

# CEFR Journal

## Research and Practice



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# CEFR JOURNAL—RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

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## Mission statement

**T**he CEFR Journal is an online, open-access, peer-to-peer journal for practitioners and researchers. Our editorial advisory board comprises stakeholders on a wide range of levels and from around the world. One aim of our journal is to create an open space for exchanging ideas on classroom practice and implementation related to the CEFR and/or other language frameworks, as well as sharing research findings and results on learning, teaching, and assessment-related topics. We are committed to a strong bottom-up approach and the free exchange of ideas. A journal by the people on the ground for the people on the ground with a strong commitment to extensive research and academic rigor. Learning and teaching languages in the 21st century, accommodating the 21st century learner and teacher. All contributions have undergone multiple double-blind peer reviews.

We encourage you to submit your texts and volunteer yourself for reviewing. Thanks a million.

### Aims, goals, and purposes

Our aim is to take a fresh look at the CEFR and other language frameworks from both a practitioner's and a researcher's perspective. We want the journal to be a platform for all to share best practice examples and ideas, as well as research. It should be globally accessible to the wider interested public, which is why we opted for an open online journal format.

The impact of the CEFR and now the CEFR Companion Volume (CEFR/CV) has been growing to previously wholly unforeseeable levels. Especially in Asia, there are several large-scale cases of adoption and adaptation of the CEFR to the needs and requirements on the ground. Such contexts often focus majorly on English language learning and teaching. However, there are other language frameworks, such as the ACTFL and the Canadian benchmarks, and the Chinese Standard of English (CSE). On the one hand there is a growing need for best practice examples in the form of case studies, and on the other hand practitioners are increasingly wanting to exchange their experiences and know-how. Our goal is to close the gap between research and practice in foreign language education related to the CEFR, CEFR/CV, and other language frameworks. Together, we hope to help address the challenges of 21st century foreign language learning and teaching on a global stage. In Europe, many take the CEFR and its implementation for granted, and not everyone reflects on its potential uses and benefits. Others are asking for case studies showing the effectiveness of the CEFR and the reality of its usage in everyday classroom teaching. In particular, large-scale implementation studies simply do not exist. Even in Europe, there is a center and a periphery of readiness for CEFR implementation. It is difficult to bring together the huge number of ongoing projects from the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), and the EU aiming to aid the implementation of the CEFR. This results in a perceived absence in the substance of research and direction. Outside Europe, the CEFR has been met with very different reactions and speeds of adaptation and implementation. Over the last few years, especially in Asia, the demand by teachers for reliable (case) studies has been growing.

For more than a decade, the people behind this journal—the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) CEFR & Language Portfolio special interest group (CEFR & LP SIG)—have been working on a number of collaborative research projects, yielding several books and textbooks, as well as numerous newsletters. This is a not-for-profit initiative; there are no institutional ties or restraints in place. The journal aims to cooperate internationally with other individuals and/or peer groups of practitioners/researchers with similar interests. We intend to create an encouraging environment for professional,

standard-oriented practice and state-of-the-art foreign language teaching and research, adapted to a variety of contexts.

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# CEFR JOURNAL—RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

## VOLUME 4

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### Editorial

#### Fergus O'Dwyer

The central concerns of the CEFR Journal are learning, teaching and assessment, with one focus of the journal to present fresh perspectives and practices that progress innovative elements relating to the above. The fourth volume of the journal opens with a contribution from Brian North examining some of these elements: the social agent in an action-oriented approach, mediation and plurilingualism. While developed in the original 2001 document, the 2020 Companion Volume (CEFR/CV) aims to create avenues for further elaboration and dissemination within these inter-related issues.

North discusses the new CEFR mediation descriptors as the potential basis of curriculum aims and assessment for/as learning, and how they potentially broaden the scope of language activity in classrooms and learner involvement in these activities. This ties in with the social agent in an action-oriented approach: North argues scaffolded learning through integrated collaborative tasks may effectively harness a broad range of the learner's resources. This connects with the second article (by Magdalini Liontou and Eva Braidwood) about a set of simulation activities (a student conference) for medical students in Finland. One important point to note is that teaching enhancements found in the article most probably would have not been discovered if not due the mother of invention: necessity! Due to COVID-19 lockdowns, the activities morphed into a hybrid conference of asynchronous presentations with real-time Q&A forums in online posts. As a result, the new design activated production, reception, interaction and mediation modes simultaneously. The editors are happy to find student perceptions regarding mediation tasks, particularly a discussion of the benefits of mediation and how authentic communication tasks can enhance engagement and learner autonomy. Participation in the conference, which requires learners to interpret and communicate meaning to others, was perceived to enhance medical-specific learning and facilitate higher-level cognition.

The thread of teacher researchers offering valuable insights into approaches utilizing the CEFR in different organizations found in previous volumes is further developed in the final article. Greg Birch and colleagues discuss their Japanese government funded project which supports several small-scale action research initiatives, proposing a 3-stage CEFR-focused AR model (CARM, which is based on plan, action, and critical review). The model potentially facilitates researchers and researcher networks to generate improved teaching practices using the CEFR as a reference and conceptual tool. With reflection integral in each stage, one aim of CARM is to provide detailed guidance to ensure research is conducted systematically and rigorously. The journal is one avenue where other teacher researchers can take up the challenge to incrementally develop their practices, and bring the enterprise forward by sharing exemplary practices with the language teaching community.

The implications of the developments for the classroom and assessment of learning found in this volume will be developed further in upcoming contributions due to be published in the fifth volume. As noted in the call for papers, there is room for further submissions to the journal where contributors personally engage with the ideas found here in their own context and practices.

—Dublin (Ireland), November 2021

# The CEFR Companion Volume—What's new and what might it imply for teaching/learning and for assessment?

Brian North (CEFR and CEFR/CV co-author)

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*This article discusses key aspects of the CEFR vision that are further elaborated in the CEFR Companion Volume and their potential for innovation in language education. The paper starts with an outline of the content of the CEFR/CV, and a clarification of its status and the relationship to the CEFR 2001, as well as an explanation of the background to the 2014-2020 project that produced it. The article then goes on to briefly summarise the main research perspectives—the integrationist/enactive perspective; the complex, ecological perspective; the agentic perspective; the socio-constructivist/sociocultural perspective; and the plurilingual perspective—that fed into the development of the CEFR/CV. It points out that, when the CEFR appeared, very many language professionals viewed the CEFR just as an instrument to promote communicative language teaching, which had some useful levels and descriptors. The key innovative concepts in the CEFR/CV—the social agent, the action-oriented approach, mediation, and plurilingualism—were all foregrounded by the CEFR in 2001, but required time for developments in research and from practitioners in the field to pave the ground for their elaboration and wider dissemination with the CEFR/CV. The article ends by considering the implications of these concepts and developments for the classroom and for assessment.*

**Keywords:** CEFR; CEFR Companion Volume; innovation; social agent; action-oriented approach; mediation; plurilingualism; classroom implications

## 1 Introduction

This article aims to give the reader an overview of the content and significance of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment—Companion Volume* (henceforth CEFR/CV) (COE 2020). It will not describe the research project that developed the Companion Volume, for which readers are referred to North and Piccardo (2019) for an overview, and to the official report on the conceptualisation, development and validation of the descriptors for mediation and related areas (see North and Piccardo 2016 for more detail). Suffice it to say that the project ran from late 2013 to early 2020 and took place in several discrete phases. In the development of the descriptors for mediation and related areas, 189 institutes and approximately 2,000 persons were involved worldwide, with over 1,000 taking part in all three validation phases during 2015-16. This was followed by a process of consultation with individuals, institutions and associations, and member states. For researchers a detailed validation report, which provides difficulty values and standard errors for the majority of the CEFR descriptors, is available online (North 2020).

## 2 What does the CEFR/CV consist of?

Before we get into discussing innovations that the CEFR/CV might bring to language education, perhaps one should start by briefly outlining what exactly it contains. The main content is the following:

- a. a brief foreword from the Director General for Democracy setting the CEFR/CV in the context of the Council of Europe's mission to promote and support democracy, the rights of minorities and human rights, pointing out that the CEFR is an education project and that: "It has never been the intention that the CEFR should be used to justify a gate-keeping function of assessment instruments." (COE 2020: 11);
- b. an introduction to the volume that lays out the contents and explains changes from 2001 (Chapter 1);
- c. a 20-page text explaining and illustrating the key aspects of the CEFR for teaching and learning (Chapter 2) and the way these have evolved over time, which it is hoped will be useful in teacher education;
- d. the entire set of CEFR illustrative descriptors (Chapters 3-6, plus Appendices 1-4 for summary scales)—with some slight adaptations to scale titles and descriptor formulations to make them gender- and modality-inclusive;
- e. examples for the extension of the descriptors for mediation and online interaction for the public, personal, occupational and educational domains (Appendix 5).

In addition to this main content, the CEFR/CV also contains a preface thanking institutions and key people who took part in the development project (Preface with acknowledgements), a brief account of the development project in which some 190 institutions and 1500 persons were involved (Appendix 6; North and Piccardo 2016, 2019), a short list of 2001 descriptors that have been substantially changed (Appendix 7); a list of 'supplementary descriptors' calibrated in the project, which did not make it into the official set of illustrative descriptors for one reason or another (Appendix 8); a list of sources used (Appendix 9) and another list with related online resources (Appendix 10).

The CEFR/CV, the CEFR 2001 and a growing wealth of related resources, including presentations and example classroom materials from the current series of Council of Europe web workshops promoting the CEFR/CV, are available on the CEFR website ([www.coe.int/lang-cefr](http://www.coe.int/lang-cefr)). One needs to remember that the CEFR should be seen as an evolutive framework, produced in a collective endeavour with several drafts produced for consultation and piloting before a definitive version is consolidated. This is what happened between 1996 and 2001 and between 2014 and 2020. The CEFR framework has been embodied in the CEFR 2001 and the CEFR/CV 2020 respectively; no doubt in another ten or twenty years there will be a third version, which will move even further away from a book bound by two covers.

## 3 What is the status of the Companion Volume?

The CEFR/CV (COE 2020) renews the CEFR (COE 2001), which it replaces as a primary reference for the vast majority of new CEFR users. One does not need to look at both the CEFR and the CEFR/CV. The latter updates and extends the conceptual model of the CEFR 2001, clarifies the CEFR vision in the light of developments in our field over the past 20 years, and provides *all* the CEFR descriptors—newly developed and previously existing. The CEFR/CV puts this point as follows:

This volume presents the key messages of the CEFR in a user-friendly form and contains all CEFR illustrative descriptors. For pedagogical use of the CEFR for learning, teaching and assessment, teachers and teacher educators will find it easier to access the CEFR Companion volume as the updated framework. The Companion volume provides the links and references to also consult the chapters of the 2001 edition, where necessary. (COE 2020: 4)

The integrity of the CEFR conceptual model (CEFR 2001 Chapter 2) and the CEFR Common Reference Levels (CEFR 2001 Chapter 3) are not affected by the CEFR/CV, though each is extended. The conceptual model is further developed, particularly in relation to mediation—though the broader view taken can be claimed to be foreshadowed in the CEFR 2001 (see Piccardo 2012). The CEFR/CV also highlights many features of the CEFR vision that tended to be overlooked by many users of the CEFR 2001 (not least the move from four skills to the four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction, mediation). The Common Reference Levels are extended through the introduction of Pre-A1—though again, this was foreshadowed with the ‘Tourist’ proficiency band discussed in CEFR 2001 Chapter 3 (COE 2001: 31). The description of the ‘plus levels’, again overlooked by many users of the 2001 version, are extended. The integrity of the calibration of the new descriptors to those descriptors calibrated in the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) research project (North 2000; North and Schneider 1998; Schneider and North 2000) was assured through personnel (the current author) and methodology (see North and Piccardo 2016, 2019).

In an echo of the ambiguity of the 2001 text over whether the CEFR 2001 was ‘neutral’ or in fact proposed a particular approach, the CEFR/CV, in a similar political compromise, addresses the issue of the relationship of the CEFR/CV to the CEFR with statements like the following: “This publication updates the CEFR 2001, the conceptual framework of which remains valid” (COE 2020: 3) and “Researchers wishing to interrogate the underlying concepts and guidance in CEFR chapters about specific areas should access the 2001 edition, which remains valid” (COE 2020: 4). The name ‘Companion Volume’, does cause some confusion since it can give the impression that one still needs the CEFR 2001 as well, both documents on the table/screen at the same time. Largely for that reason, the COE Publications Department proposed that the final version of the CEFR/CV should be called the CEFR 2<sup>nd</sup> edition—since second editions of both policy texts and standards are often substantially different from the first. However, this suggestion led to lively debate amongst experts consulted and so the ‘Companion Volume’ title was kept, despite the potential for confusion, since it had by this stage achieved some ‘brand recognition’.

To summarise: The CEFR/CV is the new CEFR—the CEFR 2020 (one of the titles that was proposed). It builds on and respects the integrity of the CEFR 2001, which will always remain as a reference document, also available on the CEFR website. The CEFR conceptual model outlined in CEFR 2001 Chapter 2 is unchanged. The categories of the CEFR descriptive scheme, first proposed by North (1994), remain unchanged—but the meaning and significance of ‘mediation’ has developed considerably. The levels are unaffected—but there is now a Pre-A1 as well. Many parts of the CEFR 2001 text have stood the test of time well (e.g., on plurilingualism, on levels, on assessment). Others, however have been superseded by subsequent COE texts. For example, CEFR Chapter 8 on curriculum options is effectively replaced by the later *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education* (Beacco et al. 2016) and the lists of elements in the taxonomic scheme in CEFR Chapters 4-5 have now been elaborated in the various ‘Reference Level Descriptions’ (RLDs: content specifications for the six levels in different languages). The CEFR 2001 remains a useful font of information, but the descriptors in it are now out of date and the text, which never read as prose text, is today best accessed for more detail on aspects presented in the CEFR/CV.

## 4 What is the background to the CEFR Companion Volume?

The CEFR 2001 made clear that the CEFR was an open-ended as well as open-minded project, as one sees in the third and fourth principles it should meet:

- *multi-purpose*: usable for the full variety of purposes involved in the planning and provision of facilities for language learning;
- *flexible*: adaptable for use in different circumstances;
- *open*: capable of further extension and refinement;
- *dynamic*: in continuous evolution in response to experience in its use;

- *user-friendly*: presented in a form readily understandable and usable by those to whom it is addressed;
- *non-dogmatic*: not irrevocably and exclusively attached to any one of a number of competing linguistic or educational theories or practices. (COE 2001: 7-8)

John Trim, first author of the CEFR, stated shortly before his death that the CEFR is “always open to amendment and further development, in an interactive international system of co-operating institutions [...] whose cumulative experience and expertise produces a solid structure of knowledge, understanding and practice shared by all” (Trim 2012: xl-xli). Even before the development of the CEFR/CV, it was recognised that the ‘CEFR’, in the intended sense of a common framework, extended beyond the published book to embrace core CEFR resources referred to on the CEFR website. These include items such as: the documented video samples of spoken performance at different levels for different languages calibrated in a series of benchmarking seminars; the banks of supplementary descriptors, often stemming from versions of the European Language Portfolio; the RLDs for different languages; the manuals for developing tests and examinations related to the CEFR (ALTE 2011) and for relating examinations to it (COE 2009), as well as further materials related to them; plus examples of calibrated test items for listening and reading.

