

The Degree of Correspondence between CEFR-based Curriculum and the New Iranian EFL Curriculum

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Abstract: This study is a comparative analysis investigating the degree of correspondence between the new Iranian EFL curriculum and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) with the aim of further approaching this unifying system of second language teaching throughout the world. In order to delineate the details of an EFL curriculum based on CEFR principles for Iranian public schools, two groups of participants including three of the authors of the new Iranian EFL curriculum and 64 English teachers who worked in junior high schools of 19 districts in Tehran were selected. To collect the required data, written documents, interviews, and a questionnaire were employed. A factor analysis through varimax rotation was conducted to investigate the underlying constructs of the CEFR-based curriculum questionnaire consisting of 45 items. The findings revealed that the new Iranian EFL curriculum has drawn ideas from the CEFR, although its authors have not attempted to adhere closely to the CEFR. It was concluded that the CEFR is used as a reference and not as a framework in Iran. In fact, as the findings of this study showed, the new Iranian EFL curriculum follows most of CEFR principles. The only component that was not linked to CEFR was 'time'. As the results of this study showed, the time allocated to teaching the materials in this new curriculum was not sufficient for reaching the objectives.

Keywords: CEFR, Curriculum development, ELT Curriculum in Iran

INTRODUCTION

The problematic issue that inspired the researchers of the present study to investigate this topic was the fact that most Iranian students cannot handle everyday communication after studying English books during high school. According to Janfeshan and Nosrati (2014), the main reasons of this breakdown are lack of theoretical basis and creative contexts, not paying attention to the culture and needs of language learners, inappropriate teaching methods, and students' low motivation. As Dahmardeh (2009) noted, Iranian curriculum is supposed to be based on CLT principles but in reality it is not happening. In other words, EFL curriculum in Iran does not seem to follow some international criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Many Asian, European, and American countries have adopted or made CEFR based curriculum to their language teaching syllabus to offer a curriculum which can enhance learners' language. Ornstein and Hunkins (2004) believe that curriculum is a plan including strategies for to achieve desired goals. In order to have a suitable curriculum and high quality language classes a good curriculum should be designed based on a valid reference framework. According to Martyniuk and Noijons (2007), the CEFR has

influenced development of a number of curricula from primary and upper secondary schools to higher university educational system, although its partial and global impacts are not equal in different contexts. This study was aimed at investigating the degree of correspondence between the newest Iranian EFL curriculum and CEFR-based curriculum from the view point that it can lead to a common basis for designing FL curriculum based on CEFR principles for Iranian public schools. This common basis is expected to be applicable for language learning, teaching, and assessment in all language teaching centers according to students' and teachers' needs and expectations. Comparing the newest EFL curriculum used in Iranian public schools with CEFR-based curriculum used in other countries can lead to remarkable results to align the Iranian FL curriculum to standards like the CEFR which is internationally recognized and provides a common basis for the elaboration of language curriculum guidelines and syllabi.

The main research question that this study was aiming to address is: To what extent, if at all, does the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the suggestions for language curriculum design at a national level in the CEFR? Accordingly, this would be broken down into a number of Research Questions (RQ) as follows:

1. Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same philosophy?
2. Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same objectives?
3. Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools provide the same communicative and authentic materials?
4. Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools include the same content?
5. Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same methodology?
6. Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same procedure to assess students' language proficiency?
7. Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools assign the same teacher role?
8. Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools assign the same student role?

Literature Review

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

Council of Europe (2001) defined CEFR as “a Common European Framework of Reference, providing a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe”. This framework includes the knowledge and skills that language learners must gain and develop to communicate successfully. Levels of proficiency are also specified to measure learners' progress at every stage of learning on a life-long basis. In order to update and improve the CEFR, in September 2017, the final version of the CEFR has been accompanied by a Companion Volume with New Descriptors (Council of Europe, 2017).

The CEFR has a theoretical and practical base for advancing foreign language teaching and assessment as well as curricula and materials; Although the purpose of the authoring team is different, the CEFR scale system is now “commonly understood as its core” (Little, 2014). According to Figueras (2012), the CEFR is the top one, the most applicable and at the same time one of the most contentious survey topics in the field of language studies in the twenty-first century. She suggests there are two factors which have great impacts on the CEFR. The first factor is a geopolitical and scientific factor and the second one is the change to positive descriptions of proficiency and a non-compulsory approach to the presentation of the contents of the CEFR.

According to the Council of Europe (2001), for designing curriculum in relation to the CEFR, three main principles must be taken in to account. The first principle is promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity. Based on the second principle, this linguistic diversity is possible if the cost of the system is efficient especially at schools. The third principle is that the majority of considerations relating to curricula should be conducted according to general language educationa and linguistic knowledge, skills, and the ability to learn (Council of Europe, 2001, p.169). Therefore, CEFR emphasizes on Plurilingual and pluricultural competences of language learners.

Using the CEFR in curriculum and syllabus design

Curriculum is defined by Taba (1962) as “a plan for learning, a production system, and a program evaluation of the outcomes.” Curriculum development is argued by Richards (2011) as “a dynamic process containing interrelated fundamentals of needs analysis, goals placement, situational analysis, course organization, teaching material selection and preparation, implementation, and program evaluation.” According to Cambridge ESOL (2011, p.12), there are four principles to connect curriculum and syllabus to the CEFR: “adapting the CEFR to fit your context, focusing on the outcomes of learning, focusing on purposeful communication, and focusing on the development of good language learning skills.”

Aims and objectives of different context connect the curriculum to the CEFR (Cambridge ESOL, 2011). By defining relevant scales and descriptors in the CEFR, the curriculum developers can indicate the language proficiency that students are supposed to be able to achieve at each level. It is also worthwhile to mention that according to Martyniuk and Noijons (2007), the CEFR does not provide ready-made guidelines but an in-depth interpretation and adaptation is necessary to alter the framework to the communicative needs of students as well as the conditions of different contexts.

