

Unlocking CEFR Potentials: Insights from Scaffolded Instruction to Boost EFL low-performing students' Writing Performance

CEFR Potansiyelini Ortaya Çıkarmak: Başarısı Düşük EFL Öğrencilerinin Yazma Performansını Artırmak için Basamaklı Öğretimden Elde Edilen Bulgular

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ABSTRACT: Assisting students in achieving proficiency in writing has been a longstanding priority for teachers worldwide, particularly in the Algerian context where official exams heavily rely on written performance. In this regard, the application of the CEFR Framework holds the potential to address this issue. Therefore, this article delves into the role of CEFR-based instruction in scaffolding the development of writing skills among students with beginner-level proficiency in English. It does not only seek to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of CEFR-based instruction in achieving proficiency in writing but also aims to identify strategies for scaffolding EFL students' writing performance. To accomplish this, a sequential exploratory mixed methods design was employed. Various data collection tools were utilized, including researchers' reflections, semi-structured interviews with 5 local teachers, and a questionnaire surveying 56 national teachers across 19 wilayas. The findings shed light on the main CEFR-focused strategies that range from sequential learning, skill integration, real-life focused content to natural skill development, modelling, supplementary materials and cross-cultural awareness. Additionally, a CEFR-focused differentiation mechanism to scaffolding students' writing, especially for low-performing learners, is presented along with its implications particularly those related to merging this CEFR-driven mechanism with Artificial Intelligence.

Keywords: CEFR, scaffolding, teaching, writing skills.

ÖZ: Öğrencilerin yazma becerilerinde yeterlilik kazanmalarına yardımcı olmak, dünya genelinde öğretmenler için uzun süredir öncelikli bir hedef olmuştur. Bu durum, özellikle resmi sınavların büyük ölçüde yazılı performansa dayandığı Cezayir bağlamında daha da önem kazanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Diller için Avrupa Ortak Başvuru Metni (CEFR)'nin uygulanması bu soruna çözüm getirme potansiyeline sahiptir. Bu makale, İngilizceye başlangıç düzeyinde hâkim olan öğrencilerin yazma becerilerinin gelişimini desteklemede CEFR temelli öğretimin rolünü incelemektedir. Yalnızca öğretmenlerin, CEFR tabanlı öğretimin yazma becerilerinde yeterlilik sağlamadaki etkinliğine ilişkin algılarını araştırmayı değil, aynı zamanda İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin yazılı performanslarını desteklemeye yönelik stratejileri belirlemeyi de amaçlamaktadır. Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek için sıralı keşifsel karma yöntem araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırmacıların yansımaları, 5 yerel öğretmenle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar ve 19 vilayetten 56 ulusal öğretmeni kapsayan bir anket dâhil olmak üzere çeşitli veri toplama araçları kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, ardışık öğrenme, beceri entegrasyonu, gerçek yaşam odaklı içerik, doğal beceri gelişimi, modelleme, tamamlayıcı materyaller ve kültürlerarası farkındalık gibi çeşitli CEFR odaklı stratejilere ışık tutmaktadır. Ayrıca, özellikle düşük başarı gösteren öğrenciler için yazma becerilerini desteklemeye yönelik CEFR merkezli bir farklılaştırma mekanizması sunulmakta ve bu mekanizmanın Yapay Zeka ile birleştirilmesine ilişkin çıkarımlar ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: CEFR, basamaklı öğretim, öğretim, yazma becerileri.

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The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) offers a comprehensive model for language proficiency, defining a set of Common Reference Levels (from A1 to C2) through illustrative descriptor scales. It also provides guidelines for curriculum design that promote plurilingual and intercultural education (Beacco et al., 2016). Moreover, the CEFR was developed as a continuation of the Council of Europe's language education initiatives from the 1970s and 1980s. Its "action-oriented approach" builds upon and advances the communicative approach first introduced in the mid-1970s with the publication of *The Threshold Level*, which was the initial functional/notional framework for language needs (Council of Europe, 2001). Similarly, the Council of Europe (2001) states that the CEFR is primarily focused on learning and teaching, aiming to improve transparency and coherence between curriculum, teaching, and assessment within institutions and to ensure alignment and consistency across different institutions, educational sectors, regions, and countries.

In recent years, learning foreign languages, particularly English, has become increasingly popular. However, developing productive skills like writing remains a significant challenge for language learners, especially in academic and professional settings (Huy, 2015). The writing process is considered complex for several reasons, which can prevent learners from achieving higher proficiency levels. These challenges include understanding the audience, defining the purpose, organizing content, and the influence of the writer's emotional state on their writing (Brown & Hood, 1989). Furthermore, Piamsai (2020) emphasizes that good writers possess the necessary language skills, enabling them to comprehend, synthesize, and apply new knowledge to produce appropriate written work. Liang (2007) adds that excelling in writing requires the ability to make accurate and appropriate language choices, extending beyond the sentence level. Similarly, language experts argue that despite numerous efforts to improve students' writing by focusing on raising their awareness of sentence structure, they continue to lack essential textual and linguistic features (Firklins et al., 2007).

In this light, CEFR resources regarding enhancing learners' writing skills have been widely integrated within language curricula. As far as this article is concerned, CEFR writing descriptors indicate an increasing level of complexity regarding learners' expected performance in each level, starting from having A1 learners being able to write a simple postcard and filling personal information forms to completely being able to complex letters, reports or articles when reaching C2 level for instance (Council of Europe, 2001). In reference to CEFR-based writing instruction, there are plenty of valid resources to be integrated in EFL classes. To name among many, the use of CEFR-based writing task design which involves a set of conditions to be met while designing a writing task or a writing test (ALTE, 2014). These conditions cover the time needed for each task, whether it is controlled, semi-controlled or open-ended, the target genre, and many other criteria. While the main thing is to identify and consider the learner's proficiency level during the task design. Another CEFR-based writing tool is a writing checklist aiming at assessing learners' achievement (Harsch & Seyferthb, 2020).

With the same intent, scaffolding is another crucial instruction tool that strengthen the teaching learning process, especially when it comes to writing. This concept appeared first in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory (Walqui, 2006) then it was integrated in EFL instruction for more professional practice. Stuyf (2002) identifies several key scaffolding techniques that enhance the learning process.