It was also recognised that the original book had, to a great extent, failed to meet the fifth principle, user-friendliness<sup>1</sup>. In addition, a 2007 Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum (COE 2007) emphasised that the potential of the CEFR for stimulating educational reform and the reflection on and further development of teaching practice, rather than any standardisation, was more central to their needs.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the COE Education Department decided in May 2013 to confirm the COE’s commitment to the CEFR as its most successful policy document and to update both the CEFR conceptual apparatus and the CEFR illustrative descriptors. Over the years a number of requests to develop descriptors of mediation, reactions to literature, and online interaction had in fact been received. In addition, there was also a desire to take account of developments in research and communication practices in the field since 2001.

Initially, the task of updating the CEFR conceptual model was given to Daniel Coste. Coste, together with Marisa Cavalli, produced a text on the role of mediation in schools (Coste and Cavalli 2015), which contains (early versions of) a number of descriptors from both the CEFR/CV and the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*<sup>2</sup>. Since the Coste and Cavalli text did not in fact address the issue of the CEFR model and it was impossible to develop descriptors without a theoretical framework to work from, updating the CEFR conceptual model became part of the work of the descriptor project, presented in the project report (North and Piccardo 2016)<sup>3</sup>. After the completion of the development, validation, consultation, and piloting processes, it was decided to add short introductions to and rationales for all of the CEFR descriptor scales (newly developed and previously existing). Finally, to address the issue of user-friendliness, CEFR/CV Chapter 2 was developed to explain the CEFR conceptual vision in a simple and concise manner.

## 5 What is the theoretical background to the CEFR/CV?

1. The CEFR/CV is an attempt to address this. “With this new, user-friendly version, the Council of Europe responds to the many comments that the 2001 edition was a very complex document that many language professionals found difficult to access” (COE 2020: 21).
2. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture>
3. The theoretical framework for the development of the 2001 CEFR descriptors was presented in North (2000).

The theoretical background to the CEFR/CV comes from progress in different areas of research in the 20 years following the development of the CEFR 2001 in 1993-6. These developments support and broaden hints, implications and tentative suggested moves already in the CEFR 2001. The principal areas of research, which all interrelate, are the following (see Piccardo and North 2019 Chapter 3 for a detailed account).

### **5.1 The integrationist and enactivist perspectives**

As part of the move from a linear to a complex perspective, integrationists reject the ‘language myth’ (Harris 2001) of one-to-one relationships between words and concepts or exact equivalences of concepts across languages. Integrationists and enactivists eschew artificial divisions (e.g., mind/body/environment; the four isolated skills: listening / reading / speaking / writing) and the transactional ‘information-gap’ perspective associated with the communicative approach. Instead, they promote a holistic, integrationist vision of language education and language activity, a concept of language as action in context, with *situated experience* (Masciotra and Morel 2011) as the central pedagogical concept.

### **5.2 The complex, ecological perspective**

The application of complexity theories, especially complex dynamic systems theory, to language education has gained momentum in the last twenty years (Larsen-Freeman 1997, 2017). In this perspective, the learner, class and school was seen as complex adaptive systems embedded in one another in a fractal pattern. In language development, Larsen-Freeman gives central importance to the concept of ‘emergence’ of both language and language learning which replaces the idea of gaining access to something that already exists. This is linked to van Lier’s ‘ecological approach’, the key to which is “perception in action”, (2004: 97) which helps users/learners to see and act on ‘affordances’ in the environment. An ecological perspective has “a conception of the learning environment as a *complex adaptive system*, of the mind as the totality of relationships between a developing person and the surrounding world, and of learning as the result of meaningful activity in an accessible environment” (van Lier 1997: 783, my emphasis). Like Halliday, with his “meaning potential” (1973: 54), van Lier sees meaning as lying in the situation, the “action potential” (2004: 92) offered by the (learning or performance) situation, with its opportunities—but also its conditions and constraints. He proposes “action-based teaching” (2007) that provides the affordances necessary to promote learner awareness and agency, and to deepen learning.

### **5.3 The agentive perspective**

Autonomy was a theme in language education before the CEFR, and could be said to have (over-)influenced the development of the European Language Portfolio (ELP). But agency is about more than autonomy: studies into classroom discourse demonstrated the absence of learner agency in conventional classrooms (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) as well as children’s ability to work collaboratively in small groups when given the chance and training to do so (Barnes and Todd 1977). The work of these pioneers influenced the development of the concept of interaction strategies in the CEFR. However, the socio-cognitive theory of agency (Bandura 2001, 2018) goes way beyond even this, emphasising cyclical planning, working towards concrete goals, stress-free rehearsal or drafts, and self-monitoring, building the self-efficacy that stems from the experience of earned success.

### **5.4 The socio-constructivist / sociocultural perspective**

Since the 1990s, the insight that learning is primarily a process of internalising concepts met in a social environment (learning through interaction) has steadily gained ground. This is largely related to the work of Vygotsky, which sees such mediation as key to all learning, as well as observations that, for

example, apprentices learn more from each other in 'situated learning' than they do from their trainers (Lave and Wenger 1991). The result is a greatly increased focus in all areas of education on collaborative learning in which learners think through their ideas, mediating for themselves and each other, through a process called 'linguaging' (Swain 2006).

### 5.5 The plurilingual perspective

The concept of a holistic, plurilingual repertoire linked to interculturality—as opposed to compartmentalisation of different languages (multilingualism<sup>4</sup>)—was bold when it appeared in an early draft of the CEFR. At first the concept had little impact in language education, with John Trim lamenting at the 2007 Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum that the CEFR “descriptive apparatus for communicative action and competences together with the ‘Can Do’ descriptors of levels of competence are a good basis for a plurilingual approach to language across the curriculum, *which awaits development*” (Trim 2007: 49, my emphasis). Since then, however, neurolinguistic studies have confirmed both the concept itself and the multiple benefits of plurilingualism and a considerable body of research and practices has developed (see Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford and Lawrence 2021).

### 5.6 Theoretical contributions to the CEFR/CV

The CEFR 2001 built upon 1980s-90s research in sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, second language acquisition, and language assessment, and as a result it introduced a number of new concepts and perspectives to the field of language education. As we have discussed in this section, in the 20 years or so since the CEFR was written, many concepts touched on or hinted at in the CEFR 2001 have been considerably further developed. These theoretical contributions, listed above, have been fed into the development of the CEFR/CV. In the following section, we discuss the key innovative concepts in the CEFR/CV, referring back in several instances to the perspectives listed above.

## 6 What are the key innovative concepts in the CEFR/CV?

When the CEFR appeared, most people considered it an instrument to promote communicative language teaching (CLT), which therefore required little changes to practice except perhaps for the introduction of 'Can Do' descriptors into curricula and course books.

With the appearance of the CEFR/CV, the same kind of debate is starting as to whether the CEFR/CV represents something new—or whether the CEFR did all that. It is certainly true that the CEFR *implied* a paradigm shift with many of its concepts—e.g., alignment of planning, teaching, assessment; teaching for competence in action as opposed to inert knowledge; the learner seen as a social *agent*; a shift from the four skills to an integrated approach with the four modes of reception, production, interaction and mediation; and last but not least plurilingual education. However, although considerable progress was made over the next decade with the alignment of planning, teaching, assessment into coherent curricula, any *conceptual* shift was not very noticeable in practice. Partly because of the fact that many of these concepts were somewhat ahead of their time, many users, even those who worked regularly with the CEFR, do not appear to have adopted or even noticed them.

The developments in theory and research discussed in the previous section, plus the gathering of experience in the field through experimentation in practice, meant that, twenty years on, the time was ripe for the elaboration and further development of these key aspects of the CEFR vision in the CEFR/CV.

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4. Not all applied linguists have adopted this distinction; many have attached to 'multilingualism' adjectives like 'dynamic,' 'holistic,' 'inclusive,' 'active' or 'integrated' to try and capture the plurilingualism concept; see the introduction in Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford and Lawrence (2021).

## 6.1 The social agent

The concept of the learner as a social agent was introduced in explaining the CEFR conceptual model in CEFR 2001 Chapter 2. In completing tasks, the social agent mobilises and combines *all* of their repertoire, all of their general competences (cognitive, emotional, cultural, etc.) and (plurilingual) communicative language competences in a strategic manner, further developing their competences in that process. In this view competence only exists and further develops in action. However, this model, and in particular the significance of the ‘agency’ in the expression ‘social agent’ was not greatly noticed in language education in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The vogue word at the time was ‘autonomy’ as mentioned above, by which one generally thought of learners beavering away on their own, taking responsibility for their learning, self-access, self-assessment, etc.—without much effect on classroom teaching (See Schmenk 2008; Schmenk, Breidbach and Küster 2018 on the trivialisation of the concept of autonomy in language education).

The CEFR/CV highlights the view of the learner as a social agent completing tasks in collective, collaborative action. Users/learners “co-construct [...] meaning in interaction” (COE 2020: 21) and perform tasks to “act in the social world and exert agency in the learning process” (ibid.: 28). In the way it has developed, the concept of social agent has two sides to it: firstly, regarding the social context, which (a) with its conditions and constraints determines to a great extent what one ‘can mean’ in any situation (Halliday’s 1973 ‘meaning potential’), and (b) implies learning in social, collaborative interaction. Secondly, within that context, there is agency, which has four fundamental characteristics: *intentionality*, *forethought*, *self-regulatory processes* and *self-reflection* (Bandura 2001, 2018). Consequently, learners need to be given experience of collaborative task/projects that allow them, under given conditions and constraints, to take the initiative, collaborate, plan and produce something, monitoring progress as they proceed. In this way, they learn to act in the language and develop as lifelong learners. This is the conceptual model behind the action-oriented approach.

## 6.2 The action-oriented approach

The meaning of the term ‘action-oriented approach’ (AoA) has developed over the years. It was introduced in the CEFR 2001, but not elaborated. In the CEFR 2001 one can identify three aspects as characterizing the AoA:

- a. The concept of the social agent discussed above.
- b. The related proposal to integrate collaborative tasks allowing learner agency in teaching and assessment—with a chapter specifically on tasks (CEFR 2001 Chapter 7). The primary purpose of tasks should not be the mere production of language, as so often is inferred in CLT, including task-based language teaching (TBLT).
- c. ‘Can do’ descriptors for target language situations to implement an action-oriented approach to curriculum, and facilitate alignment of planning, teaching and teacher, peer and self-assessment.

The CEFR/CV develops the concept of the AoA further, picking up on the agentive and complex/ecological perspectives mentioned in the previous section. The fundamental differences between the AoA and even more developed forms of TBLT (e.g., van den Branden 2006) are the concrete goals provided by descriptors, the *agency* in relation to the affordances presented by *plurilingualism*, and tasks (see Piccardo and North 2019). In the AoA student behaviour is *motivated* as opposed to casual: students have a mission and it is they, not the teacher, who make decisions about how they will carry it out (Bourguignon 2010). Secondly, all the languages a student possesses are always present in the classroom; they naturally mobilise *all* their resources and so this should be taken into account, with the teacher either defining the ‘language policy’ for each phase of the task or requiring students to do so (see plurilingualism below).

## 6.3 Mediation

Mediation was added as the fourth mode of communication in the CEFR 2001, replacing an earlier fourth category 'processing' (North 1992), but the concept had not been included in the Swiss research project, so there was no proper conceptualisation or descriptors. The very short section on mediation (COE 2001: 87-88) gave the impression that the concept was limited to summarizing, translating and interpreting across languages. Piccardo (2012) suggested that there was more implied by the CEFR description of mediation than what had been generally understood, and thus the notion was worth revisiting, since linguistic mediation inevitably also involved cultural and social mediation. In addition, with the concept of the social agent (see above) "although it is not stated explicitly in the 2001 text, the CEFR descriptive scheme *de facto* gives mediation and agency key positions in the AoA, similar to the role that other scholars give them when they discuss the language learning process" (Piccardo and North 2019: 186).

This broader conceptualisation on mediation found in the CEFR/CV concerns access to new knowledge and concepts and the importance of working with others in a process of co-construction. As Walqui (2006) points out, collaborative group work can double the sources of mediation for the learner. It adds mediation by a peer—and even more significantly mediation for a peer— to mediation for oneself in making sense of something, and mediation from a 'significant other' (parent, teacher, trainer etc.). The CEFR/CV provides descriptors for the CEFR 2001 *Mediation of text* and *Acting as an intermediary in informal situations*—well-established in curricula and tests in Germany (Kolb 2016) and Greece (Stathopoulou 2015). But it also adds the notion of *Mediating concepts* in collaborative work as well as broadening both the concept of *Mediating a text* (to include both non-verbal data and creative text/literature) and *Mediating communication* (by adding the *Facilitating of pluricultural space* and *Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements* to the 2001 *Acting as an intermediary*).

## 6.4 Plurilingualism

As mentioned above, the notion of plurilingualism was introduced in the CEFR. However, despite considerable space given to it in CEFR 2001 Section 6.1.3. and Chapter 8, there was little initial take up, as discussed in Section 5.5 above.

The CEFR/CV highlights plurilingualism as an educational goal, stating that: "Plurilinguals have a *single*, inter-related repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies in order to accomplish tasks" (COE 2020: 30). Plurilingual competence is an unstable competence changing constantly through a process of emergence (Larsen-Freeman and Todeva forthcoming; Piccardo 2017, 2018). Plurilingualism is not only concerned with individuals' linguistic (and cultural) trajectories and the flow between languages and varieties in their repertoire, it is also helping to break barriers and hierarchies between languages. Furthermore, plurilingualism is explicitly outward-looking. It also relates to the learning of additional languages and a stance of interculturality—hence the expression 'plurilingual and intercultural education,' the promotion of which is the main aim of the Council of Europe's engagement in language education. The goal is for learners to become plurilingual, intercultural speakers (Byram 2008) and develop partial competences in a constantly developing repertoire that holistically builds on different languages (languages of origin, language of schooling, additional languages, as well as any form of linguistic encounter). The CEFR/CV therefore contains three scales for plurilingual and pluricultural competence, intended to help teachers incorporate plural aims in their syllabi (*Building on pluricultural repertoire; Plurilingual comprehension; Building on plurilingual repertoire*).

In the same plurilingual perspective, CEFR Level C2 was never associated with the concept of native-speaker. However, all references in the descriptors to that concept (which were found at A1 and B2 in relation to the presence or absence of linguistic accommodation on the part of the native speaker) have also now been removed in the CEFR/CV. Also, the scale for phonological competence has been replaced in order to focus on intelligibility rather than any native speaker model and admit that even obviously C2 speakers frequently retain an accent. And in addition, as well as descriptors specifically for

signing competences (Chapter 6), all descriptors have now been made modality inclusive, following the approach taken in the ECML PRO-Sign project.

