

# ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF THE CEFR-ALIGNED LEARNING OUTCOME IMPLEMENTATION FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT HUE UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** The study was carried out to explore the issues related to the CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation for non-English major students at Hue University. Its focus was on the advantages and challenges during the implementation process perceived by general English teachers. Qualitative approach was chosen with the data being collected by means of in-depth interview. Ten general English teachers who have experienced teaching non-English major students at Hue University took part in the study. The findings have shown that the CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation process for non-English major students at Hue University has gained a number of advantages but still faced some challenges. The advantages included appropriate teacher training, modern facilities and resources, teacher sound understanding of the policy, and positive changes in teaching methodology. The challenges were more related to the imbalance among students' proficiency, assigned textbooks, teacher-led hours and required learning outcome and assessment practices.

**Key words:** CEFR, learning outcome, language policy implementation

## 1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and integration, English is more and more indispensable to the development of any country. It has become the first foreign language to be taught and a compulsory subject for both undergraduates and graduates at tertiary level in Vietnam (MOET, 2008). Nonetheless, English language education has encountered great difficulties in catching up with the society need. Vietnam was still grouped into “low proficiency” countries in terms of English (EF Education First, 2013). To change the situation, various attempts have been made to reform the foreign (especially English) language teaching system. Especially, in 2008, the Vietnamese Government launched a national project named “Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national educational system for the 2008-2020 period”, often referred to as the 2020 Project, as a national strategy aimed at renovating the foreign language teaching and learning in the national education system during the period 2008-2020 (MOET, 2008), now extended to 2025 (Vietnamese government, 2017). The most significant part of the 2020 Project is the adoption of the CEFR, a global framework, into Vietnamese local context of language teaching and learning as a “quick-fix” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) solution to restructure the national foreign language education system.

This adoption of the CEFR as standard-based outcomes and professionalism in Vietnam, underpinned by the 2020 Project has been hoped to bring positive and radical changes in the national foreign language education system as it is clearly stated in Decision 1400 of the government (MOET, 2008). In effect, this has led to the renewal and modification of language

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curricula, language teaching materials, testing and assessment as well as language learning outcomes at different levels of education, for different types of learners and at different schools, universities and institutions nationwide.

Under the impacts of this innovative national foreign language (mainly English) policy, curricula for students at tertiary level of Hue University were changed. Not only foreign language (English) major university students' curriculum became standardized and CEFR-aligned, but general English curriculum for university students majoring in subjects other than English was also modified. A 7-credit general English curriculum was compelled for non-English major students before their B1 CEFR-aligned examination. In effect, non-English major students have a total of 105 teacher-led hours of English classes in their first three semesters, divided into 30-30-45 hours respectively, and are expected to achieve level B1. General English teachers at Hue University, as implementers, have to bond learners, materials, teaching practice and assessment altogether so that non-English major students can achieve the required CEFR-aligned learning outcome B1 within the given timeframe and curriculum. After six years of implementation, it is worth investigating what advantages and challenges the implementation process has brought about, which is the aim of the present study.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. The landmark of the CEFR**

The CEFR gained attention and respect not only in Europe but also in the rest of the world very soon after its publication (Alderson, 2002; Byrnes, 2007; Hulstijn, 2007; Tono & Negishi, 2012). Its first distribution was in 1996, but has become more widely spread since its commercial publication in 2001 (Little, 2006). At first, it was published in English and French, and then was almost immediately translated into German (Little, 2006, p.167). Since the time of its writing, it has been translated into thirty nine languages (English Profile, n.d.), and its power and enthusiasm for the document extends far beyond Europe to Latin America, the Middle East, Australia and parts of Asia (English Profile, n.d, p.2).

As for the language use, the CEFR has been applied not only to English, French, Italian but also to other non-European languages studied in Europe, including Chinese, Japanese, Urdu and so on (Pham, 2012; Casas-Tost & Rovira-Esteve, 2014) and the adaptation is not only for L2 but also L1 learning (Figueras, 2012). Besides, many countries have adapted and adopted the CEFR, especially the six-level scale (commonly known as the global scale) as the salient guideline for their language teaching and learning context, which resulted in the commonplace use of the CEFR in all educational levels [not only for adults and young adults learning foreign languages, but also for young learners and for L1 learners] by different stakeholders [government officials, publishers, admissions officers at universities, immigration authorities] with different degrees of validity (Figueras, 2012, p. 479).

