

CONTENT ANALYSIS ON CEFR ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR ADVANCED MALAYSIAN ESL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

In 2017 the Malaysian education system has been introduced to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which is an international standard for describing language ability. The CEFR standard has been officially implemented in Malaysian schools in 2018. The ministry has opted internationally produced books to meet the new CEFR levels, since the preceding materials are not in tandem to the CEFR standards. In relation to this, local publishers must develop textbooks that are in line with the CEFR standards. This coincidentally also applies to the tertiary education context in Malaysia, where advanced ESL learners are required to acquire and apply linguistic and pragmatic competence of the target language precisely in varying contexts. Content analysis of CEFR certified books is essential as it is the initial stage in the process of developing books that best achieve the international standards set and the local state of affairs. The study aims to analyse the structural content, functional features, as well as the pragmatic and cultural representations of CEFR English proficiency books. The research will analyse 12 CEFR certified international books on English proficiency for tertiary level learners (CEFR level A1-B2). The range of books to be analysed will be books published within 2015 -2018. The research will conduct a summative analysis of structure, functional features, and pragmatic and cultural representations identified. The research will adapt Hsieh and Shannon's content analysis framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2004), Swales moves framework (Swales, 1990), and Saussurean Semiotics (Saussure, 1983). The findings of the analysis may provide the guideline on the structure and function of CEFR certified ESL references required in benchmarking towards Malaysian published ESL materials that apply to the Malaysian context.

Keywords: CEFR, English as a Second Language for Advanced Learners, Learning Materials

1.0 CEFR IN EUROPE

Since The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was introduced in 2001, the European Union Council Resolution has claimed that they present systems that validate linguistic abilities in 40 European and non-European languages. The six-point scale CEFR framework describes language ability beginning from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for the language masters (“Common European Framework of Reference for Languages,” 2018). Three tables of Common Reference Levels have been introduced: Table 1 (Global scale), Table 2 (Self-assessment grid), and Table 3 (Qualitative aspects of spoken language use).

The CEFR framework promotes the communicative approach of language teaching, learning and testing designs. For the educational bodies and employing institutions, this framework functions as a comparison of qualifications to other examinations in the European Union countries. The CEFR is however not an authoritarian that prescribes on what and how to implement syllabus, curriculum, and examinations but it serves as the common meta-language guideline in providing language proficiency scales. This is to ensure that quality, coherence and transparency are systematically evident in language education and employing processes.

2.0 CEFR IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, the Education Ministry introduced the CEFR standards in 2017, and later officially implemented this system in 2018 in Malaysian Government Schools. Malaysia, known for its multiracial community officially recognises Bahasa Malaysia as the National Language, English serves as the Second Language, and Malaysian Chinese and Indian languages are also offered by Government schools. The CEFR implementation currently is specifically focused on the English Language subjects offered, not all languages.

Concerns related to CEFR in Malaysia have mainly highlighted the English proficiency assessments and learners’ performance; specifically ESL students’ oral proficiency (Idris & Zakaria, 2016), ESL students’ reading comprehension (Puteh-Behak et al., 2018), and writing assessment (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Studies relating to the implementation of CEFR based self-and peer rating assessment in the Malaysian ESL context

suggested that modest ESL learners were able to rate their performance decisively (Idris & Raof, 2017a, 2017b). In endorsing awareness of language competencies objectively in unison, Lo (2018), pointed the importance of intervention programs supporting Malaysian Secondary School teachers.

The majority concern of the CEFR implementation in Malaysia has yet to explore the English learning materials provided to the Malaysian ESL students. The Malaysian Government Schools and Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions are currently opting for non-local published textbooks, since the local textbooks are not CEFR compliance thus far. In relating to this issue, content analysis of CEFR certified books is essential as it is the initial stage in the process of developing books that best achieve the international standards set and the local state of affairs. Points of interests to be securitised vary from the text source, discourse type, estimated difficulty level, intercultural pragmatics and cross-cultural sensitivity.

3.0 CEFR TEXTBOOK CONTENT ANALYSIS

The study aims to analyse the structural content, functional features, as well as the pragmatic and cultural representations of CEFR English proficiency books for advanced ESL learners. The research will analyse 12 CEFR certified international books on English proficiency specifically reading and writing for tertiary level learners. The scale of focus ranges from CEFR level A1 to CEFR level B2. The range of books to be analysed will be books published within 2015 to 2018. The research will conduct a summative analysis of structure, functional features, and pragmatic and cultural representations identified in the textbooks. The research will adapt Hsieh and Shannon's content analysis framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2004), Swales moves framework (Swales, 1990), and Saussurean Semiotics (Saussure, 1983).

The findings of the analysis may provide the guideline on the structure and function of CEFR certified ESL references required in benchmarking towards Malaysian published ESL materials that apply to the Malaysian context. The CEFR compliance ESL learning materials ideally should not only be able to provide European contexts and discourses, but relevant and appropriate to the Malaysian context, Asian context, and universally all around the globe.

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