## 7 What implications does the CEFR/CV have for teaching/learning and assessment?

The AoA operates at both the curriculum and classroom levels. At a curriculum level it involves five principles:

- a. adopting the same framework and metalanguage for the teaching of different languages;
- b. planning backwards from learners' real-life communicative needs (= backwards design (Richards 2013));
- c. the alignment of planning, teaching and assessment;
- d. the involvement of students in the learning process, with the use of descriptors for the communication of learning aims, in order to create concrete learning goals, and
- e. the use of the descriptors to monitor performance and finally assess the achievement of those goals—where possible with peer and self- as well as teacher assessment.

The CEFR/CV broadens the scope for this kind of curriculum alignment by providing descriptors for new areas that can inspire learning goals (mediation, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, online interaction, and an action-oriented approach to literature). It also makes even clearer in all the descriptors that the goal is intelligibility and interculturality—not native-speakerness. CEFR/CV Section 2.7 also adds a significant concept for curriculum and test design: needs profiles: the use of descriptor scales to identify the communicative needs of particular groups at an early step of the planning process. It is to assist in the creation of such profiles *before* developing a curriculum or standard that is the reason for having so many different CEFR descriptor scales. The CEFR/CV provides two examples of needs profiles (pages 38-39) and suggests two ways in which they might be developed (see pages 42 to 43).<sup>5</sup>

Let us now turn to practical implications for classroom teaching and assessment, since other works are available that focus on CEFR-based curriculum and course planning (e.g., Beacco et al. 2016; North 2014; North et al. 2018).

### 7.1 Implications for the classroom: What is new?

The key implications of the CEFR/CV to consider for the classroom are perhaps complexity, integration, agency, mediation, and plurilingualism.

#### 7.1.1 Complexity

As we saw earlier, in line with developments in education and science, the CEFR/CV embraces a complex (as opposed to linear) perspective. Instead of trying to simplify everything, breaking things into little pieces and working through them all, it stresses the need to accept complexity. Complexity inevitably occurs in two ways:

5. The concept of needs profiles was in fact illustrated in the 1998 provisional version of the CEFR but was removed after the consultation process with member states. As Krumm (2007) pointed out, such differentiated profiles—rather than just setting a global level as a required standard—are vitally important in determining an objective, particularly in an immigration context. Unfortunately, the requirement of a 'level' in all skills is still the norm across Europe for entry, permanent residence and citizenship (Rocca, Hamnes Carlsen and Deygers 2020); fewer than a handful of countries require a lower level for written skills or productive skills.

- a. in the provision of a challenging and exciting learning environment;
- b. in the language needs that come up in relation to the tasks.

In relation to the environment, the AoA suggests more complex task/projects lasting several lessons in which students create an artefact—and in which groups may work at different speeds. They may use languages that the teacher does not speak at times during that process. There is room for autonomous use of resources, for learners to make choices and decisions.

In relation to language, there is a focus on encouraging students to formulate their thoughts, to use more complex sentences patterns (syntax) and appropriate vocabulary (register, collocation, colligation).

The aims here would be to encourage the gradual development of learner autonomy and agency in the learning activities, and to encourage teachers to promote metalinguistic awareness, introducing language features as they are needed, rather than following a grammatical syllabus.

### 7.1.2 Integration

It has long been common practice for textbooks to have units that consist of a series of lessons that provide balanced practice of different activities and skills. Generally, the unit starts with a *texte déclencheur* (not always authentic) to introduce the topic, and sometimes it has a productive task at the end. However, it is less usual for these activities to be situated within a credible, real world-oriented scenario and to build up to a creative, culminating task in which skills, competences and strategies are integrated—and further developed through the experience (Bourguignon 2010; Piccardo, Lawrence, Germain-Rutherford and Galante (forthcoming). What action-orientation is all about is using one or more languages to complete an integrated (complex) task to:

- research and make sense of new concepts and knowledge (reception; mediating for oneself - notetaking);
- collaborate with peers to construct meaning (interaction; mediating concepts) in order to create artefacts (production);
- using local, relevant authentic materials creatively, and
- becoming aware of the importance of strategies, and developing self-belief in the process (= self-efficacy: Bandura 2001).

### 7.1.3 Agency (in the classroom)

When one looks at the examples of tasks given in books on TBLT, it is often remarkable how little room is left for learners to be involved in setting their goal, planning how to get there, deciding who does what and monitoring their progress. Most leave little room for the initiative necessary for learners to purposefully and strategically exert their agency. Nunan, for example, uses a very restricted example of a task to introduce the contrast between 'task', 'communicative activity' and 'exercise' (2004: 20-21). Willis and Willis offer a taxonomy of seven types of tasks in their task generator: listing; ordering and sequencing; matching; comparing; sharing personal experience; problem-solving; and "projects and creative tasks: class newspaper, poster, survey, fantasy, etc." (Willis and Willis 2007: 108). Of these, only the last two categories would allow the learners sufficient agency for the type of collaborative action-oriented task discussed above. The concepts of feed-forward (planning from goals) and feedback (from monitoring), or to use the term common to quality management and action research 'plan-do-check-reflect' are integral to the AoA—but hardly ever considered in TBLT (Piccardo and North 2019). Piloting of the new CEFR/CV descriptors showed that they are a powerful tool to guide learner action in groupwork and to help teachers and learners monitor the ongoing process.

### 7.1.4 Mediation (in the classroom)

Cross-linguistic, textual mediation has been proven in examinations for over 10 years and is a good place to start (see Stathopoulou 2015; Dendrinos and Karavas forthcoming; ECML METLA project). In fact 13 of the 22 mediation subscales in the CEFR/CV relate to this CEFR 2001 interpretation of mediation (the first eight of those from *Mediating a text*, the four strategies, plus *Acting as an intermediary*). However, from a classroom perspective, one should not overlook the fact that it is precisely the collaborative, goal-oriented nature of *Mediating concepts* that makes mediation action-oriented. Action-oriented tasks that require the collaborative co-construction of meaning through mediation in interaction have a broad educational as well as narrow linguistic potential. As mentioned when discussing integration, mediation implies mediating for oneself (reception and notetaking) through exchange of information and ideas gained through research (*mediating a text*) and collaboration in order to construct meaning (*mediating concepts*) during the process of planning and producing an artefact. In addition, the scales *Facilitating pluricultural space* and *Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements* add the cultural and social aspects of mediation that may be essential for learners in real life.

### 7.1.5 Plurilingualism

Plurilingualism can be seen from a number of different perspectives, so there are a developing range of techniques that can be used to encourage plurilingual awareness in the classroom. Plurilingualism implies overcoming the barriers between the way different languages, including the language of schooling, are taught, and encouraging learners to appreciate their plurilingual profile. These profiles can be presented in a number of ways, for example, through graphic plurilingual profiles presenting growth as the covering of terrain (see CEFR/CV Section 2.7), through language portrait silhouettes (Krumm and Jenkins 2001; Prasad 2014), language mapping (Somerville, D'warte and Brown 2014), identity texts (Cummins and Early 2011), and of course through CLIL (Bernaus et al. 2011).

Sometimes plurilingualism can be expressed and developed through reflection on similarities and differences, false friends etc. (Corcoll López and González-Davies 2016) to promote metalinguistic awareness. Sometimes this is done through the use of one-language-at-a-time, in the way suggested by the descriptors for *Mediating a text* and *Acting as an intermediary* with their talk of Language A, Language B (and potentially Language C and D), and sometimes it happens in a free-flowing process of plurilinguaging (Piccardo 2017, 2018) in which learners use all of their plurilingual and pluricultural resources in the process of completing a task. In practice, the teacher—or perhaps the students themselves—may need to define a 'language policy.' This would define the phase(s) of activity in which all languages may be used (e.g., in a research phase, or in mediating concepts), and the phase(s) in which one or more specific languages are to be used (e.g., for the artefact). Obviously, policy should vary depending on the context, the aims and priorities of the class, and the nature of the task.

## 7.2 What does the CEFR/CV mean for assessment

Incorporating points like the above in the classroom, and using (adapted) CEFR/CV descriptors to monitor the activity and assist self- peer and teacher assessment is quite a radical change, but it is not conceptually challenging. To the contrary, it is much in line with developments in education generally. There is a tendency for education to be seen more holistically, curriculum aims to become more integrated, and the development of competences, creativity and agency to take centre stage. When it comes to formal assessment and test development, however, things are more complicated. This is because testing, with its yearning for a clear construct, instinctively prefers to subdivide rather than integrate. This starts with the candidates. Whereas group assignments—with all the group receiving the same grade for the work—are common in continuous assessment even at degree level, in language testing, which remains focused on the individual performance, or on a series of discrete performances

by the individual in response to 'items', the idea is still revolutionary.

Perhaps one could consider implications for testing in two steps. Firstly, there are potential adjustments suggested by the CEFR/CV that do not affect the contemporary language testing paradigm. Here one starting point could be the 'plus levels,' more prominent in 2020. Many users have not realised that the global scales defining the CEFR levels in CEFR 2001 Chapter 3 (and now in CEFR/CV Appendices 1-4) do not contain any descriptors from the 'plus levels—only those for the criterion levels (A1, A2, B1, etc.). Then there are pointers in the scales and in CEFR/CV Appendix 5 for simulated online tasks and for cross-linguistic mediation of texts, already common in Greece and Germany as mentioned. Finally, oral tests might reconsider their criteria for pronunciation, to check that candidates are not penalised purely for accent, given "the well-established fact that accent is partially independent of comprehensibility and intelligibility and that the latter two are more important to successful communication" (Derwing and Munro 2015: 168).

But there are more fundamental issues implying more need for reflection. These include the provision of a credible unifying context or scenario for a set of test tasks; the integration of skills in a linked sequence of tasks—including the use of online as well as offline resources during a task; the provision for agency in approaching tasks; the treatment of group communication with the co-construction of meaning and artefacts; and above all the attitude taken to the mother tongue, plurilingualism, codeswitching, trans- and plurilinguaging. These are more difficult issues that could occupy us for years. They are considered briefly below.

### *7.2.1 Scenario/real world context for linked tasks*

It is true that one does see more attempts to link test tasks together through a unifying topic, and this is certainly a positive development, but a primary problem in doing so is the identification of the addressee(s) or audience. Kolb (2016) considers this the main problem with the incorporation of mediation in tests in Germany where "[...] it is sometimes the case that the contextualisation with a particular addressee is considerably underspecified [so that the context given] can be seen as above all an excuse for a summary" (Kolb 2016: 52, my translation). There is also the additional problem that in language testing one generally seeks to avoid having all questions relating to just one or two topics, since this may well (dis)advantage certain learners due to their degree of familiarity with the topic. One would have to ensure that the topic of the scenario was appropriate for all test takers—easier to achieve with a test developed for a specific context; less easy with international tests. In this and other respects, James Purpura and colleagues have recently been investigating the possibilities of scenario-based language assessment (Beltrán & Lin 2017; Carroll 2017).

### *7.2.2 Integration of skills*

In general, language testers tend to prefer separately defined test constructs, and hence to stick to testing the four skills separately. Inspired by the logic of real communication, the early 1990s saw the beginning of experimentation with integrated skills in tests by, for example, the Institute of Linguists (Luukko-Vinchenzo 1993). The idea with such tests is that information from the texts used to assess the receptive skills serves as input to the tasks for assessing the productive skills. There are, naturally, several complications with this concept. Firstly, there is the problem of creating a credible context for a series of linked tasks, as discussed above. Secondly, there is the question of defining the construct(s) and then there is the knotty issue of the scoring. Should the receptive parts of the test be scored separately—or should certain information found in the source materials provided be required in the scoring of the productive parts? Should scoring on the productive parts in that case depend on successful completion of the receptive parts? It is certainly possible to find answers to these issues. For example, the Trinity ISE (Integrated Skills in English) examinations each have two modules, for spoken language and written language respectively, the latter including both a reading-to-writing task and an independent writing task,

and the relationship of these tasks to the CEFR levels has recently been confirmed (Harsch & Paraskevi Kanistra 2020). The Greek KPG exams for different languages have long contained intralinguistic and interlinguistic tasks that require integrated skills (Dendrinis and Karavas, forthcoming) and finally the ECML's 2020-2022 VITbox project on implementing the CEFR/CV, coordinated by Johann Fischer, is pursuing integrated tasks for assessment.

### 7.2.3 Agency (related to assessment)

It would not be an exaggeration to say that current language tests leave little room for agency. Even the possibility of some choice over which papers or questions to answer (common in pre-scientific days) seems to have fallen out of favour. Is agency indeed feasible in a standardised test? A prototype test for the Erasmus programme, cited in the CEFR (COE 2001: 178-179), did in fact try to put the candidate 'in charge.' In this oral exam, the candidate was a subject expert who explained their discipline and/or project to the examiner, who would ask follow-up questions from a position of genuine ignorance. It is difficult to see how one can introduce agency into a standardised test without giving the candidate some kind of special initiative like this. In an educational context, one possibility could be to introduce a 'coursework' assignment to the test, in the form of a collaborative task/project. The team could get joint grades for the product from the project itself (as with such university assignments) but the project could then be the topic of one phase of the oral exam, with the individual candidate expected to explain it and answer probing follow up questions, as in the Erasmus test. Alternatively, the oral exam could be constructed so as to encourage classroom task/projects as test preparation, as is the case with the recent Austrian Certificate of Plurilingualism<sup>6</sup> (Steinhuber forthcoming), which stimulates collaborative class task/projects that require the integrated use of L2 and L3<sup>7</sup>. Of course, that is not possible in international machine-delivered gate-keeping tests, but international tests claiming to provide an educational curriculum, like the DELF or the Cambridge, Goethe Institute and Trinity suites, could perhaps consider ideas like this.

### 7.2.4 Collaborative co-construction

As suggested above, the introduction of a course work element could encourage collaborative learning. However, collaborative task/projects can also be encouraged through washback, as is the case with the recently developed oral examination for the Austrian Certificate of Plurilingualism (Steinhuber forthcoming), as mentioned above. But to take account of the more collective view of communication that has developed since the 1990s, one would really want to include collaborative co-construction with peers during the test itself. The Eurocentres Foundation successfully used small group classroom tasks for assessment of level (North 1991, 1993) for over 20 years, but would this be feasible in more formal testing? Here, as with integrated skills, there were attempts in the early 1990s, noticeably in relation to the development of the Cambridge Advanced, but the constraints of the need for replicability in high stakes testing soon caused the format to atrophy into the familiar rather reductive paired tasks by the time it was introduced in practice in the Cambridge tests in the mid-1990s. But even rigidly controlled paired interviews throw up problems in rating the contributions. Pairing needs to be undertaken sensitively and it can be more difficult to avoid discourse dominance by one person and the emergence of complex group dynamics if more than two candidates are involved. With pairs it has been suggested that in formal tests both candidates should receive a joint grade (May 2009). Could this be a way forward for collaborative tasks in general?

6. [https://www.cebs.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Austrian\\_framework\\_plurilingual\\_oral\\_exams-Druckausgabequalit-1.pdf](https://www.cebs.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Austrian_framework_plurilingual_oral_exams-Druckausgabequalit-1.pdf) (assessed 15 July 2021).

7. [https://www.cebs.at/home/plurilingualism/plurilingual\\_lessons/](https://www.cebs.at/home/plurilingualism/plurilingual_lessons/) (assessed 15 July 2021).

