing and assessment, an observation that Little (2006) made 20 years ago across various contexts. The reported teaching adjustments were mainly temporary and short-lived strategies employed by the teachers to address the immediate requirement of achieving the CEFR-B1 level for non-English-major students. This reliance on coping strategies rather than sustainable pedagogical change may reflect institutional and contextual constraints. Teachers were required to help students achieve the mandated CEFR-B1 benchmark within existing curricular structures and a limited timeframe. Under these conditions, immediate adjustments seemed more feasible, particularly when teachers had to accommodate students with low proficiency levels and balance instructional demands.

The findings also showed the teachers' adoption of various strategies to enhance learner autonomy, from providing additional materials for self-study to directing students to supplementary learning resources. On taking a closer look, however, teachers' practices did not fully follow the autonomous learner approach. Autonomous learning requires students to take charge of and make decision about their own learning, setting goals, choosing learning activities and and select [appropriate] methods and techniques (Benaissi, 2015, p.410). Students were not

supported in developing such capacities. They just did some exercises and practice tests outside the classroom, away from teacher initiative and control. This finding aligns with previous studies (e.g., Despagne & Grossi, 2011; Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011; Pham, 2017; Ong & Tajuddin, 2021), which identified learner autonomy as essential to successful CEFR-aligned curriculum implementation. However, at the researched university, the implementation of learner autonomy among non-major students remains unstructured and spontaneous. Teachers' emphasis on developing learner autonomy was not simply a pedagogical choice but a strategic response to constraints within their teaching context.

While the failure of foreign language teaching reforms is often attributed to the lack of effective innovation implementation, sustainable strategies, supportive conditions for teachers' ownership of change, and necessary institutional support (Waters, 2009, p. 450), the key factors essential for successful curriculum reform such as adequate learner entry proficiency, sufficient time allocation, proper training for both teachers and learners, and well-structured courses remain absent. As a result, the reforms have been applied in a fragmented manner. This has resulted in a short-lived, strategic approach in teaching rather than sustained pedagogical change. These findings further support the view that educational reforms cannot be transferred mechanically across contexts. Instead, successful implementation depends on the alignment between policy expectations and contextual readiness. Without the necessary enabling conditions, policy implementation is likely to become compliance-oriented rather than developmental, making the implementation of curriculum reform unsustainable in the long run. This has important implications for curriculum developers and policy makers, as focusing solely on macro-level factors may not be sufficient. Sustainable education reform requires careful attention to micro-level factors such as students' proficiency level, sufficient time allocation, feasible assessment methods, and appropriate learning pathways.

Conclusion

This study examined EFL teachers' responses to implementing a CEFR-aligned curriculum for non-English-major university students. The findings show that the implementation of the curriculum has led to modifications and adaptations in all language teaching domains investigated, namely teaching activities, teaching materials, and assessment practices. The study showed teachers' efforts to adjust their teaching activities, adapt teaching materials, and renew assessment practices so as to create changes in the implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. Nonetheless, qualitative data indicate that these adaptation decisions are largely driven by teachers' personal reasoning and preferences rather than by well-informed, systematic considerations. As such, it is likely that the changes and innovations were superficial rather than profound, and unlikely to yield lasting results. While the government demonstrates strong determination to reform the foreign language teaching system, and while innovation has been initiated at the national level over an extended period, the study shows that the implementation phase at the bottom-up level continues to face numerous challenges. Teachers, who are the direct policy implementers, are still grappling with various challenges such as students' low level of proficiency, constraint time of the curriculum, and unclear implementation processes. As a result, their solutions and strategies tend to be situational. Consequently, the implementation has not been as effective as desired, and has not created significant breakthroughs, meaning that the innovation institutionalization is not guaranteed. The teachers need further substantial and sustainable support from the home university, the faculty, and their peers to make their modifications and adaptations

more effective and longer lasting. As key stakeholders of the CEFR-aligned curriculum, teachers need further preparation and training on the curriculum implementation. Ongoing capacity building and developing a culture for learning are suggested.

Focusing on one single university, the findings of the present study cannot be generalized beyond the context in which the data were collected. Future studies need to explore the application of the CEFR in a wider range of contexts. Other socio-cultural and economic factors that may influence how local teachers respond to such a global framework should also be taken into account.

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