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## LANGUAGE TEACHERS' VIEWS ON CEFR

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### Abstract

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) provides a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications, thus facilitating educational and occupational mobility. The document was recommended to the member states to be used by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. As a result, it has increasingly become a key reference document and valuable tool as it is related to all who are directly involved in language teaching and testing. Teachers play a vital role in the application of this document effectively. This is why they have to be offered training as a first step. However, in order to prepare an effective training related to CEFR, it has to be analyzed that what language teachers know about the document and how they apply the issues stated in this reference tool. For this aim, this study tries to determine what teachers know about the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) document and what they think about the applicability of the document.

*Keywords:* Common European Framework of Reference, Teacher Training, Council of Europe

### 1. Literature review

#### 1.1. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2001) describes the aim of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR or CEF)* as promoting transparency and coherence in the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe. Although the word *European* refers to European languages, the CEF has been translated into more than 30 languages, some of which are not European languages, and this has made the CEF accessible to almost everybody in the world. The CEF provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe (Council of Europe, 2001). In this reference tool, language learners' levels are described at six levels: A1 and A2 (Basic Users), B1 and B2 (Independent Users), C1 and C2 (Proficient Users). In the CEF document, each level is described in detail. The description of each level includes competencies needed for effective communication, skills and knowledge related to language learning and competencies, and situations and contexts in which communication takes place (Council of Europe, 2001).

Plurilingualism, which supports that many people show some degree of competence in another language, is the focus of the CEF. According to the view of plurilingualism, the aim of the language teaching is to make people aware of this competence, and to feed and promote this

competence (Morrow, 2004). Thus, the CEF gives importance learner autonomy and self-assessment.

## **1.2. The applicability of the document**

Morrow (2004) includes some insights from the CEF users about the applicability of the CEF. Both positive and negative insights are included in her book. Some criticisms from students are about the length and structure of the CEF: points like “overlaps, and never-ending typologies and lists” (p.10). Some criticisms from academics are about its theoretical background. It is argued that the CEF lacks a “consistent underlying theory and terminology” (Morrow, 2004, p.10). However, despite these criticisms, many teachers, teacher trainers and academics who have used the CEF in their teachings such as Keddle, Heyworth, Komorowska, North, Little and Simpson, Huhta and Figueras, Manasseh, and Wall are of the opinion that the CEF is worth the effort (as cited in Morrow, 2004). They describe the strengths of the CEF as giving emphasis on what the learners are able to do rather than what they are not able to do, developing learner autonomy and self-assessment, effective incorporation of learning skills and strategies into the CEF, and promoting language through diagnostic assessment.

## **1.3. Role of CEFR in foreign language teaching**

The CEF has been important for foreign language teaching because of many reasons. The Council of Europe (2001) describes benefits of the CEF as eliminating the different educational systems in Europe, providing the means for educational administrators, teachers, teacher trainers, course designers etc., providing a comprehensive description of what skills and knowledge language learners have to develop in order to communicate effectively, and enhancing the transparency of syllabuses and courses by providing a common basis for the explicit description of objectives, methods and contents. Heyworth (2004, p.12) also declares the importance of the CEF in his following sentence: “...the CEF provides a comprehensive account of an approach to language education which language teachers, teacher trainers, and academic managers need at least to consider, together with a set of resources which can have practical applications in the planning and delivery of language courses.”

## **1.4. The CEFR in Turkish Education System**

The European Language Portfolio (ELP), which is a part of the CEF, was introduced to the Ministry of Education in Turkey in 2001. By 2004, it had been piloted in 30 schools with 60 teachers and 1357 students nationwide. After the piloting, the ELP prepared by the Ministry of Education in Turkey was presented to the Validation Committee of the Council of Europe and was found appropriate for meeting the standards of the Council. After this validation process, digital copies of the ELP were prepared, and distributed for the use of teachers and students (Demirel, 2005).

In order to see the effectiveness of the CEF in Turkey, a pilot study on the use of the CEF in teaching Turkish as a foreign language was carried by Güneyli and Demirel (2006). The results of the study have shown that the CEF has positive results in terms of students' autonomy and self-assessment, their willingness to learn the language, their self-confidence and motivation, participating actively in the learning process, and learning the target culture.

As for the university level, each university in Turkey follows a different way in foreign language teaching, but a growing number of universities are applying the CEF criteria for proficiency in the target language.