### 7.2.5 Mediation (related to assessment)

Mediation of text can clearly be included in formal tests, with considerable experience being gained with cross-linguistic tasks in both Germany and Greece as mentioned above. Dendrinou (2013) and Stathopoulou (2015) each provide in English a range of examples of such test items. Several international tests of English have also started to include mediation of text in the same language. Mediation of concepts in interaction is, however, a more complicated issue since it involves the collaborative co-construction discussed above. In consultation and piloting, teachers found the descriptors for mediating concepts eminently suitable for goal-setting and beneficial for awareness-raising about the nature of collaborative group work as well as monitoring and assessment by the teacher but, perhaps reflecting the issues discussed immediately above, were less sanguine about formal tests. In the first issue of this journal, Pavlovskaya and Lankina (2019) suggest that mediation might be taught and monitored as part of the learning *process*, but that the quality of the *product* could then be assessed as usual with assessor-oriented qualitative factors. Their data showed that, at least with advanced learners, awareness-raising and training with mediation descriptors could improve the quality of that final product. Mediation of communication, particularly *Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements* is also problematic from the point of view of formal assessment. Whether it should be included in assessment really depends on the target communicative situations concerned.

### 7.2.6 Recognising plurilingualism

Taking account of the language repertoire of plurilinguals in assessment appears to be a coming topic and is indeed the subject of a forthcoming edited volume (Melo-Pfeiffer and Ollivier forthcoming). Clearly the place to start is with simply creating profiles of competence in different languages, as in the ELP and as in the plurilingual profiles suggested in the CEFR/CV (COE 2020: 40). In terms of assessing the alternation and/or mixing/meshing of languages, cross-linguistic mediation is one form of plurilingual assessment, and the Austrian oral examination for a Certificate of Plurilingualism has also already been mentioned. The latter is a 15-minute exam with two phases: Phase 1 mediation of text (including *Explaining data*) from language of schooling to L2 and L3 and Phase 2: *Acting as an intermediary* and collaborative mediation of concepts in L2 and L3 (Steinhuber forthcoming). No doubt other examples of plurilingual testing formats will follow. One could imagine the development of more standardised items on understanding a text in a language similar to one that the candidate has studied (intercomprehension), or language awareness items in which similarities and equivalent expressions are deduced. Then again there is CLIL: the possibility of assessing content knowledge through other languages.

Clearly in any assessment context involving interaction, the policy regarding when and how different languages are to be used needs to be clearly specified in different phases of reception, information exchange, collaborative interaction, and the artefact production. In some phases one specific language may be required, in others passing from one to another (classic cross-linguistic mediation) and in yet others free sourcing of material (if there is a project element) in whatever language desired and free-flowing translanguaging in subsequent collaborative interaction. There is no intrinsic right and wrong here. As Cummins (2017) points out, plurilingual students need to be equipped to use one-language-at-a-time when it is needed in certain real-life situations, to acknowledge and accommodate the presence of multiple languages in other situations, and to be able to determine when translanguaging is appropriate to the situation and when it is not.

## 8 Conclusion

This article has tried to give an overview of where the CEFR/CV is coming from in terms of its contextual background and the developments in theory and practices that it reflects. The status of the CEFR/CV was discussed, as was its relationship to the CEFR 2001, which it replaces as a primary reference for the

majority of users. The aim of the CEFR/CV is to bring the CEFR up-to-date, aligning with developments in education, especially language education, over the past 20 years. The various perspectives that have fed into the renewed CEFR vision (integrationist, complex, ecological, agentic, socio-constructivist/sociocultural, plurilingual) were briefly outlined. The key innovative concepts in the CEFR, developed and clarified in the CEFR/CV, were discussed: the social agent in an action-oriented approach, mediation in its narrower 2001 and broader 2020 senses, and again plurilingualism. The function of CEFR/CV Chapter 2 'Key aspects of the CEFR for teaching and learning' is to clarify and illustrate these and other aspects of the CEFR vision in order to balance the tendency to focus only on the CEFR levels. For more detail on the conceptualisation of mediation, readers are referred to the report on the mediation project (North & Piccardo 2016), for the AoA to Piccardo and North (2019) and for plurilingualism to Piccardo et al. (2021). One of the most important points about the innovation potential of the CEFR/CV is that the various concepts concerned—the move away from the four skills for curriculum development, the social agent, the action-oriented approach, mediation, plurilingualism—should not be seen in isolation from each other. They are all linked, as one would expect from complexity theories.

Some potential implications that the CEFR/CV could have for teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom on the one hand and for more formal assessment on the other were then presented. The essential point made is a proposal to move on from seeing language just as a subject with the teaching of language in context and the focus on getting students to use that taught language in fluency practice (as in the communicative approach). Learning is more effective when it is situated in a context of real use (Lave and Wenger 1991) in a rich, challenging yet scaffolded environment. Such an environment can offer affordances that develop learners' "perception in action" (van Lier 2004: 97) through collaborative tasks that harness and integrate *all* the learner's resources (general as well as language competences and strategies). Language programmes should therefore recognize the inevitably plurilingual nature of language learning and use.

It was admitted that it is easier to see how these concepts, though challenging, can be applied in classroom teaching and assessment than may be the case in a formal testing context. Indeed, the concepts have mostly been developed as classroom practices over the past 20 or so years, at least partly inspired by the CEFR 2001. The CEFR is after all mainly concerned with learning, teaching and assessment—in that order. An important aim of the CEFR descriptors is to provide teachers with both curriculum aims and a means to develop instruments for continuous assessment of their achievement. The CEFR promotes the broader view of assessment as assessment for learning and assessment as learning (Assessment Research Group 1999). The new descriptors provided in the CEFR/CV offer teachers the opportunity and challenge to broaden the scope of language activity in their classrooms and to involve learners in the process of planning and monitoring it.

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## 10 Biography

**Brian North**, is a researcher and consultant to the Council of Europe. After developing the CEFR levels and descriptors, he co-authored the CEFR itself, the prototype European Language Portfolio, the Manual for relating assessments to the CEFR, and Eaquals' core inventories for English and French. Recent projects include the coordination of the CEFR/CV plus co-investigation in a study of CEFR use in Canada and Switzerland, alignment of the Canadian Language Benchmarks to the CEFR and the ECML project CEFR QualiMatrix. Recent (co-)publications include *The CEFR in Practice* (CUP 2014), *Language Course Planning* (OUP 2018) and *The Action-oriented Approach* (Multilingual Matters 2019).

# Mediation in practice in an ESAP course: Versions of the Medical English student conference

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*The Medical English course at the University of Oulu (Finland), which is compulsory for 200 first-year medical students, is designed to enhance professional English language communication focusing on work life relevance. The course design utilized the action-oriented approach promoted by CEFR CV (2018), to support the active use of language through various simulation activities. This paper describes specifically the final assignment of the Medical English course, which is integrated with the Clinical Psychology course. Having discussed topics in Finnish in groups, complementing the lectures in the Clinical Psychology course, students present in English what they have learnt in these discussions in the framework of a student conference. While preparing for the conference, the students create a poster presentation in teams. During the conference, they present the posters and, thus, practice communication relevant to work life. In this assignment, they must actively apply cross-linguistic mediation and use mediation strategies to explain new concepts and simplify the source text. Traditionally, the assignment requires students to participate in a simulated real-time face-to-face conference both as presenters and attendees. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we used an alternative solution: a hybrid conference of asynchronous presentations with real-time Q&A forums in online posts. The new design similarly provides students with stimuli to activate all modes of communication (production, reception, interaction and mediation) simultaneously.*

*This article reports on this novel solution for the assignment together with its context and the course design in relation to mediation scales and descriptors. Moreover, an analysis of the self-assessment forms between the student cohorts in 2019 and 2020 allows an insight into the learners' experiences. The results show that students perceive the assignment as an authentic communication task, which enhances their engagement and autonomy in the learning process.*

**Keywords:** cross-linguistic mediation, mediation strategies, pandemic, pedagogical solution, online teaching, curriculum development, CLIL

## 1 Introduction

Foreign language education at tertiary level enjoys a special status in Finland; all degree programs contain compulsory language courses provided free of charge at the undergraduate level. The law regulating university education stipulates that apart from the official national languages, which are Finnish and Swedish, graduates must attain proficiency in at least one foreign language to an extent that enables them “to monitor progress in their own field and operate in an international setting” (section 6 of Decree 2015). According to the Official Statistics of Finland, for 95% of students in upper secondary schools this foreign language (FL) is English (OSF 2019). As FL teaching in Finland starts at an early stage of primary education (in some schools in year one, while the majority start in year three), students entering university have a solid FL skill foundation. Thus, the expected level of students’

proficiency at the start of the compulsory FL course in their undergraduate studies is B1 on average. However, in certain fields where the competition to gain admission is higher, such as veterinary surgery and degree programmes in medicine, the language competence of undergraduates is commonly B2<sup>1</sup>. This high entry level of language proficiency explains why English language courses at tertiary level in Finland can indeed be customized to prepare students for their future careers.

While undergraduate compulsory English courses focus on professional communication (ESP), in certain disciplines and specializations, the students' future profession requires lifelong use of academic skills for keeping pace with research in the field (Zrníková and Bujalková 2018), among others, in medicine, biomedical engineering, biochemistry. This double mission of professional and academic needs can be served in the enhanced *specificity*<sup>2</sup> of English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) (Hyland 2006: 9-12). This is the case of the Medical English course, which is compulsory for first year students of medicine and dentistry at the University of Oulu. The course follows the ESAP principles, and is designed to support students in developing skills and strategies that will allow them to follow in English current developments in medical research and medicine in general. In this article, we will discuss the course design, the course activities which provide practice in applying mediation skills and strategies, and will focus on the final course component, which is a simulation of a scientific conference.

### 1.1 English for Specific and Academic Purposes in the medical curriculum

The curriculum of the degree program in medicine and dentistry at the University of Oulu was reformed in 2017. The new curriculum, introduced in academic year 2017-18, places a special emphasis on the importance of teamwork in both pre-clinical and clinical studies. Training students for working in a team, for example when discussing patient presentations with colleagues to establish the diagnosis, has been a traditional element of medical teaching (Kopel et al. 2019; Blackmore et al. 2018; Ziv et al. 2006). The new curriculum, however, also aims to address the challenges of an ever-expanding, globalized workplace, where such teamwork may have to be carried out in English. This recognition led to a novel solution: the integration of certain subject courses with the foreign language course, namely the Medical English course. Two subject courses in the first-year degree program were chosen for this purpose: the cell biology course and the clinical psychology course. Both courses are compulsory for first year students of medicine and dentistry. The cell biology course was chosen because students in this course must research a current topic (different every year) and summarize their findings in an essay in Finnish, which is the language of instruction for the course. Much of the literature students must process, however, is only available in English. Similarly, the clinical psychology course uses source materials in English. Clinical psychology is a subject course where medical students learn the aspects of psychology relevant to their profession (working with patients as general practitioners or dentists). Complementary to lectures in the course, students are assigned to groups to discuss certain topics in depth. The language of groupwork is Finnish, which prompted the integrated assignment (discussed below). Identifying the built-in English components in these two subject courses marked the first stage of the integration process. Clarifying the aims and the design of the integrated assignments was the task of the ESAP teachers.

While the aim of the integration was to create synergy between the chosen subject courses and the ESAP course, due to institutional considerations, the Medical English course was preserved as a separate

1. The degree program in medicine at the University of Oulu is the second most difficult to get admitted to: in 2019 only 14.6% of all applicants gained admission. According to the Finnish National Agency for Education, in 2020, only 198 students out of 1335 were granted admission [https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/\\_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/en-gb/Reports/Haku-%20ja%20valintatiedot%20-%20korkeakoulu%20-%20yo%20-%20koulutusala-EN.xlsb](https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/en-gb/Reports/Haku-%20ja%20valintatiedot%20-%20korkeakoulu%20-%20yo%20-%20koulutusala-EN.xlsb).
2. Hyland explains specificity, "a concept fundamental to most definitions of ESP" as this "ESP involves teaching the literacy skills which are appropriate to the purposes and understandings of particular communities" K. Hyland/English for Specific Purposes 21 (2002) 385–395, 386.

entity in the curriculum. This solution follows the recommended practices of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at the tertiary level (Anderson 2014: 197). Consequently, the Medical English course is divided into three modules, which run in the first year and must be completed consecutively (Figure 1). The first module focuses on scientific writing: students write an English summary of their own cell biology essay written in the Finnish language. The second module focuses on the traditional contents of medical English courses, doctor-patient communication and doctor-doctor consultation. To build their professional vocabulary for this purpose, students process medical topics on anatomical systems and disorders using authentic texts and give team presentations in class. The main assignment of the third module is integrated with the clinical psychology groupwork. Each group of students, led by a clinical psychologist, explores one particular topic in Finnish, for which students also read some literature in English. The topics include, among others, regulation of emotions, coping with pain and trauma, and the well-being of medical practitioners. The integrated assignment in the Medical English course is based on the same topics. Regarding language skills, this assignment builds on the summary writing activity in Module 1. Using skills of scientific reporting succinctly, students in the ESAP course work in the same groups formed in the clinical psychology course. The groups create a brief presentation on their own topic and explain it using a multimodal medium, a poster as such, in a simulated conference. In the course design, this conference assignment is identified as scientific reporting (Figure 1). In addition to using English for professional and academic purposes, this assignment supports transferable skills such as leadership skills, time management, creativity, analytical reasoning, and critical thinking, among others, which they will need in their future working lives.

 <b>Course code: 902155Y    3 ECTS credits = 80 hrs    Level: B2-C1</b> <b>This course consists of three parts: module 1 and 2 and 3.</b>		
<p><b>Module 1: integrated with cell biology (0.5 ECTS credit)</b></p> <p> – focusing on reading scientific texts and practising scientific writing</p> <p>Format: lecture (lesson 1) &amp; writing task of scientific summary Assignment: draft 1 – teacher’s feedback -&gt; revised version</p>	<p><b>Module 2: medical terminology &amp; doctor-patient consultation (2 ECTS credits)</b></p> <p> - focusing on vocabulary development and speaking</p> <p>Format: contact lessons (face-to-face or online) and self-study – all <b>compulsory</b> Assignments: team presentations and pair work</p>	<p><b>Module 3: integrated with clinical psychology → Student Conference (0.5 ECTS credit)</b></p> <p> – focusing on reporting (poster presentation)</p> <p>Aim: to learn about topics in psychology through English team presentations /posters Format: online lecture (instruction) and two tutorials for teams &amp; participation in conference</p>
<p><b>Final task: online self-assessment &amp; reporting on conference</b></p>		

Figure 1. Course design of Medical English: extent, level, aims and components.

These assignments in the Medical English modules (Figure 1), which have been created as a follow-up to the Finnish medium subject courses, are grounded in the CLIL approach. The model is what Bentley identifies as soft CLIL, which is a language-led approach to content learning, where “some curricular topics are taught during a language course” (2010: 6). The model is based on finding certain areas and assignments in subject courses which students can revise and extend in the foreign language and, thus, enhance their learning of the subject. Enhancing subject knowledge while using English is particularly relevant in Module 3. Integrating the clinical psychology group discussions, which are carried out in

Finnish, in other words, Language A<sup>3</sup>(LA), with an assignment in the Medical English course boosts students' subject knowledge. The reporting in the ESAP course on their psychology topic in English, which is Language B (LB) in this case, and the various language and communication skills applied in the process enhance students' learning and will lead to higher level cognitive processes identified in Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al. 2001); see Figure 2. Switching from LA to LB is the core element of these activities, and are clearly tasks based on the use of cross-linguistic mediation.

