

# Everyone Matters: Scaffolding EFL Low Proficiency Students' Writing Performances with a Practical CEFR-based Writing Instruction Framework

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## Article Info

## ABSTRACT

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This action-oriented pedagogical research aims to support low-proficiency EFL secondary school students in Algeria who are experiencing poor writing performances, particularly due to the misalignment of the high expectations of the Algerian English curriculum with their actual English level. For this purpose, we opted for merging CEFR affordances, tailoring scaffolded writing instruction materials, and integrating Hyland's genre-based instruction strategies into the pedagogical action research process to align these low-proficiency students with EFL national standards. The present work consists of a teacher-led action-research project involving 50 first-year EFL secondary students whose English proficiency level is too low compared to their classmates'. To address the research objectives, a structured plan was employed involving four stages: 1. planning, 2. acting, 3. observing, and 4. reflecting within each cycle of the research. Data collection involved placement tests to determine students' initial writing proficiency, differentiated writing tasks aligned with CEFR levels, and ongoing assessment using Harsch and Seyferth's CEFR Writing Assessment Checklist to evaluate progress. Research findings revealed that merging the aforementioned models in addition to Wheeler's model for curriculum design and Feez's teaching-learning cycle contributed to upgrading students' writing performance, granting a CEFR-informed writing instruction framework to reintegrate low-performing students within higher EFL learning contexts.



## Herkes Önemlidir: Pratik bir CEFR Tabanlı Yazma Öğretim Çerçevesi ile Düşük Yeterlilikteki EFL Öğrencilerinin Yazma Performanslarını Destekleme

### Makale Bilgisi

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### ÖZET

Bu eylem odaklı pedagojik araştırma, özellikle Cezayir'deki İngilizce müfredatının yüksek beklentileri ile öğrencilerin gerçek İngilizce seviyeleri arasındaki uyumsuzluk nedeniyle yazma becerileri zayıf olan düşük seviyedeki İngilizce (EFL) lise öğrencilerini desteklemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, CEFR'in sunduğu olanakların birleştirilmesi, yapılandırılmış yazma öğretim materyallerinin uyarlanması ve Hyland'ın türe dayalı öğretim stratejilerinin pedagojik eylem araştırması sürecine entegre edilmesi yoluyla bu düşük seviyedeki öğrencilerin İngilizce öğretim standartlarıyla uyumlu hale getirilmesi hedeflenmiştir. Bu çalışma, İngilizce seviyeleri sınıf arkadaşlarına göre oldukça düşük olan 50 birinci sınıf lise öğrencisinin yer aldığı öğretmen liderliğinde bir eylem araştırması projesinden oluşmaktadır. Araştırma hedeflerini gerçekleştirmek amacıyla, her döngüde 1. planlama, 2. uygulama, 3. gözlem ve 4. yansıtma olmak üzere dört aşamayı içeren yapılandırılmış bir plan izlenmiştir. Veri toplama süreci; öğrencilerin başlangıç yazma yeterliklerini belirlemek için seviye belirleme sınavlarını, CEFR seviyelerine göre uyarlanmış farklılaştırılmış yazma görevlerini ve ilerlemeyi değerlendirmek için Harsch ve Seyferth'in CEFR Yazma Değerlendirme Kontrol Listesi'ne dayalı sürekli değerlendirmeyi içermektedir. Araştırma bulguları, yukarıda belirtilen modellerin Wheeler'ın müfredat tasarımı modeli ve Feez'in öğretme-öğrenme döngüsü ile birleştirilmesinin, öğrencilerin yazma performanslarının gelişmesine katkı sağladığını ve düşük performanslı öğrencilerin daha ileri düzeydeki İngilizce öğrenim bağlamlarına yeniden entegre edilmesine olanak tanıyan CEFR tabanlı bir yazma öğretim çerçevesi sunduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, writing assignments are deemed to be a challenging task for students (Vysotska, 2022), especially the low-performing ones. These students struggle with different aspects of the English language, moving from sentence structure (Farooqui, 2023) and grammar rules to ensuring cohesion and coherence (Febriani, 2022). In other words, once embarking on the journey of writing assignments, low-performing EFL learners realize how challenging and demanding the writing task is, especially since their English language proficiency level is lower than the standards set and expected in a learning context (Cumming, 1989). These students mainly are often considered to have a writing deficiency at the cognitive level, as they lack basic knowledge about EFL writing (Fernsten & Reda, 2011). Addressing these challenges requires a deep understanding of effective pedagogical measures such as scaffolding writing aligned to other resources that are based on the Common European Framework of References (henceforth CEFR). As far as this action research is concerned, we aim at exploring the impact of coupling scaffolding writing strategies along with CEFR measures (the CEFR placement test, CEFR Can-Do Statements, and CEFR Writing Scales Descriptors) for the sake of engaging low-proficiency students in the writing process. In a more context-driven perspective, the problem with low-proficiency students, particularly in Algeria, is that their English proficiency level is lower than the expectations of the Algerian English Curriculum, which hinders them from completing their writing assignments. As Apple (2004, p. 11) asserts, “It is a matter of both principle and action to contribute most to the advantage of the least advantaged.” For this reason, we opted for integrating Wheeler’s cyclical modal for syllabus design, Hyland’s genre teaching strategies, and Feez’s teaching-learning model along with the aforementioned CEFR resources to develop a comprehensive practical framework that supports low-proficiency EFL students’ writing performance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Exploring Common EFL Writing Challenges**

Writing in a foreign language means composing in a language that is neither the student’s mother tongue nor the language spoken in his surroundings (Cimasko & Reichelt, 2011). This fact makes the writing task less feasible as it is complex even at the college level due to the intricate combination of activities and processes involved (Ariyanti, 2016). For this reason, a lot of EFL learners are facing real challenges in completing a writing task, starting from grappling with grammar rules and finding relevant lexis to adjusting the cultural and stylistic dimensions of their written piece bearing in mind both the social and cultural aspects of writing (Graham, 2006; Prior, 2006; Lavelle and Bushrow, 2007). Thus, Lee (2011) asserts that it is infrequent for students to find pleasure in the act of writing; rather, it tends to be perceived as a significant burden, imposing considerable pressure on them. In this regard, Fernsten and Reda (2011, P.171) claim that “students may subtly or overtly resist writing assignments by turning them in late, leaving them undone or incomplete, or even plagiarizing in an attempt to approximate school’s required discourses”.