Using the CEFR in specific contexts

Different countries use the CEFR to develop and improve their language teaching programs. Studies of the impact of the CEFR on teachers' practices have been carried out by many researchers. Díez-Bedmar and Byram (2018) aim at the impact of the CEFR on a group of Spanish teachers by analyzing their beliefs about and perceptions of the CEFR. The results point out they were superficially familiar with the CEFR although they perceive general impact of the CEFR on syllabi, curricula, and methods is substantial. Zheng et al. (2016) state that the CEFR is not popular among Chinese English teachers and university professors. They believe that although CEFR furthers some techniques such as task-based language teaching, it does not have important impacts on teaching methodologies. Figueras (2013) in Andalusia and Castillo Molina (2015) in Catalonia came to the same conclusion. They said that teachers in both regions are familiar with the CEFR, but they are less familiar with the European Language Portfolio. A study at universities of Australia (Normand-Maconnet & Lo Bianco, 2013) shows students and teachers who they survey are familiar with the CEFR and 60% are aware of its Common Reference Levels. Another study in Canada, (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith, & Crowley, 2011), analyses the perceptions of teachers on an in-service course. According to the results of the study, using the CEFR has some benefits such as enhancing learners' autonomy and motivation, using authentic language and oral ability, and encouraging positive self-assessment.

In addition, there are some surveys to represent applying the CEFR in practice and actual English classes. Arian (2015) focuses on specific language skills and how they are treated in the CEFR. He studied all aspects of reading to understand the theoretical and practical issues related with them. Results show that all kinds of tasks and materials can be used in classrooms as long as their content and delivery correspond to the principles of the framework. Nakatani (2012) examines the relationship between communication strategies listed in the CEFR and learners' proficiency improvement in communicative tasks. He concludes that improving students' test scores, using the achievement strategies and, enhancing students' awareness of strategy use are the findings of his study. As Nagai and O'Dwyer (2011) describe in their article, the CEFR has considerable influence on improvement of foreign language education and the formation of Japanese standards of English language proficiency. In addition, they add that 'can do' descriptors of the CEFR are

used as assessment, goal-setting, and reflective tools in curriculum development. Ustunluoglu et al., (2012) describe the process of developing a new teaching program based on the CEFR at the Preparatory Program at the School of Foreign Languages, Izmir University. They make a comparison between the CEFR and the Preparatory Program in which the former focuses on general English whereas the latter emphasizes on both general and academic English.

On the other hand some studies have been done as a comparative work between the educational systems' curricula and the CEFR principles. A research has been carried out by Hoseinikhah et al (2012) in which a comparative study of Iranian and Swedish English curriculum has been done. The results indicate that in comparison to Swedish curriculum, the Iranian one has some drawbacks such as accepting ineffective goals and approach; focusing on sub-skills; and implementing national tests without covering communicative skills. Gereide (as cited in Ustunluoglu et al., 2012) compares the old and reconsidered curricula of Preparatory Program at Anadolu University and the results show that a remarkable progress has been made in considering students' language requirements. Tono and Negishi (2012) have a paper on the CEFR-J which is a new framework for English Language Teaching in Japan. In order to incorporate the CEFR into Japanese contexts, lower proficiency levels should be broken in to smaller sub-skills, therefore, the existence of 'can do' descriptors is necessary for the defined sub-skills in order to initiate the new version of the CEFR-J.

Method

Research design and variables

This research investigated the degree of the correspondence between the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools and the suggestions for language curriculum design at a national level in the CEFR by comparing the key features of current EFL curriculum for 7th and 8th grade of junior high schools and CEFR-based curriculum used in other countries. To fulfill this objective, a descriptive method was adopted through survey. Qualitative data gathered through interview with the authors of the curriculum and written documents were also analyzed to obtain more detailed information. As for quantitative data, a questionnaire consisting of 45 items in eight sections was constructed to collect data from the teachers regarding their insights about the newest EFL curriculum.

Participants

Due to the purpose of the research it was determined that there had to be two groups of participants in the study. The first group was composed of authors of the new Iranian FL curriculum and the second group involved English language teachers. Three of the authors of this new EFL curriculum and 64 English teachers worked in junior high schools in 19 districts in Tehran, Iran participated in the study . Two of the authors were PhD university lecturers with eight and five years of experience in designing foreign language curriculum and one of them was a language teacher with 10 years of experience in designing foreign language curriculum. The English teachers were selected through non-random sampling and their age and gender were not controlled. The researchers interviewed three of the authors of this new EFL curriculum who were the authors of new series of English books (Prospect) published for junior high school.

Instrumentation

Written documents, interview, and a questionnaire were applied in order to collect the required data for the purpose of this research.

- **Written documents**

Written documents were reviewed to provide information about the environment, organizational structure, goals and the objectives of the new EFL curriculum in Iran. The following documents were reviewed: CEFR document, the new Iranian EFL curriculum guide, the new English textbooks (Prospect 1 & 2), and finally the teacher's guide.

- **Interview**

Interviews conducted with three authors of the new curriculum in order to get in-depth data about the objectives and principles of this new curriculum and its relation with CEFR. The interview schedule had 10 open-ended questions related to the program and books. Prior to the administration of the interviews, the questions were edited by two experts so as to see whether the questions were understandable and clear. Interviews were recorded for further analysis.

- **Questionnaire**

In the last phase of the study, the researchers made a questionnaire including 45 items in eight sections to elicit Iranian English teachers' opinions about the new curriculum and books. To develop the items of the questionnaire, the researchers used CEFR document to determine the elements of a good curriculum.

Procedure

The realistic information about the important components of curriculum, including rationale, aims and objectives, materials, learning activities, and assessment were gathered by the researchers through reviewing the written documents including the CEFR document, the new Iranian EFL curriculum guide, the new designed textbooks, and the English language teacher's guide. During the interview sessions, five important sections (Rationale, Aims and Objectives, Materials, Learning activities, and Assessment) of the curriculum were taken in to account.

In order to construct questions to ask authors of the curriculum during interview sessions three principles were outlined in the CEFR regarding curriculum. The first principle should be in line with the overall objective of promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity. The second principle is the cost and efficiency of the system to avoid unnecessary repetition and as a result promote economies of scale and transfer of skills which linguistic diversity facilitates. The third principle is that curricula for different languages should not be considered in isolation from one another or from language education as a whole.

Prior to the administration of the interviews, the questions were edited by two experts to make sure the questions are understandable and clear. The interviews schedule had 10 open-ended questions. Each interview took about 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Persian. To fulfill the purpose of the study, it was therefore decided to construct a questionnaire composed of the CEFR principles including 45 items in eight sections and distribute it among English language teachers teaching at 7th and 8th grades of junior secondary high school to elicit their opinions about the new curriculum and find out the degree of the correspondence between these two curricula. Three main stages preceded the administration of the questionnaire: designing, piloting, and distribution.