The CLIL approach used in the ESAP course creates the framework for supporting students' higher-level learning. The assignment is to prepare a poster presentation in groups on a pre-selected topic. Preparing a presentation and participating in the conference, requires the use of various learning strategies including mediation and communication skills. Figure 2 demonstrates the various stages of learning students accomplish when reporting their work in English in the simulated conference. Stage 1-remembering: preparing for the conference starts with recalling subject knowledge acquired in the subject course. Stage 2-understanding: what does the assignment mean? What is the purpose of the conference? How do we structure and convey information in a conference? How can we work on this as a team? How can we divide the workload? To answer these questions, students use support provided by the teachers: model example posters, analysis of English conference posters, text structure, design features, presenting a poster, relevant vocabulary, style guide, etc. In Stage 3, students apply language skills while mediating the content acquired in Finnish and English to the genre of the poster. They use mediation skills corresponding to the CEFR mediation scales, described explicitly in Figure 3. In Stage 4, while preparing the poster presentation students need to analyze the communicative situation: what is the difference between the text of the poster and the presentation of the poster? In other words: mediating between written and spoken production and referencing visual data. Additionally, they must also consider the aim of the conference: to learn about clinical psychology topics other than their own. Thus, in Stage 5, they will have to evaluate the affordances of the medium (poster and its presentation) and their own knowledge of the psychology topic. Once they have followed this process, they reach the ultimate goal, Stage 6, which is creating a poster presentation, when they can demonstrate their higher-level learning. Figure 2 also presents a list of the scaffolding tools teachers use to support students in this process.

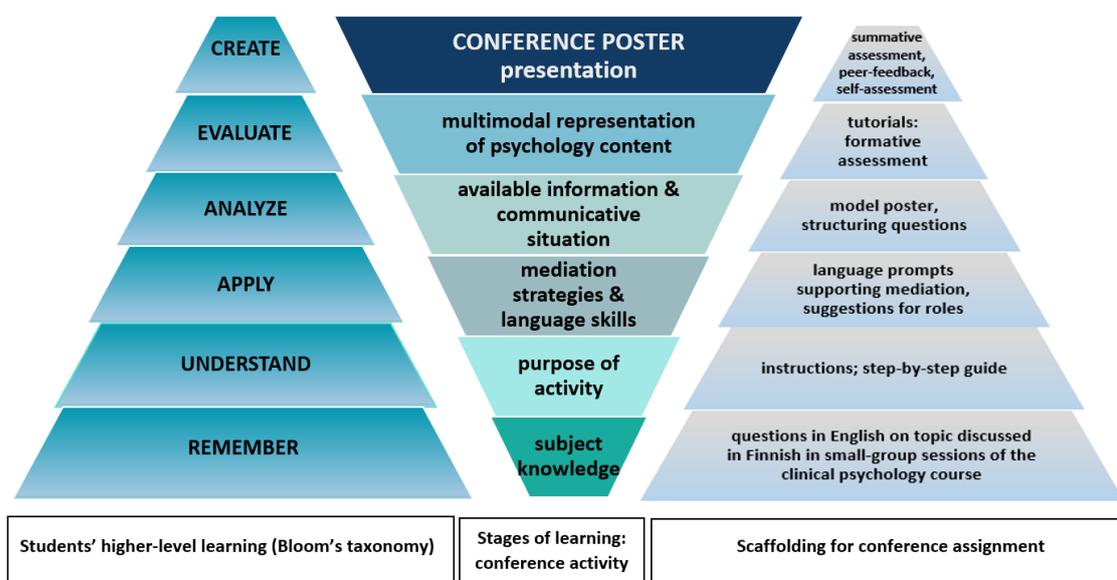


Figure 2. Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001) adapted for the Medical English conference assignment (Module 3)

3. The terms 'Language A' (source language) and 'Language B' (target language) are used in accordance with CEFR CV (2018).

## 1.2 Medical English as situated social practice: the role of mediation

The concept of mediation was briefly introduced in the Common European Framework in 2001 (Council of Europe 2001). The Companion Volume (CV) (2018) expanded the concept and introduced three categories with scales and descriptors: mediating a text, mediating communication, and mediating concepts. Moreover, five scales of mediation strategies were presented: explaining a new concept by linking to previous knowledge, breaking down complicated information, adapting language, and strategies to simplify a text by either amplifying and/or streamlining it.

The Medical English course draws upon various pedagogical traditions; Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, the concept of social negotiation and scaffolding, and Bandura's social learning theory. As Piccardo, North and Goodier (2019) point out, the complex concept of mediation which sees the learner as a social agent, also draws upon these socio-cultural theories. In this course, students simultaneously practise mediation activities from all three categories. The conference assignment provides an authentic experience through simulation of a real-life event, which is a training method commonly used in medical education. Participating in the conference, "the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning" (Council of Europe 2018), sometimes within the same language [especially during team collaboration], sometimes from one language to another.

The simulated conference follows the traditional conference structure: 20-minute presentations followed by 10-minute Q&A discussions. Each team member can choose from various duties and roles: presenter, team leader, design expert, script writer, researcher, editor. Prior to the conference, each team must participate in two tutorials, which serve as the scaffolding for this student-led activity. In the tutorials, the teams present the first and second draft of their posters and rehearse the presentation. They get informal feedback both on their poster and the presentation from the teacher as formative assessment of the assignment. On the conference day, the students give electronic peer-feedback to the presenters in English, while the posters and the presentations are assessed by the psychology and ESAP teachers, who monitor the conference and give overall feedback at the end of the conference. In addition to the initial collaboration in planning the integration, the teachers cooperate each year in formulating the conference assignment; they identify the psychology topics to be used for the conference activity, and then at the end, when they evaluate the conference.

In the annual revision of the course design, the Can-Do descriptors offered in the CV were taken into consideration and adapted when we formulated the conference assignment. We analysed the Can Do descriptors of "relaying specific information", "processing text", "explaining data", "translating a written text", and "note-taking" mediation scales both in speech and writing. As the level of our medical students is B2-C1, we used the B2+ statements when available to specify the objectives of the assignment (Table 1). In this process, we also acknowledged that some scales are more permanent, *dominant scales*, e.g., "relaying information in speech/writing" and "processing information in speech/writing" than others, the *supplementary scales*, such as "explaining data", "translation" and "note-taking", due to the variety of materials students had to process.

Table 1. Medical English Course (Module 3) – Can Do mediation statements

<p><b>Relaying specific information in speech / writing (dominant mediation scale)</b></p> <p><i>Based on the selected clinical psychology topic, students can:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• relay relevant academic points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups to an academic poster from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li><li>• relay relevant academic points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups to a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li></ul>
<p><b>Processing text in speech / writing (dominant mediation scale)</b></p> <p><i>Based on the selected clinical psychology topic, students can:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• summarize the main points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups in an academic poster from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li><li>• summarize the main points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups in a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li><li>• compare, contrast and synthesize the main points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups in an academic poster from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li><li>• compare, contrast and synthesize the main points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups in a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li><li>• explain various viewpoints presented in the Clinical psychology groups through a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li><li>• explain the main viewpoints presented in the Clinical psychology poster through a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li></ul>
<p><b>Explaining data (e.g. ingraphs, diagrams, charts etc.) in speech (supplementary mediation scale)</b></p> <p><i>Based on the selected clinical psychology topic, students can:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• interpret and describe diagrams/graphs/bar chart discussed in the Clinical psychology groups during a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li><li>• interpret and describe visual data included in academic research during a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).</li></ul>
<p><b>Translating a written text in speech / in writing (supplementary mediation scale)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students can translate the key terms of the Clinical Psychology course from Finnish (LA) to English (LB).</li></ul>
<p><b>Note taking (supplementary mediation scale)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students can take notes on points which strike them as important during the two tutorials from English (LA) to Finnish and/English (LB).</li></ul>

The conference as a course activity is designed as an induction into professional life, in line with the law on language education in HE in Finland. However, at the planning stage we were unaware that the replication of work life experience, namely the conference setting, would pose a significant challenge in the Covid-19 pandemic. The following sections discuss our solution and students' reactions.

### 1.3 Solutions during the Covid-19 pandemic

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face teaching was cancelled, and courses transferred to online meetings in the second week of March 2020. This meant that the conference, scheduled for 8-9 May 2020, was in danger of being postponed or cancelled. While the traditional components of the Medical English course, Module 2 (language of doctor-patient consultation) were adopted to the online mode relatively smoothly, this was not the case for the group discussions in the psychology course. Since the psychologists leading the group discussions work in the clinical setting, and as hospitals were restricted

to essential patient care, they had to cancel the lessons. Consequently, the teachers in the Medical English course resorted to a solution that drew upon the mediation strategies and skills students had already practiced in Module 1. Since students did not get instruction in the subject course, we requested relevant materials from the psychologists for the students to use. These texts were a mixed bag of Finnish and English articles, web-based sources, and recordings in Finnish made by the psychologists. This time when preparing for their conference presentation, students had to use all the mediation strategies mentioned above. We hoped that this ‘repetition’ of all mediation strategies and activities they had practiced in previous modules of the course would lead to a better understanding of the topics and improved competence in professional communication.

In addition to securing appropriate source texts, organizing a conference in a virtual setting posed another challenge. The solution we found was a hybrid method: asynchronous presentations followed by synchronous Q&A forum in Moodle. This meant that the students had to create their posters and record their presentations, which had an added value: participants could listen to the recorded presentations at their own pace, several times if needed. The conference presentations were available within a given time frame over two afternoons. During that time, the presenting teams took turns in ‘manning their stations’ and answering online in real-time as they were posted to the forum attached to each poster. ESAP teachers monitored the process and intervened when needed (called for answers). This hybrid model allowed participants to learn about specific clinical psychology topics within the ESAP course framework, which they otherwise would not have known.

## 2 Methodology

The scope of this article is students’ perceptions of the mediation tasks (team presentations, conference poster creation and poster presentations) included in Module 2 and 3 during the 2019-2020 academic year. This research paper builds on a previous research report of the 2018-2019 student cohort, presented at the EALTA 2019 conference. A comparison of the two cohorts is presented in the Discussion section. In this study, we set out to investigate the following research questions:

1. How did students perceive the mediation activities (team presentations, conference poster creation and poster presentations) completed in Module 2-3 in the 2019-2020 academic year?
2. How did students cope with these mediation activities during the Covid-19 pandemic?

To address these research questions, a mixed-method design was chosen as the most suitable for a multi-purposed research study (Bryman 2012; Thomas 2009). We prepared a self-assessment questionnaire, which students answered at the end of the Medical English course. The course participants (2019-2020 student cohort) submitted the answers following the conference in May 2020. Including both question types (Likert-scale and open-ended questions) was meant to enable self-reflection and provide a deeper understanding of the tasks, a strong asset of mixed methods in social research (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010). While answering the questions, students reflected on their learning progress through the course modules and the unique circumstances caused by the pandemic.

Regarding the analysis of the first research question, descriptive statistics were used to report students’ perceptions of the tasks (Module 2-3) and the acquired skills. Potential correlations of the opinions regarding face-to-face team presentations (Module 2), the conference conducted online due to the pandemic (Module 3), and the acquired skills were investigated through Pearson Chi-square tests, a measure of association between two variables. Chi-square tests can also indicate how strong the relationship is between the variables to some extent (Blaikie 2003). Similarly, to answer the second research question, descriptive statistics and Pearson Chi-square tests were used for the same reasons. We correlated the difficulty posed by the online mode of the conference with the students’ perceptions of the mediation tasks in Module 3 and the perceived acquired skills. The current case study falls into the category of explanatory design, “where the prime purpose is to provide causal explanations of phenomena” (Robson 2011:525). The open-ended questions allowed the participants to elaborate and

subsequently enrich the numbers extracted from the quantitative part of the questionnaire (Creswell and Plano 2011; O’Leary 2010). Thematic text analysis of the open-ended questions provided further answers to the research questions. Acknowledging that the findings could be contradictory and the analysis time-consuming, especially when a large number of responses are involved, double-blind coding of the data by two researchers enhanced the internal validity of the study and minimized the risk of subjectivity by promoting investigator triangulation (Bryman 2012; Thomas 2009; Wellington 2000).

### 3 Analysis

The sample was based on 188 first-year medicine and dentistry students (94% of the overall sample). Of these, 135 students were females (72%) and 53 males (28%).

#### 3.1 Research Q1: Quantitative analysis

In the first part of the analysis, we present the quantitative data collected for the first research question. Particularly, the focus is on students’ perceptions regarding the mediation activities (e.g. team presentations, conference poster creation and poster presentations) in Module 2-3. Table 2 demonstrates that team presentations on medical topics carried out face-to-face in class (Module 2) were perceived as a useful task by many students (M=3.79, SD=1.32); similarly, presentations in the conference, were perceived positively by most (M=3.2, SD=1.056).

Regarding the preparation for the conference (Table 3), an almost even number of students (roughly 14%) selected the two extreme options of evaluation (working on the presentation was very useful: worth it / working on the presentation was too time-consuming: not worth it). Half of the students (55.8%) considered that attending the conference and listening to the presentations was beneficial. This response was also highlighted in the students’ comments on the acquired skills (open-ended questions); which is presented later in the qualitative part of this study.

