



THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE (CEFR) IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT SMPIT ZAIN AL-MUTTAQIN PALEMBANG

Putri Pitaloka¹, Tahrur², Aswadi Jaya³

^{1,2,3}Universitas PGRI Palembang

E-mail : 1putripitaloka317@gmail.com , 2tahrur@univpgri-palembang.ac.id , 3aswadijaya@univpgri-palembang.ac.id

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Corresponding Author:

Putri Pitaloka

Email Corresponding:

putripitaloka317@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standard in English language teaching at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang. A mixed-method case study approach was employed to investigate the implementation of CEFR and capture the perspectives and experiences of the research participants in their natural setting. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with one English teacher, curriculum document analysis (lesson plans/teaching modules), and questionnaires distributed to 66 students across grades 7, 8, and 9. The results indicate that the CEFR implementation has been carried out well and systematically. CEFR was integrated into English language teaching through lesson planning, classroom instruction, learning materials, and assessment practices. The teacher applied differentiated instruction and communicative learning activities to accommodate students with different English proficiency levels while maintaining the same learning objectives. The teacher also perceived CEFR positively because it provided clear learning objectives and supported students' confidence and participation. Furthermore, the questionnaire results showed that most students had positive perceptions of CEFR-based learning, reporting that they understood the learning objectives, actively participated in classroom activities, and felt more motivated to learn English. Overall, the implementation of CEFR contributed to a more structured and student-centered English learning environment. In conclusion, the integration of CEFR with the Merdeka Curriculum has successfully created a structured, inclusive, communicative, and student-centered learning environment.

Keywords: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), CEFR Implementation, English Language Teaching, Merdeka Curriculum, Student-Centered Learning.*

1. INTRODUCTION

English has become increasingly significant in contemporary education because it functions as a major medium of international communication, academic exchange, technological development, and access to global knowledge. English proficiency therefore extends beyond linguistic competence and represents an important

educational resource that enables students to participate more effectively in an increasingly interconnected world (Kurniawan, 2024). Within this context, English language education requires clearly articulated learning outcomes, systematic instructional practices, and assessment standards capable of describing learners' communicative competence in measurable terms. Internationally recognized proficiency frameworks are particularly valuable because

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they provide common reference points through which curriculum objectives, classroom instruction, learning materials, and assessment can be aligned.

One of the most influential frameworks developed for this purpose is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR provides a comprehensive system for describing language proficiency through six principal levels, ranging from A1 and A2 for basic users, B1 and B2 for independent users, to C1 and C2 for proficient users (Council of Europe, 2020; Huhta, 2025). Rather than functioning solely as a proficiency scale, the CEFR provides a broader conceptual framework for language learning, teaching, curriculum development, materials design, and assessment. Its descriptors articulate what learners are expected to accomplish communicatively at different stages of language development, thereby facilitating greater transparency and coherence across instructional contexts (Piccardo & North, 2019). The continued development of the CEFR has further emphasized communicative competence, learner agency, mediation, plurilingualism, and an action-oriented approach to language education (Council of Europe, 2020, 2024).

The pedagogical value of the CEFR lies particularly in its potential to establish explicit connections among learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessment practices. CEFR-based instruction encourages teachers to formulate learning outcomes in terms of observable communicative abilities rather than relying exclusively on grammatical knowledge or isolated linguistic components. This orientation is consistent with contemporary approaches to language teaching that position learners as active social agents who use language to accomplish meaningful communicative purposes (Piccardo & North, 2019). Moreover, CEFR descriptors can support learner autonomy by enabling students to recognize their current proficiency, monitor their progress, and participate more actively in evaluating their own language development (Little, 2007, 2016). Recent CEFR developments have similarly emphasized the pedagogical use of descriptors in classroom planning and learning-oriented assessment (Council of Europe, 2025).