In short, the CEFR has had large-scale influences on teaching/learning both European and non-European languages as L1 and L2, at all educational levels with different stakeholders all over the world.

## 2.2. The domains of the CEFR use

So far, the impact of the CEFR in different countries has been documented to be diverse and partial (Little, 2011), on various domains in language education. Within European contexts, the CEFR, first and above all, has impact on assessment (Little, 2006; Little, 2007; Figueras, 2012, Jones & Saville, 2009, Beresova, 2011) which is claimed to “outweigh” its impact on curriculum design and pedagogy (Little, 2007, p. 648). Evidence is the appearance and development of DIALANG, the free-of-charge online self-testing service, available in fourteen (14) European languages aiming at helping learners to familiarize themselves with the six-reference-level tests (Figueras, 2007; Little, 2007).

Outside the European contexts, the CEFR has been observed to have such major influences in language policy planning (Bonnet, 2007; Byrnes, 2007; Little, 2007; Pham, 2012; Nguyen & Hamid, 2015) that it is called a “supranational language education policy” (Little, 2007, p. 645) especially in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Specifically, Asian countries have witnessed the implementation of the CEFR in national contexts as an attempt to reform the system of language teaching in the country. In Japan, a newly-developed framework called the CEFR-J, dated back to 2004, is one of such attempts (Tono & Negeshi, 2012). In Vietnam, the launch of the Project 2020 in 2008 acknowledged the need to adopt the CEFR as a language policy to renew the national foreign language education system (MOET, 2008). Similar impacts have also been found in Canada (Faez, Taylor, Majhanovich, Brown, & Smith, 2011a; Faez, Taylor, Majhanovich, Brown, & Smith, 2011b; Mison & Jang, 2011) or Mexico (Despaigne & Grossi, 2011).

In terms of curriculum design, until the mid-twenties of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Little (2006) noticed that the impact of the CEFR was not so strong and the reconstruction of curricula using the CEFR’s descriptive apparatus was scarce despite its declared purposes of “elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines” (CoE, 2001, p. 1). However, in contexts where the CEFR as a global framework is adopted as a local standard in language planning policy, its impact on curriculum development has been observed to start prevailing. Specifically, the influence of the CEFR on curricula is mainly related to setting desired language learning outcomes aligned with the CEFR in Japan (e.g. Nagai & O’Dwyer, 2011) or Vietnam (Pham, 2015). For teacher education and pedagogy, its impact has been sparse (Little, 2006; Westhoff, 2007; Nguyen & Hamid, 2015).

## 2.3. The CEFR in English language learning outcomes in Vietnam

In Vietnam, the CEFR was first introduced in September 2008 through Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTĐ by the Prime Minister. It was then drafted several times and officially launched six years later through Circular No. 1 on January 24, 2014. This CEFR-based reference framework was stated to be developed “on the basis of the CEFR and the English frameworks of some other countries, together with the reality of language teaching and learning in Vietnam” (MOET, 2014, p. 3). Nonetheless, it is criticized to be merely “a translation of the original CEFR with limited modifications and adaptations” (Pham, 2015, p. 54) and “still embryonic” (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015, p. 64). Besides, although first introduced in 2008, not until 2014 was

the Vietnamese version of the CEFR-based framework officially promulgated and is still subject to more adjustment in the future (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015).

Since 2011, three years after its first introduction in Vietnam, the CEFR has been widely applied in language education from setting teacher professionalism standards and student learning outcomes to renewing language curriculum, adapting teaching materials and modifying language assessment practice. With an aim to reform learners' language proficiency, MOET also states the language proficiency requirement for different school levels. Specifically, Level 1 - A1 is compulsory for learners after primary education, Level 2 - A2 for learners after secondary education, and Level 3 - B1 for high school leavers and non-English major university students. Graduate students of foreign language majors at junior colleges are required to obtain a Level 4 - B2 certificate, whereas those at senior colleges and language teachers are supposed to achieve Level 5 - C1 of the CEFR (MOET, 2008, pp. 2-3). However, there has been little explanation or arguments from MOET for their decisions (Pham, 2017). Although the requirements are itinerary, implementing such standards nation-wide regardless of the current stakeholders' real capacity, the differences in infrastructure between big cities and remote areas, the local and regional culture varieties and learners' needs, etc. is prone to being subjective and impractical.

