

Editorial

CEFR in Asian Contexts: Alignment, Assessment, and Emerging Technologies

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has become firmly established in language education and assessment settings. It is widely recognized by teachers, teacher educators, curriculum designers, and assessment specialists across contexts, despite minor variations in operationalization and implementation (Byram, 2022). Originally conceived as a common reference system to support transparency and comparability in language proficiency, the CEFR was grounded in the broader objective of facilitating the mobility of people and ideas through shared standards (English Profile, 2015; Van Ek, 1975).

Since its development, the CEFR has extended far beyond its European origins. It is now actively adopted, adapted, and reinterpreted across diverse educational contexts, including inner-circle settings such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; outer-circle contexts such as Malaysia, Singapore, India, and Nigeria; and expanding-circle contexts such as Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and South Korea (Ali et al., 2018; Kachru, 1992). This global diffusion has transformed the CEFR from a regional framework into a shared point of reference for language policy, pedagogy, and assessment worldwide. However, the widespread uptake of the CEFR has also shifted the focus of inquiry. The central question is no longer whether the framework is influential, but how it is interpreted, operationalized, and critically engaged within local contexts, particularly in an era increasingly shaped by digital and AI-mediated language use.

Geographically, the contributions to this special issue reflect the diversity of CEFR-related research in Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, alongside representation from West Asia through research situated in

Iranian EFL contexts. This distribution underscores the region's active engagement with CEFR across multiple domains, including assessment, pedagogy, and teacher development. At the same time, it underscores the need for broader cross-regional collaboration and comparative work to further enrich understanding of how the framework is interpreted and implemented across diverse sociolinguistic and educational settings.

The manuscripts featured in this special issue showcase CEFR research endeavors within the Asian context. This line of research reflects a more mature and diversified phase of inquiry that is no longer confined to questions of adoption or policy transfer. Themes addressed in this context tap into how the CEFR framework can be interpreted, operationalized, validated, and extended across diverse local settings. Taken together, the contributions to this special issue portray a field that is simultaneously consolidating its assessment foundations, broadening its pedagogical reach, and increasingly engaging with digital and AI-mediated environments. This trajectory aligns with broader CEFR scholarship, which has documented the framework's spread far beyond Europe and its growing influence on curricula, teaching materials, teacher education, and assessment practices (Council of Europe, 2001; Read, 2019; Sahib & Stapa, 2022).

A first notable contribution of this special issue lies in its attention to the macro-level development of CEFR scholarship itself. Two bibliometric studies by Khan et al. and Mutammimah et al. discuss the evolution of CEFR-related research in English language teaching and in speaking pedagogy, respectively. These manuscripts are significant in that they go beyond merely quantifying publications; rather, they indicate shifts in thematic priorities. In Mutammimah et al.'s study on CEFR implementation in ELT, the field is characterized as shifting from policy and test-oriented concerns toward learner-centered, classroom-based, and technology-mediated perspectives. Similarly, Khan et al.'s speaking-pedagogy bibliometric study traces a developmental shift from technology-enhanced instruction to CEFR-aligned assessment and, more recently, to the affective dimensions of speaking performance. These trajectories

are consistent with broader evidence indicating that CEFR research has expanded significantly in Asia, even though collaboration across the region remains uneven (Sahib & Stapa, 2022). They further reinforce the view that CEFR is not merely an assessment framework; it is equally concerned with learning and teaching, although these dimensions are often less visible in implementation discourse (Read, 2019).