Though developing the CEF-based language teaching programmes is not currently a common practice in Turkey, the pilot studies show its effectiveness, which makes the CEF gain importance in course design, teacher education, and assessment issues. However, the literature on the CEF shows that the biggest common problem about it is that educators and students are not familiar with the reference tool (Elder & O'Loughlin, 2007; Morrow, 2004).

## 2. STUDY

### 2.1. Research goals

Main purpose of this study was to determine language teachers's views on the use of Common European Framework. The study aimed to achieve research objectives through following research questions:

- What do language teachers know about CEF?
- How do they apply the issues stated in this reference tool?
- What do they think about the applicability of the document?

As a data collection tool, a questionnaire was developed under the light of research questions. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. First part mainly focused on demographic information about the participants, their knowledge and ideas about the CEF and ideas of participants about the applicability of the document. For this aim, first part included 15 items. The second part of the data collection tool was prepared to learn participants' ideas about the importance of outcomes of a CEF-based teacher training programme. So, second part included 35 items. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended ones. Data collection tool was distributed through a web site called [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) after making needed modifications with the help of experts in this field.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Demographic information*

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	35	%76.1
Male	11	%23.9

As it is seen from the table, most of the participants (n=35) are female. Male participants consists of only %23.9 percentage of total.

Data was gathered from 46 teachers living in 18 different cities. The names of the cities and the number of the participants are given on the table.

Table 2. *Distribution of cities*

Names of the Cities	Number
İstanbul	11
Karabük	10
Malatya	9
Ankara	3
Aydın	3
Eskişehir	2
Rize	2
Bingöl, Kocaeli, Isparta, Mardin, Konya and Bursa.	1

It can be easily inferred that a wide variety was provided in the study in terms of locations. In other words, the questionnaire was not only distributed to the teachers in İstanbul in order to learn the situation in different cities other than İstanbul.

It was also aimed to reach teachers teaching at different levels and institutions. As a result, 26 instructors working at the university, 11 teachers working at primary school, 7 teachers working at high school and 2 teachers working at private language center participated in the study.

Table 3. *Knowledge in CEFR*

Have you read the common european framework of reference for languages (CEFR)?	
Yes	%57.8
No	%42.2

The table shows that most of the participants read the document. However, still the high number of the participants (%42.2) have not read the document yet.

Table 4. *Level of participation in European studies*

Do you follow the studies of the European Union in Foreign Language Teaching?	
YES	%41.3
NO	%58.7

When the participants were asked whether they follow the studies of the European Union in foreign language teaching or not, %58.7 of the participants stated that they do not follow the studies in the Union.

Table 5. *Opinions on teacher education*

Do you think that the CEFR should have a place in teacher education?	
YES	%88.9
NO	%11.1

As illustrated in table 6, %88.9 of the participants thinks that the CEFR should have a place in teacher education.

Participants also stated comments on the role of the CEFR in teacher education. Totally 32 comments were taken by the participants. The comments were grouped according to the topics shared by the participants.

Table 6. *Reasons for CEF in teacher education*

Topics	Number
Standards	10
Teacher's Knowledge	7
The role of CEFR in Material Development	5
Four skills	4
Total	32

Most of the comments stated by the participants are related to standards in the document. The importance of teacher's knowledge comes secondly. The relation between the document and material development is another most stated issue.

Table 7. *The role of CEFR in teaching*

Do you take the issues stated in the CEFR into consideration in your teaching?	
YES	%33.3
NO	%66.7

Even though most of the participants think that the CEFR should have a place in teacher education, most of the participants (%66.7) do not take the issues stated in the CEFR into consideration in their own teaching.

Participants were asked to write the names of the classes in which CEFR is taken into consideration. These are the classes focusing on all language skills, general English, all classes at preparatory school and speaking. The issues taken into consideration were also examined in the analysis. According to the results, it is seen that participants focus on ELP, common levels, skills, material design, assessment and daily language.

Table 8. *Need in training*

Do you need in-service training on CEFR?	
YES	%82.2
NO	%17.8

It is again most of the participants (%82.2) answered the question of “do you need in-service training on CEFR?” as yes.

35 statements from “European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages” designed by the Modern Centre for European Languages in Graz which aims to provide a guidance both for trainers and trainees were chosen according to the views of experts in foreign language education. Even though the statements were grouped under the titles of “context”, “methodology”, “resources”, “lesson planning”, “independent learning” and “assessment”, they were not given on the questionnaire in an order. Participants were asked “which of the following output statements should be included in a CEFR-led teacher training programme?”. They were supposed to choose among the options of “should include”, “undecided”, “no need to include”.