Based on the learning outcomes set by MOET, state-run universities develop the curriculum and select the textbooks for their non-English major students. Nonetheless, since it is hard to find an available textbook that can be totally aligned with the CEFR and suitable for the local context in Vietnam, adapting and developing the ready-made materials are encouraged and have been applied at state-run universities in Vietnam at present. After the selection of a certain textbook (sometimes by university's administrators as the case at Hue University) and its implementation, the duty of textbook adaptation and material development belongs to general English teachers, the direct practitioners who clearly know all the issues of contextualization, individual needs, personalization and timeliness (Block, 1991; Tomlinson, 2005). The success or failure of material development can be said to be dependent on general English teachers, their understanding of the CEFR or the six-level framework and their willingness to create such changes or adaptations.

In short, since its first commercial publication in 2001, the CEFR has caught world-wide interest and applications of the CEFR have been found in different domains for different purposes in various countries. Despite its attempt to be comprehensive, its descriptions are claimed to be never exhaustive nor total (Little, 2006; Cambridge, 2011). Besides, its comprehensiveness also poses a challenge to language education across countries, whose adaptation and implementation require cautions and careful consideration.

Applying the CEFR into English education is both a language policy for education innovation (Freeman, 2016) and classroom grass-root intervention as it steps in different major areas in language teaching from curriculum to teaching materials, assessment and teacher education. As such the implementation of the CEFR into a specific education can be considered as change. For profound understanding of the perceptions of responses to this change of the stakeholders, especially teachers involved in this change process, we need to have insights into educational change management in the areas in which the CEFR intervenes. The following section then presents the theoretical framework on how

educational change should be implemented. Whenever relevant, references to the implementation of the CEFR as change are made.

#### **2.4. Factors for successful language policy implementation**

Implementation, the phase when the ideas or reform are put into practice, is more likely to be successful when the individuals and groups ready for change have models they can support and emulate. Kaplan, Badaulf & Kamwangamalu (2011) stated that language policy making and implementation are “complex processes” (p. 105) that there may be a number of factors hindering their successful implementation. Accordingly, twelve factors were listed as causes to lead to a failure of language policy implementation, including time dedicated to language learning, teacher training, materials, methodology, resources, continuity of commitment, etc.

In the same effort, Fullan, Cuttress and Kilcher (2005) develop a substantial list of factors which allow the change to be implemented successfully. Although the terms for factors are not the same, the viewpoints of both expert groups share a lot in common. For Fullan et al. (2005), the factors, which they refer to as drivers or forces, have been provided the ground on which not just the failure or success of change implementation but also the perceptions and responses of the stakeholders in educational systems involved in the change process are understood (e.g., White, 2008; Hyland & Wong, 2013). Specifically, Fullan et al. divide the eight forces into foundation and enabling drivers. Three foundation drivers include engaging people’s moral purpose, building capacity and understanding the change process. Five enabling drivers are developing cultures for learning, developing cultures of evaluation, focusing on leadership for change, fostering coherence-making and cultivating tri-level development. Both emphasize that language policy is not easy to be implemented and much harder to be successful. The two viewpoints serve as the theoretical framework for the present article.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research question**

For the present study, the following question is addressed: What are the advantages and challenges of the B1 CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation at Hue University?

#### **3.2. Research instrument**

The study investigated the advantages and challenges of the B1 CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation for non-English major students at Hue University. A qualitative research design was found appropriate and chosen for the present study. An in-depth semi-structured interview protocol, which had two parts, was thus designed. The first part consisted of a preamble and demographic questions. Its major aims were to get the demographic information of the participants as well as develop a good rapport between the interviewer and participants. The main part included eighteen questions exploring teachers’ perceptions and responses to the CEFR implementation. For the purpose of this article, five major questions delving into the advantages and challenges during the implementation process, perceived by general English teachers, the key implementers of the policy were chosen for analysis.