The relevance of the CEFR has gradually extended beyond its original European context, including to Asian educational systems seeking internationally comparable language proficiency standards. Indonesia represents one such context in which CEFR principles have increasingly entered discussions of curriculum development, textbook design, learning outcomes, and English language assessment. Previous research has highlighted both the potential and complexity of adopting the framework within Indonesian educational settings (Arifudin Abi Maryo, 2021; Novawan et al., 2023; Robbani et al., 2023). More recently, Mualim (2025) discussed the feasibility of CEFR adoption in Indonesia as a means of strengthening the international recognition and comparability of foreign-language competence. These developments indicate that CEFR is becoming increasingly relevant to discussions surrounding the quality and direction of English language education in Indonesia.

This relevance has become more pronounced within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The curriculum emphasizes competency-based learning, flexibility, meaningful classroom experiences, differentiated instruction, and the development of learners according to their individual needs and stages of progression. National learning outcomes established under the Merdeka Curriculum provide an important policy foundation for English instruction across educational levels (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan [BSKAP], 2024). English instructional materials developed within this curriculum also increasingly emphasize functional language use and communicative competence, as reflected in nationally developed teaching resources such as *English for Nusantara* (Damayanti et al., 2022). These orientations share important principles with CEFR-informed language education, particularly regarding communicative competence, learner progression, explicit learning objectives, and meaningful language use.

Nevertheless, translating a proficiency framework into classroom practice is considerably more complex than formally adopting proficiency descriptors or CEFR-aligned materials. Effective implementation

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requires teachers to understand how proficiency descriptors can be transformed into lesson objectives, classroom activities, instructional materials, and assessment criteria. Astrianingsih and Dwinalida (2024), for example, demonstrated that implementing a CEFR-based curriculum involves pedagogical considerations extending from curriculum interpretation to actual English teaching practices. Similarly, research concerning CEFR implementation in Indonesia has identified challenges related to contextual adaptation, teacher understanding, institutional readiness, and the correspondence between CEFR principles and existing educational practices (Arifudin Abi Maryo, 2021; Novawan et al., 2023; Robbani et al., 2023). Consequently, formal references to CEFR do not necessarily guarantee that its principles are consistently enacted at the classroom level.

Teachers occupy a particularly central position in this implementation process because curriculum frameworks are ultimately interpreted and enacted through teachers' beliefs, knowledge, pedagogical decisions, and classroom practices. From the perspective of teacher cognition, instructional behavior is closely connected to what teachers know, believe, and understand about language teaching and learning (Borg, 2006). In CEFR-informed education, teachers must interpret proficiency descriptors, establish realistic learning objectives, select appropriate materials, design communicative activities, and construct assessments that correspond to intended proficiency outcomes. Recent research further demonstrates that successful CEFR implementation is closely related to teacher receptivity and sustained professional development (Marzaini et al., 2025; Sukri et al., 2025). Thus, examining teachers' perceptions is essential for understanding not merely whether CEFR has been formally adopted, but how it is understood and operationalized within actual instructional practice.

Assessment constitutes another critical dimension of CEFR implementation. A coherent CEFR-informed system requires alignment among intended proficiency outcomes, learning activities, and the methods used to evaluate learner achievement. The framework can support formative and

summative assessment by providing descriptors against which communicative performance can be interpreted (Council of Europe, 2020). Contemporary applications increasingly emphasize classroom assessment as an integral part of learning rather than merely a mechanism for assigning scores (Council of Europe, 2025). However, the implementation of CEFR-aligned assessment requires adequate teacher knowledge and professional preparation. Marzaini et al. (2025) demonstrated the importance of professional development in supporting teachers' enactment of CEFR-aligned classroom-based assessment, indicating that assessment reform cannot be separated from teachers' capacity to interpret and apply the framework appropriately.