As far as EFL writing is concerned, students are not the only ones struggling with writing tasks; their teachers, on the pedagogical side, are also working diligently to provide effective teaching tools to accompany their students in their writing journey as this task is often considered a “puzzling phenomenon” (River & Hall, 1966, p.503) to teachers. Hence, Leki (2001) identifies several contextual elements that specifically influence the teaching of EFL writing. These factors encompass practical aspects such as extensive class sizes, time limitations, the necessity to adapt to local conditions, limited instructor expertise in teaching EFL writing, and a deficiency in student experience and training in first language (L1) writing. Another point to consider is the students’ initial language proficiency level as it plays a significant role in determining the extent to which achieving a writing task is feasible. In the

same vein, Firkins, Forey and Sengupta (2007) argue that low proficiency EFL students struggle to perceive the rhetoric aspects of the English language in the first place. In the same study, they claim that those low proficiency students often lack the whole image of how a written piece would look like at the final stage, which is known as modelling in EFL writing instruction (Firkins et al, 2007; White, 1988).

## **2. EFL writing instruction approaches**

In the realm of English as a foreign language pedagogy, there is a prevailing consensus that writing instruction is certainly a laborious process, as it pushes the teacher to set prior plans inclusive of selected cognitive and linguistic resources as an attempt to facilitate the writing task for low-proficiency students, especially since writing in a second or foreign language differs from writing in the students' native language (Hamzaoui, 2021; Tsiriotakis et al., 2020; Kormos, 2012; Firkins et al., 2007). One of the common practices in foreign language writing instruction for low-proficiency students in the US, for instance, was designing guided tasks that focus on crafting sentences at the initial stage (Peyton & Reed, 1990). Given the fact that teachers need to be equipped with an array of writing instruction strategies, as Goyal (2012) claims that "one size doesn't fit all," a selection of writing approaches was laid out for consideration depending on the teacher's or curriculum's objectives to ensure a successful learning process (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019).

As we navigate EFL writing instruction approaches, moving from the controlled approach (Raimes, 1983), free writing approach (Peyton & Staton, 1996), grammar-syntax organization approach (Erdal, 2014), paragraph pattern approach (Raimes, 1983), communicative approach (Likaj, 2015), product-based approach (Steele, 2004), process-based approach (Nunan, 1991), and ultimately the genre-based approach (Dudley-Evans, 1997), a fundamental question arises: Which approach best assists low-proficiency EFL students in their writing assignments, bearing in mind that EFL classes are often heterogeneous as regards students' English proficiency? Also, supposing that an EFL teacher selects a writing approach that best suits low-proficiency students, would it also be rewarding for higher-proficiency students, knowing that their needs are widely different (Shaughnessy, 1977; Perl, 1979; Pianko, 1979)? In other words, the main issue in such contexts is ensuring "equity" (Apple, 2004) when adopting a writing approach in the EFL classroom.

## **3. EFL writing instruction strategies for low proficiency students**

In a broader scheme, Scott, Vitale, and Masten (1998) argue that strategies aiming at supporting less experienced learners necessitate lowering content course difficulty by altering curriculum and instructional materials. Similarly, Skehan and Foster (2001) assert that tasks beyond students' level shift their focus to produce less linguistically complex productions. In light of these difficulties, Wheeler's model (1967) for cyclical curriculum design offers a systematic roadmap to sketch an effective tailored learning experience. The model focuses on students' needs and class level in the initial stage, as they are considered the cornerstone for setting a flexible curriculum design (Bhuttah et al., 2019).

**Figure 1**

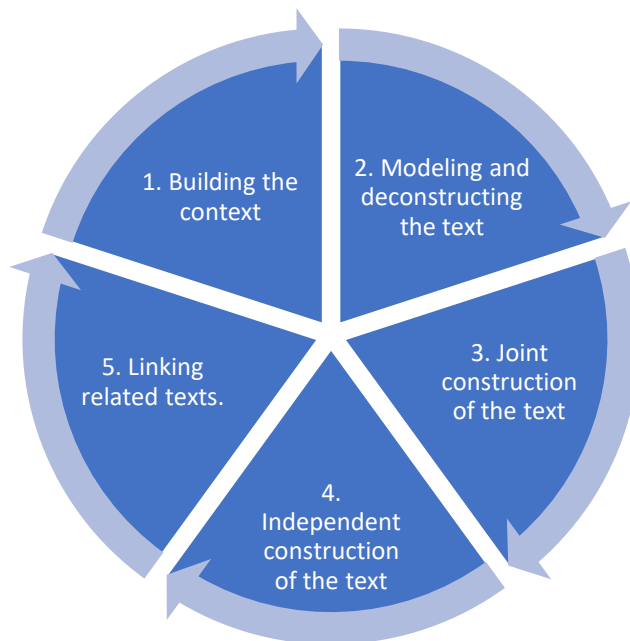
*Wheeler's Model (1967) for Cyclical Curriculum Design*



As far as writing instruction is concerned, Hyland (2004) highlights the relevance of genre-based writing instruction, claiming that it supports both low- and high-proficiency students through discussing their needs before setting the course objectives. One of its techniques is providing different variations of the target text so that it would meet the students' needs. As a matter of fact, genre-based writing instruction has gained currency regarding supporting low-proficiency students' writing performances on account of its learning/teaching stages (Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Hyland, 2008; Dirgeyasa, 2016), as shown in the figure below:

**Figure 2.**

*Feez Teaching-Learning Cycle (1998)*



The teaching-learning cycle is a representation of how the genre-based writing instruction functions to facilitate the writing task for students who need assistance in their writing. Genre-based instruction also relies on the notion of scaffolding when delivering writing courses through providing support from a more experienced individual, who can be their actual teacher or a higher-proficiency classmate (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1990; Donato, 2000; Ohta, 2000; Hyland, 2007). Scaffolding is based on designing or selecting guided activities to pave the way for low-proficiency students to get started with the writing task, which is the main issue for most of them. The next step is moving towards a freer writing task so that more autonomy would take place (Bliss & Askew, 1996; Bodrova & Leong, 1998; Palincsar, 1998; Elicker, 1995; Hyland, 2007).