### **3.3. Research participants**

For qualitative in-depth interviews, issues to ensure the richness and comprehensiveness of data were more focused (Creswell, 2013). Ten teachers who have experience in teaching general English for non-English major students for at least a semester were thus recruited on a voluntary basis for the semi-structured interviews. In other words, those who participated in the present study were willing to share information on the issue under investigation and thus, their willingness demonstrated an evidence to contribute reliable and constructive information. Eight of them did participate in the interviews. The two remaining teachers refused due to their businesses. Since data analysis showed repetition of stories among participants after eight interviews, the data reached the “saturation point” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The researcher stopped selecting new participants for their study.

### **3.4. Data collection and data analysis procedures**

The data collection procedure of the present study occurred in December, 2017. Ten teachers were invited to take part in the one-to-one in-depth interviews. Eight interviews were actually carried out in December 2017. The interviews took place at a time and place of convenience for the participants, either at coffee shops, classrooms or their home. Although the interviews took place only after having teachers’ agreement, informed consents were obtained in written form before the interviews were started. Each interview lasted from thirty to forty-five minutes. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and recorded for later transcription. The interviews were then transcribed, coded and analyzed. Two or three weeks after the interviews, the researcher sent the transcripts for those participants to do member-checking. No participants requested any changes to the transcripts.

Data analysis was conducted carefully and with consideration to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. After being transcribed and sent back to the interviewees for accuracy checking, interviews recordings were listened to many times and transcribed notes were read and reread, assisting in assuring the accuracy of the languages captured in the transcribed notes. Simultaneously, participants’ voices and tones were captured to deeper understand their perceptions and attitudes to the issues under investigation. As themes emerged from data analysis, an individual list of corresponding themes was created. Coding techniques were implemented to organize data from the interviews analysis and determine the overriding themes. Specific themes were determined and established, and information was merged into one document with all themes and supporting phases made by the participants. Valuable concepts became categories, some were placed under other sub-headings and minor ideas and concepts were excluded from the coding process.

## **4. Findings and discussions**

From the interviews, the advantages and challenges of implementing the CEFR-aligned learning outcome for non-English major students at Hue University perceived by general English teachers were presented below. It was found that the advantages were more related to teacher capacity and the home university infrastructure while the disadvantages were linked with students and the curriculum.

## **4.1. Advantages of implementing the CEFR-aligned learning outcome**

### ***4.1.1. Sufficient teacher professional development***

The first advantage of implementing the CEFR-aligned learning outcome lies in the university's policy for teacher's professional development. Firstly, together with MOET's policy to "standardize [teachers'] training level under regulations" (MOET, 2008), general English teachers were tested their English proficiency to check if they were eligible for teaching students at a particular proficiency level (MOET, 2011). While this caused great concern and worries among English language teachers at first, general English teachers now acknowledged the chance for improving their English proficiency, making them more confident and ready for the policy implementation. Moreover, general English teachers were sent to workshops and trainings on the CEFR and its implementation organized by either MOET or the home university. Although the participant' recruitment was based on a voluntary basis, 100% of the teacher participants reported their chance(s) to attend the aforementioned workshops and training at least once, proving the home university's focus on enhancing the staff's perceptions and understanding towards the new policy. All teacher participants acknowledged the workshops and training, which, according to their view, provided valuable information and knowledge on the CEFR in general and its principles for good implementation in particular. The finding proved that building teacher capacity, the second foundation factor for language policy implementation suggested by Fullan et al. (2005) was focused.

### ***4.1.2. Available facilities and resources***

The effort to build up capacity by the home university was also reflected by general English teachers in another aspect. Not only human resources but the infrastructure of the university was also sufficient for the change implementation process. When being interviewed, general English teachers appreciated the facilities and resources made available for the CEFR implementation process. Better-equipped classrooms with computers, projectors, CD-players, together with supportive online software and programs were among resources listed by respondent teachers as efforts made by the university to assist teachers in helping their students achieve B1 level as the new standard-based learning outcome.

### ***4.1.3. Teachers' sound understanding of the policy***

The home university's efforts resulted in a third advantage, which was that teachers gained a proper understanding of the values and philosophy of the CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation. In other words, the moral purpose, a foundation driver proposed by Fullan et al. (2005) was paid attention to. From the interview, it was found that general English teachers could relate the CEFR implementation process at the university with MOET's policy and Project 2020 in an understanding and knowledgeable way. Furthermore, general English teachers were well aware of the "plus" and "minus" points of the CEFR application for non-English major students at Hue University. When being interviewed, six teachers appreciated the strong points of the CEFR implementation for non-English major students. Simultaneously, they were quite straightforward in criticizing the inappropriateness of the CEFR for non-English major student application. Being well aware of the advantages and drawbacks of the policy can be considered a good start for successful implementation.