Learning materials represent an equally important component because textbooks and supplementary resources often mediate the relationship between curriculum expectations and classroom instruction. CEFR-informed materials should provide tasks and linguistic input that correspond to learners' proficiency levels while promoting meaningful language use (McGrath, 2013; Morrow, 2004; Tomlinson, 2013). Within Indonesia, studies examining textbooks and CEFR criteria suggest growing interest in evaluating whether instructional materials adequately represent expected proficiency outcomes (Putri, 2023). Therefore, investigating CEFR implementation requires attention not only to teachers and assessment but also to the extent to which classroom materials, learning activities, and proficiency objectives operate as a coherent instructional system.

Students' experiences constitute another dimension that should not be overlooked. Although CEFR implementation is frequently examined from curriculum, assessment, or teacher perspectives, learners are the individuals who directly experience the instructional consequences of these frameworks. Their perceptions can provide important evidence regarding whether learning objectives are understandable, classroom activities are meaningful, instructional materials correspond to their abilities, and assessment practices reflect what they have learned. Learner engagement and motivation are also closely connected to the instructional

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environment and classroom processes (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Ushioda, 2014). Consequently, examining students' perceptions alongside teachers' perspectives can produce a more comprehensive account of how CEFR principles function in everyday English instruction.

The implementation of CEFR also raises questions of contextualization. Although the framework provides internationally recognizable proficiency descriptors, language education remains embedded within particular social, cultural, institutional, and curricular environments. CEFR principles therefore need to be interpreted in ways that remain pedagogically meaningful within local contexts rather than being transferred mechanically from one educational system to another. Indonesian schools vary considerably in institutional characteristics, student backgrounds, educational philosophies, learning resources, and approaches to English instruction. This diversity makes context-sensitive investigation particularly important when evaluating how an international proficiency framework operates within specific school environments (Novawan et al., 2023; Mualim, 2025).

One context that remains relatively underexplored is the Islamic integrated school. Such schools combine national curriculum requirements with institutional educational values, including the integration of Islamic principles into teaching and school culture. SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang represents this distinctive educational setting. The school has adopted CEFR-aligned textbooks and learning objectives while simultaneously incorporating Islamic values into English instruction. This combination creates an important context for investigating how an internationally recognized language framework is interpreted and enacted within a locally situated educational environment. The implementation process may involve not only the alignment of language proficiency objectives with classroom practices but also the negotiation of institutional values, instructional materials, learner characteristics, and broader curricular expectations.

Although previous studies have addressed CEFR implementation in Indonesian education (Arifudin Abi Maryo, 2021;

Astrianingsih & Dwinalida, 2024; Novawan et al., 2023; Robbani et al., 2023), several gaps remain. Existing research has largely concentrated on CEFR adoption, curriculum alignment, textbooks, implementation challenges, or teachers' perspectives. International studies have similarly emphasized teacher receptivity, professional development, and CEFR-aligned assessment (Marzaini et al., 2025; Sukri et al., 2025). However, comparatively limited research has examined CEFR implementation holistically by connecting lesson planning, classroom instruction, learning materials, assessment practices, teacher perceptions, and student perceptions within a single school-based investigation. Evidence is particularly limited regarding Islamic integrated junior high schools in Indonesia, where international language standards operate alongside distinctive institutional and religious educational values.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to address this gap by investigating the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in English language teaching at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang. Rather than treating CEFR implementation merely as the formal adoption of proficiency levels or textbooks, the study examines how the framework is translated into actual educational practices. Specifically, attention is directed toward lesson planning, classroom instruction, the selection and use of learning materials, assessment practices, teachers' perceptions, and students' perceptions. By examining these interconnected dimensions, the study is expected to provide a contextualized understanding of the extent to which CEFR principles are reflected in everyday English teaching and learning within an Islamic integrated school.

The study therefore contributes to the existing literature in two principal respects. First, it extends research on CEFR implementation into the relatively underexplored context of an Indonesian Islamic integrated junior high school. Second, it adopts a multidimensional perspective by examining both pedagogical practices and the perceptions of the principal educational actors involved in implementation. Such an approach

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can reveal not only how CEFR is formally represented in instructional planning and materials but also how teachers interpret the framework and how students experience CEFR-informed instruction. The findings may consequently provide practical insights for schools, teachers, curriculum developers, and educational stakeholders seeking to strengthen the contextualized implementation of internationally referenced language proficiency standards within Indonesian English language education.