Table 2. *Self-assessment questionnaire in Medical English – overall impressions*

Questions	Mean	SD	SE
<b>What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates? (1: not useful at all- 5: very useful)</b>	3.79	1.032	0.075
<b>What did you think of the conference: how useful was it? (1: not useful at all- 5: very useful)</b>	3.20	1.056	0.077

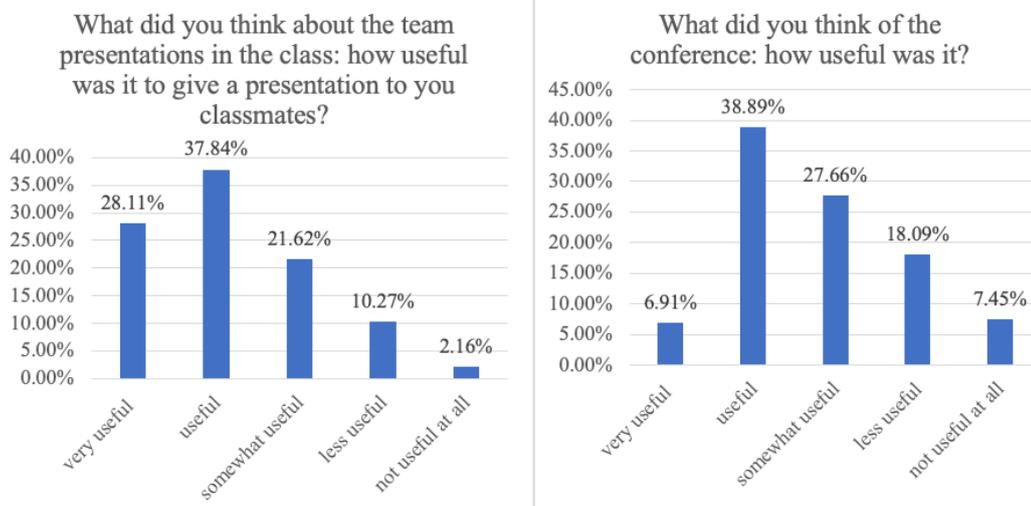


Figure 3. Illustrations of Table 2

Table 3. *Self-assessment questionnaire in Medical English – conference satisfaction*

<b>Did you find:</b>	<b>%</b>
the conference better than expected	38.8%
the conference not as good as expected	17.5%
the conference a good solution in the coronavirus situation	78.1%
the conference more demanding than expected but worth it	13.8%
participating in conference (Moodle) was too time-consuming: not worth it	9%
the tasks easier to do than first thought	43%
working on the presentation was very useful: worth it	14.8%
working on the presentation was too time-consuming: not worth it	14.3%
listening to the various topics was very useful	55.8%
listening to the various topics was not as useful as expected	17.5%
that the posters gave enough information: no need for the audio	16.4%
Other	7.4%

### *Pearson chi-squared correlations*

Three Pearson chi-squared tests were applied to investigate a correlation between the students' opinions regarding the usefulness of face-to-face team presentations in Module 2 and the useful aspects of the conference (acquired skills). We found a positive correlation ( $0.027 < 0.05$ ), between the aspects the students considered useful in the conference (Module 3) and the usefulness of the face-to-face presentations in Module 2 (Table 4). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The more positive responses students shared about the face-to-face presentations, the more useful they found the various skills they acquired from the conference assignment. Additionally, we used Pearson chi-squared correlations between the usefulness of the conference, the useful aspects of the conference (acquired skills), and the usefulness of face-to-face presentations in Module 2 (Table 5). As we can see, only the opinions regarding the usefulness of the classroom team presentations in Module 2 were correlated to the usefulness of the conference (Pearson chi-squared test:  $0.000 < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Specifically, there was a linear relationship between the two variables since the Linear-by-Linear Association value was 0 ( $< 0.05$ ) (Table 5), which means that the relationship between the two variables would be presented as a straight-line in a graph (Blaikie 2003). The students who found the conference useful also considered the team presentations in class useful.

**Table 4. Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses to the useful aspects of the conference (acquired skills) and team presentations in class**

<b>Crosstab: Module 3: reporting about clinical psychology- What did you find useful in the conference? * What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates</b>							
% of Total							
		What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates?					Total
		not useful at all	less useful	somewhat useful	useful	very useful	
Module 3: reporting about clinical psychology- What did you find useful in the conference?	language skills		2.7%	2.2%	4.3%		9.2%
	cognitive skills	1.6%	4.3%	16.2%	23.8%	16.8%	62.7%
	learner autonomy			0.5%	1.6%	3.2%	5.4%
	transferable skills	0.5%	3.2%	2.7%	8.1%	8.1%	22.7%
Total		2.2%	10.3%	21.6%	37.8%	28.1%	100.0%
<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>							
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			
Pearson Chi-Square		23.113 <sup>a</sup>	12	.027			
Likelihood Ratio		27.023	12	.008			
Linear-by-Linear Association		3.544	1	.060			
N of Valid Cases		185					

**Table 5. Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses to usefulness of and relevance of the conference (acquired skills)/ Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses to usefulness of the conference and team presentations in class**

<b>What did you think of the conference: how useful was it? * Module 3: reporting about clinical psychology What did you find useful in the conference? Crosstabulation</b>						<b>What did you think of the conference: how useful was it? * What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates? Crosstabulation</b>						
What did you think of the conference: how useful was it?	Module 3: reporting about clinical psychology-What did you find useful in the conference?					What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates?						
	language skills	subject knowledge	learner autonomy	Transferable skills	Total	not useful at all	less useful	somewhat useful	useful	very useful	Total	
not useful at all	1.1%	5.3%		1.1%	7.5%	1.1%	2.2%	2.2%	1.6%	0.5%	7.6%	
less useful	1.1%	10.6%	0.5%	5.9%	18.1%	0.5%	3.2%	4.9%	5.9%	3.8%	18.4%	
useful	4.3%	16.5%	1.1%	5.9%	27.8%		3.2%	6.5%	14.1%	4.3%	28.1%	
somewhat useful	2.7%	26.1%	3.2%	8.0%	39.9%	0.5%	1.6%	7.6%	15.7%	14.1%	39.5%	
very useful		4.8%	0.5%	1.6%	6.9%			0.5%	0.5%	5.4%	6.5%	
Total	9.0%	63.3%	5.3%	22.3%	100%	2.2%	10.3%	21.6%	37.8%	28.1%	100.0%	
<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)				
Pearson Chi-Square	9.866a	12	.628			49.984a	16	.000				
Likelihood Ratio	11.232	12	.509			44.748	16	.000				
Linear-by-Linear Association	.089	1	.766			28.776	1	.000				
N of Valid Cases	188						185					

### 3.2 RQ1: Qualitative analysis

Four themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the open-ended question “Reporting about clinical psychology: What did you find useful in the conference?”: 1) subject knowledge, 2) transferable skills, 3) language skills, and 4) learner autonomy.

#### *Subject course knowledge*

Based on the responses, ‘learning their subject’ was the most prevalent benefit of the conference. The students mainly focused on the connection of the conference with the topics taught in the Clinical Psychology course. Since the students did not have the opportunity to learn about all the topics, they recognized that the conference was an alternative way to familiarize themselves with them intensively.

For example:

- *“Some of the presentations were really informative and useful. I got new information about really important topics”* (student no. 77)
- *“Great posters combined with the audio was great.”* (student no. 159)
- *“Hearing about topics that maybe I wouldn’t have dug that deep into on my own time.”* (student no. 1)
- *“The posters were short and informative, so it was easy and interesting to study”* (student no. 5)

Some of the respondents were more specific on which presentations they appreciated the most, such as: *“Things about (doctor’s) burnout, like risk factors and how to avoid it.”* (student no. 160) and *“I learned about diseases, terms and some health conditions that are common with Finns”* (student no. 183). In both cases, they found the topics meaningful because they could relate to them. Moreover, some of the students also reflected on this year’s exceptional circumstances acknowledging that they would not have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the topics otherwise. The responses of the following students can be seen as representative examples: *“I learnt a lot about our topic and found it very interesting. Especially since we didn’t get the chance to participate in the psychology group teaching, I felt like this compensated for it a bit”* (student no. 34) and, *“I learnt about the topics that we didn’t study at the psychology course due to coronavirus”* (student no. 72).

#### *Transferable skills*

Transferable skills have been described as “generic personal and interpersonal qualities which are independent of the field of study” (Jones 2013). On a macro-level, the students saw a clear link between the transferable skills which were acquired during the conference assignment and their future profession. They reflected on the authenticity of the mediation tasks by acknowledging that they could encounter a similar situation in their professional life. For example:

- *“preparing presentations and presenting medical topics to professionals”* (student no. 116)
- *“Learned how to participate in an e-conference”* (student no. 121)
- *“Learning how an online conference might work.”* (student no. 123)
- *“It made me think about the different things I read and how they affect me in my life and/or future work.”* (student no. 5)

On a micro-level, students identified the application of critical-thinking skills by making decisions about their own posters and scripts, evaluating others’ posters and understanding the criteria of a good scientific poster. The students reflected on the procedures and the decisions that they had to make. Their answers echoed both the “mediation strategies to explain a new concept” and “to simplify a text”. Some of the responses mentioned the special circumstances and skills they acquired thanks to the conference’s online features. Some examples were the following:

- *"I learned how posters are made and how to get the most out of them by listening to all of them and comparing them between each other."* (student no. 3)
- *"It was useful to do the poster and put ONLY the most important things on it and then decide what more to tell in the script."* (student no. 22)
- *"It was good to learn what a good poster should be like."* (student no. 49)
- *"It was useful to learn how are the scientific posters look like and how can posters be made in English."* (student no. 185)
- *"I learned how to add a recording to a PPT, I have never done that before. A very useful new thing to learn."* (student no. 119)
- *"I think the students had cropped the topics really well. They highlighted the most important parts of each topic well."* (student no. 79)
- *"At the conference, it was good to note the presentation of the different students. Live performances would probably have been much more rewarding, but the situation was what it was"* (student no. 9)

A number of students also commented on the development of team-working skills and giving feedback as positive outcomes of the conference. For example, student no. 50 said: *"Overall, I think it was a great way of teaching us teamwork- related skills. I found it more useful in that aspect than in psychology's aspect. However, it was a good way to teach us the main points about other groups' topic in psychology. So, I'll give this thumbs up"*. Regarding online teamwork, student no. 61 acknowledged: *"I learned how to work in a group better, even when we couldn't meet in person. Also, I learned a lot about my own topic, chronic pain."*

### Language skills

Only a few students stressed the importance of the conference regarding language skills. They focused primarily on listening and then, vocabulary and writing. Some of the replies were general such as:

- *"listening comprehension developed"* (student no. 87)
- *"It helped me to listen and understand the spoken medical English."* (student no. 147)
- *"Audio listening was great."* (student no. 167)

Additionally, student no. 139 praised the speakers' diversity *"It was nice to hear many different kinds of speakers"*. Student no. 144 emphasized the importance of activating their listening and oral skills *"I had to work with text and pronouncing"*. Regarding vocabulary development and writing, they pointed out the opportunity to learn more medical terminology. The following extracts are examples of their use of cross-linguistic mediation for the event. For instance:

- *"Really good idea to combine the [psychology] topics with the medical English course so that you can learn some new medical English terminology at the same time"* (student no. 7)
- *"I learned more about scientific writing"* (student no. 188)
- *"Learning to write very short texts"* (student no. 99)

### Learner autonomy

A minor but still interesting theme that emerged was the independence the students enjoyed due to the pandemic. Due to the asynchronous online delivery of the conference, they could choose to listen to several presentations based on their interests. Students expressed their appreciation for this kind of flexibility. In their opinion, this mode of learning allowed them to control and adjust the pace of their learning, something that would not be possible during a traditional conference.

- *"I liked the fact that I got to choose which presentations I want to listen to."* (student no. 26)
- *"It was good that I could spend certain time for each presentation: some were more difficult to understand, so I used more time on those. So, what I am trying to say is that it was good that I could choose myself how*

*much I spend on each presentation and quiz.” (student no. 29)*

- *“Maybe the fact that I could choose 4 most interesting topics to me.” (student no. 37)*
- *“As the presentations were in Moodle, it was easy to watch them as you could pause them and watch again if some information was missed.” (student no. 104)*

### 3.3 RQ2: Special circumstances (Covid-19 pandemic)

As presented in both Table 6 and Figure 3, the vast majority did not report significant difficulties ( $M=2.21$ ,  $SD=1.151$ ) regarding the special circumstances imposed by the pandemic. Only a small percentage of the respondents (13.83%) found the transition from face-to-face to online mode difficult. Moreover, in the multiple-choice option (Table 3) students revealed that they found the conference better than expected (38.8%) and only less than a quarter of the participants (17.5%) reported their disappointment. Overall, the vast majority acknowledged that the online conference was the right solution during the pandemic (78.1%), while very few found the conference too time-consuming and not worth participating in (9%).

Table 6. *Self-assessment questionnaire in Medical English – special circumstances*

Questions	Mean	SD	SE
<b>How difficult did you find to switch to online Zoom meetings? (1: not difficult - 5: very difficult)</b>	2.21	1.151	0.083

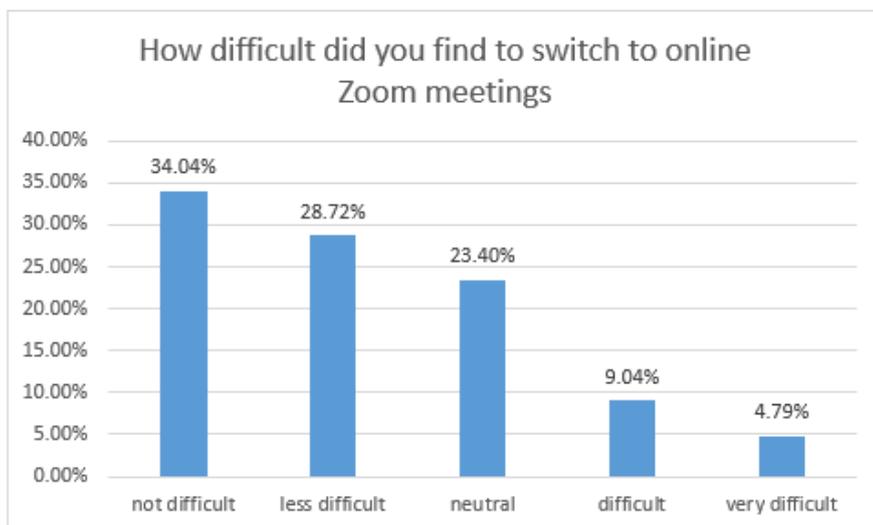


Figure 4. Illustration of Table 5

The combined results in Table 7 illustrate that there was no correlation between the difficulties caused by the online mode and the opinions about the usefulness of the conference or the aspects the students found useful in Module 3. In Table 7, the Pearson Chi-square values were over 0.05 ( $0.250 > 0.05$  and  $0.337 > 0.05$ ). Taking these facts into consideration, the null hypothesis was accepted, and the values are considered independent.

**Table 7. Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses regarding the special circumstances and usefulness of the conference / Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses regarding the special circumstances and useful aspects of the conference**

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES (coronavirus). How difficult did you find to switch to online Zoom meetings?* What did you think of the conference: how useful was it? Crosstabulation							SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES (coronavirus). How difficult did you find to switch to online Zoom meetings?* Module 3: What did you find useful in the conference? Crosstabulation				
How difficult did you find to switch to online Zoom meetings?	What did you think of the conference: how useful was it?						Module 3: What did you find useful in the conference?				
	not useful at all	less useful	useful	somewhat useful	very useful	Total	language skills	subject knowledge	learner autonomy	transferable skills	Total
not difficult	4.3%	3.7%	9.6%	12.8%	3.7%	34.4%	2.1%	20.7%	1.6%	9.6%	34.0%
less difficult	0.5%	4.8%	8.5%	13.3%	1.6%	28.7%	3.7%	18.1%	0.5%	6.4%	28.7%
neutral	1.6%	5.9%	6.4%	8.5%	1.1%	23.4%	2.7%	14.4%	2.1%	4.3%	23.4%
difficult		2.1%	3.2%	3.2%	0.5%	9.0%	0.5%	6.9%		1.6%	9.0%
very difficult	1.1%	1.6%		2.1%		4.8%		3.2%	1.1%	0.5%	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>18.1%</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>39.9%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>63.3%</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>22.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>				<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>		
Pearson Chi-Square	19.359a	16	.250				13.458a	12	.337		
Likelihood Ratio	23.130	16	.110				13.242	12	.352		
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.669	1	.196				1.009	1	.315		
N of Valid Cases	188						188				

## 4 Discussion

Mediation, according to Coste and Cavalli (2015: 15), can be regarded “either as aiming to provide access to information and knowledge and to competence building (cognitive mediation) or as contributing to interaction, the quality of exchanges and the resolution of conflicts (relational mediation)”. By analyzing the students’ responses in the self-assessment questionnaire, we aimed to investigate how students on the Medical English course perceived various mediation activities (face-to-face team presentations, conference poster creation, and conference presentation) as part of their learning and development, and how the pandemic affected their perceptions.