Due to the nature of this research, it was decided to construct a questionnaire composed of the CEFR principles. To design the questionnaire's sections, the researchers used FL curriculum components at macro and micro levels proposed by the CEFR. The questionnaire in the very beginning was prepared in five sections composed of 60 principles while the final edition prepared in eight sections including 45 principles. After designing the questionnaire, a pilot study was executed among 25 teachers of 15 districts of the Ministry of education in Tehran. After executing the pilot stage, the aim was to survey a sample of English teachers from different schools in different districts in Tehran. The questionnaire was sent to the teachers by electronic mail. 64 complete questionnaires were managed to be gathered by this method.

In order to conduct a pioneering investigation, several statistical procedures were followed containing both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data. The data from written documents and interviews analyzed qualitatively to arrive at a full understanding of principles and objectives of CEFR and the new EFL curriculum. All the answers of the interviewees were analyzed by categorizing the points come out from the statements for each question. In addition, thematic analysis and categorized answers from different interviewees employed for the analysis of interviews.

Data Analysis

Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics

In a pilot study done on 25 EFL teachers sharing similar features with the main sample of this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability indices were computed, as reported in Table 1 and it was concluded that all instruments enjoyed satisfactory internal reliability. It should be noted that the number of the items of the first draft of the questionnaire was 50 and the above-mentioned coefficients were obtained after five faulty items were excluded.

Table 1: Reliability statistics for sub components of newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools

Test	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Belief & Philosophy	3	0.76
Objectives	5	0.78
Materials	9	0.81
Content	4	0.79
Methodology	5	0.80
Assessment	8	0.84
Teachers	5	0.91
Students	6	0.89
Total	45	0.82

Construct Validity

A factor analysis through varimax rotation was conducted to examine the underlying construct of the CEFR-based curriculum questionnaire with 45 items (Table 2) before it was administered to the main participants of the study. To prove that the data was appropriate for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) value and Bartlett's test were checked. KMO value of .77 exceeded .60 and Bartlett's test was also significant ($p = .000$, $p < .05$) showing that the data could be subjected to factor analysis. The SPSS extracted eight factors and explained 65.37 of the variance: F1: Belief (3 items, $\alpha = 0.76$), F2: Objectives (5 items, $\alpha = 0.78$), F3: Materials (9 items, $\alpha = 0.81$), F4: Content (4 items, $\alpha = 0.79$), F5: Methodology (5 items, $\alpha = 0.80$), F6: Assessment (8 items, $\alpha = 0.84$), F7: Teachers (5 items, $\alpha = 0.91$), and F8: Students (6 items, $\alpha = 0.89$). A five-point Likert scale was employed for each statement, ranging from 5 (Very Accurate) to 1 (Very Inaccurate).

Table 2: Total variance explained (CEFR-based curriculum questionnaire)

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	of Variance	Cumulative	Total	of Variance	Cumulative
Teachers	9.972	22.160	22.160	9.972	22.160	22.160
Students	4.251	9.447	31.607	4.251	9.447	31.607
Assessment	2.689	5.975	37.582	2.689	5.975	37.582
Materials	2.332	5.182	42.764	2.332	5.182	42.764
Methodology	2.198	4.884	47.648	2.198	4.884	47.648
Content	2.028	4.506	52.154	2.028	4.506	52.154
Objectives	1.842	4.094	56.249	1.842	4.094	56.249
Belief	1.635	3.633	59.882	1.635	3.633	59.882

Since using Kaiser Criterion, it was found that too many components are extracted, so it was important to look at the Screeplot, as demonstrated in Figure 1. Figure 1 indicates that there is quite a clear break between the second (Students) and third components (Assessment). Components 1 (teachers) and 2 (Students) explain much more of the variance than the remaining components.

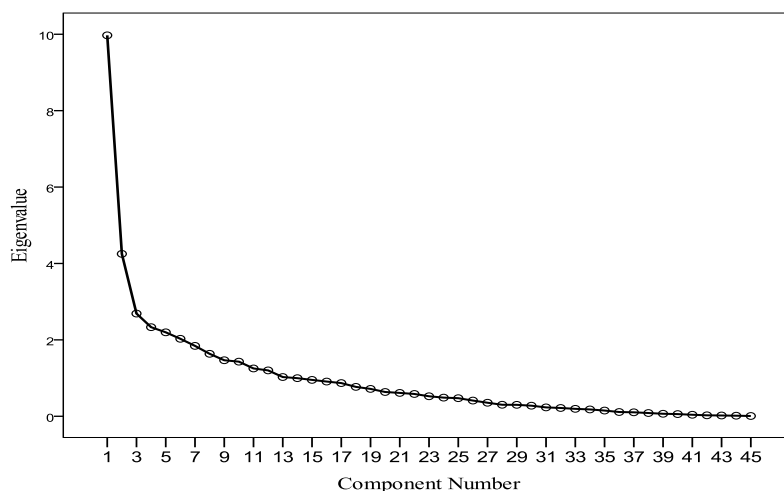


Figure 1: Screeplot of the sub components of newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools

Testing assumptions

Three assumptions of interval data, independence of subjects, and normality should be met before one decides to run parametric tests (Field, 2009). The first assumption was met because the present data were measured on an interval scale. Likert scales can indeed be analyzed effectively as interval scales, and therefore conducting parametric test. Allen and Seaman (2007) support treating Likert scales as interval data with certain rather sensible provisions. The “intervalness” here is an attribute of the data, not of the labels. Also, the scale item should be at least five and preferably seven categories. Another example of analyzing Likert scales as interval values is when the sets of Likert items can be combined to form indexes. However, most researchers insist such combinations of scales pass the Cronbach’s alpha or the Kappa test of inter correlation and validity. The combination of scales to form an interval level index assumes this combination forms an underlying characteristic or variable.

Bachman (2005, p. 236) believes that the assumption of independence of subjects is met when the performance of any given individual is independent of the performance of other individuals which was the case in the present research. The third assumption concerned the normality of the data and was tested through the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. Table 3 reflects the results of the normality test revealing that the p values were higher than .05 for all eight sub categories of scores obtained on the sub components of the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools questionnaire. Thus, normal distribution assumption was met as well.