Furthermore, Wray and Lewis (1997) claim that providing students with “writing frames” (p. 12) allows them to have a structured idea of what the final product would look like. Nevertheless, scholars have divergent opinions about the use of scaffolding within genre-based writing instruction. Badger and White (2000), for instance, assert that this writing approach underestimates the skills needed for text production and perceives learners as passive members who need external support. Likewise, Hyland (2004) states that students’ needs, in the first stage of genre-based instruction, cannot always be identified. This fact can lessen the efficiency of the whole writing course.

#### **4. CEFR Practices to Support Students' Writing Performances**

The Common European Framework of References, henceforth CEFR, is a basis for coordination between language syllabuses and examinations in many European countries, offering a bewildering array of teaching implementation options, curriculum planning, and textbook designs in Europe and beyond (Council of Europe, 2001; Harsch & Rupp, 2011; Daghigh & Abdul Rahim, 2021). Simply put, CEFR was meant initially to calibrate language teaching, learning, and assessment. This framework is well known for its six scales, moving from basic language users (A1 and A2 levels) to independent language users (B1 and B2 levels) to proficient language users (C1 and C2 levels), which cover practical level descriptions under the name of Can-Do Statements or Self-assessment Grid regarding the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills aiming at maintaining a personalized teaching/learning experience (Harsch & Rupp, 2011; Trim, 2012). In short, CEFR deals with “uneven language profiles” in pursuit of simplifying communication about language proficiency levels and ensuring consistent and mutual comprehension among all parties involved (Carlsen, Rocca & Machetti, 2023; Prajapati, 2022).

With regard to writing skill, more focus is given to lower proficiency levels given the fact that assessing their writing skill with the same tasks provided to higher proficiency levels creates a kind of “inadequacy” (P.2); for this reason, differentiation is a key element in such processes (Konrad, Holznecht, Schwarz, & Spöttl, 2018). A case in point is highlighted by Goullier (2007, p. 94). “When the level of the pupils composing the group is not homogeneous and the context allows, it is quite conceivable, and even recommended, to introduce tasks of different levels in an assessment concerning production activities.” Along the same lines, CEFR offers guidelines for designing writing tasks within language tests that should be aligned to learners’ language proficiency level and many other criteria (CoE, 2007). Equally, the Council of Europe sat for considerations when designing writing tasks, including general information such as task duration, task purpose, number of writing tasks, other skills integration, handwritten or word-processed answer, the target CEFR level, controlled/semi-controlled/open-ended, writing genre, rhetorical functions, target audience, expected word count, and finally, setting the topic. Conversely, when assessing students’ written productions, CEFR assessment guidelines are also provided; To name a few: setting the task rating method (descriptive, analytical, with compensation...etc.) and assessment criteria (grammar, lexis, cohesion, coherence...etc.). Also, the way of giving feedback should be set (quantitative score or quality comments).

An in-depth analysis of the aforementioned guidelines reveals that the CEFR writing assessment grid is still not a plug-and-play tool, as it lacks practicality for its implementation in real-world use. In light of recent research contributions, Harsch and Seyferth (2020) proposed a writing assessment checklist (see Tables 3 and 4) that is an off-the-shelf instrument when assessing students' productions with regard to their language proficiency level or the target one, as shown in the figure below:

This writing assessment tool is designed to flexibly meet the different learning goals set in a CEFR-informed curriculum in which attaining targeted genres is the primary point of assessment while reflecting learners' writing performances (Harsch & Seyferth, 2020). As shown in the table, this checklist is based on qualitative rating targeting learners' achievement instead of using numerical assessment, which is not informative enough. After delineating curricular frameworks for writing in a broader educational landscape, it is pertinent to shed light on the context of this research paper. Back in the 2000s, Algeria witnessed a school reform alongside the assistance of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and the National Curriculum Council to define new learning objectives that are embedded in the European standards-based approach (CEFR principles) and ought to be reflected in the Algerian EFL curriculum and textbooks (Boukhentache, 2020). These initiatives gave birth to the so-called Algerian English Framework (AEF, 2009) that is aligned to CEFR levels as the output of Algeria's Partnership School Program realized by Creative Associates International organization in collaboration with the Algerian Ministry of Education, World Learning Organization, and School for International Training Graduate Institute. This framework includes lists of can-do statements reflected upon the Algerian curriculum across the Algerian grades (from middle school years to the last year of secondary school). Eventually, these statements were derived from CEFR's Can-Do objectives starting from level 1 to level 6. By applying a simple conversion, we notice that middle school objectives in the Algerian English Framework refer to the basic levels of CEFR, while the secondary school ones refer to the higher levels of English proficiency.

On this basis, Algerian students are expected to meet predefined learning objectives by the end of each term. However, one of the notable challenges facing Algerian teachers of English in secondary schools today is having students with a writing deficiency that mirrors their lower level of English proficiency (Bensalem & Idri, 2022; Hamzaoui, 2021; Bourouba, 2012) in spite of the fact that they have been taught English following a level-specific curriculum (Algerian English Framework) since their first years of schooling. In other words, students who are expected to show a B1 level of English proficiency, as mentioned in the Algerian English Framework, actually reflect a beginner level of writing performance. As a matter of fact, it is challenging in this case to seek achievement in students' writing, especially since students' textbooks and teachers' materials are already set at a specific level, which is often higher than the students' actual level of proficiency. This issue has led to the creation of a lot of heterogeneous groups within the Algerian context, adding layers of complexity in terms of writing instruction and assessment, as it is hard to bridge the gap between what is supposed to be achieved and meeting students' writing deficiencies.