Focusing on the first research question “How did students perceive the mediation activities (team presentations, conference posters creations and poster presentations) as part of Module 2-3 in the 2019-2020 academic year?”, we found that students recognized the benefits of the activities. The responses were mostly positive for all mediation tasks. A positive correlation was found between the usefulness of the face-to-face team presentations of medical topics in Module 2, and the conference presentations in Module 3. An explanation for this could be students’ familiarity with the medical and psychology topics, which gave the appropriate context for the students to select and present relevant information (Zrníková and Bujalková, 2018), as well as the scaffolding that promoted cognitive mediation in the Medical English course (Coste and Cavalli 2015:15). We also identified four main themes regarding the students’ perceptions of the mediation tasks in the course: subject course knowledge (63.3%), transferable skills (22.34%), language skills (9.04%), and learner autonomy (5.32%). The findings appear to be in agreement with another study (Pavlovskaya and Lankina 2019), which highlights that mediation combines language proficiency with transferable skills associated with professional knowledge and future employability.

In higher proficiency levels (B2-C1), course activities generally involve a wider range of genres and discourses which students must mediate to complete the task (Stathopoulou 2020). This conference indeed is such a course component, which stimulates mediation skills. Most respondents recognized the mediation products (poster creation/presentation) as the most significant contributors to their

development, especially related to subject knowledge and transferable skills. Moreover, their responses seemed to focus primarily on the mediation products rather than on language learning. This clearly resonates with the action-oriented approach introduced in the CV, which emphasizes “purposeful, collaborative tasks, whose primary focus is not language” (2018: 27). The role of mediation in the course was multi-functional; creating a relationship between the learner and teachers, the learner with other learners, and with the materials (Beacco et al. 2016). No consensus was found regarding the most useful part of the conference. However, all students’ responses regarding the presentations and posters can be clearly linked to the mediation strategies and scales and/or authenticity of the mediation task. Specifically, many examples of mediation strategies such as “linking to previous knowledge, adapting language, and streamlining a text” (COE 2020a: 90) according to the requirements of the poster as a new genre, were identified under the transferable skills theme. The students reflected on the procedures and the decisions they had to make. Many commented on the adaptation of language based on the audience and product. Their answers reveal that the students perceived the assignment as a combination of mediation strategies and tasks; which confirms that the task follows Stathopoulou’s recommendation (2015) that the mediation activity and its strategies should be utilized simultaneously as they complement each other.

Regarding the second research question “How did students cope with the mediation activities during the Covid-19 pandemic?”, our findings demonstrate that most students felt they benefited from participating in the conference and that the online solution was a successful alternative during the pandemic. Compared to the 2018-2019 student cohort about which we reported in the 2019 EALTA Conference, the views of the 2020 cohort were slightly more positive regarding the usefulness of the conference. The mean value of the 2019 cohort answers was 3.19, while in 2020, the value was 3.2. This demonstrates that the pandemic and its consequences did not negatively affect the students’ perceptions of the usefulness of the mediation activities. Hence, we can conclude that the online solution achieved the original aim of the conference assignment: higher learning through mediation. This notion is supported by the Pearson Chi-square value, which showed no correlation between the aspects found useful in the conference and difficulties expressed regarding the online mode. Additionally, the low number (14%) of students who found it difficult to switch to online sessions and the high number (78.1%) of those accepting overall the online conference as a good solution during the pandemic indicate that students adapted quickly to the virtual model. This finding also emerged from the open-ended questions. This is in line with recent studies reporting the students’ positive perceptions of the online teaching-learning offered during the pandemic (Mishra et al 2020). Another explanation for overall satisfaction with the online delivery could be a generational characteristic: Generation Z, the internet generation, displays a willingness and ability to communicate online and operate in a virtual environment from a young age (Yawson and Yamoah 2020).

## 5 Conclusion

This study has implications for designing language and content integrated courses in HE settings utilizing mediation activities. The findings of this research give voice to students’ perceptions regarding the mediation tasks, a view that is often neglected in research. Additionally, this study can inform ESAP practice in medical education. Overall, students’ responses regarding the usefulness of the conference assignment seem to highlight the benefit of mediation, which according to Dendrinos, is “a purposeful social practice, aiming at the interpretation of (social) meanings which are then to be communicated/ relayed to others” (2006: 12). Respondents also acknowledged that participating in the conference clearly enhanced their subject learning and facilitated higher-level cognitive processes, which is obviously due to the soft-CLIL course design. Acknowledging the benefits to students’ learning and their satisfaction, the teachers, however, experienced the solution as a considerable challenge with an increased workload, primarily due to the unprecedented circumstances. This contradiction is similar to the difficulties reported in another CLIL/ESAP course (Braidwood and Hirvonen-Kantola 2018). Compared to other

studies using an adapted version of the Can Do mediation statements in class (Saito 2020; Schmidt and Head 2020), we considered that applying open-ended questions in the self-assessment form would stimulate a deeper understanding of the students' experiences of the processes that mediation activities involve. However, in future we will include certain examples of Can Do mediation statements in the self-assessment form after the open-ended questions to facilitate further exploration of the conference assignment. Regarding the research methodology, one limitation we identified in the use of open-ended questions was that many students misunderstood the purpose of the self-assessment questionnaire and used it as a tool for providing feedback on the course design, which is possibly due to the widespread practice of giving feedback within HE and outside, particularly in Finnish healthcare. Therefore, we think that elements of self-assessment must be introduced at earlier stages of the course. Such tasks could complement peer-feedback, raise awareness of the benefits of self-monitoring the learning progress, and consequently the course will also foster students' metacognitive skills.

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## 7 Authors' Contributions

The authors have contributed equally to this study.

## 8 Biographies

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# Foreign Language Education Reform through Action Research—Putting CEFR educational principles into practice

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*This research, funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)<sup>1</sup>, has been undertaken by the JALT CEFR & LP SIG<sup>2</sup> in order to support numerous small-scale action research (AR) projects related to foreign language teaching in Japan and beyond from April 2020 to March 2023. Practitioners invited to participate in the project will reflect on and find ways to improve their teaching practices using the CEFR as a reference and conceptual tool, and will be provided with support and guidance to ensure that their research is conducted systematically in relation to the AR literature and reflective of CEFR principles. This paper proposes a CEFR-focused AR model (CARM) based on a critical review of the AR literature. The CARM model is the product of the first-year of this research project (hereafter referred to as the Kaken research project). Our hope is that teacher-research guided by this model will produce robust findings that practitioners and other stakeholders in language programs will find both informative and of practical use.*

**Keywords:** Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), action research (AR), practitioner-researcher, critical reflection

## 1 Introduction

The CEFR-focused AR model (CARM) is a reflective 3-stage model (PLAN, ACTION, CRITICAL REVIEW) that encourages teachers in stage 1 to reflect on their teaching practices and beliefs and then specify a concrete solution to a teaching-learning issue using the CEFR. Data to evaluate the efficacy of the solution are collected and analyzed in stages 2 and 3 and are then used to decide how best to proceed (e.g., how to revise the intervention) in the subsequent AR cycle. While many AR models devote a fourth stage to reflection, following Burns (2010: 141), reflection is seen as integral in each stage of the CARM model (See Sect. 5.1). Detailed guidance to ensure the research is conducted systematically and rigorously is also provided in the CARM model.

1. JSPS Grant-in-Aid research project (Kaken) (2020-2022) No. 20K00759 「アクションリサーチの手法を用いた言語教育改善: CEFRの教育理念を参考にして」 Foreign Language Education Reform through Action Research: Putting CEFR educational principles into practice. For more details see <https://cefrjapan.net/kaken-5>
2. The CEFR & Language Portfolio (LP) SIG is a special interest group within The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT).

The paper is divided into five sections. It starts by describing why action research is the perfect vehicle for teachers to systematically research putting CEFR educational principles into practice. The following section, a brief overview of the CEFR, is based on the CEFR & LP SIG's latest publication, *CEFR-informed Learning, Teaching and Assessment: A Practical Guide* (Nagai et al. 2020). An overview of action research is then provided, and includes an introduction to various AR models, ranging from the traditional (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988) to the more recent (Mertler 2020; Mills 2018). Essential features common to all AR models are highlighted to clarify how AR differs from other types of research. A model for AR that defines the research focus in relation to the CEFR and builds upon the principles of AR laid out in section 4 is then proposed. The paper concludes with a discussion of how the viability of this model will be examined over the final two years of the Kaken research project.

## 2 The Complementary Nature of the CEFR and Action Research

Action research (AR) has a long, rich history dating back to the 1930's, when this style of research was first defined by Kurt Lewin in the United States (Adelman 1993). Furthermore, the CEFR has been rapidly growing in influence since its publication in 2001. However, it appears that very little research exists which *explicitly* uses an AR approach to promote and evaluate CEFR-informed educational reform (Bower et al. 2017; Jaakkola et al. 2002)<sup>3</sup>. To the best of our knowledge no persuasive argument has yet been made for the optimal nature of AR in facilitating the planning, conduct and evaluation of teaching interventions drawing on the CEFR. In the following paragraphs we first explain why the CEFR is an ideal resource for language education AR. Second, we present four points of strong synergy between AR and the CEFR. And last, we explain how the rigorous nature of AR can improve the quality of CEFR-informed research.

The CEFR is ideal for facilitating each of the commonly defined stages of AR. The CEFR and its accompanying resources expedite the first step of AR, which is reflection on current teaching practice to identify a problem. The CEFR helps at this stage by clearly defining language proficiencies, and also by describing an action-oriented approach (Piccardo and North 2019). The CEFR can be used to identify language education problems or areas needing improvement, for example, a need for a greater focus on autonomy, for better alignment between course goals, content and assessment, or for more focus on learners' active use of language. Furthermore, the CEFR provides an abundant set of resources to draw upon at the second stage of action research: planning and implementing solutions. Through its function as a common framework, the CEFR facilitates shared understanding of language proficiency, which supports the later stages of AR: objective evaluation of research interventions and the communication of results.

In the following paragraphs, we present four areas of synergy between the CEFR and AR. Firstly, these two naturally align through a common aim of promoting teacher development based on critical reflection on practice. Reflection is fundamental to action research (McIntosh 2010; Mertler 2020). Mertler (2020: 44) states that "Action research is primarily about critical examination of one's own practice. In order for someone to critically examine her or his practice, that person must engage in systematic reflection on that practice." Fostering reflection is also a central tenet of the CEFR. "(T)he primary aim of the CEFR [...] (is) to encourage reflection on current practice in relation to the specification of what is taught and the assessment of the successful learning of that content" (Sheehan 2010). Furthermore, "The CEFR is also intended to provide a shared basis for reflection and communication among the different partners in the field [...]" (COE 2020b). The common primacy of reflection as a means to improve practice is an important facet of the synergistic relationship between the CEFR and AR.

The second synergistic aspect of AR and the CEFR is a common focus on adaptation to local contexts and local problems. Adaptation of the CEFR descriptors for specific educational contexts is encouraged

3. The ECML AR Communities project advocates AR for language teacher professional development in Europe, but it does not specifically refer to or encourage implementation of the CEFR.

in the CEFR. The CEFR-Companion Volume states that “Users of the CEFR are invited to select the CEFR levels and illustrative descriptors that they consider to be appropriate for their learners’ needs, to adapt the formulation of the latter, in order to better suit the specific context concerned, and to supplement them with their own descriptors where they deem it necessary” (COE 2020a: 42). AR is also intended to focus on small, local, context-specific problems. According to Stringer (2014: 1), it “uses continuing cycles of investigation designed to reveal effective solutions to issues and problems experienced in specific situations and localized settings”. This shared adaptability to local and small-scale contexts is a key facet of the synergistic nature of AR and the CEFR.

A focus on collaboration is another important common point between AR and the CEFR. The CEFR is intended to facilitate collaboration and communication between practitioners, educational institutions and educational stakeholders by providing a common meta-language for describing language proficiency. AR is also commonly defined as a collaborative process (Burns 1999; Mertler 2018, 2020; Wallace 1998). The mutual focus on collaboration further strengthens the synergy between the CEFR and AR.

Finally, the CEFR and AR both aim at reform. The CEFR CV states that “[...] the CEFR is a tool to facilitate educational reform projects ...” (COE 2020a: 26), and according to the Glossary of Education Reform (2015), “Educators typically conduct action research as an extension of a particular school-improvement plan, project or goal—i.e., action research is nearly always (a part of) a school-reform strategy.” This common focus on educational reform is the fourth and final important aligning feature of the CEFR and AR.

In addition to the natural alignment of the CEFR and AR outlined above, AR has the potential to greatly improve the quality of research into local CEFR implementation, due to its systematic and rigorous nature (Mertler 2020). While there is a growing body of literature on the implementation of the CEFR in language education (Alderson 2002; Eaquals 2008; O’Dwyer et al. 2017), the research approach used is often not explicitly defined, and criteria for conclusions reached along with solid evidential backing are sometimes lacking. We believe that by applying an AR approach, research on CEFR-informed interventions can be made more systematic and produce more robust research, from which better supported conclusions will be generated. Such solid AR research will be invaluable as a reference for practitioners and other stakeholders in language programs.

In conclusion, we strongly believe that the complementary nature of the CEFR and AR outlined in the above paragraphs makes AR the ideal research approach for investigating and evaluating small-scale, CEFR-informed educational reform. For this reason, we are actively promoting and supporting CEFR-focused AR projects in Japan and beyond as part of a Kaken project. We encourage more language education researchers to utilize an AR approach in order to broaden and deepen research into applications of the CEFR.

### 3 The Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (CEFR)

In the following section, a brief overview of the CEFR is provided to demonstrate the direction the CEFR encourages AR researchers to take. Firstly, a description of the *action-oriented approach* is provided. Secondly, important approaches to curriculum design known as *backward design* and *needs analysis* are described. Finally, the *comprehensive, transparent, coherent* and *neutral* nature of the CEFR is introduced to illustrate why the CEFR can serve as a metalanguage for action researchers to discuss interventions made in their local contexts.

#### 3.1 An overview of the CEFR

First published in 2001 by the Council of Europe (COE) in English and French, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR) (COE 2001) has been translated into 40 languages (COE 2020a), informing language standards, curricula and education reform both

inside and outside of Europe. Since 2001, the CEFR, its use, and the accompanying European Language Portfolio (ELP) have been thoroughly researched (Byram and Parmenter 2012; Kühn and Perez Cavana 2012; Language Learning in Higher Education 2011 Special Issue; Martyniuk and Noijons 2007), leading to the publication of the CEFR Companion Volume (CEFR/CV) (COE 2020a) that complements and expands upon the original volume.

