

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Aligning the curriculum to CEFR

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THE Malaysian government is cognizant that competency in the English language is a major prerequisite to form a competitive work force that is able to meet the demands of an international market. Having a good command of the language will ensure that our young Malaysians are able to venture into businesses and professional platforms internationally where English is the common medium of communication.

Acknowledging the need to equip our young learners with a good mastery of the English language, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE) has taken the initiative to introduce a major reform in the English language education in Malaysia. Key to this reform is the development of the English Language Roadmap 2015-2025 which serves as a guide for a systemic transformation at all levels from pre-school to higher education.

A main objective of the roadmap is to align the English language curriculum taught in Malaysian schools at all levels from pre-school to higher education to comparable international standards benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) that focuses on producing learners who can communicate and interact competently in the English language. In order to do this, the MoE is collaborating with Cambridge English.

While the overall alignment process of the English language curriculum is being overseen by the Curriculum Development Division (BPK) and the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC), the other significant players such as the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC), Teacher Education Institute Malaysia (IPGM), Teacher Training Division (BPG), Textbook Division (BBT), Education Technology Division (BTP) and the Examination Syndicate (LP) take charge of operationalising and undertaking their respective tasks and responsibilities in order to ensure that the aligned English language curricula provide learners with a strong foundation in English language. This alignment has been thought through and has undergone many levels of scrutiny and discussions by relevant stakeholders.

The alignment process of the English language curriculum means aligning the objectives, the content, teaching and learning strategies and assessment as all these factors form the key components of a unified curriculum. At

the same time aligning a curriculum also means providing teacher development programmes that make teachers conscious with how the aligned curriculum should be presented and evaluated to ensure the achievement of its objectives and outcomes. Workshops have been initiated where MoE master trainers play a role in promoting the understanding of the CEFR-aligned curriculum among teachers.

Aspirational language proficiency targets based on the CEFR, are also attached to each year of the aligned curriculum from preschool to higher education indicating the targeted English language proficiency level to be achieved by the learners. The existence of these aspirational targets offers our teachers a way to plan their teaching and learning.

Phase 1 of the alignment process saw the CEFR familiarisation training taking place where teachers were exposed to the CEFR. Efforts were and are underway to select appropriate textbooks which will support the CEFR-aligned curriculum. Meanwhile, the Examinations Syndicate has also been co-opted to work on the examinations component. Next year will see the training for formative assessment. Additionally, the teacher training curricula of all higher education institutes will also be reviewed to ensure that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared for the CEFR-aligned curriculum in schools.

To ensure that teachers are confident and competent in translating the new aligned curriculum, they are provided with a support toolkit that includes exemplar lessons, worksheets, teaching and learning aids and assessment tools. In Phase 3, from 2021-2025, the CEFR-aligned curriculum would have completed its first full cycle of implementation and will be reviewed once again with the aim of strengthening it for future cohorts of learners.

The process of aligning the English language curriculum to the CEFR is not just a matter of matching the learning standards in the national English language curriculum with those of the CEFR. The standards and can do statements within the CEFR, serve as a framework of reference and are adapted to meet the specifications of the Malaysian curriculum. The CEFR-aligned English language curriculum is better able to inform administrators, language teachers and all those involved in language teaching about the levels of proficiency and competency that their students should attain.

The success or failure of any educational reform depends on many factors including effective information dissemination, materials, resources, adequate teacher preparation and capacity building. However, the greatest chal-

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lenge to change has always been the human factor, namely the changing of mindset and attitudes. The human mind tends to resist change and be contented with familiar routines and habits. To accept change it is important that people understand the relevance, the need and the significance of change. In the case of the CEFR-aligned curriculum, the changes required are both relevant and timely as the MoE moves to boost the level of English language education in the country.

Another factor in accepting any change is readiness, and in this case, teacher readiness. Teachers as educators must adopt a positive mindset and be ready for change in line with global demands and development. The key to successful change as shared by Michael Fullan in *The New Meaning of Educational Change* is collaborative practices. For any educational change or reform to succeed, every teacher must get on board and commit to the reform that seeks to bring about a brighter future for the nation's children. The change must come from within. Socrates shared that the secret of change is to focus all our energy on building the new, that is each and every one has to walk the talk to achieve the desired change. What we want is for our children to become competent and confident global citizens of the world who can contribute towards creating a sustainable and nurturing society at home and beyond, and this can be achieved in large part through providing them an education that is relevant and geared towards modern-day realities. The CEFR-aligned English language curriculum is one important element of this education.

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PHASE 2 OF THE CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT PROCESS FOR CEFR

Year	Preschool	Primary	Secondary
2018	Preschool 4+ and 5+	Year 1 & Year 2	Form 1 & Form 2
2019		Year 3	Form 3
2020		Year 4	Form 4
2021		Year 5	Form 5
2022		Year 6	-