Table 3: Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality tests for scores obtained on sub components of CEFR-based curriculum questionnaire

Variable	N	Mean	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Sig.
Belief	63	4.00	1.360	.060
Objectives	63	3.55	.813	.523
Materials	63	3.18	.697	.716
Content	63	3.48	1.033	.237
Methodology	63	3.67	.703	.706

Assessment	63	3.71	.568	.904
Teachers	63	3.86	.962	.313
Students	63	4.02	.889	.408

Analysis of RQ-1

Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same philosophy? To test the first research question, One Sample Test was conducted. Before discussing the results of *T*-test, the descriptive statistics of participants' responses to the items related to belief and philosophy were computed and presented in Table 4. This table shows that the mean score was 4.00, which is much above the Test value (3 = Partially Accurate), with the standard deviation of .54.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for belief and philosophy sub component

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Belief	63	4.0053	.54376

The results of one sample test, as shown in Table 5, indicated that the One Sample Test was significant ($t = 14.67$, $p = .000$) with more than 95% Confidence Interval ranging from .86 to 1.14. In fact it was claimed that the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same belief and philosophy.

Table 5: One Sample T-Test for the newest Iranian EFL curriculum (belief and philosophy)

Test Value = 3					
T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
14.674	62	.000	1.00529	.8683	1.1422

Figure 2 below is a histogram that illustrates the participants' responses to the items of the questionnaire related to belief and philosophy. As it is obvious in the figure, most of the scores are greater than 3, 'Partially Accurate choice' of the questionnaire with the mean difference of 1.00.

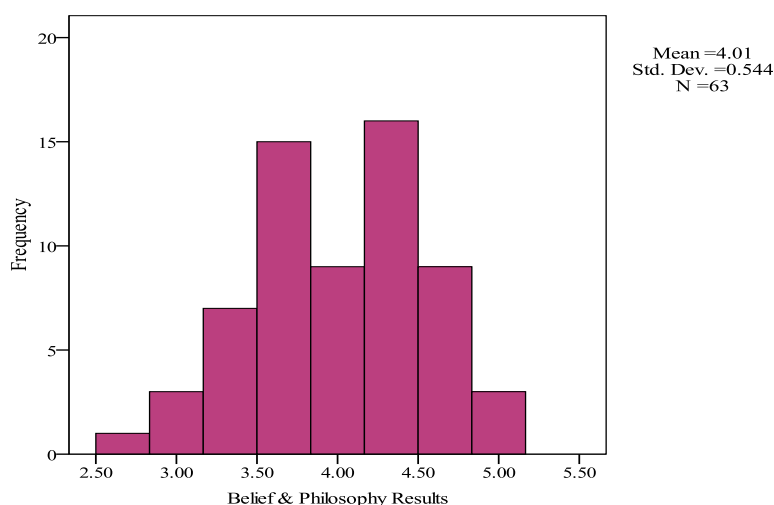


Figure 2: Belief and philosophy results and their frequencies

The frequency and percentage of the participants' responses to all 3 items of the belief and philosophy are provided in Table 6. As it can be seen in the table, the item that received the most positive responses

(*Accurate* =49.2%) and (*Very Accurate* = 38.1%) from the teachers was *Item 1*: “The New Iranian EFL Curriculum philosophy is based on the Communicative Language Teaching approach which focuses on language ‘functions’.

Table 6: Frequency and percentage of teachers’ responses to items related to belief and philosophy

Item	Very Inaccurate		Inaccurate		Partially Accurate		Accurate		Very Accurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Item 1	0	.0%	0	.0%	8	12.7%	31	49.2%	24	38.1%
Item 2	0	.0%	0	.0%	16	25.4%	29	46.0%	18	28.6%
Item 3	0	.0%	9	14.3%	11	17.5%	31	49.2%	12	19.0%

Analysis of RQ-2

The second Research Question was: *Do CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same objectives?* Before discussing the results of *T*-test, the descriptive statistics of participants’ responses to the items of the questionnaire related to objectives are reported in Table 7. Table 7 reflects that the mean score was 3.55, which is much more than the test value (3 = Partially Accurate), with the standard deviation of .50.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics for objectives sub component

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Objectives	63	3.5587	.50693

One Sample Test (Table 8), revealed significant results ($t = 8.74$, $p = .000$) with more than 95% Confidence Interval ranging from .43 to .68; Therefore, it was claimed that CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same objectives.

Table 8: One sample T-Test for the newest Iranian EFL curriculum (objectives)

Test Value = 3					
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
8.748	62	.000	.55873	.4311	.6864

A histogram that displays the participants’ responses to the items related to objectives is shown in Figure 3 in which most of the scores are more than 3, ‘Partially Accurate choice’ with the mean difference of .55.

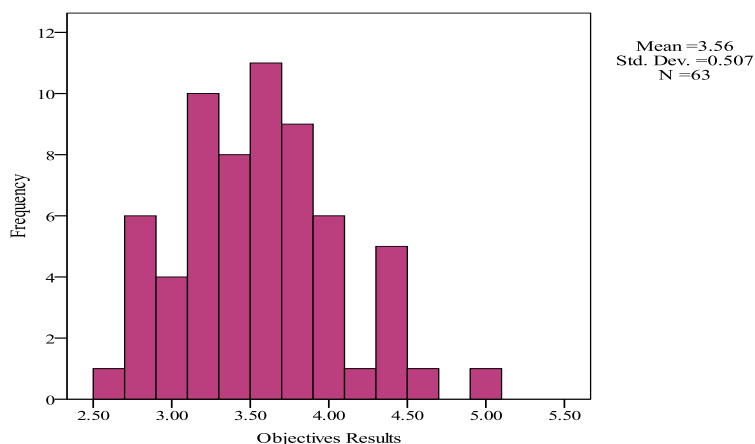


Figure 3: Objectives results and their frequencies

The frequency and percentage of the teachers' responses to all 5 items of the objectives are represented in Table 9 below. Table 9 reflects that the item that attracted the most positive responses (*Accurate* = 41.3%) and (*Very Accurate* = 42.9%) from the teachers was *Item 4* "To help students develop their communicative language competence in its linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic components through the development of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing."

Table 9: frequency and percentage of teachers' responses to items related to objectives

Item	Very Inaccurate		Inaccurate		Partially Accurate		Accurate		Very Accurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Item 4	0	.0%	0	.0%	10	15.9%	26	41.3%	27	42.9%
Item 5	0	.0%	0	.0%	16	25.4%	30	47.6%	17	27.0%
Item 6	0	.0%	13	20.6%	24	38.1%	25	39.7%	1	1.6%
Item 7	0	.0%	11	17.5%	21	33.3%	24	38.1%	7	11.1%
Item 8	7	11.1%	15	23.8%	26	41.3%	10	15.9%	5	7.9%

Analysis of RQ-3

The third Research Question was: *Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools provide the same communicative and authentic materials?* The descriptive statistics of participants' responses to the items related to materials were counted and are set forth in Table 10. Table 10 indicates that the mean score was 3.18, which is greater than the Test value (3 = Partially Accurate), with the standard deviation of .46.