Data from the interviews proved that general English teachers understood and supported the implementation of the CEFR implementation for non-English major students. Among the eight respondents, six teachers claimed that the CEFR implementation policy met the need and tendency of integration in the new era. Mrs. An commented that the previous standards such as TOEIC, TOEFL were more academic and thus more challenging for non-English major students whose language needs should be more daily and communicative. Applying the CEFR-aligned outcomes of A1-B1 seems to be more practical and appropriate for non-English major students. This idea was also shared by Mrs. Giao, who appreciated the division of language proficiency into six levels of the CEFR, making it more appropriate for different groups of language learners. Mrs. Yen added that this policy partly fulfill a bigger objective of MOET to improve the language proficiency for Vietnamese. Mrs. Hoa acknowledged the potential to create mutual recognition among institutions with the CEFR-aligned learning outcomes, which was a favorable condition for students pursuing education at another university or institution. Therefore, it is another advantage of the CEFR-aligned learning outcome adaptation for non-English major students at Hue University.

#### ***4.1.4. Positive changes in students' awareness***

Data in the present article were collected at the time when the CEFR implementation for non-English major students had been carried out for six years, which was just long enough for teachers to experience changes and make comparisons. Therefore, seven teachers acknowledged the advantages of applying the CEFR-aligned outcomes for non-English major students. Several enormous changes in their teaching environment connected with the CEFR implementation were acknowledged as other advantages that the implementation of the CEFR-aligned learning outcomes for non-English major students had brought.

Specifically, Mrs. An talked about the change in “students’ awareness” which leads to the changes in “learning methodology”. Mrs. Binh said that “the policy is a motivation for students’ language improvement”. For Mrs. Chi, “it [the CEFR] affects students’ perceptions, which will result in changing students’ language competency”. None of them mentioned the change of students’ language competency and proficiency. The second change reported by all eight teachers was the modification and adaptation in teaching practices teachers had made, either voluntarily or not. The final change teachers also discussed was the university’s qualification and reputation resulting from the two above changes. Mrs. Yen and Giao were rather negative when they looked at the percentages of students’ achieving the required B1 certificate. Others were more positive as they assessed their students’ language competency over the years. In short, the interviewed teachers pinpointed three impacts exerted by the CEFR implementation policy: changing students’ attitude and motivation in English learning, changing teachers’ classroom practices and to some extent changing the university’s qualification and reputation, and regarded them as opportunities created by applying this framework for their non-English major students. Again, the moral purpose was already established among not only teachers but also students at Hue University. Besides, general English teachers’ perceptions of the CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation at Hue University also proved that they had a sound understanding of the change process. By comparing with the drivers proposed by Fullan et al. (2005), it can be seen that the foundation forces for the implementation process were achieved.



## 4.2. Challenges of implementing the CEFR-aligned learning outcomes

Besides the aforementioned advantages, from the experience of six years' implementation, general English teachers spotted out a lot of dissatisfaction, mainly caused by the imbalance of students' proficiency, assigned textbooks, limited teacher-led hours and required learning outcomes and assessment practices. Regarding the eight drivers of change, the enabling drivers were not sufficiently paid attention to.

### 4.2.1. *The top-down nature of the policy*

Firstly, data from the interviews showed that teachers at Hue University considered themselves as solely implementers of the CEFR application policy and complaint that the policy was very much top-down and that they had no voice in the policy-planning and policy-making. Among the eight teachers interviewed, five admitted forgetting the beginning year of the CEFR implementation at the university, two gave incorrect answers, and one skipped this question. Words and phrases indicating their uncertainty such as “perhaps”, “maybe”, “I’m not sure”, “I don’t know”, “I don’t remember”, etc. were repeated many times in almost all respondents' answers regarding the work involved in the implementation process. The leadership for change was ignored.