These include engaging the student's interest in the task, simplifying tasks to make them more manageable, providing direction to maintain focus on the goal, reducing frustration, and clearly modeling the expected outcomes. Consequently, scaffolding can be seen as a method to lower students' writing apprehension by fostering a supportive and motivating learning environment, thereby minimizing frustration during the writing process. Furthermore, scaffolding allows students to experience the writing process with guided support, aligning with Laksmi's (2006) assertion that the emphasis should be on the writing journey itself, from drafting to publication. Laksmi also highlights that this process not only boosts students' confidence in writing but also encourages a stronger commitment to their work, as cited in Vonna et al. (2015).

Despite the significant contributions in EFL teaching and the wide existing literature regarding the use of CEFR, its concept was mainly targeting assessing students' language proficiency (Haines et al., 2013; Zou & Zhang, 2017), giving students feedback on the written productions (Hasselgreen, 2013) or giving automated writing evaluation (Shermis, 2018). Some gave an inventory of different general English resources (North et al., 2015, Nagai et al., 2020) but few of them, if any, thoroughly studied the strategies being utilized in these CEFR-based resources and even less uncovered a derived CEFR-driven mechanism for differentiation. That is why, this research seeks to address the existing gap in the literature by:

1. How can CEFR framework help scaffold Algerian students' writing performance?
2. What strategies do CEFR-focused resources employ to enhance students' writing skill?

Method

To conduct the study, a mixed-method sequential exploratory approach (Fuentes, 2008) was chosen to explore teachers' perceptions and identify the different CEFR-based strategies to scaffold their teaching practices in general and the writing performance in particular. In this regard, Fuentes' (2008) model was adopted, following a two-phased study. The first phase was qualitative and included teachers' reflections - initiating this endeavour - on CEFR-focused resources along interviews conducted with local teachers. The second phase was quantitative, incorporating a survey of teachers at the national level. In other words, the research followed a progressing from a personal standpoint to local contexts and then to the national level (Figure 1). Naturally, this methodology integrates both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in two sequential phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). To bring this research endeavor to completion, three data collection tools were used, namely reflections, recorded semi-structured interviews (automatically transcribed), and a questionnaire.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

In the first phase, quantitative data collection began with the researcher's reflection after five years of utilizing CEFR-centric pedagogical materials. This reflection served as the initial data collection tool, providing insights into the researcher's personal experiences with CEFR implementation. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four local teachers who had significant experience using CEFR resources in their classes. The interview questions were

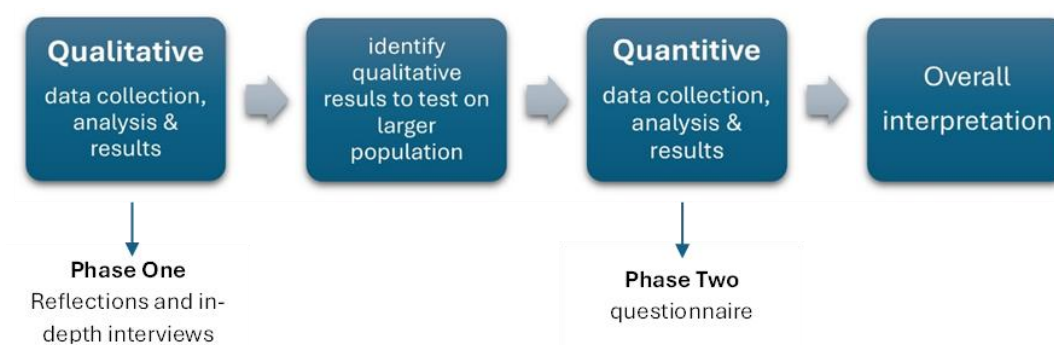
developed based on the findings from the researcher's reflection, aiming to gain a broader understanding of local instructors' perspectives and practices.

For the second phase of the study, the questionnaire was developed based on the results of the first phase. Naturally, the themes that emerged from the interviews were used to formulate the survey questions. Two experts in EFL pedagogy reviewed the questionnaire; one of them provided suggestions that were subsequently incorporated. The questionnaire was then piloted with three participants, who identified some minor issues that were addressed before the final administration.

Subsequently, the questionnaire was distributed to various national teachers with CEFR expertise, who had taught students from different regions across the country. The questionnaire focused on basic language users' attainment (A1), aligning with the target population of the study. The aim of this phase was to uncover teachers' perceptions and practices regarding CEFR-informed writing classes and to gather insights from a broader national perspective. Lastly, the data was collected, synthesized, and analyzed through thematic analysis. This process involved interpreting both qualitative and quantitative raw data, progressing towards data coding, and ultimately identifying overarching themes for the study (Terry, 2017). For a more precise content analysis, Huberman et al. (2018)'s framework was employed to systematically code and categorize the interview data. Manifest analysis was used to identify concrete, directly observable facts, such as the simplicity of instruction and the use of model answers. In contrast, latent analysis was applied to interpret underlying meanings and potential issues. For example, in cases where teachers noted that some examples in CEFR-based materials do not fully align with students' cultural backgrounds, latent analysis highlighted concerns regarding the extent to which these resources are culturally representative and promote intercultural understanding. This dual approach allowed for both a detailed description of teaching practices and a critical interpretation of the challenges associated with the materials.

Figure 1

Fuentes' (2008) Sequential Exploratory Mixed Methods Design



Participant and Context of Study

Five participants were interviewed, consisting of 1 male and 4 female participants, who worked in Mostaganem at private schools demonstrating ample experience in teaching English across different educational institutions using CEFR-based resources. The first interviewee has over ten years of experience and is a high school teacher. The second interviewee is a university teacher with more than ten years

of experience. The third interviewee is an assistant lecturer with approximately six years of experience, and the fourth and the fifth interviewees are English teachers at a local private school with about four years of experience.

It is important to note that in the second phase, a questionnaire was distributed to 56 instructors - three instructors were excluded from the study as they were from other countries given the focus on Algeria - across 19 wilayas in Algeria with males accounting for 67.9% and females for 32.1%. As such, 41.5% of the participants had between zero and two years of experience, 28.3% of them had between three and five years of experience, and the remaining 30.2% had more than six years of experience. Another worth-mentioning aspect is the fact that 41.5% of them declared that they teach students from urban area whereas 52.8% affirm that they teach students from both rural and urban areas.

A purposive sampling technique - it is a non-probability sampling method in which the researcher selects subjects based on their suitability for the study's objectives (Obilor, 2023) - was employed, as participants needed to meet specific criteria: they had to be familiar with the CEFR framework concept, operate with CEFR-focused educational resources, and have a sense of its different applications in EFL classes. Hence, the number of participants in the last phase was somewhat limited to ensure the desired profile was met.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical code of conduct is necessary for researchers to understand that they are engaged not only in research activities but also in a process of transforming the education system, (Govil, 2013). Therefore, it is mandatory to follow these basic principles to conduct the research on solid and sound ethical grounds. In this respect an informed consent was obtained electronically, as participants were required to indicate their consent by ticking the designated checkbox prior to completing the online questionnaire. It is important to highlight that formal written consents and ethical approval documentation are not required for this type of data collection, in line with prevailing local regulations in Algeria.