2. METHODS**2.1 Research Design**

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design, with qualitative inquiry as the primary approach, to explore the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in English language teaching at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang. Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with one English teacher, and curriculum document analysis, while quantitative data were obtained from questionnaires completed by 66 students from Grades 7–9. Questionnaire responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages), whereas qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to CEFR implementation. By integrating qualitative and quantitative findings, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of CEFR implementation, including lesson planning, classroom instruction, learning materials, assessment practices, teachers' perceptions, and students' perceptions within an Islamic junior high school context. This design allows the researcher to:

1. Describe CEFR-based English teaching and learning is implemented at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang
2. Describe teacher at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin designs their CEFR-based lesson plan
3. Describe teacher at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin designs their classroom instruction to reflect CEFR

principles

4. Describe learning materials are used at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin
5. Describe teacher evaluates CEFR-based teaching at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin
6. Describe teacher perceives the implementation of CEFR-based English teaching and learning at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang
7. Describe students perceive the implementation of CEFR-based English teaching and learning at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang

2.2 Research Procedure

This section explained the research procedures, which described the steps undertaken by the researcher during the qualitative research process. The procedures focused on preparing research instruments, conducting classroom observations, interviewing teachers and students, collecting relevant documents, and analyzing the data. The research procedures are as follows:

1. Pre-research: Preparing research instruments, coordinating with the school, holding discussions with English teachers, and identifying the classes involved in CEFR-based instruction.
2. Data collection: Collecting data through classroom observations during the implementation of CEFR, conducting interviews with teachers and students regarding their experiences in using the CEFR framework, and gathering relevant documentation.
3. Data analysis: Analyzing the collected data using the Miles and Huberman technique (Data Reduction, Data Display, Conclusion Drawing and Verification), technique to describe and explain the implementation of CEFR.
4. Report preparation: Organizing and presenting the research findings based on the research focus, drawing conclusions, and providing suggestions.

Vol 9, No 2 (2026): ESTEEM**3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION****3.1 Findings****3.1.1 Implementation of CEFR-Based English Teaching and Learning**

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang was reflected across multiple dimensions of the English teaching and learning process. The analysis focused on six interrelated aspects: lesson planning, classroom instruction, learning materials, assessment practices, teachers' perceptions, and students' perceptions. Data were obtained through classroom observations, teacher interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires administered to 66 students.

Classroom observations indicated that CEFR principles were incorporated into instructional practices rather than being limited to formal curriculum documents. Learning objectives were communicated at the beginning of instruction, while classroom activities were organized around communicative language use and adjusted to students' proficiency levels. The teacher provided opportunities for students to participate in discussions, collaborative activities, and proficiency-appropriate learning tasks.

This finding was reinforced by the teacher's explanation during the interview:

"We use CEFR as a reference to identify the students' English proficiency and to determine appropriate learning objectives. It helps us understand what students are expected to achieve at each level, so the teaching activities can be adjusted to their abilities."

(Teacher Interview)

The statement indicates that CEFR functioned not merely as a proficiency classification system but also as a practical reference for organizing classroom instruction according to students' language development.

3.1.2 Lesson Plan Design

Document analysis revealed that lesson planning constituted an important component of CEFR implementation. The teacher developed instructional plans by considering predetermined learning objectives and students' expected levels of language proficiency. The lesson plans incorporated textbooks, PowerPoint presentations, instructional videos, worksheets, and teacher-prepared activities.

Differentiated instruction was also incorporated into lesson planning by adjusting task complexity and instructional support according to students' proficiency levels. The teacher explained:

"When preparing the lesson, I consider the different English levels of the students. The learning objective can be the same, but the difficulty of the tasks and the support given to students may be different because their abilities are not exactly the same."