In a nutshell, although the Algerian school reform was based on CEFR principles, there is still no silver bullet for supplying teachers with effective materials regarding designing multi-level writing tasks equipped with their assessment tools when having a heterogeneous group instead of a one-specific-level group. Another point to consider is that while previous research in this field has offered practical pedagogical plans for teachers to improve students' writing performance using strategies like scaffolding and differentiation, which are already integrated in the CEFR framework, it is evident that the writing tasks within the Algerian school textbooks do not align with any of these plans, and

furthermore, they are often pitched at a higher level than the students' actual proficiency level. Yet, another fundamental issue is that many Algerian teachers are not even familiar with CEFR, which explains their lack of expertise regarding managing CEFR tools and strategies. In short, despite the existing resources as regards to writing instruction, there remains a significant gap in supporting low-proficiency students while everything around them seems to be beyond their level in the Algerian context and any other contexts with similar issues.

### **Research Questions**

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What pedagogical measures can EFL teachers, regardless of their teaching expertise, adopt to improve low proficiency students' writing performance?
2. To what extent can CEFR strategies support students' writing performances?

### **METHOD**

This study is pedagogical action research conducted to support low EFL proficiency students' writing performance and to reintegrate them within the Algerian EFL national standards of learning English in secondary school. The primary issue revolves around having secondary school students facing significant difficulties in writing, particularly due to the misalignment of the high expectations of the Algerian English curriculum and their actual English level. To address this challenge, we opted for merging CEFR affordances, tailoring scaffolded teaching materials and integrating Hyland's genre-based instruction strategies into the pedagogical action research framework. First of all, it is noteworthy to mention that this research falls under the pragmatism paradigm as it seeks to offer practical solutions to real-world problems (Ågerfalk, 2010). As a result, the research design was purposefully selected, encompassing in a four-phase iterative action research process (Mertler & Charles, 2011; Mertler, 2017) to thoroughly address this research issue. In the same line of thought, conducting a feasibility and viability analysis (Jamnongsarn & Zhang, 2024) was so crucial as a first step before taking any action to ensure the availability of the materials and to examine the conformity of the interventions along with the Algerian English curriculum. The table below highlights the feasibility criteria on a scale (1-5) used to assess the viability of this research:

**Table 1**

*Assessing the feasibility and viability of the research*

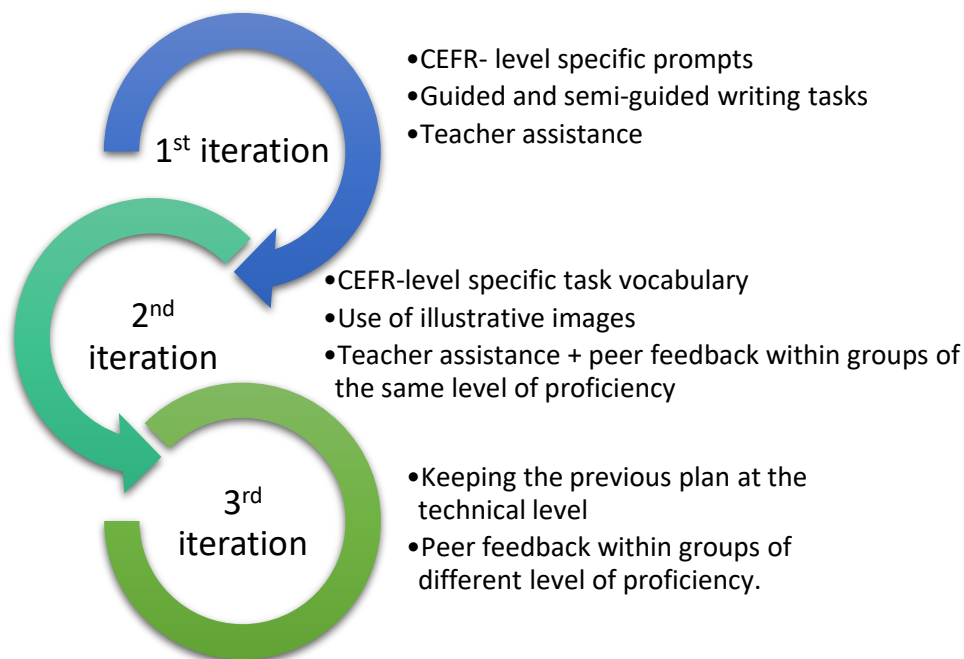
<b>Research Objective:</b> Supporting EFL low proficiency students' writing performances		
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Practical feasibility	4	The basic resources are available (CEFR writing scales, CEFR Can-Do statements, CEFR placement test...etc). Other materials need to be designed according to the students' proficiency level.
Technical feasibility	4	The teacher practitioner has expertise in using CEFR materials
Operational feasibility	4	The interventions are aligned to the objectives and can be smoothly integrated in regular classes.
Economic feasibility	-	No funding needed
Cultural and ethical fit	5	The interventions and adjustments do not highlight any cultural or ethical issues.

As mentioned earlier, to address the research objectives, a structured plan was employed involving three iterations comprising stages of planning, acting, observing and reflecting within each cycle of the research. As far as the initial iteration is concerned, we started by conducting a CEFR

placement test to identify the various English proficiency levels existing in the target EFL group, followed by examining the CEFR writing scales and the CEFR Can-Do statements (Council of Europe, 2001) so as to tailor differentiated and scaffolded writing tasks aligned with students CEFR level-specific competencies. The iterations that follow, involve different adjustments seeking to obtain better results. Figure 3 below shows the adjustments made from one iteration to another.