Abed (2015) advances that informed consent is crucial for voluntary participation, ensuring that participants are fully informed about the research process and their rights. In other words, informed consent in social science research refers to participants' understanding of the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw, and the potential privacy risks involved (Doerr et al., 2020). When conducting the interviews, the interviewees verbally consented to participate in this research after it was explained to them what the research entails. The second part was a bit trickier, as the participants did not live in the same geographical location, and the study sought to inquire about a national perspective which led the researcher to turn to an online informed consent. Accordingly, Skelton et al. (2020) argue that e-consenting is well-received and offers efficient alternative to in-person methods, enhancing workflow and staff satisfaction streamlining the consent process (Chhin et al., 2017; Haussen et al., 2017). In this research-driven context, all the fifty-three participants who filled out the questionnaire e-consented to take part voluntarily in the research.

Results

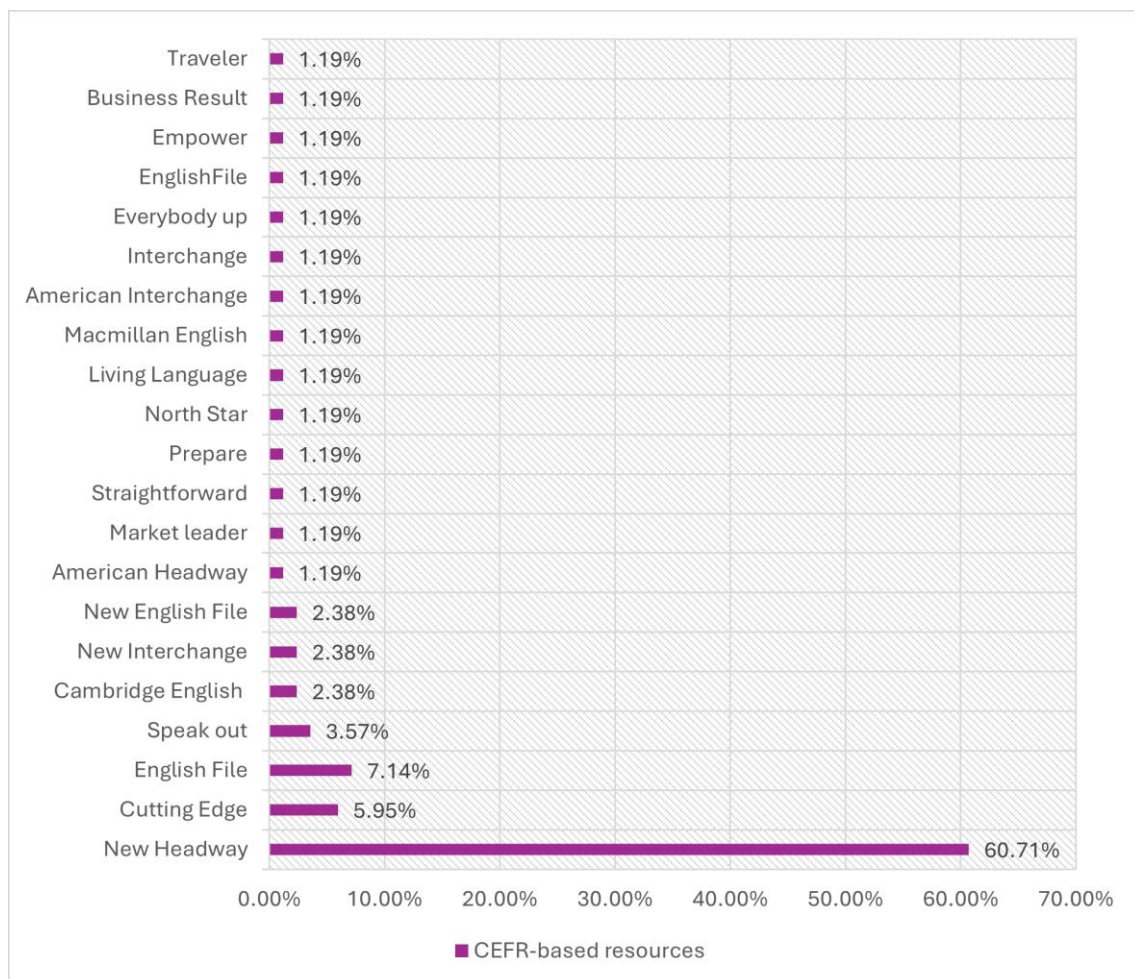
In each step of the study, data were collected through succinct data collection tools. Because the study is sequential, each step was built upon the previous step. The result of the study involves different aspects related to CEFR: 1. the types of resources and students' engagement, 2. the progress in students' writing skills, 3. extracting key factors for enhancing writing performance and 4. the critics and challenges of CEFR-oriented resources.

Types of CEFR-Driven Material and Students' Engagement

The initial focus was on the type of CEFR-powered resources used by teachers in their respective private schools. The New Headway series is the most widely used, with 60.71% of the population reporting its use (Figure 2). In second place, English File holds 7.14%, followed by Cutting Edge at 5.95%. Speak Out comes next with 3.57%, while Cambridge English, New Interchange, and New English File each have 2.38%. Each of the remaining resources individually represents 1.19% including American Headway, American Interchange, Business Result, Cambridge English, Cutting Edge, Empower, English File, Everybody Up, Interchange, Living Language, Macmillan English, Market Leader, New English File, New Interchange, North Star, Prepare, Speak Out, Straightforward, and Traveler.

Figure 2

The Types of CEFR-based Resources Used by Instructors.



When asked if the writing tasks for beginner A1 and elementary A2 levels were engaging enough in the writing process, 60.4% of the participants agreed, indicating that students maintained their focus during the writing process when working with CEFR-based materials. The participants cited various reasons for utilizing these CEFR-driven resources.