A second major strength of the special issue lies in its sustained focus on alignment and validation. Poonpon and Tangsakul and Limgomolvilas have focused on locally developed tests, namely the Khon Kaen University Academic English Reading Test and the Chulalongkorn University Language Institute Test, respectively. Together, these projects remind us that the legitimacy of CEFR depends not on attaching labels to tests, but on rigorous standard setting, descriptor-based interpretation, and empirical validation. This is important in Asian contexts, where the appeal of CEFR as an international benchmark can sometimes lead institutions to prioritize comparability over construct clarity (Read, 2019; Foley, 2019). Poonpon and Tangsakul's project on standard-setting for the KKU-AELT is especially significant because it demonstrates a careful alignment process with strong inter-rater consistency and clearly defined cut scores from A1 to C1. Limgomolvilas's study on the CULI test adds a further dimension by demonstrating that mapping test items onto illustrative scales could reveal restricted coverage across CEFR levels and communicative activities. Rather than treating such findings as weaknesses alone, the study effectively reframes them as design decisions: either refine the test for narrower-level precision or extend item coverage to capture a broader proficiency range. This precisely constitutes the kind of evidence-based reflection required for CEFR-linked assessment.

The issue also points to an emerging modernization of test development. For example, Deeprom's study on algorithmic randomization responds to a practical challenge faced by many higher education institutions: how to develop scalable, secure, and psychometrically robust English proficiency tests without relying solely on manual item assembly. By showing strong model fit and internal

consistency, this study suggests that CEFR alignment can be integrated into automated design systems without compromising assessment quality. Along the same lines, the manuscript implicitly foregrounds an important agenda for future work: technological efficiency must remain aligned with and accountable to communicative constructs. It is well established that the CEFR was not intended to function as a rigid standardization device; rather, it was designed as a common reference to support transparent curriculum and assessment decisions (Council of Europe, 2001; Foley, 2019). The fundamental challenge, then, is not whether technology can accelerate alignment, but whether it preserves the interpretive logic of the framework. While the first two studies focus on the alignment of locally developed institutional tests, Deeprom's work extends this line of inquiry by demonstrating how CEFR-aligned assessment can be embedded within algorithm-driven test construction systems.

A third theme of this special issue relates to pedagogy and the contextual enactment of CEFR principles in classroom settings. CEFR implementation has often been criticized for becoming overly test-driven, particularly in contexts where levels and descriptors are adopted without sufficient attention to teacher development, materials, and local pedagogical realities (Foley, 2019). Within this issue, several studies move beyond this limitation by examining how CEFR-informed practices are interpreted, negotiated, and operationalized in diverse educational environments.

Madkur's study of English language teaching in Indonesian *pesantren* provides an important sociocultural perspective on CEFR implementation. Drawing on classroom observations, teacher interviews, and curriculum analysis, the study argues that teachers do not perceive CEFR's intercultural orientation as inherently incompatible with Islamic educational values. Instead, those teachers reinterpret CEFR principles through religious and moral frameworks, selectively adapting them to align with institutional identity. In doing so, they exercise professional agency while mediating between global pedagogical models and local ideological expectations. The study also highlights naturally occurring plurilingual practices, where Indonesian, Arabic, and English are

mobilized as complementary resources for meaning-making, thereby illustrating an organic realization of the CEFR's plurilingual competence.

Complementing this perspective, Ghajarieh and Don examine the implementation of a CEFR-aligned professional development model for classroom-based assessment in Iranian EFL contexts. Using a mixed-methods design, their study demonstrates that targeted professional development can significantly enhance teachers' assessment literacy, particularly in designing communicative, criterion-referenced tasks aligned with CEFR descriptors. The findings highlight a persistent challenge in CEFR implementation: teachers often lack familiarity with the framework at the outset, and meaningful adoption requires sustained, context-sensitive support rather than one-off training initiatives. By tracing the shift from limited awareness to more confident and informed classroom practice, the study provides a practical model for bridging the gap between policy-level adoption and pedagogical enactment.

Putri and Kristanto's CogniWrite study extends this pedagogical line of inquiry into digitally mediated higher education contexts. Based on a quasi-experimental design, the findings indicate that CEFR-informed instruction can be effectively integrated with cognitive activation strategies, reflective scaffolding, manual writing tasks, and QR code-based adaptive feedback. Particularly noteworthy is the finding that delayed retention in writing outperforms speaking retention, challenging conventional assumptions about modality and digital support. More broadly, the study demonstrates that CEFR-based pedagogy can be innovative without becoming mechanically descriptor-driven, provided that instructional design remains grounded in cognitive and communicative principles.