The items which were agreed to include in a teacher training program by more than %85 percent of the participants were given below.

Table 10. *Views on E-POSTL items*

Items	Should include	Undecided	No need to include
1. Can understand and integrate content of European documents (e.g. Common European Framework of Reference, European Language Portfolio) as appropriate in his/her teaching.	88.9%	11.1%	0.0%
2. Can understand the personal, intellectual and cultural value of learning other languages.	97.8%	2.2%	0.0%
3. Can recognize the organizational constraints and resource limitations existent at his/her school and adapt his/her teaching accordingly.	93.3%	4.4%	2.2%
4. Can create a supportive atmosphere that invites learners to take part in speaking activities.	91.3%	6.5%	2.2%
5. Can help learners to use communication strategies (asking for clarification, comprehension questions, etc.) and compensation	93.3%	4.4%	2.2%

strategies (paraphrasing, simplification) when engaging in spoken interaction.			
6. Can evaluate and select a range of meaningful writing activities to help learners become aware of and use appropriate language for different text types (letters, stories, reports etc.).	89.1%	10.9%	0.0%
7. Can design and select different activities in order to practice and develop different listening strategies.	88.9%	11.1%	0.0%
8. Can set different activities in order to practice and develop different reading strategies according to the purpose of reading.	93.2%	6.8%	0.0%
9. Can evaluate and select tasks which help learners to use new vocabulary in oral and written contexts.	89.1%	10.9%	0.0%
10. Can evaluate and select activities which help learners to develop their socio-cultural competence.	86.7%	11.1%	2.2%
11. Can vary and balance activities to include a variety of skills and competences.	93.5%	4.3%	2.2%
12. Can design activities to make the learners aware and build on their existing knowledge.	95.7%	2.2%	2.2%
13. Can plan for learner presentations and learner interaction.	87.0%	10.9%	2.2%
14. Can be flexible when working from a lesson plan and respond to learner interests as the lesson progresses.	93.5%	6.5%	0.0%
15. Can relate what he/she teaches to learners' knowledge and previous language learning experiences.	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
16. Can make explicit and help learners to develop appropriate learning strategies.	86.7%	13.3%	0.0%
17. Can encourage learners to use the target language in their activities.	95.7%	4.3%	0.0%
18. Can evaluate and select a variety of activities which help learners to reflect on their existing knowledge and competences.	93.5%	6.5%	0.0%
19. Can assist learners in choosing tasks and activities according to their individual needs and interests.	89.1%	10.9%	0.0%
20. Can deal with errors that occur in spoken and written language in ways which support learning processes and do not undermine confidence and communication.	91.3%	8.7%	0.0%

#### 4. Conclusion

More than half of the participants stated that they have read the document. However, most of the teachers do not follow studies conducted by the EU in foreign language education. It is clearly seen that foreign language teachers need in-service training on CEFR. Therefore, sample lessons taking the issues in CEFR into consideration might be shared with the teachers. In addition, tasks and handouts for the teachers can be prepared to present basic information about the CEFR.

Workshops or conferences on the use of Common European Framework might be also organized for teachers.

Another result is teachers (%33.3) apply the issues stated in the reference tool in four skills, but with a special emphasis on speaking. But the rest (%66.7) of them does not take the issues stated in the CEF into consideration in their teaching. Teachers tend to make use of CEF criteria for assessment, material design, skills teaching, ELP, having common levels, learning daily language. This result indicates that teachers either do not give importance the issues which are strongly emphasized like culture, process-based learning or they are not aware of these issues.

Teachers think that CEF document should have a place in teacher education. So, not only in-service education but also pre-service education should be prepared in a way to include CEFR. When teachers were asked to share their choices on E-POSTL items in order to prepare a teacher training program accordingly, twenty items from the list got higher than %85 per cent. This shows that teachers at practice also believes in the necessity of the items suggested in European Portfolio for Language Teachers. This fact which can be regarded as a kind of needs analysis has to be taken into consideration before designing a CEFR based teacher training program.

It can be concluded that teacher training programs (both pre-service and in-service) should educate teachers on CEF and teach them how to use the tool for foreign/second language teaching more effectively (such as materials development, assessment, skills teaching, setting objectives, alternative assessment (ELP) etc.).

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