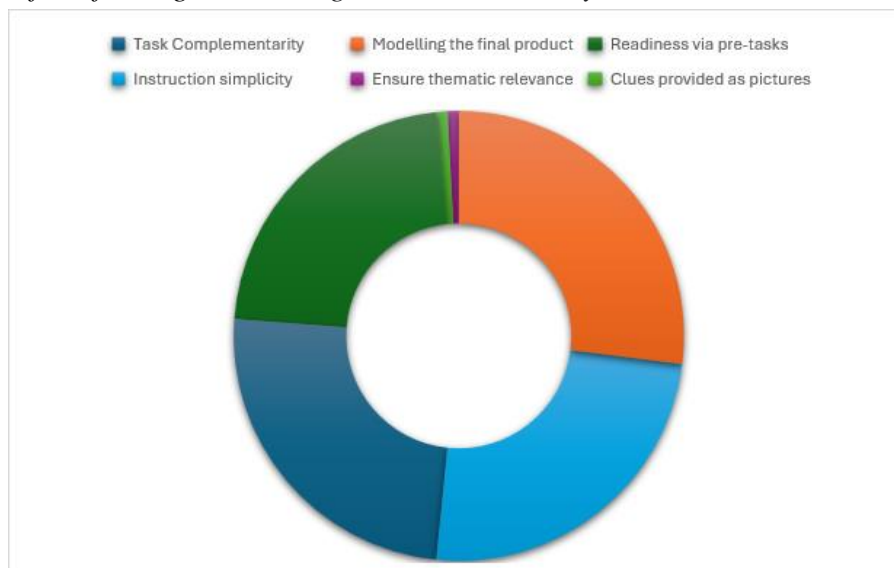
This suggests that “the tasks are appropriately challenging for the students' level” (participant 13) according to another participant, who adds that “the CEFR-based writing tasks in the New Headway program respect learners' linguistic capabilities, with sufficiently scaffolded learning experiences that enable production” (participant 13) making them a valuable resource. The lesson plans are “goal-driven” (participant 4) and “foster peer collaboration and peer evaluation” (participant 9). For example, one participant noted that “pair work” (participant 17) tasks generate situations “where students need to ask questions of each other and then write about their partners” (participant 17) which is particularly engaging from an educational perspective.

Interestingly, one instructor contends that “it is not engaging for students who are not motivated” (participant 5) and therefore argues that “it needs improvement to better meet students' motivational needs, especially in today's age of digital natives” (participant 5). This suggests that regardless of the materials' design efficiency, it is the teacher's responsibility to update them and choose ones that resonate with students' interests, thereby capturing their attention and keeping them engaged in the learning process, especially during writing sessions. Participants preferred these CEFR-enabled resources for the broad range of benefits they offer educators, particularly emphasizing six specific elements (Figure 3).

More than half the participants (64.20%) mentioned that the final product is usually modelled along with the simplicity of instruction and the complementarity of the tasks (58.50%). These elements are crucial to scaffold students' learning process, which can enable them to successfully complete the final writing task. Another pertinent element to mention is that the students are not given the final writing tasks, but they are prepared with a set of integrated pre-tasks (52.8%), which is called sequential learning, which will be further explained in the section below. Finally, only 1.9% of the respondents noticed that these CEFR-based resources ensure thematic relevance and often provide visual aids as support.

Figure 3

Benefits of Using the Writing Tasks Provided by These CEFR-Based Books



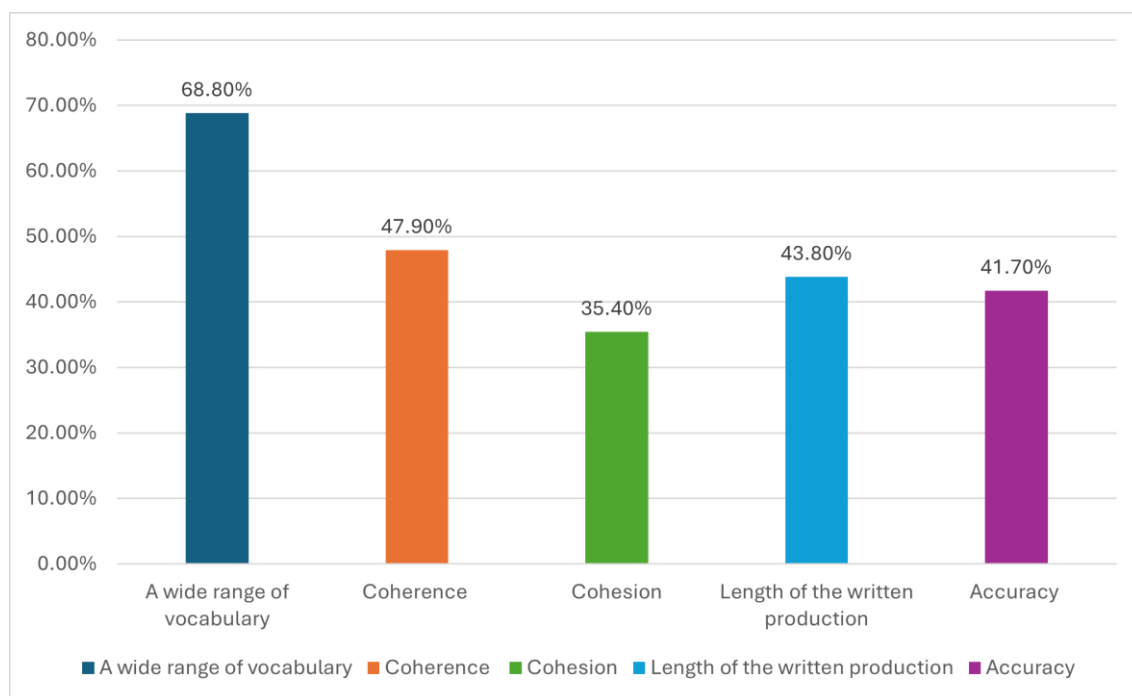
Another participant mentioned that the clues provided as pictures offer additional support to students, aiding them in completing the tasks. Furthermore, one respondent highlighted that the tasks are thematically aligned with the unit. This means that when students receive ample comprehensible input related to the same theme, it becomes less difficult for them to write about a specific aspect of that theme. Lastly, another respondent encapsulated the previous points by stating that the tasks are also tailored to the students' level, with instructions that are exceptionally clear.

The Progress in Students' Writing Skills

For students at basic levels (A1, A2), a large majority of the sample population (86.80%) reported progress in writing skills when utilizing CEFR-based teaching materials. This progress was particularly evident in vocabulary expansion (68.8%) because the CEFR-enabled resources are thematically organized, and writing tasks are generally placed at the end of the lesson allowing students to produce content based on the material they have been exposed to. This approach helps broaden their vocabulary.