Table 10: Descriptive statistics for materials sub component

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Materials	63	3.1834	.46079

Table 11 shows that One Sample Test was significant ($t = 3.15$, $p = .002$) from .06 to .29. Therefore, the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools provide the same communicative and authentic materials.

Table 11: One Sample T-Test for the newest Iranian EFL curriculum (materials)

Test Value = 3					
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
3.159	62	.002	.18342	.0674	.2995

Figure 4 demonstrates the participants' responses to the items related to materials. As clear from the figure, almost most of the scores exceed 3, 'Partially Accurate choice' of the questionnaire with the mean difference of .18.

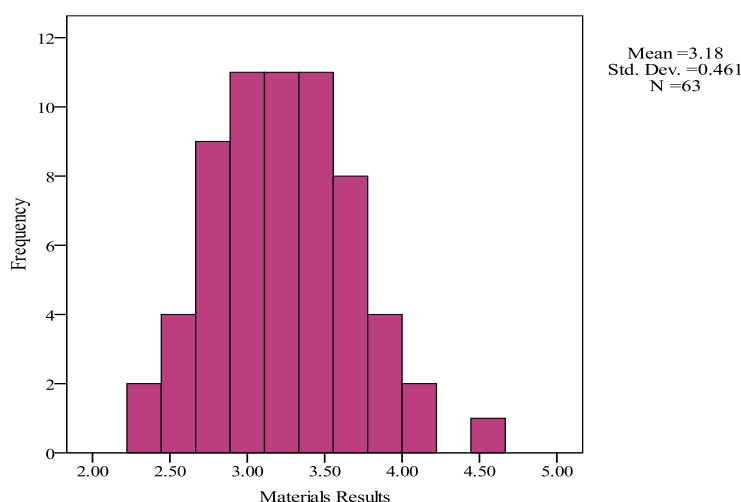


Figure 4: Materials results and their frequencies

Table 12 reflects the frequency and percentage of the teachers' responses to all 9 items of the materials. It reveals that the item that received the most positive responses (*Accurate* =52.4%) and (*Very Accurate* = 27.0%) from the teachers was *Item 11*: "The activities are meaningful and communicative."

Table 12: Frequency and percentage of teachers' responses to items related to materials

Item	Very Inaccurate		Inaccurate		Partially Accurate		Accurate		Very Accurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Item 9	0	.0%	15	23.8%	22	34.9%	19	30.2%	7	11.1%
Item 10	0	.0%	7	11.1%	22	34.9%	31	49.2%	3	4.8%
Item 11	0	.0%	0	.0%	13	20.6%	33	52.4%	17	27.0%
Item 12	0	.0%	4	6.3%	16	25.4%	32	50.8%	11	17.5%
Item 13	0	.0%	3	4.8%	21	33.3%	19	30.2%	20	31.7%
Item 14	34	54.0%	23	36.5%	5	7.9%	1	1.6%	0	.0%
Item 15	9	14.3%	31	49.2%	12	19.0%	11	17.5%	0	.0%
Item 16	8	12.7%	16	25.4%	21	33.3%	17	27.0%	1	1.6%
Item 17	0	.0%	7	11.1%	32	50.8%	17	27.0%	7	11.1%

Analysis of RQ-4

The fourth Research Question of this study was: *Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools include the same content?* Table 13 shows that the mean score was 3.48, which is more than the Test value (3 = Partially Accurate), with the standard deviation of .60.

Table 13 Descriptive statistics for content sub component

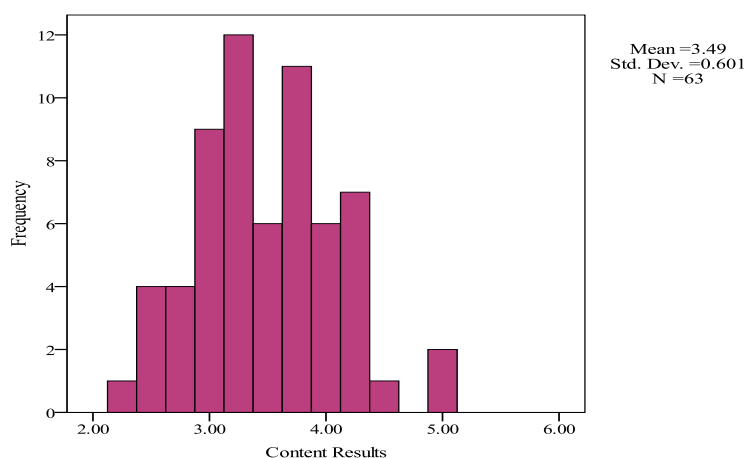
Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Content	63	3.4881	.60146

Table 14 indicates significant results ($t = 6.44$, $p = .000$) with more than 95% Confidence Interval ranging from .33 to .63. Hence, it was asserted that the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools include the same content.

Table 14: One sample T-Test for the newest Iranian EFL curriculum (content)

Test Value = 3					
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
6.441	62	.000	.48810	.3366	.6396

As the Figure 5 shows graphically, almost the majority of the scores are higher than 3, 'Partially Accurate choice' of the questionnaire with the mean difference of .48.

**Figure 5:** Content results and their frequencies

The frequency and percentage of the teachers' responses to all 4 items of the content are set forth in Table 15 and it shows that the item that attracted the most positive responses (*Accurate* = 47.6%) and (*Very Accurate* = 12.7%) from the teachers was *Item 20*: "The content draws the students' attention to linguistic features (either explicit or embedded grammar instruction)."

Table 15: Frequency and percentage of teachers' responses to items related to content

Item	Very Inaccurate		Inaccurate		Partially Accurate		Accurate		Very Accurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Item 18	0	.0%	8	12.7%	32	50.8%	17	27.0%	6	9.5%
Item 19	3	4.8%	7	11.1%	21	33.3%	24	38.1%	8	12.7%
Item 20	0	.0%	10	15.9%	15	23.8%	30	47.6%	8	12.7%
Item 21	0	.0%	6	9.5%	20	31.7%	29	46.0%	8	12.7%

Analysis of the RQ-5

The fifth Research Question of this study was: *Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same methodology?* Table 16 depicts that the mean score was 3.67, which is above the Test value (3 = Partially Accurate), with the standard deviation of .59.