(Teacher Interview)

This statement demonstrates that differentiation was incorporated into instructional planning while maintaining common learning objectives. Thus, CEFR-informed planning allowed the teacher to accommodate learner diversity without separating students from the broader instructional goals.

3.1.3 Classroom Instruction

Classroom observations demonstrated that teaching was predominantly communicative and student-centered. Students were encouraged to use English actively through discussions, question-and-answer activities, audiovisual materials, and collaborative group work. Mixed-ability grouping was also employed to facilitate interaction and peer support among students with different proficiency levels.

The teacher described the instructional process as follows:

"I try not to make the class completely teacher-centered. Students need

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opportunities to speak, discuss, and work together. In group activities, I usually mix students with different abilities so they can learn from and support each other."

(Teacher Interview)

The interview statement was consistent with the classroom observation data. The teacher primarily functioned as a facilitator who provided guidance, monitored students' activities, and assisted learners experiencing difficulties. This approach enabled students with different proficiency levels to participate actively in the same instructional environment.

3.1.4 Learning Materials

The findings revealed that various learning resources were employed to support CEFR-based instruction. These included CEFR-aligned textbooks, PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, videos, audio materials, and supplementary resources prepared or selected by the teacher. Materials were adapted where necessary to accommodate differences in students' proficiency.

As explained by the teacher:

"We do not depend only on the textbook. I also use PowerPoint, videos, worksheets, and audio materials to make the lessons easier for students to understand. Sometimes I adapt the materials because some students need simpler explanations, while others are ready for more challenging tasks."

(Teacher Interview)

The statement highlights the teacher's active role in adapting instructional resources rather than using published materials rigidly. The combination of textual, visual, and auditory resources also supported the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

3.1.5 Evaluation of Learning (Assessment)

Assessment was implemented through multiple mechanisms, including formative assessment, daily tests, school examinations, and AFLA/TOEFL-based assessments. These

assessment practices were used to evaluate students' achievement and monitor their development in English proficiency.

The teacher explained:

"Assessment is not only conducted at the end of learning. During classroom activities, I also observe students' performance and check their understanding. We also have daily tests, school examinations, and other English proficiency assessments to see how their abilities develop."

(Teacher Interview)

This statement indicates that assessment served both formative and evaluative functions. Classroom-based assessment enabled the teacher to identify students requiring further support, whereas more formal assessments provided broader information concerning their English achievement and proficiency development.

3.1.6 Teacher's Perception

The interview findings revealed that the teacher generally perceived CEFR positively because it provided clearer proficiency references and facilitated differentiated instruction. The framework was also considered compatible with the learner-centered and competency-oriented principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The teacher stated:

"CEFR is helpful because the levels make students' abilities clearer. It becomes easier for me to decide what students need and what kind of activities are suitable for them. I also think it is compatible with the Merdeka Curriculum because both encourage us to consider students' different abilities." (Teacher Interview)

Nevertheless, differences in proficiency remained a practical challenge. The teacher noted that students at lower proficiency levels often required additional guidance, whereas more proficient students needed sufficiently challenging activities to maintain engagement. Therefore, CEFR implementation required

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continuous instructional adjustment rather than simply assigning learners to proficiency categories.

3.1.7 Students' Perceptions

Questionnaire findings from 66 students indicated generally positive perceptions of CEFR-based English learning. Most students reported that they understood the learning objectives, could participate in classroom activities, and perceived the learning tasks as appropriate to their English abilities. Students also indicated increased confidence and motivation in learning English.

A representative student response can be presented as follows:

"I like the English activities because I can understand what we are expected to learn, and the teacher helps us when the tasks are difficult. Working with friends also makes me more confident to speak English because we can help each other." (Student Response)

Another student similarly emphasized the suitability of the learning activities:

"The activities are interesting because we do not only read the textbook. Sometimes we watch videos, discuss with friends, and do different tasks, so learning English is more enjoyable and I feel more confident participating in class." (Student Response)

Overall, the convergence of questionnaire responses, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis indicates that CEFR-based instruction was positively experienced by students. Clear learning objectives, differentiated tasks, varied learning materials, communicative activities, and teacher support collectively contributed to a classroom environment that accommodated differences in proficiency while encouraging students' active participation and confidence.