Additionally, improvements were observed in coherence (47.9%) and cohesion (35.4%), suggesting that students' writing exhibited clear organization and logical flow, with effective use of linking words and transitions to ensure a coherent text. There were also gains in the length of the written product (43.8%) and accuracy (41.7%) (Figure 3). This shows that students' written pieces were consistent with the required word count. Furthermore, the accuracy improvement implies that students were able to write with minimal grammatical or orthographic errors, using English correctly.

Figure 4

Teachers Perceptions Regarding Students Progress in Writing

One participant specifically noted progress in the logical flow of writing a paragraph, such as organizing topic sentences, supporting sentences, concluding sentences, and transitioning from general to specific points. In other words, students demonstrated an understanding of sentence structure and the sequence of ideas. Another respondent observed that students showed increased interest in writing, and when they did write, their messages were clear and communicative.

Extracting Key Factors for Enhancing Writing Performance

Participants identified several elements that make CEFR-based books useful for teaching writing to students with limited proficiency. Some noted that these books offer “a variety of listening, writing, and grammar activities” (participant 4)⁹ with “engaging topics” (participant 11), “clear and straightforward instructions” participant 12, “scaffolded activities” participant 7, and often “a model to follow” (participant 13). These features provide students with strong support, helping them not only grasp the lesson but also advance by internalizing the material and producing it either orally or in writing.

In a similar vein, a participant mentioned that “the choice of topics by the designers, the use of visual aids for illustration, and the progression from simple to more complex tasks and vocabulary make it a highly effective and beneficial tool for achieving successful results” participant¹⁴. They further noted several additional benefits, including the manner in which the tasks are presented, the clarity of the instructions, and the writing model, which is very helpful for students. Additionally, the use of simpler tasks to introduce more complex ones and the straightforward nature of the tasks, which aligns well with the lesson's objectives, were highlighted as contributing factors to its effectiveness. In addition to these advantageous aspects, six factors contributing to the enhancement of students' writing performance emerged as particularly prominent.

Sequential Learning

Participants emphasized the effectiveness of techniques embedded in CEFR-based materials for scaffolding writing performance, particularly through sequential learning. This approach organizes tasks in a progressive sequence, with each task building upon the previous one, until they reach the final writing activity. Instead of a single pre-writing task followed by the main writing assignment, which is what teachers usually do in their classes, students engage in multiple tasks that are designed to deepen their understanding of the topic. This step-by-step procedure is more likely to develop learners' abilities, all the while, ensuring that they are prepared to complete the final writing task. The interconnected nature of ideas across these tasks facilitates a coherent progression, from acquiring vocabulary to forming sentences, and eventually linking sentences using grammar structures that are emphasized in the lesson. This progression leads to the production of a cohesive piece of writing by the learners.

Such an approach not only simplifies the learning process but also sustains student engagement. Participants noted that sequential learning is particularly effective for low-performing students, as it provides a structured pathway to build their knowledge and enhance their writing proficiency. By scaffolding learning from foundational to advanced levels, sequential learning fosters both confidence and competence in writing skills.

An example from the North Star materials also supports this approach. One participant noted that the tasks are "scaffolded," (participant 23) with "writing skill development starting at a basic level and gradually becoming more challenging" participant 7. This feature helps beginners produce written work despite limited proficiency, as the task is "gradually introduced after sufficient input has been provided" (participant 13). Approximately 58.5% (figure 3) of respondents indicated that the writing tasks are complementary, aiding in the achievement of the final writing objective, meaning that each task prepares students for the next step, ultimately making the writing process easier.

Skill Integration

The second tactic that this research identified in CEFR-oriented resources is the integration of secondary skills with the primary writing task. This approach reinforces a holistic understanding of language by connecting students' prior knowledge with newly acquired concepts. Tasks involving secondary skills - such as listening, reading, or grammar - are used before the final writing task to provide skill-based input, which can strengthen significantly students' ability to produce well-structured written pieces.

As a case in point, one scenario involves introducing auditory input through a listening activity to provide targeted vocabulary, generally related to a specific theme or unit. This vocabulary is revisited in subsequent tasks, such as comprehension questions or reading activities, which help in the assimilation of these key concepts. Depending on the unit and the students' language proficiency, additional activities may scaffold the writing process further. Integrating multiple skills assists students in building a solid foundation for developing their final written output.

All participants in the questionnaire and two interviewees stressed the importance of integrating secondary skills with writing instruction particularly for basic

levels. One interviewee highlighted that these CEFR-empowered resources employ sequential, interlinked tasks focusing initially on non-writing skills, arming students with sufficient vocabulary and syntax to confidently produce well-rounded written pieces. Another respondent noted:

Working with all four skills on a single theme is very effective. This involves using different authentic materials on the same theme, initially focusing on receptive skills. Once students are comfortable with the vocabulary and syntax, the emphasis shifts to productive skills to enhance their fluency and, hopefully, accuracy in both written and spoken output. (participant 23)

This progression optimizes the learning process by starting with receptive skills (listening and reading) through exposure to authentic materials. After processing the information, including grammatical tools, students transition to productive skills (speaking and writing), promoting active and creative use of language. Another respondent similarly observed that "learners undertake initial writing tasks following reading and listening activities, which support the final writing objectives by integrating the linguistic resources encountered throughout the unit" (participant 13). This combination of skills scaffolds the writing process, ensuring a deeper understanding and retention of knowledge while making the writing experience more rewarding and effective.

Real-Life Focused Content

A prominent theme emerging from the research data is the emphasis on practicality and real-life-focused content, which are closely intertwined. CEFR-based resources are characterized by their alignment with real-world situations, with all identified themes rooted in authentic contexts. Writing tasks such as emails, postcards to friends, and application letters are designed to mimic real-life scenarios, emphasizing practical writing skills that hold direct relevance to students' everyday lives. This communicative orientation fosters the development of skills that are immediately applicable, making the learning process more tangible and pragmatic.

The integration of realistic and meaningful tasks enhances student engagement and promotes greater involvement in writing activities. One participant noted that "the effectiveness lies in their interesting and current writing topics" (participant 11) along with the "simplicity of the tasks" (participant 11)). All interviewees assert that these key elements can ensure that writing activities remain accessible and relatable. Another respondent notice that "the writing tasks are generally connected to students' daily lives" (participant 9) which can help engage students' in the writing process. Additionally, giving immediate feedback - whether from teachers or peers - plays a crucial role in reinforcing learning. Feedback enables students to identify and correct errors, ultimately leading to the production of more proficient written work. These real-based context tasks not only develop practical skills but also serve as a motivational tool, as they are very relevant to students' personal experiences which make them more meaningful and engaging.