Table 16: Descriptive statistics for methodology sub component

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Methodology	63	3.6730	.59384

The results of One Sample Test, as appear in Table 17, revealed that the One Sample Test was significant, $t = 8.99$, $p = .000$, $p < .05$, in which the t observed, 8.99, was higher than the t critical, 2.00, and the p value, .000,

was lower than the chosen significant level for this study, .05 with more than 95% Confidence Interval ranging from .52 to .82; in so doing, the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same methodology.

Table 17: One Sample T-Test for the newest Iranian EFL curriculum (methodology)

Test Value = 3					
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
8.996	62	.000	.67302	.5235	.8226

Figure 6 clarifies the participants' responses to the items of the questionnaire related to methodology and indicates that almost most of the scores exceed 3, 'Partially Accurate choice' of the questionnaire with the mean difference of .67.

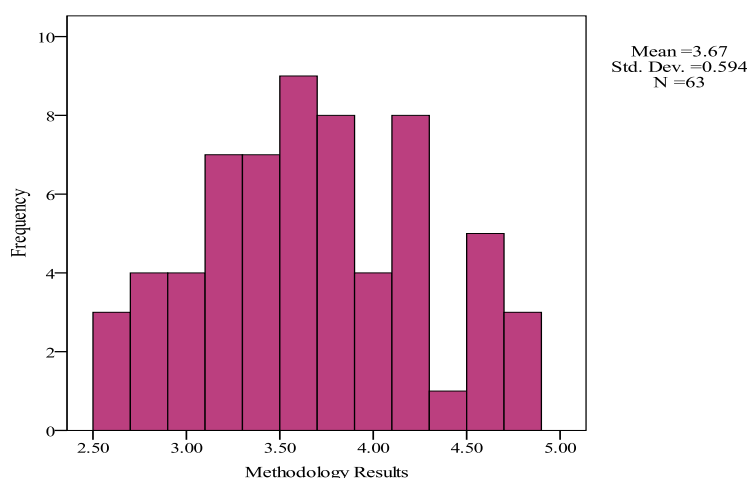


Figure 6: Methodology results and their frequencies

Table 18 depicts the frequency and percentage of the teachers' responses to all 5 items of the materials. The item that had the most positive responses (*Accurate* = 23.8%) and (*Very Accurate* = 38.1%) from the teachers was *Item 22*: "The New Iranian EFL Curriculum has a task-based approach which establishes the communicative purpose of the activity and describes what the students will do to demonstrate what they can do."

Table 18: Frequency and percentage of teachers' responses to items related to methodology

Item	Very Inaccurate		Inaccurate		Partially Accurate		Accurate		Very Accurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Item 22	0	.0%	6	9.5%	18	28.6%	15	23.8%	24	38.1%
Item 23	0	.0%	0	.0%	30	47.6%	21	33.3%	12	19.0%
Item 24	0	.0%	6	9.5%	27	42.9%	21	33.3%	9	14.3%
Item 25	0	.0%	8	12.7%	19	30.2%	24	38.1%	12	19.0%
Item 26	0	.0%	6	9.5%	23	36.5%	25	39.7%	9	14.3%

Analysis of the RQ- 6

The sixth Research Question of this study was: *Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same procedure to assess students' language proficiency?* Table 19 reflects

the mean score was 3.71, which is larger than the Test value (3 = Partially Accurate), with the standard deviation of .56.

Table 19: Descriptive statistics for assessment of sub component

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Assessment	63	3.7143	.56904

Table 20 indicates significant results ($t = 9.96$, $p = .000$) with more than 95% Confidence Interval ranging from .57 to .85; consequently, the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools follow the same procedure to assess students' language proficiency.

Table 20: One sample T-Test for the newest Iranian EFL curriculum (assessment)

Test Value = 3					
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
9.963	62	.000	.71429	.5710	.8576

Figure 7 displays almost the majority of the scores are greater than 3, 'Partially Accurate choice' of the questionnaire with the mean difference of .71 which is relatively high.

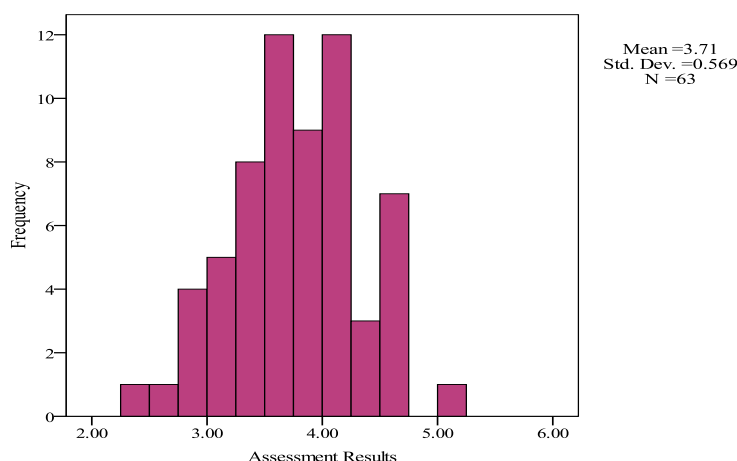


Figure 7: Assessment results and their frequencies

The frequency and percentage of the teachers' responses to all 8 items of the assessment are laid out in Table 21; the item that attracted the most positive responses (*Accurate* = 61.9%) and (*Very Accurate* = 23.8%) from the teachers was *Item 32*: "Students are allowed to demonstrate their understanding of concepts in a variety of ways (e.g., displays, models, oral presentations)."

Table 21: Frequency and percentage of teachers' responses to items related to assessment

Item	Very Inaccurate		Inaccurate		Partially Accurate		Accurate		Very Accurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Item 27	3	4.8%	1	1.6%	10	15.9%	35	55.6%	14	22.2%
Item 28	0	.0%	10	15.9%	21	33.3%	24	38.1%	8	12.7%
Item 29	3	4.8%	3	4.8%	9	14.3%	35	55.6%	13	20.6%
Item 30	3	4.8%	9	14.3%	15	23.8%	21	33.3%	15	23.8%
Item 31	0	.0%	12	19.0%	15	23.8%	24	38.1%	12	19.0%

Item 32	0	.0%	6	9.5%	3	4.8%	39	61.9%	15	23.8%
Item 33	0	.0%	9	14.3%	21	33.3%	21	33.3%	12	19.0%
Item 34	0	.0%	3	4.8%	24	38.1%	18	28.6%	18	28.6%

Analysis of RQ-7

The seventh Research Question of this study was: *Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools assign the same teacher role?* Table 22 indicates that the mean score was 3.86, which is higher than the Test value (3 = Partially Accurate), with the standard deviation of .66.