Throughout the special issue, one can see a recurring tension that has shaped CEFR practices in Asia for years: the balance between global referencing and local meaning. Read (2019) argues that this balance is never easy to achieve, and Foley (2019) similarly notes that implementation in the region has often been hindered by limited understanding of the framework, inadequate follow-up

support, and a tendency to reduce CEFR to assessment. The present collection of studies does not resolve that tension, but it engages with it more critically than much of the earlier work. The studies do not treat CEFR as a finished solution. Instead, contributors to this issue use it as a heuristic and design framework: to map a reading test, to interrogate the coverage of a local proficiency test, to structure bibliometric analyses of research growth, and to guide pedagogical innovation in digitally mediated classrooms. This represents a more constructive direction for the field, as it promotes a shift towards context-sensitive CEFR perspectives as well as locally relevant interpretations and practices.

Additionally, the special issue highlights areas that warrant careful attention. For example, the bibliometric studies have explicitly identified underexplored areas such as mediations, classroom language functions, and CEFR-AI integration. These gaps are non-trivial and call for sustained research efforts to address them. With regard to meditations issues, the Companion Volume expanded the CEFR's treatment of mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural competence, signaling a broader understanding of communication beyond traditional four-skill models (Council of Europe, 2018; Foley, 2019). Nevertheless, much of the work represented in this special issue primarily emphasizes themes related to assessment, reading, writing, and speaking. While this emphasis is understandable, future research should extend more fully into classroom discourse, interaction, multilingual meaning-making, and teacher assessment literacy. Another area requiring attention concerns the ecology of implementation. Further research is needed to adequately examine how institutions support teachers in translating descriptors into syllabus design, task development, feedback practices, and classroom assessment. In the absence of such support, CEFR adoption risks remaining administratively attractive yet pedagogically superficial.

Overall, this special issue appears at a critical juncture. CEFR research in Asia is no longer asking whether the framework is influential; that question has already been resolved. The more pressing question concerns the kinds of knowledge being produced under its influence. The studies compiled in this issue

suggest three answers. First, CEFR scholarship is becoming more self-reflexive, as bibliometric work maps its own trajectories and blind spots. Second, assessment research is becoming more technically sophisticated, while still wrestling with questions of construct representation and local relevance. Third, pedagogical applications are beginning to engage more seriously with digital design, retention, and learner development. For these reasons, the special issue makes a timely contribution and shows a field undergoing increasing methodological and conceptual diversification: from adoption to interrogation, from alignment to evidence, and from framework familiarity to context-sensitive innovation.

For editors and researchers, the implications are clear. Work conducted under the CEFR umbrella should not be assessed solely on the basis of reference to levels, descriptors, or alignment claims. Strong CEFR scholarship must demonstrate conceptual fit, methodological transparency, and contextual sensitivity. This entails justifying the suitability of a particular scale, skill, or descriptor set for the target population; showing how judgments were made; and clarifying the interpretations warranted from scores, tasks, or classroom outcomes. It also means resisting the temptation to treat imported labels as self-evident indicators of quality. In this respect, the studies in the present issue offer useful models as they foreground procedures and evidence rather than mere benchmarking. That stance is especially important in Asia, where institutional pressure for international visibility can easily turn CEFR terminology into a symbolic resource rather than an analytical one. Many studies in this issue avoid that trap by using the framework to ask sharper questions about proficiency, task design, construct coverage, and learning consequences. If this special issue has a unifying message, it is that CEFR work in the region is most valuable when it is both internationally legible and locally sensitive. This is the standard to which future CEFR scholarship should aspire.

Alla Khan and Atta Gebril

Guest Editors

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