Natural Skill Progression

Another critical element revolves around supporting low-performing students' writing skills through the structured progression of skill development. Beginner-level students often lack the necessary basic knowledge that is needed to express themselves accurately. To address this, CEFR-driven resources use a gradual, skill-by-skill

approach. At the beginning, students focus on receptive skills - listening and reading to expose them to comprehensible input and introduce basic lexis. Afterwards, this vocabulary is applied in progressively more complex grammatical structures. Once internalized through sub-tasks, the focus shifts toward productive skills - writing and speaking - which enable students to utilize this newly acquired knowledge in the final writing task.

This incremental approach consists of a steady progression of complexity that begins with simple sub-tasks that gradually increase in difficulty. Each task is designed to prepare students for the next one which creates a scaffolded learning experience that supports their transition from basic comprehension to more complex writing tasks. This strategy promotes holistic skill development as it integrates various skills and ensures that each task builds on the previous one. In addition to that, the sense of accomplishment students experience from completing increasingly challenging tasks surely enhances their self-confidence, which is an essential factor particularly for low-performing learners.

More than half of the participants (52.8%) acknowledge that these CEFR-guided teaching materials prepare students for final writing tasks (Figure 3) through a sequence of sub-tasks that are praised by the respondent for their simplicity of instructions and that is a key factor. Fourteen participants emphasized the importance of this simplicity. Other features of CEFR-aligned materials were also highlighted. One participant noted that resources like North Star Reading and Writing tasks prepare students from the beginning of the unit by activating background vocabulary, teaching grammar points, and engaging them in various reading and writing activities. This demonstrates the holistic design of these materials, which integrate multiple aspects to enhance the overall learning process.

Modelling

In addition to other strategies, teachers employed modeling as an effective scaffolding technique to enhance students' writing performance. Modeling provides students with a clear visual representation of the desired outcome, helping them understand the structure and expectations of their writing tasks. Writing, however, remains unique in its ability to allow students to express their ideas distinctively. Even when all students write about the same topic, each piece of writing is inherently different. While this individuality is a positive feature, it can be challenging for struggling students who may lack a clear framework for organizing their work effectively. Modeling addresses this challenge as it provides structured guidance and examples which assist students in navigating the writing process with clarity.

One advantageous aspect of modeling is the use of a "sample answer" (participant 4) to illustrate the expected final product. This feature was highlighted by 64.2% (Figure 3) of participants, who stressed its value despite its absence in many mainstream textbooks. As the first interviewee explained, "what's great about these tasks is that students are going to the task because they already know what to do" and he also noted that:

If the task is writing a letter to someone, then students are given, in the text beforehand, a model of the letter. This way, they do not have to wonder how to write a letter or what it should look like. They are equipped not only with the model but also with every general structure they need to complete the task. (Interviewee 1)

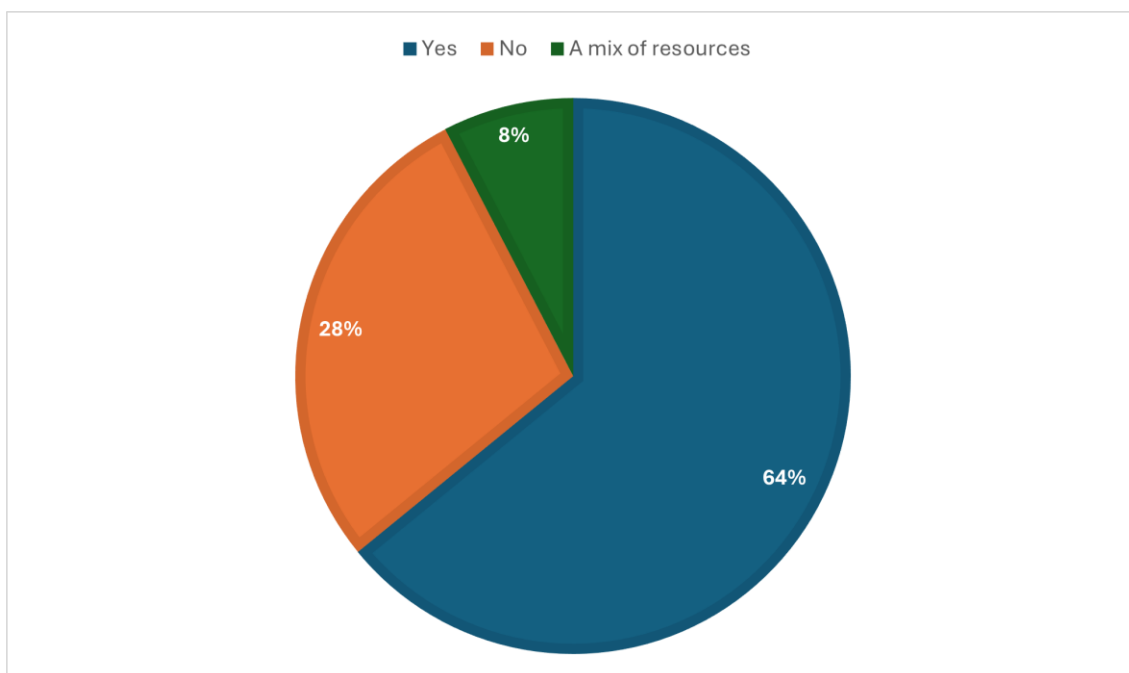
This step-by-step procedure scaffolds students' learning from the initial stage to the final writing task. For instance, students are first introduced to the necessary vocabulary through visual aids, such as an image related to the topic. This visual support is then discussed and leads to subsequent tasks, such as reading a sample letter. The components of the letter are analyzed, highlighting what could be changed or added, as well as its technical and structural aspects. After that, students are introduced to relevant grammatical structures that can help them craft their writing. Finally, they complete the main task - such as writing an email - by following the model provided at the beginning. This simple approach ensures that students are well-prepared at every stage which enables them to produce a well-rounded written piece.

Supplementary Materials

The respondents also used a wide range of supplementary online materials that come with the CEFR-based resources. These materials include online activities, reading texts, visual aids, and even videos. These theme-based resources provide students with a holistic understanding of each unit, encompassing vocabulary, grammar, and other linguistic components. By incorporating these materials, students are offered additional opportunities to master the content they are studying which helps them reinforce their skills through diverse and engaging formats.

Figure 5

The Extent to which Teachers Use CEFR-resources



When participants were asked about their reliance on CEFR-based writing activities from textbooks like New Headway particularly when it comes to teaching beginner or elementary-level writing, 64.1% affirm they use different CEFR-driven pedagogical materials (Figure 5). One participant explained that while they depend on these activities, they occasionally modify them to better suit their learners' needs and align with specific learning objectives. Another participant highlighted their practice of supplementing the textbook tasks with additional resources to enrich lesson plans and maximize students' learning opportunities during writing sessions.