**Figure 3.**

*The major iterations of the study*



### Participants

This research was conducted as part of the researcher's regular EFL teaching practice at secondary school that lasted for 5 months. The participants were the teacher-researcher actual first year scientific stream secondary school students. They were aged between 15-17 and divided into two groups (n= 50 students) coming from a suburban area. The sampling method employed in the study is convenience sampling, as students were not chosen randomly but were all included, making it a non-random sampling approach (Sedgwick, 2013).

### Research procedure

#### *The initial stage: CEFR placement test*

Prior conducting the research, students were handed the Headway CEFR edition placement test, that is certified by the University of Oxford, covering grammar, vocabulary, everyday English, and reading multiple choice activities in a duration of 45 min. The students' CEFR levels of English proficiency were then identified according to the total score, as mentioned in test's guidelines. The table below shows the test's results:

**Table 2.**

*Students' CEFR levels of English proficiency identification*

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Students' CEFR-informed Level</b>
27 students	A1 low
15 students	A1 high
8 students	A2 high
5 students	B1 low

Being able to set the students' language proficiency level allows the teacher to use CEFR resources, such as Can-Do descriptors and CEFR writing scales, so as to examine their actual linguistic abilities and then decide which measures should be taken to upgrade their skills and boost their performance alongside lesson planning and task design. Also, these CEFR levels reveal the degree of the existing misalignment between the curriculum content and the students' linguistic abilities, knowing that most of its lessons fall under higher levels of proficiency, such as B1 and B1+.

Considering the fact that, this research is interested in supporting low proficiency students' writing performances only, higher performing students' (B1) writing performance was not reported in the following stages. Consequently, a total of 50 students (A1 low, A1 high and A2 levels) writing performance is reported below.

#### ***The second stage: tailoring CEFR- level specific writing tasks***

The next step subsequent to identifying the students' actual English proficiency level(s) was designing multi-level (differentiated) writing worksheets aligned to the learning objectives mentioned in the Algerian curriculum for first-year secondary school students as a response to the huge lack of supportive resources within the students' textbooks regarding writing instruction. In this vein, the first iteration of the action plan consists of the following strategy:

As for the A1 beginner level (low and high), we opted for tailoring writing worksheets that are composed of fully controlled grammar tasks and semi-controlled writing tasks with teacher assistance all along the writing session. Moreover, A2 elementary CEFR level students were given writing worksheets appropriate to their linguistic capabilities (semi-controlled writing tasks only). The prompts of the writing tasks of both levels (A1 and A2) were tailored based on CEFR Can-Do Statements and CEFR Writing Scale Descriptors. For example, CEFR Can-Do Statements indicate that A1 language users can complete basic forms and write short notes, while A2 language users are able to write short simple letters or short simple narratives, which is not the case for A1 students. For this reason, we considered these linguistic abilities when designing the worksheets along with implementing scaffolding techniques.

A key point to highlight in this research is that, despite students' A1 level of English proficiency, teachers are obliged to teach B1-level lessons because these are embedded in the Algerian first-year secondary school English syllabus. As shown in Figure 4, the tailored lesson "Writing a Report Using Reported Speech" is clearly a B1-level task. However, first-year secondary school students are still expected to grasp and engage with it even though their English proficiency corresponds to A1.

#### **Figure 4**

*The first adapted and scaffolded version of a B1-level writing task for A1 learners, based on CEFR resources.*

**Objective:** write a report about the environment  
**Level:** A1  
**Task 1. Match each verb with its past simple form**

Verb	Past Simple
Am- is - are	did
To try	Was- were
To do	tried

**Task 2. Turn sentences into reported speech**

- The journalist asked, "Is our environment in danger?"  
 .....
- The journalist asked, "Do you try to protect the environment?"  
 .....
- The journalist asked, "What do you do to protect the environment?"  
 .....

**Task 3. Complete the report using answers from task 1, task 2 and the table below:**

Number: 100	
Questions	Answers
Is our environment in danger?	Yes: 100 / No: 00
Do you try to protect the environment?	Yes: 92 / No: 08
What do you do to protect it?	A: use recyclable material (60) B: plant trees (40)

I asked 100 people about the environment. All of them said it is in danger. First, I asked the participants if....., all of them said yes. Next, I asked them if.....  
 92 said yes and 8 said no. After that, I asked them what.....  
 .....60 said by using recyclable materials and 40 said by planting trees. Finally, I think that we should.....

**Figure 5**

*The first adapted and scaffolded version of a B1-level writing task for A2 learners, based on CEFR resources.*

**Objective:** write a report about the environment  
**Level:** A2  
**Task 1. Turn sentences into reported speech**

- The journalist asked, "Is our environment in danger?"  
 .....
- The journalist asked, "Do you try to protect the environment?"  
 .....
- The journalist asked, "What do you do to protect the environment?"  
 .....

**Task 2. You asked 100 people about the environment. Here are the results:**

Number: 100	
Questions	Answers
Is our environment in danger?	Yes: 100 / No: 00
Do you try to protect the environment?	Yes: 92 / No: 08
What do you do to protect it?	A: use recyclable material (60) B: plant trees (40)

**Write 5–6 simple sentences about the survey results. Use the following steps to guide your writing:**

- Say if most people think the environment is in danger.
- Explain if people try to protect it or not.
- Mention the two most popular ways people protect the environment.

**Start like this:**

I asked 100 people about the environment. All of them said it is in danger. Most people try to protect it.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

As shown in the figures (4 and 5), both worksheets are variations of the same lesson, in which both students were asked to write a report about the environment using sentences in the reported speech, as dictated in the Algerian English curriculum and syllabus of the first-year secondary school. It is important to note that the Algerian syllabus for student writing competences places a strong emphasis on integrating previously covered grammar into learners' written work.

For A1-level students, the first two tasks were scaffolded to serve the last writing task, which is similar to filling forms as described in CEFR Can-Do Statements. However, for A2-level students, we opted for a single task as scaffolding to the main writing task, which consists of writing a simple composition (six sentences or more) reporting the results of the given table using answers from task 1. In addition to this, the teacher practitioner was always present in the writing process, as she was guiding students and giving instant feedback on their writing performance.