Table 22 Descriptive statistics for teachers' sub component

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers	63	3.8667	.66235

The results of One Sample Test in Table 23 reveal that the One Sample Test was significant ($t = 10.38$, $p = .000$) with more than 95% Confidence Interval ranging from .69 to 1.03. It was claimed that the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools assign the same teacher role.

Table 23: One sample T-Test for the newest Iranian EFL curriculum (teachers)

Test Value = 3					
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
10.386	62	.000	.86667	.6999	1.0335

Figure 8 illustrates that almost most of the scores are larger than 3, 'Partially Accurate choice' of the questionnaire with the mean difference of .86 which is high.

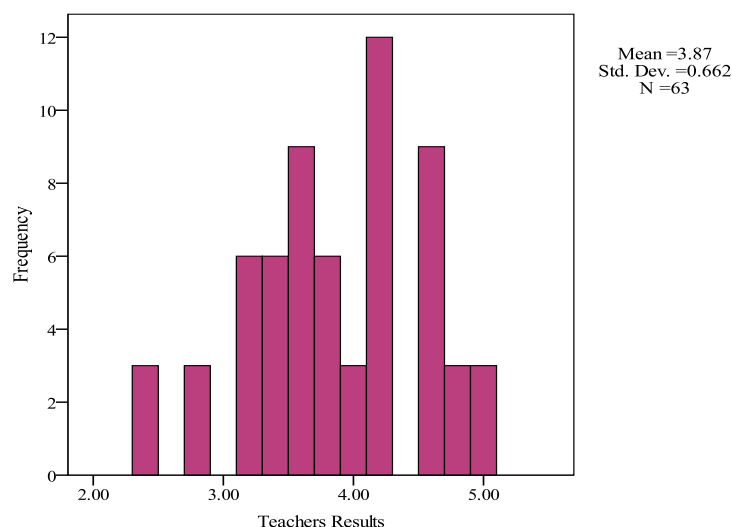


Figure 8: Teachers results and their frequencies

Table 24 clarifies the frequency and percentage of the participants' responses to all 5 items of the teachers. Table 24 indicates that the item that had the most positive responses (*Accurate* = 47.6%) and (*Very Accurate* = 28.6%) from the teachers was *Item 37*: "Intended learning outcomes offer a useful checklist for the assessment of teaching materials."

Table 24: Frequency and percentage of teachers' responses to items related to teachers

Item	Very Inaccurate		Inaccurate		Partially Accurate		Accurate		Very Accurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Item 35	0	.0%	3	4.8%	27	42.9%	27	42.9%	6	9.5%
Item 36	0	.0%	6	9.5%	12	19.0%	27	42.9%	18	28.6%
Item 37	0	.0%	0	.0%	15	23.8%	30	47.6%	18	28.6%
Item 38	0	.0%	6	9.5%	18	28.6%	15	23.8%	24	38.1%
Item 39	0	.0%	3	4.8%	18	28.6%	24	38.1%	18	28.6%

Analysis of RQ-8

The eighth Research Question of this study was: *Do the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in school assign the same student role?* Table 25 depicts that the mean score was 4.02, which is above the Test value (3 = Partially Accurate), with the standard deviation of .59.

Table 25: Descriptive statistics for students' sub component

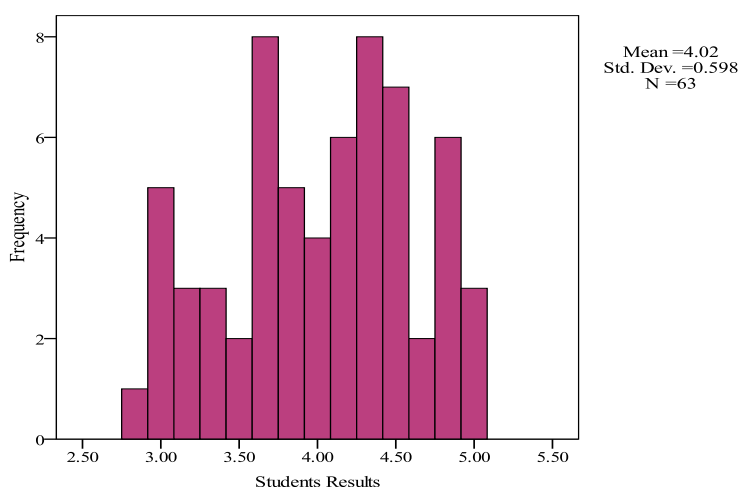
Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students	63	4.0212	.59755

One Sample Test, Table 26, shows significant results ($t = 13.56$, $p = .000$) from .87 to 1.17; as a result, the CEFR-based curriculum and the newest Iranian EFL curriculum in schools assign the same student role.

Table 26: One sample T-Test for the newest Iranian EFL curriculum (assessment)

Test Value = 3					
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
13.564	62	.000	1.02116	.8707	1.1717

As Figure 9 shows clearly, most of the scores are higher than 3, 'Partially Accurate choice' of the questionnaire with the mean difference of 1.02 which is very high.

**Figure 9:** Students results and their frequencies

The frequency and percentage of the teachers' responses to all 6 items of the students are set forth in Table 2, in which the item that attracted the most positive responses (*Accurate* =27.0%) and (*Very Accurate* = 66.7%) from the teachers was *Item 44*: "language learning is necessarily a life-long task to be promoted and facilitated throughout educational systems."