Besides, all the teachers reported that they participated in the implementation phase, when the all aspects of the language policy for non-English major students from curriculum, teaching materials to assessment and learning outcomes had been approved and legitimated. They all added that teachers, students and other key-practitioners such as parents and the society had no voice in this top-down policy. Mrs. An and Yen spotted that after five years of implementation, teachers did try some professional recommendations and requests but apart from the recent replacement of textbooks (*Life* instead of the previous *English Elements*), none have been noticed to be taken into consideration. It seems that there is a lack of the tri-level development of the change knowledge. What is more, the CEFR implementation policy was legitimated and applied immediately for non-English major students at Hue University without pilots or polls, causing confusion and bewilderment among teachers and students at the time of its application. When teachers, the key implementers were so passive, the home university had fail to address the issue of focusing on leadership and cultivating tri-level development (Fullan et al., 2005) where everyone should become a leader in the change process.

### 4.2.2. *Limited timeframe*

Secondly, when being interviewed, general English teachers reported their dissatisfaction with the limited teacher-led hours for courses. This is the most widespread dissatisfaction from general English teachers at the moment, which leads to two other dissatisfactions. The word “time constraints” was repeated many times in six teachers' interviews. Accordingly, the English language curricula non-English major students at Hue University contained 30 teacher-led hours for A1, A2 courses and 45 hours for B1 courses, which was stated “too short to do to anything”. Mrs. Chi complained: “We need adequate time to change students' language competence. Yet time allowance [for my non-English major students] to move from A1 to B1 is too limited”. Mrs. Dung reflected “the total 30 or 45 periods are not enough to improve students' language proficiency”. Mrs. Yen mentioned “the pressure of time limit”, etc.

Limited teacher-led hours per week were another dissatisfaction revealed by general English teachers regarding time constraints. Due to the aforementioned limit of time duration, non-English major students at Hue University had 2 or 3 teacher-led hours per week in their timetable. “The interval between two English classes is long enough for my students to forget everything (about English)”, Mrs. Trang said.

Mrs. Yen, a senior teacher with more than 25 years of teaching experiences, reported that time allowance for English language curricula for non-English major students had once been much longer, when the year-based program was applied. The shift to credit-based program considerably reduced the amount of teacher-led hours while increasing the time for students’ self-study. For language learning, this model posed tough challenges on non-English major students, “simply because not many non-English major students want to teach themselves or have the ability of self-study”. In short, with the current CEFR-aligned outcomes, insufficient time allowance was the greatest pressure general English teachers had to cope with all the time. By comparing with Kaplan et al.’s factors (2011), it can be found that insufficient time dedicated to language learning was among the factors hindering successful implementation.

#### **4.2.3. Incompatible textbooks**

Thirdly, the dissatisfaction with the CEFR implementation policy that many teachers reported was the mismatch between the assigned textbook and the CEFR-aligned outcomes. As reported by many teachers, together with the implementation of the CEFR-aligned outcomes, a new textbook series, *English Elements*, and recently another one entitled *Life* were selected for non-English major students at Hue University. Both textbook series, especially *English Elements*, were criticized to be incompatible with the CEFR-aligned outcomes. Some of the complaints and criticism are cited below.

Many teachers maintained that *English Elements* was a textbook series by Hueber, a German publisher whose purposes and target learners were far from similar to those of Hue University. Besides, the series was definitely not published for a 105-period English curriculum. Applying this series for non-English major students at Hue University caused challenges for both teachers and students. Regarding the textbook series *Life*, which was concurrently used with *English Elements*, the complaints were not as strong in terms of the book contents. Four teachers reported that the new textbook series [*Life*] was more aligned with the A1-B1 learning outcomes as it focused more equally on four skills. However, it was certainly designed to be taught with a time amount of definitely much longer than the given 105 periods of the current curriculum. Although challenges from the book itself were not so serious, general English teachers still had problems selecting the appropriate contents that could help students achieve the required learning outcomes within the given amount of time.

#### **4.2.4. Students’ limited admission level of English proficiency**

The final dissatisfaction originated from students’ low and mixed language proficiency. Two teachers, Mrs. Chi and Mrs. Dung, thought that their students’ current proficiency was far lower than the required B1 outcome (or level 3 of the six levels) for non-English major students. They cited the low percentage of non-English major students achieving the B1 certificate as evidences of this viewpoint. Six teachers mentioned the vast difference between students’

English language competence and the required learning outcomes, although the situation was different among students of different majors and from different colleges. In conclusion, although the problem may not come from the CEFR and its policy, from the reality of students' low English level, the policy has caused enormous challenges to both teachers and non-English major students at Hue University. From the viewpoint of implementers, the mismatch between students' current level of proficiency and the required learning outcome caused the dissatisfaction among general English teachers during the implementation process. Therefore, coherence-making, the seventh driver of change, was not fulfilled.