As for the second iteration of this research, both A1 and A2 students were given differentiated worksheets on a different topic, including new adjustments besides the previous measures that were taken in the first iteration (using CEFR Can-Do Statements, CEFR writing scale descriptors, and scaffolding techniques). The first adjustment involved paying more attention to the tasks' vocabulary rather than focusing solely on the tasks' prompts, as the lexis used was studied and purposefully selected, i.e., the vocabulary used in the A1-level task is simpler than the one in the A2-level task. The second adjustment within the second iteration is represented in the use of images within tasks to illustrate technical terms and to facilitate autonomous comprehension for the sake of fostering independent learning. In this case, both A1 and A2 levels would be able to understand or at least guess the meaning of the key concepts without asking the teacher. The last adjustment was allowing students within the same group of the same level of proficiency to assess or even help each other (peer feedback assessment). The following figures represent the differentiated worksheets of the same lesson, which is about writing a composition about global warming using cause and effect connectors.





**Figure 6**

The second adapted and scaffolded version of A2-level writing task for A1 learners, based on CEFR resources.

**Objective:** write a composition about global warming using cause/effect connectors.

**Level A1**

**Task 1: match each word with its definition**

Global warming 	the action of polluting the environment by factory fumes for example.
Pollution 	change in the average weather patterns
Climate change 	an accidental release of oil into water
Oil spill 	The Earth's temperature getting higher

**Task 2: Use the table content to complete the text**

Causes of pollution	Effects of pollution
Smoking	Climate change
Oil spill	Fires and burns
Factory fumes	Acid rain
Garbage	

**Task 3: Complete the text with information from task 1**

Pollution is.....  
.....There are different factors that cause pollution. First, ..... are causing air pollution **because of** the high amount of the released carbon dioxide (CO2). Next, when people throw .....everywhere instead of putting it in the bins , the degree of pollution increases. **As a result** , the.....is changing and causing ..... And .....

Global warming is .....

.....

The most changes occur **because of**.....

..... **Consequently**, the sea level .....

.....





Figure 7

The second adapted and scaffolded version of a writing task for A2 learners, based on CEFR

**Objective:** write a composition about global warming using cause/effect connectors.

**Level A2**

**Task 1: match each word with its definition**

Global warming 	It occurs when harmful substances, like factory fumes, contaminate and damage the environment.
pollution 	A shift in Earth's weather conditions and average temperatures
Climate change 	Liquid petroleum gets into the environment, usually into the ocean.
Oil spill 	The increase in Earth's average temperature

**Task 2: Use the table content to complete the text**

Causes of pollution	Effects of pollution
Smoking	Climate change
Oil spill	Fires and burns
Factory fumes	Acid rain
Garbage	

**Task 3: Complete the text with information from task 1**

Pollution is.....  
.....There are different factors that cause pollution. First, ..... are causing air pollution **because of** the high amount of the released carbon dioxide (CO2). Next, when people throw .....everywhere instead of putting it in the bins , the degree of pollution increases. **As a result** , the.....is changing and causing ..... And .....

**Task 3: Complete the text with information from task 1**

Global warming is .....

.....

The most changes occur **because of**.....

..... **Consequently**, the sea level .....

.....


*resources.*



As far as the third iteration is concerned, we decided to keep the same procedure with few modifications regarding peer feedback. We had the idea of putting students of different proficiency levels together and we invited the higher performing ones to supervise the lower performing ones to maximize the level of autonomous learning. The figures below show the last tailored worksheets in this research:

**Figure 8**

*The third adapted and scaffolded version of a A2-level writing task for A1 learners, based on CEFR resources.*

**Objective:** write a simple biography of a scientist  
**Level A1**  
**Task 1: complete the text according to the pictures**

Alexander Graham Bell was a Scottish-born scientist, inventor, engineer who is credited for inventing the  .....

His research on  and  .....led him to experiment with hearing devices .

**Task 2: write a short biography of Alexander Graham Bell, using the information in the table**

<b>Date of birth and death:</b> 1847 - 1922
<b>Studies:</b> anatomy and physiology
<b>Hobbies:</b> playing the piano
<b>Quote:</b> One day, every city in America will have a telephone.

Alexander Graham Bell is famous for inventing the ..... . He was born in ..... . Bell studied .....and .....at the University of London. He was interested in arts and music, especially..... His famous sentence was : ..... He died in .....

**Task 3: using the information in the table, write a short biography of Issac Newton**


<b>Date of birth and death:</b> 1642 – 1727 in England
<b>Studies:</b> mathematics, physics and astronomy at the university of Cambridge.
<b>Famous for:</b> the story of the apple

<b>discovered:</b> gravity law

Figure 9:


The third adapted and scaffolded version of a writing task for A2 learners, based on CEFR

**Objective:** write a simple biography of a scientist  
**Level A2**  
**Task 1:** write a short biography of Alexander Graham Bell, using the information in the table

<b>Date of birth and death:</b> 1847 - 1922
<b>Studies:</b> anatomy and physiology
<b>Hobbies:</b> playing the piano
<b>Interests:</b> the science of sound
<b>Quote:</b> One day, every city in America will have a telephone.

Alexander Graham Bell is famous for inventing the ..... . He was born in ..... . Bell studied .....and .....at the University of London. He was interested in the ..... and arts, especially..... His famous sentence was : ..... He died in .....

**Task 3: using the information in the table, write a short biography of Issac Newton**

<b>Date of birth and death:</b> 1642 – 1727 in England
<b>Studies:</b> mathematics, physics and astronomy at the university of Cambridge.
<b>Famous for:</b> the story of the apple

<b>discovered:</b> gravity law
<b>Resting place:</b> Westminster Abbey

resources.

### ***The third stage: writing assessment***

At this point, we sought to measure and keep track of low proficiency students' writing performance progress when given tailored writing resources to meet their level of English proficiency and elevate them towards the higher standards that were supposed to be met in the common context. To do so, we opted for using Harsch and Seyferth (2020) writing assessment checklist with the aim of exploring CEFR potentials in measuring achievement in writing (Brindley, 2001), as described in the literature review section (page 8).