Table 27: Frequency and percentage of teachers' responses to items related to students

Item	Very Inaccurate		Inaccurate		Partially Accurate		Accurate		Very Accurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Item 40	0	.0%	0	.0%	9	14.3%	30	47.6%	24	38.1%
Item 41	0	.0%	0	.0%	15	23.8%	27	42.9%	21	33.3%
Item 42	0	.0%	0	.0%	12	19.0%	36	57.1%	15	23.8%
Item 43	6	9.5%	3	4.8%	24	38.1%	15	23.8%	15	23.8%
Item 44	0	.0%	0	.0%	4	6.3%	17	27.0%	42	66.7%
Item 45	6	9.5%	3	4.8%	15	23.8%	21	33.3%	18	28.6%

Conclusion and Implications

The new Iranian FL curriculum guide

The new FL curriculum guide has been devised by a team of 15 in the Textbooks Planning and Designing Office under the supervision of the Iranian Ministry of Education (Vakilifard et al., 2012). Some members of this group are also the authors of the new English Language Textbooks of Prospect which are being used in the junior secondary program. As this curriculum guide states, since 2011, Textbooks Planning and Designing Office began developing a new curriculum for teaching foreign languages in Iran. For this purpose, they used the positive tips and guidelines in the previous suggested curriculums and corrected some of the defects as they incorporated from the successful experiences of other countries and took into account the limitations and conditions governing their educational system.

This new Iranian FL curriculum has not been approved and implemented completely, but the new series of English books for junior high schools published under the title "Prospect" are based on this curriculum. It mainly aims at developing communicative skills and it is based on the learners' personal needs in a second language, the social aspects of language learning, and active role in both teaching and learning. It was explicitly stated in the curriculum document that the theoretical frameworks of the curriculum are designed based on the communicative approach. This document has explicitly stated that its main aim is communicating in the target language.

The interview

The interviewees of this study were mainly questioned about their aims and constraints in designing the curriculum and the extent to which they included CEFR principles in this curriculum. They wanted the students with the help of the acquired information from the educational content to become familiarized with a foreign language while keeping their Iranian beliefs as well as national, Islamic and cultural insight. Therefore, important principles of the CEFR such as the learner-centered, action-oriented approach, and the concept of lifelong learning were being considered by the members as they discussed.

The researchers asked about the concepts of plurilingual and pluricultural competences and their application in Iranian context. One of the authors believed that they tried to integrate the plurilingualism principle into this FL curriculum because the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence is considered as an important goal of foreign language education. He gave an example of using these two concepts in the new FL curriculum. He mentioned "our teachers are asked to apply mother tongue in their teaching because a language can help learning other languages as plurilingualism suggested. As one of them discussed, portfolio

plays an important role in this new curriculum and it can be a way to promoting plurilingual and pluriculturalism.

Having compared the answers of the interviewees, the researchers noticed that the major goal of both the textbook and the new program was communication and development of students' language skills. Furthermore, according to one of the curriculum designers and the authors of course books, all the topics or themes included in the course book selected based on CEFR suggestions. That is to say, learning activities have been designed around tasks of everyday life. Putting the learners at the centre of attention and learner autonomy were stated as the key features of this new curriculum. According to the author of textbooks, there was emphasis on using supplementary and authentic materials in the textbooks and this could support what the teacher questionnaire proved.

Questionnaire

The data collected to test the second Research Question represented the fact that the teachers believe in developing communicative language competence as the main purpose of the new curriculum. This may be due to the themes included in their books. Furthermore, results from the third Research Question also revealed that teachers are not satisfied with the time of English teaching in Iran. One of the important components of the curriculum suggested by CEFR is 'time'. The time which is available for various learning domains and the time which can be spent on specific learning tasks is a central principle to have a CEFR-based curriculum (COE, 2010). School administrators could include at least four hours for English language in students' weekly programs. In addition, the data collected to test the sixth Research Question revealed that although the new curriculum did not directly include the 'Can-do' statements of the CEFR, it emphasized the usefulness of the levels, proficiency descriptors, and scales by describing the language proficiency and suggesting using portfolios which were indirectly linked to CEFR. The results obtained from the effort to test the seventh Research Question showed that The CEFR principles were included in improving the teachers' role in teaching and learning English language and teachers could be supplied with standard assessment forms for personal teaching observation and material evaluation.

Overall, the conclusion can be that although the new Iranian EFL curriculum draws ideas from the CEFR, its authors have not attempted to adhere closely to the CEFR principles. It can be concluded that CEFR is used as a reference not framework in Iran. There is a difference between using the CEFR as a framework or reference in curriculum planning. On one hand curriculum designers can frame their curricula directly in relation to CEFR as a framework, and on the other hand they get some hints without necessarily framing their curricula on its content directly and they use it as a reference. The CEFR in countries like Japan and Vietnam is used as a framework but the authors of the new curriculum attempted to use the CEFR as a reference. As the findings of this study show, the new Iranian EFL curriculum follow most of CEFR principles but having a CEFR-based curriculum needs more considerations. Lack of a translation of the CEFR Framework into Persian is necessary. There is a need to train teachers and supply them with information about CEFR principles. The need to involve teachers and parents was also mentioned as issues to be taken into account in the process of the implementation of the CEFR. It can be stated that the previous curricula for teaching English in Iran lacked any inclusion of an international standard. The recently revised curriculum (2012), however, takes into account the principles of CEFR for the first time.

Implications and further research

The findings can have broad implications in educational curriculum. Syllabus and course designers, textbook writers, and educational administrators can benefit from the results of this study related to the students' lack of progress during education, and try to make CEFR-based syllabi, courses, textbooks, and examinations considering the students' needs and the cultural and educational context of Iran.

Moreover, teachers and teacher trainers can benefit from the outcomes of this study. Teachers can become more CEFR-based through applying the approach taken by the CEFR, namely, a plurilingual action-oriented approach. This action-oriented approach emphasizes the fact that an individual as a member of society who

has tasks to accomplish in different circumstances should build up a communicative competence (COE, 2001). Furthermore, taking advantage of the information about the students' present proficiency levels and their educational needs, the instructors can use the 'illustrative' descriptors of the CEFR to promote students in every stage of education.

Future research needs to be conducted to replicate and verify the results of this investigation. It might place the emphasis on testing the findings that have been produced on a much broader sample of teachers and whether these findings are true in other cities or countries. Research is also needed to link exams and national syllabi to the CEFR leading to some work on empirical validation of the links. Studies are recommended to investigate the application of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), which is introduced by Council of Europe (2001) as a useful tool for recording and recognizing language learning and intercultural experiences, in other EFL settings. Finally, studies can be conducted to work on the development of more detailed language descriptors and teacher-training programs.

At the end, it is hoped that the results of the present study will be enlightening for all stakeholders involved in language learning, teaching, and assessment and will lead to create a CEFR-I, Iranian version of the CEFR.

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