Moreover, one interviewee emphasized the value of the complementary materials provided with CEFR-based resources, noting that “these resources bring along, aside from the book, a wealth of interactive and supplementary materials online to complement in-class studies and enrich language exposure” interviewee 1. This integration of supplementary materials enhances the overall teaching and learning experience by expanding students' exposure to the language and supporting the development of their writing skills in engaging and interactive ways.

Cross-Cultural Awareness

CEFR-driven resources are characterized by their emphasis on cultural inclusivity, described by one interviewee as “highly comprehensive in terms of activities and cultural content,” (participant 11) making them distinctly “cross-cultural” (participant 11). Each topic discussed “places students within the context of the target culture,” (participant 11) enhancing their cultural awareness and fostering a deeper understanding of otherness.

Another participant highlighted the engaging nature of the themes, noting that they appeal to both young and adult learners which open students to other cultures creating an international cross-cultural atmosphere in the classroom. This is largely attributed to students' exposure to various authentic English varieties, including those from countries such as France, India, and Italy. The learning experience is enriched by the different accents and regional varieties which allow students to explore diverse genres of English from around the world.

However, not all perspectives were positive. Some participants pointed out that the CEFR-driven materials are predominantly tailored for European contexts, which may not resonate with students from different cultural backgrounds. One interviewee remarked that “the material may not be tailored to specific cultures, making it harder for students to relate to or engage with it” (participant 8). This disconnect can present challenges, particularly when students have to write about culturally unfamiliar concepts, such as “early nesters” for instance. In such cases, the lack of alignment with students' cultural experiences can hinder their ability to fully engage with the material's content.

The Critics and Challenges of CEFR-oriented Resources

It is clear that no resource or pedagogical material is completely adequate. This means that there is always potential for adjustments and modifications to tailor the lesson to the students' learning profiles and interests. One noteworthy aspect is the edition of CEFR-oriented resources - some are outdated, while others are current. Older editions may feature outdated videos, pictures, and content that might not be as engaging as it once was. Therefore, it is advisable to use the most recent editions, as their updated content is more likely to be well-received by students compared to older versions.

In terms of challenges faced by students with CEFR-based writing tasks, one participant pointed out that his students had trouble “transitioning from general to specific details in a paragraph” (participant 7). Despite this, “students generally grasp the task since it is usually modelled before the writing assignment” (interviewee 4). This issue with a top-down approach is common, particularly among students with lower

proficiency or inadequate background knowledge. Consequently, “creative writing is often a challenging task” for A1-level learners.

In this regard, it was observed that “beginners often have limited vocabulary, which hampers their ability to create effective writing pieces” (participant 3) and “they lack the skills to construct sentences properly” (interviewee 3) due to incorrect grammar usage. This leads to considerable problems with coherence, grammar, and communication, as well as persistent “spelling errors” (participant 39). It was also noted that “they sometimes misunderstand the instructions and fail to use the provided notes effectively” (participant 9). Another issue identified was that “students are not engaged enough, as some materials provide minimal interaction” (participant 5). Therefore, the participant mentioned a preference for “more interactive approaches to enhance student engagement with the tasks” (participant 12).

Furthermore, students may experience a “gap between their proficiency levels in different skills” (participant 6). For instance, a student might be very proficient in speaking but less skilled in writing. To address this, instructors must scaffold their teaching to help students develop a balanced competence in all four macro skills. Another common problem highlighted by a participant is that “most students find writing tasks uninteresting and boring,” (participant 20) which results in “boredom” (participant 5) and prevents them from being “engaged” (participant 5) in the writing tasks.

CEFR-Driven Mechanism

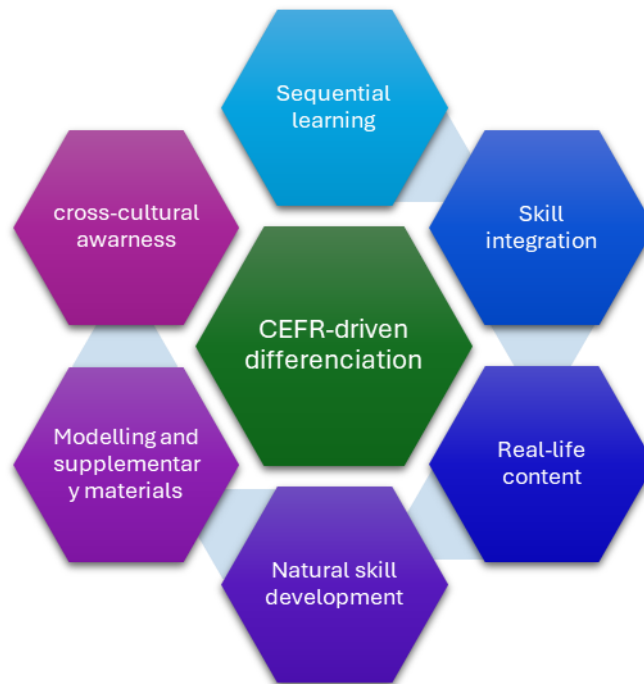
What motivated the research to launch is the desire to crack the CEFR-based material code and uncover the principle upon which it operates, which could explain the significant success it has achieved, particularly in enhancing students’ writing, in particular and English in general. The yield of the research is this CEFR-driven differentiation (Figure 5) mechanism that was generated from the findings obtained mainly from the interviews and confirmed later on in the questionnaire.

This mechanism can be leveraged by any instructor any level to cater for their students' wide spectrum needs. Usually, instructors go through the process of differentiation based on students' language level only, but knowing this mechanism can render the instructor more aware of the different elements that comes into play in the differentiation process and thus integrate the sequential learning that helps students learn in a step-by-step process while being mindful of skill integration that promote fusing the four macro skills altogether.

In addition to that, the teacher can, especially for the productive skills like writing and speaking, offer models that students can use. More than that, the instructor can supplement extra material for students to work on to strengthen what they are working on in class. Subsequently, to engage students even more, the content should be authentic and stem from real-life and, at the same time, expose students to targeted and pre-studied cultural elements so students can develop a global cultural awareness vis-à-vis the other. This does not mean in any way overlooking the students' own culture; on the contrary, the teacher can have a say on purposefully integrating authentic and context-driven content that would create an inclusive and all-encompassing learning atmosphere.