### **Ethical Committee Approval:**

Ethical approval (Meeting Date/No: 14/07/2023 / 08; Decision Number: 2023/05) was obtained and submitted to the Journal of Necmettin Erbakan University Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty of Education.

### **FINDINGS**

Students' progress regarding their writing performance was measured in three writing sessions, i.e. during three different iterations, at different intervals throughout the research period. The learning objectives were different in each session moving from one genre of writing to another, targeting different language functions and communicative effects as indicated in each assessment table.

**Table 3**

*The first session of writing assessment checklist regarding writing a survey's report*

<b>Task fulfilment</b>		<b>Completely fulfilled</b>	<b>Almost fulfilled</b>	<b>Largely fulfilled</b>	<b>Partially fulfilled</b>	<b>Not fulfilled</b>
<b>Content</b>	Can complete the task in terms of writing a report	1 2%	4 8%	21 42%	20 40%	4 8%
<b>Language Functions &amp; Communicative effects</b>	Reporting what has been said. Reporting survey results.	0	4 8%	18 36%	24 48%	4 8%
<b>Genre</b>	Report "Survey Analysis"	-	-	34 68%	12 24%	4 8%
<b>Language Competences</b>		<b>Very good ++</b>	<b>Good +</b>	<b>Satisfactor y +/-</b>	<b>Sufficient</b>	<b>Insufficient</b>
<b>Organization</b>	The use of reported speech. Paragraph structure	-	5 10%	16 32%	17 34%	12 24%

To start with, this table represents students' progress in terms of task fulfilment, language functions and communicative effects, language competences and global organization of the written productions. As noted in the table, the differentiated tasks targeting writing a survey's report were feasible at different degrees of achievement among A1 and A2 level students. As far as content covering, 92% of students (both A1 and A2) could fulfil the basic requirements of the task. While 44% students, regarding language functions and communicative effects results, were able to report what have been said regarding the survey's results. However, the rest of students 48% have partially fulfilled the task's communicative effects. As for the organization of the paragraphs and the use of reported speech, only

10% could respect the use of tenses and reporting verbs when reporting the survey's results, whilst 66% of students' paragraphs covered the essential elements of reporting speech. At the same time, 24% overall work was insufficient for multiple reasons. It is evident that the students' limited English language proficiency resulted in their inability to produce reported sentences using tenses that they had not yet mastered.

**Table 4**

*The second session writing assessment checklist regarding writing a composition about global warming or pollution.*

Task fulfilment		Completely fulfilled	Almost fulfilled	Largely fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Not fulfilled
<b>Content</b>	Can complete the task in terms of content and write about global warming or pollution	-	7 14%	27 54%	14 28%	2 4%
<b>Language Functions &amp; Communicative effects</b>	Can realize the following language functions: Passive voice, cause/effect.	-	2 4%	20 40%	26 52%	2 4%
<b>Genre</b>	Composition	-	7 14%	27 54%	14 28%	2 4%
<b>Language Competences</b>		Very good ++	Good +	Satisfactory +/-	Sufficient	Insufficient
<b>Organization</b>	Cohesion. The use of connectors "cause/effect".	-	2 4%	18 36%	20 40%	9 18%

As a follow up, we delivered the second session (second iteration) aiming at assisting low proficiency students write a composition making use of the passive/ active voice to express cause and effects. This task in common sessions is too advanced for A1 and even for some A2 students, which reflects the challenges they used to face when having writing assignments. The results of displaying the CEFR-based differentiated tasks are as follow: 96% of A1 and A2 students were able to complete their compositions and handed it back to the teacher, something that was not noticed before adding the treatment (the CEFR-based differentiated tasks). The same students were able to employ the passive/active voice with different degrees of achievements. The most relevant accomplishment at this stage is having those A1 and A2 students (80%) being able to express cause and effect in their compositions. However, 18% of students could not use cause/effect connectors sufficiently.

**Table 5**

*The third session writing assessment regarding writing a biography*

Task fulfilment		Completely fulfilled	Almost fulfilled	Largely fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Not fulfilled
<b>Content</b>	Can complete the task in terms of content and write about a scientist	4 8%	19 38%	17 34%	9 18%	-
<b>Language Functions &amp; Communicative effects</b>	Can realize the following language functions: The use of the past tense.	-	8 16%	27 54%	15 30%	-
<b>Genre</b>	Biography	-	36 72 %	14 28%	-	-
<b>Language Competences</b>		Very good ++	Good +	Satisfactory +/-	Sufficient	Insufficient
<b>Organization</b>	Chronological order.	-	30 60%	14 28%	6 12%	-

By the third session of scaffolding and customizing the writing tasks (third iteration), low performing students were already accustomed to embark on the writing task without hesitating, as they were consistently provided with the necessary tools and support, such as “writing models”, in addition to teacher and peers assistance. As noted in the table, all students (100%) could write a biography respecting major elements of this genre due to the customized support that was provided. Also, 70 % of students used the past tense correctly when describing past events of scientists, while 30% of them have partially fulfilled this requirement. As far as the chronological order and overall organization of the written productions, students succeeded at placing the scientists’ events in the right historical order. In short, it is crucial to highlight that these students were initially (before the treatment) unable to write paragraphs and used to skip the writing task believing that they had no lexical or grammatical background that enabled them to produce compositions.