Discussion

The findings indicate that CEFR was systematically implemented at SMPIT Zain

Al-Muttaqin Palembang through lesson planning, classroom instruction, learning materials, assessment, and teachers' and students' perceptions. Triangulated data from interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and questionnaires revealed that English learning reflected CEFR principles, including communicative competence, learner-centered instruction, differentiated learning, and proficiency-based teaching.

Lesson planning was conducted systematically by preparing learning objectives, instructional materials, multimedia resources, and assessments before classroom implementation. The teacher also differentiated learning tasks according to students' proficiency levels while maintaining common learning objectives. These findings support Harmer (2007), who emphasizes that effective lesson planning facilitates organized instruction, and Tomlinson (2014), who highlights differentiated instruction as an approach to addressing learners' diverse needs.

Classroom instruction emphasized communicative and collaborative learning. Students participated in discussions, group work, presentations, and question-and-answer activities, while the teacher acted as a facilitator. Mixed-ability grouping enabled peer support and active participation. These findings are consistent with Communicative Language Teaching (Richards, 2006) and collaborative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), which emphasize meaningful interaction as the foundation of language learning.

The teacher also adapted learning materials by integrating textbooks with PowerPoint presentations, videos, audio resources, and worksheets. Such adaptation provided meaningful language input suited to students' proficiency levels, supporting Tomlinson's (2013) view that effective language materials should be flexible and learner-oriented.

Assessment practices included formative assessment, daily tests, school examinations, and AFLA/TOEFL-based assessments to monitor students' English proficiency. These assessment practices reflected CEFR principles by evaluating

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students' language development through multiple assessment methods.

The teacher perceived CEFR positively because it provided clear learning objectives, supported differentiated instruction, and enhanced students' participation and confidence. Nevertheless, challenges remained in understanding CEFR descriptors, implementing CEFR-based assessment, and accommodating learners with different proficiency levels. These findings support Faez et al. (2011), who identified teacher preparedness as one of the main challenges in CEFR implementation.

Similarly, students demonstrated positive perceptions toward CEFR-based learning. Most students reported understanding the learning objectives, actively participating in classroom activities, completing tasks appropriate to their proficiency levels, and becoming more confident and motivated to use English. These findings are consistent with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that supportive learning environments reduce anxiety and increase learners' willingness to communicate.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in English language teaching at SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang has been carried out effectively through structured lesson planning, differentiated instruction, adaptive learning materials, communicative classroom practices, and continuous assessment. The integration of CEFR with the Merdeka Curriculum has contributed to a more structured, inclusive, and student-centered learning environment, encouraging students' participation, motivation, confidence, and communicative competence. Teachers also perceived CEFR positively as a framework that provides clear learning objectives and supports students' language development.

Despite these positive findings, several challenges remain. The presence of students with different English proficiency levels in the same classroom requires teachers to implement more effective differentiation

strategies to ensure that all learners receive appropriate learning support. In addition, the findings suggest that teachers need continuous professional development and CEFR-focused training to strengthen their understanding of CEFR descriptors, assessment practices, and instructional strategies. Such training is essential to ensure that CEFR is implemented systematically and intentionally rather than becoming a routine practice without a clear understanding of its underlying principles. Therefore, improving teachers' understanding of CEFR and strengthening differentiated instruction are important to make CEFR implementation more effective in Indonesian junior high schools.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from SMPIT Zain Al-Muttaqin Palembang prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

AI tools were used only for language editing and manuscript refinement. AI was not used to generate, manipulate, analyze, or interpret research data. All findings and conclusions remained the responsibility of the researchers.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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