Figure 5

A CEFR-based Differentiation Mechanism for Enhancing students' Language performance



A direct implication is fusing this CEFR-driven mechanism with AI; if applied in the old-fashioned way; it can be rewarding for the students, yet very challenging and time-consuming for the teacher. But if integrated with AI, the process would be seamless and time-efficient. Each step can be not only done by AI and adjusted by the teacher, but the whole process would be optimized to maximize learning benefits. Even better, with hard copies, modification and adjustments are difficult, but with AI, it would be automatically done along with the all details that follow. We are living in a world where AI is developing every day. This entire procedure can be done in a few clicks if the teacher masters prompting and communicating properly with the AI.

Discussion

There are different CEFR-aligned resources that are used by different teachers and the New Headway is being used par excellence nationally. These resources are leveraged due to potential in scaffolding the writing instruction. In this sense, Van Aertselaer (2013) affirms that CEFR supported students in crafting more dialogic and organized arguments after breaking B2 descriptors down into specific criteria for structure, coherence, and stance.

In this regard, these resources were praised for maintaining students' engagement during writing tasks because of their clarity and the simple nature of their instructions, particularly for beginners. These tasks are inspired from real-world scenarios which renders the writing task akin to those in real life.

The activities leading up to the writing task scaffold the writing instruction because of the way they are inter-connected and sequenced to infuse the students with a profuse amount of lexis that is then coupled with syntax for them to be able to complete the targeted task. However, it remains the teachers' responsibility to recalibrate and readjust the form of the content to accommodate students' needs.

Besides, these CEFR-driven materials come with other resources online that can supplement their instruction and thus optimize their learning process. Another strategy by which the instruction is scaffolded is through the sample answers or the models procured to students giving them a concrete image of the expected final outcome. As such, Osamu (2006) and Guirao et al., (2015) both agree that when teaching writing, the use of models can enhance their lexical repertoire by exposing learners to range of vocabulary and expressions beyond those used in their writing. What is also interesting is that all the tasks are theme-driven with units that strive to teach the students the four skills, beginning with the receptive and then the productive skills.

The intentional combination of skills, ranging from listening and speaking to reading and writing gives these CEFR-enabled resources an all-encompassing feature that enables students increase vocabulary retention, coherence, cohesion, consistency and accuracy in their writing. Another aspect to consider is the extent to which these CEFR-founded materials are cross-cultural as they immerse the students in the target culture adding an extra layer for learning the foreign language and writing about it appropriately. Overall, teachers reported positive feedback for these resources and this finding is aligned with that of Pham (2017) and that of Gaidi and Mizab (2024) whose findings indicate that these resources (particularly New Headway "Intermediate" Fourth Edition Textbook) are grounded on cultural linguistic input alongside language skills (98.85%). In addition, this CEFR-driven textbook content incorporates activities promoting reflection, responsibility, and social interaction, which help familiarize learners with intercultural contexts and that's what these resources are, to some extent, praised for. On the flip side, these CEFR-driven materials were criticized for being outdated and, at times, failing to motivate students. However, it is up to the teacher to step up, intervene and adjust the teaching practice to suit the students' expectations. In addition to that, these resources were equally reproached for not being tailored to particular cultures making it difficult for students to relate to them. Similar findings were highlighted in a study conducted by Nhung (2019), which investigated English language teachers' perceptions of the top-down implementation of the CEFR for non-English major students at a university in Vietnam. The study found that the CEFR-based materials being used contained irrelevant topics and themes that were not aligned with the country's culture. More than that, Amerian and Tajabadi's (2020) results clearly suggest that the textbooks in this series exhibit shortcomings and biases in their presentation and development of intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and awareness. Although 96.30% of respondents report that CEFR-based materials (the entire *Headway* series) incorporate cultural content to some degree, 96.25% indicate that learners' own culture is not represented.

An opposing view believes that these openings serve as windows to launch debates and discussions to compare and contrast the two cultures. What's more, students' imbalanced proficiency across the four macro skills can pose a problem to their learning process. The last point to highlight is that the CEFR-oriented resources may not suit some advanced levels as they are deemed to be somewhat basic. This aligns with Negishi et al's (2013) findings as they have encountered a similar issue, so they adopted the CFER to their Japanese context and created a new one name J-CEFR where they even added levels like the inclusion of the Pre-A1 level. A direct implication of these findings is their integration into mainstream education through differentiation

by assigning students tasks according to their language level rather than their grade or better yet devise a new CEFR framework to fit the Algerian context.

In tandem with this, the findings can be leveraged by stakeholders, policymakers, educators and teachers to bring about reforms to their respective educational institutions. As for the limitation, due to the research context specificity, the sample population should have been larger, but it was a bit challenging to locate teachers with experience in teaching with CEFR-focused books across the country. Another limitation of this study, is its partial reliance on teachers' self-reported perceptions which may be influenced by subjective bias and may not fully represent the actual teaching practices.

Regarding future research agendas, these findings should serve as a basis for launching pedagogical action research that integrates this CEFR-driven mechanism to help students, especially low-performers, attain proficiency. This can validate this model that can be used by any teacher to enhance their *savoir-faire* and amplify the teaching-learning process overall.

Conclusion

This research aims to trace personal, local and national perspectives on teachers' utilization of CEFR-based materials at their respective training centers, focusing on how these resources are used to scaffold learning in general and the writing instruction in particular. The findings revealed that instructors capitalize on the wide range of affordances offered by CEFR-led resources to enhance students' writing skills. These strategies include the straightforward instructions to simplify the process, real-life-based content they maintain engagement, and interconnectedness of tasks preceding the writing activity, which infuses students with enough vocabulary and grammar to express themselves accurately in writing.

Additionally, the cross-cultural feature of these pedagogical materials promotes intercultural competence. Notably, these resources have contributed to progress in coherence, cohesion and consistency in students' writing. All these elements are fused altogether in a CEFR-driven mechanism that can be harnessed to optimize the differentiation process, especially if merged with AI. This promising CEFR-focused mechanism can be adopted by any teacher, educator or policy maker to personalize the learning process even in large classes and regardless of the students' level of education or their language proficiency. This research is a valuable addition in the EFL arena. Despite these positive elements, CEFR-oriented materials face criticism from a cultural and content perspective. Nonetheless, they remain considerably effective, and it is crucial for teachers, educators and researchers to engage in further research to harness their true potential in steering students' learning toward proficiency.

Statement of Responsibility

All authors are responsible for all the sections of this article. FB: research design, methodology, and writing. AG: data collection, and writing. MB: data analysis, review, and editing.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in the research.

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