### **A Call to Action: a CEFR- based Reintegration Framework**

At critical junctures of the present action research, studying CEFR affordances such as CEFR placement test, CEFR Can-Do Statements and CEFR Writing Scales Descriptors, along with scaffolding strategies Feez’s model for teaching and learning, in addition to Wheeler’s model for curriculum design, turned out to be catalysts for us to generate a framework that covers seven practical steps. These steps can be applied by any EFL teacher, regardless of their teaching expertise, to support low proficiency students’ writing performance. Additionally, our primary intention in developing this framework was to reintegrate these students within the standards set by curriculum designers and also to restore their self-confidence and autonomous learning. The framework proposed in this study is composed of the following steps: identifying objectives, conducting the CEFR placement test, tailoring multi-level writing tasks, teacher assistance, integrating the learning experience (writing performance), and CEFR writing assessment, as the figure below shows:

**Figure 10**

*CEFR-based Cyclical Writing Instruction Framework*



The framework above serves as a practical guide to support low-proficiency students regarding their writing performance and also to facilitate and reinforce the teaching process. First, the initial stage involves identifying the learning objectives typically outlined in syllabuses and identifying their level of complexity. Next, teachers ought to know their students' proficiency level(s) so that convenient supportive measures would be undertaken properly and purposefully. For this reason, conducting a CEFR placement test is mandatory for the sake of spotting the different existing levels of English proficiency within the EFL group. The following step involves tailoring scaffolded, differentiated, multi-level writing tasks that match students' levels. This laborious step is conducted using CEFR resources (CEFR Can-Do Statements and CEFR Writing Scales Descriptors) that describe the linguistic abilities of each CEFR level. As a result, each low-proficiency student receives a differentiated writing worksheet along with the teacher's support, which is portrayed as modelling the writing task or negotiation of text, as Hyland (2004) calls it. Later, students are encouraged to complete the writing tasks independently in order to foster autonomy and boost their self-confidence. At the end of the process, teachers assess their students' writing performance using Harsch's (2020) writing assessment model. At the end of this process, low-proficiency students would be able to engage in writing tasks regardless of their level of complexity as soon as the tasks are well tailored.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide insights into supporting low EFL proficiency students' writing performances and hence facilitating the task of writing instruction, as they align with the aforementioned research in the literature review section. Although few studies have directly explored scaffolding B1-level content for A1 learners, the persistent difficulty in teaching writing at lower proficiency levels has been widely documented (Firkins et al., 2007). To start with, this study addresses this gap by implementing controlled tasks in which their outcomes were reflected in the results of A1-level students' writing performance, as they served as a scaffold to the last writing task in the worksheet. This technique

was emphasized by Peyton and Reed (1990), who claimed that tailoring guided tasks is a common approach to teaching writing to low-proficiency students in the United States. Moreover, by connecting the findings of the research (the generated framework) to prior one(s) in this field, one notices the relevance of focusing on genre-based writing instruction to meet the needs of students of different levels, as Hyland (2004) argued. Another point to consider is the key practices outlined in Feez's (1998) teaching-learning cycle and Wheeler's curriculum design cyclical model (1967), both of which significantly contributed to the research procedure and to the development of the framework, which is regarded as the overarching finding of the present study. A key element in the findings (the framework) is ensuring that all students within the same group receive a differentiated task(s) that aligns to their English level of proficiency. This aligns with Apple's (2004) emphasis on ensuring equity in the classroom.

Lastly, previous studies in this field addressed A2-level students as being basic language users and worked on elevating their level to meet higher levels of proficiency learning objectives, as is the case of Nagamanuma et al.'s work (2017), which focused on using the CEFR matrix through designing multilayered chapters of the same textbook used to teach English for Academic Purposes, addressing both basic language users (A2 level) and independent ones (B1 and B1+ levels) so as to reach the same learning objectives at the end of the course. However, less research has focused on lower levels of proficiency (A1 low and A1 high), who are often expected to perform at the same level as the previously mentioned levels. As a result, this research specifically addresses this gap by tailoring teaching materials that meet the needs of A1 learners while ensuring that their progress is aligned to the curriculum's expectations.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study aims at improving the writing performance of low-proficiency EFL students, who are expected to show higher writing skills in a secondary school context, by integrating CEFR resources, scaffolding techniques, and other strategies inspired by Feez's teaching-learning cycle and Wheeler's model for curriculum design in an iterative action research process. The findings of the research show that aligning scaffolding strategies with CEFR Can-Do Statements and CEFR Writing Scales Descriptors boost low-proficiency students' ability to construct sentences and even paragraphs by directly addressing their actual learning gaps. Furthermore, the nature of the action research iterative process impelled us, on a continuous basis, to reflect more on what we can add or adjust to upgrade the writing instruction materials for better outcomes. Therefore, the proposed framework in the findings' section serves as a practical guide for EFL teachers to be used before, during, and after the class. Additionally, we propose the idea of creating a teachers' community within secondary schools so that teachers work in teams to tailor the most effective and personalized writing instruction materials, as this task proved to be time-consuming in the context of this study. Also, future studies would explore the proposed framework coupled with AI digital tools to upgrade the scaffolding process. In addition to exploring how scaffolded writing tasks affect student motivation and engagement in EFL contexts. In a nutshell, this framework is deemed a guideline that empowers instructors, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to meet the target standards in a learning context regardless of students' heterogeneity.

## **Ethical Statement**

This study is based on My doctoral thesis entitled "Exploring the Potentials of the Common European Framework of References in Scaffolding Writing Performances: The Case of \*\*\*\*, Algeria.", under the supervision of Dr \*\*\* and Professor \*\*\* (the PhD thesis has not been submitted yet).

### **Ethical Committee Approval:**

Ethical approval (Meeting Date/No: 14/07/2023 / 08; Decision Number: 2023/05) was obtained and submitted to the Journal of Necmettin Erbakan University Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty of Education.

### **Author Contributions**

Research Design (CRediT 1) Author 1 (%60) – Author 2 (%20) – Author 3 (%20)

Data Collection (CRediT 2) Author 1 (%50) – Author 2 (%25) – Author 3 (%25)

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Writing the Article (CRediT 12-13) Author 1 (%70) – Author 2 (%15) – Author 3 (%15)

Revision and Improvement of the Text (CRediT 14) Author 1 (%50) – Author 2 (%25) – Author 3 (%25)

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

### **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

Sustainable Development Goals: 4 Quality Education

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