All the aforementioned challenges can be seen as the shortcomings of the CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation process that has been applied for non-English major students at Hue University. By comparing with Fullan et al.'s theoretical framework of change, it can be found that the drawbacks were largely related to the enabling drivers, namely focusing on leadership for change, fostering coherence-making and cultivating tri-level development.

## **5. Conclusion and implications**

The results obtained indicated that the CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation process for non-English major students at Hue University has gained a number of advantages but still faces some challenges. The advantages include appropriate teacher training, available facilities, teachers' sound understanding of the policy, and positive change in teaching methodology. These fit into the foundation drivers of Fullan et al.'s change theory (2005) regarding the moral purpose engagement, capacity building and change process understanding. The challenges were more related to the imbalance among students' proficiency, assigned textbooks, teacher-led hours and required learning outcome and assessment practices. Concerning change management theory by Fullan et al. (2005), the implementation failed to address the enabling drivers, namely focusing on leadership for change, fostering coherence-making and cultivating tri-level development.

The results of the present study have compelled the implications for practice. Firstly, teachers are the actual deliverers of curriculum across disciplines and across levels. Their instructional practice and educational foundations may vary, but they still remain the key implementers of the curriculum. This suggests that general English teachers and/or non-English major students should be involved in the CEFR-aligned curriculum planning. Therefore, their voices must be acknowledged, listened to and acted upon.

Moreover, general English teachers should take initiatives in the implementation process. They should call for understanding and acceptance among students, parents and local community so that the CEFR application becomes more effective. Inside classrooms, they need to perceive themselves as leaders and perform the role of active leaders, not just passive implementers. By realizing the intentions and plans of policy-makers, they act out the policy and spread the leadership to their students and peers, making leadership developed in others on an ongoing basis for sustainable reform (Fullan et al., 2005).

There is evidence that capacity building, the second driver for change management pinpointed by Fullan, has been made in preparation for the CEFR implementation. Nonetheless, for capacity building, front-end training is insufficient (Fullan et al., 2005). Teacher training and

collaboration ought to become a regular part of teacher professional development because “successful change involves learning during implementation” (Fullan, et al., 2005, p. 55). This offers hints that the home university has planned and continues organizing relevant workshops and trainings for general English teachers. For successful CEFR-aligned learning outcome implementation, the home university should take these issues into careful consideration to make appropriate modifications and adjustments in the coming years.

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## THUẬN LỢI VÀ THÁCH THỨC CỦA VIỆC ÁP DỤNG CHUẨN ĐẦU RA THEO CEFR CHO SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGỮ ĐẠI HỌC HUẾ

**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu được thực hiện nhằm tìm hiểu những vấn đề liên quan đến việc áp dụng chuẩn đầu ra theo CEFR cho sinh viên không chuyên ngữ tại Đại học Huế. Bài báo này tập trung làm rõ những thuận lợi và thách thức trong quá trình áp dụng qua nhận thức của giáo viên phụ trách. Nghiên cứu áp dụng phương pháp định tính với công cụ khảo sát là phỏng vấn. Mười giáo viên dạy tiếng Anh cơ bản có kinh nghiệm dạy cho sinh viên không chuyên ngữ tại Đại học Huế tham gia vào nghiên cứu này. Kết quả cho thấy quá trình áp dụng chuẩn đầu ra theo CEFR cho sinh viên không chuyên ngữ ở Đại học Huế đã có những thuận lợi nhất định nhưng cũng không tránh khỏi các thách thức. Về phía thuận lợi, giáo viên được đào tạo, tập huấn. Họ có những hiểu biết sâu sắc về chính sách và cũng đã có những thay đổi tích cực trong phương pháp giảng dạy cho phù hợp. Tuy nhiên những thách thức trong quá trình áp dụng gồm sự không đồng đều giữa năng lực của sinh viên, giáo trình được chọn, thời gian học và các yêu cầu của chuẩn đầu ra và kiểm tra đánh giá.

**Từ khóa:** CEFR, chuẩn đầu ra, áp dụng chính sách ngôn ngữ