One of the primary goals of the CEFR is to “stimulate reflection and exchange between language professionals for curriculum development and in teacher education” (COE 2020a: 11). The theoretical foundation for this inquiry is the educational values promoted in the CEFR, framed within a descriptive model of language use and competences. In practical terms, CEFR reference levels and illustrative descriptors serve as the metalanguage for discussing the complexity of language proficiency and for reflecting on and communicating decisions on learning objectives and outcomes that are coherent and transparent (COE 2020a).

Learning, teaching and assessment can first be discussed using the Common Reference Levels—six broad bands of proficiency covering four modes of communication: receptive, interactive, productive and mediative skills. These skills are articulated in CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales containing detailed descriptions of language use and strategies according to real-world tasks along with the competences necessary to realize these goals. The justification for defining learning objectives in terms of performance standards is explained in the CEFR, and includes “the promotion of the positive formulation of educational aims and outcomes at all levels”, which in turn “inform curriculum reform and pedagogy” and “provide transparency and clear reference points for assessment purposes” (COE 2020a: 27). The original volume of the CEFR (COE 2001) has been updated in the CEFR Companion Volume (COE 2020a), with new descriptors for language activities and competences. Another important development is the ongoing work into Reference Level Descriptions (RLDs) for different languages (COE 2019b), which specify the grammar and vocabulary at various CEFR levels. The Companion Volume (COE 2020a: chapter 2) offers an excellent introduction to the CEFR, and North (2014) provides the most comprehensive and detailed description.

The CEFR is also complemented by the European Language Portfolio (ELP) (COE 2019a), both of which were conceived and introduced together in 2001. The ELP is a concrete tool encouraging language users to monitor and document their progress in relation to the Common Reference Levels and illustrative scales, enabling learners to take responsibility for their language learning.

## **3.2 Key aspects of the CEFR**

### ***3.2.1 Action-oriented approach and learners as social agents***

The action-oriented approach views users and learners of a language primarily as ‘social agents’ (COE 2001: 9). The emphasis is on what the learners can do with the language (action-oriented) as opposed to what the learners should know about the language (knowledge-oriented). The action-oriented approach of the CEFR envisions curricula and courses based on real-world communicative needs, which are communicated to the learners using ‘Can Do’ descriptors, and proficiency is achieved (and assessed) through guidance and practice with appropriate real-life and pedagogic tasks (COE 2020a: 28).

By presenting the language user/learner as a ‘social agent,’ learners not only use language for social purposes, but they are encouraged and expected to take responsibility for their learning through such measures as goal-setting and reflecting on the language learning process and their progress. Learner autonomy is a central goal within the CEFR. Furthermore, learners are seen as “plurilingual, pluricultural beings (which) means allowing them to use all their linguistic resources when necessary, encouraging them to see similarities and regularities as well as differences between languages and cultures” (COE 2020a: 30).

### 3.2.2 Backward Design and Needs Analysis

*Backward Design* A curriculum or course that is based on the CEFR and an action-oriented approach starts with the specification of learning outcomes in terms of language use and then proceeds to identify the content, methodology, activity types, and assessment tools most appropriate for realizing these goals. This is known as *Backward Design* (see Richards 2013)<sup>4</sup>. In other words, CEFR descriptors serve as the goals for language learning (e.g., learning outcomes) and Reference Language Descriptions (RLDs) inform content selection<sup>5</sup>. Assessment tasks linked to ‘Can Do’ descriptors have the potential to reinforce use of the action-oriented approach through a positive washback effect on classroom practice as teachers are more likely to employ tasks in their lessons if their students will be assessed using similar tasks<sup>6</sup>. Employing *Backward Design* is challenging, but AR can help teachers document and evaluate the efficacy of this approach in a systematic way.

*Needs Analysis* When learning outcomes are articulated using Can Do descriptors, determining the most appropriate objectives involves a Needs Analysis, which refers to “the process of gathering information before or during a course to determine objectives that can then be analysed in order to create an inventory of aims and suitable activities for that course” (North et al. 2018: 47). The main advantage of using CEFR-descriptor scales when designing a curriculum or course is that stakeholders can help identify the important target situations, activities, and possible levels of each activity (North et al. 2018: 53). Descriptors can also “provide a detailed, flexible resource for [...] offering a ‘menu’ to negotiate priorities with adult learners in a process of ongoing needs analysis” (COE 2020a: 42).

There are many parallels between needs analysis and AR. In fact, a needs analysis can be thought of as a form of AR due to the importance of researching how best to accommodate the learners’ needs and evaluate the appropriateness of the learning objectives that were chosen.

### 3.2.3 Comprehensive, Transparent, Coherent and Neutral

To serve as a metalanguage for educators (and action researchers), it is necessary for the CEFR to be comprehensive, transparent and coherent. The CEFR is quite comprehensive as it attempts to “specify as full a range of language knowledge, skills and use as possible” (COE 2001: 7). This is accomplished through a taxonomic descriptive scheme covering domains of language use along with communicative language activities, strategies and competences. The information within the CEFR must also be transparent, or “clearly formulated and explicit, available and readily comprehensible to users”, and coherent, or “free from internal contradictions” due to the “harmonious relationships” between the different components of the CEFR (COE 2001: 7). In the previous section, the importance of local adaptation was made. While a proposed solution might not be appropriate for other contexts, the comprehensive, transparent, and coherent nature of the CEFR provides a shared understanding for which to view an AR project.

4. Traditionally, course development employed Forward Design, which starts with content specification (e.g., grammar and vocabulary) then moves to methodology and later assessment. Curriculum development within the Task-Based Language Teaching literature tends to prioritize the process of teaching and learning, or Central Design.
5. RLDs are available for Croatian, Czech, English, German, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish (COE 2019b), but Hulstijn (2014: 14) argues that these and other RLDs are at considerably different levels of development. Therefore, RLDs should be seen as reference works to draw upon when designing courses and assessment tasks rather than prescriptive lists to be blindly followed.
6. The justification for using pedagogic tasks is not just their link to real world contexts, but also their ability to further develop the learners’ communicative competence. According to Ellis (2009: 222; emphasis added), these tasks and Task-Based Learning and Teaching in general are “based on the principle that language learning will progress most successfully if teaching aims simply *to create contexts in which the learner’s natural learning capacity can be nurtured* rather than making a systematic attempt to teach the language bit by bit (as in approaches based on structural syllabus)”.

It is important to point out that the CEFR is neutral in that it does not prescribe any particular pedagogical approach (COE 2020a: 29). However, decisions concerning pedagogy must incorporate the underlying principle that language learning should be directed towards enabling learners to act in real-life situations (COE 2020a: 29), and this is given priority in curriculum development through Backward Design, enacted in the classroom through the use of purposeful, collaborative tasks (material development and implementation) and reinforced with assessment tasks linked to ‘Can Do’ descriptors (assessment).

In addition to learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio, these four areas—curriculum and course design, materials development, classroom implementation, and assessment—are perhaps the most common themes of CEFR-focused research, and therefore, the CARM model is built around these themes. The authors of this article have also written a practical guide to the CEFR with chapters organized around these themes, and each chapter includes exercises to guide the reader, case studies serving as examples of contextualized CEFR use, and extensive lists of resources (See Nagai et al. 2020). As mentioned earlier, one of the primary goals of the CEFR is to stimulate reflection. For the CEFR to have a lasting and significant impact on education, however, this reflection must be conducted systematically (e.g., through action research). Therefore, in the following section, the action research literature will be reviewed before proposing CARM—a CEFR-focused Action Research Model.

## **4 Overview of action research (AR)**

The CARM model differs from other AR models in a number of ways which will be discussed in Section 5, but CARM is also informed by these models and based on a critical review of the AR literature. To keep Section 5 as brief as possible, this literature review is provided to examine the differences that exist between various models and approaches (Burns 1999, 2010; Kemmis and McTaggart 1998; Mertler 2020; Mills 2018), as well as the essential features common to them. The section ends with a discussion of rigor and how it can be incorporated into the stages and steps of AR, as exemplified by Mertler’s model (2020).

### **4.1 What is action research?**

In this section, a brief overview of action research (AR) is provided, starting with a definition of AR. According to Mills (2018: 10),

Action research is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn. This information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, affecting positive changes in the school environment ..., and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved.

Action research is research done by teachers for themselves; it is not imposed on them by someone else. Action research engages teachers in a four-step process:

- Identify an area of focus.
- Collect data.
- Analyze and interpret data.
- Develop an action plan.

As stressed in the above definition, action research is conducted systematically (as well as rigorously) so that information can be collected, analyzed, and used to develop a future plan of action that addresses a particular problem or area for improvement.

## 4.2 How AR differs from other types of research

What distinguishes AR research from other types of research is that the main goal of action research is “to address local-level problems with the anticipation of finding immediate solutions” (Mertler 2020: 14). These solutions can be based on numerical data collected and analyzed using quantitative research methodologies, narrative data (e.g., observation notes, interview transcripts, document analysis) obtained through qualitative research methodologies, or a combination of the two (i.e., a mixed-method research design). While AR can employ all three types of research methodologies, it aligns more closely with qualitative research studies, which “utilize a much broader, more holistic approach to data collection (than quantitative studies) [...] in order to gain knowledge, reach understanding, and answer research questions” (Mertler 2020: 13). These guiding research questions also tend to be more broad and open-ended than the ones for quantitative research. Last, AR is more flexible as teachers may not proceed through the cycle in a linear fashion but may find it necessary to go back and repeat steps as new insights emerge (see Mills 2018 visual in Table 1 for this last point; Mertler 2020: 36).

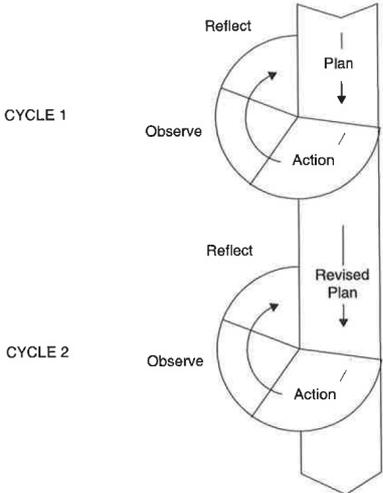
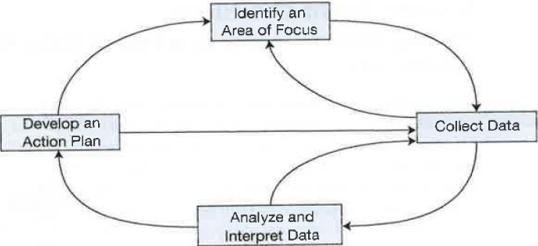
## 4.3 The different AR Models

One advantage of AR is its flexible nature—it can be employed for a variety of purposes and applied in different ways. All AR models, however, are a rather simplistic representation of a complex process. The stages appear straightforward, and they can be, but as with any research that is conducted rigorously, there are numerous issues to be considered, including the addition of more detailed steps within each stage and the use of different research methodologies to collect and analyze data. The goals and steps outlined in Mills (2018) are common to all models, including “(t)he central idea of the *action* part of AR (, which) is to intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice” (Burns 2010: 2). Furthermore, all models stress the importance of collecting and analyzing data. According to Burns (2010: 2),

[T]he improvements that happen in AR are ones based on information (or to use the research term, *data*) that an action researcher collects systematically. [...] So, the changes made in the teaching situation arise from solid information rather than from our hunches or assumptions about the way we think things are.

Comparing different models can be challenging as key terms and the contents of each step are defined differently (See Table 1). For example, in an earlier model by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), the **action** phase precedes **observation** and **reflection**. In short, the teacher is trying to determine whether their solution to a problem is effective. In later models (Mills 2018; Mertler 2020), developing an action plan is typically the last stage. A description and implementation of an *initial* intervention can be included in the first two stages (e.g., the **identification** stage in Mills 2018), but the term, **action plan**, is reserved for the *revised* intervention which is based on insights gained throughout the AR cycle (e.g., Step 4: **developing an action plan** in Mills 2018) and implemented in the next cycle. One reason for the different terms and order of the stages is that later models acknowledge that some teachers may want to start by identifying and understanding the nature of the problem(s) they face before considering possible solutions (see Mertler 2020: 24). These changes can also be seen as a response to earlier criticism of AR; namely, the lack of scientific methods and the less rigorous nature of AR research. Later, one such response (Mertler 2020) will be reviewed as it offers concrete steps to address these issues.

**Table 1. Two AR models**

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)	Mills (2018)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Planning:</b> identify a problem and develop a plan of action</li> <li>2. <b>Action:</b> put into action some deliberate intervention</li> <li>3. <b>Observe</b> systematically the effects of the action</li> <li>4. <b>Reflect</b> on the effects of the action</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Identifying</b> an area of focus</li> <li>2. <b>Collecting</b> data</li> <li>3. <b>Analyzing &amp; interpreting</b> the data</li> <li>4. <b>Developing</b> a plan of action</li> </ol>
 <p data-bbox="209 1137 687 1160">Figure 1.1 Cyclical AR model based on Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).</p>	<p data-bbox="842 613 1331 636"><b>figure 1-1 ■ The Dialectic Action Research Spiral</b></p> 

It is also possible to combine these approaches as Burns (2010) has done. However, it must be pointed out that Burns (2010: 8-9) used the terms outlined in Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) to organize the chapters of her book, but assigned them different meanings which more closely resemble the stages in the Mertler (2020) and Mills (2018) models. Furthermore, Burns (2010: 8) has argued that the weakness of the Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) model is that it is too fixed and rigid, and that in practice AR processes cannot be easily categorized into distinct steps and points out that some practitioners prefer to view AR as a number of interwoven processes (Burns 1999: 35-43).

The takeaway is that different schools of thought exist, ranging from the flexible approach offered by Burns (1999; 2010) to more systematic approaches (Mills 2018; Mertler 2020), with the traditional model (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988) falling somewhere in the middle. The goal of this section was to make the reader aware of these differences, the benefits and drawbacks of each approach, and stress that regardless of the model chosen, it is paramount that the research is conducted rigorously.

### 4.4 Essential Features of AR

Despite the differences between the AR models, there are many features which are considered essential. Burns' (2010: 10) excellent summary is a useful complement to the discussion so far.

First, it (AR) involves teachers in evaluating and reflecting on their teaching with the aim of bringing about continuing changes and improvements in practice. Second, it is small-scale, contextualised, and local in character, as the participants identify and investigate teaching-learning issues within a specific social situation, the school or classroom. Third, it is participatory

and inclusive, as it gives communities of participants the opportunity to investigate issues of immediate concern collaboratively within their own social situation. Fourth, it is different from the ‘intuitive’ thinking that occurs as a normal part of teaching, as changes in practice will be based on collecting and analysing data systematically. Finally, we can say that AR is based on democratic principles; it invests the ownership for changes in curriculum practice in the teachers and learners who conduct the research and is therefore empowering.

Taken together, these features are seen in AR research that is conducted by teachers (often working collaboratively with others) to address teaching-learning issues in their local context. These issues are resolved in an action plan which is informed by data collected and analyzed systematically and scientifically. Next, it is necessary to consider what is meant by conducting research rigorously.

#### 4.5 Rigor in AR

According to Mertler (2020: 26-27, citing Melrose 2001), “**rigor** refers to the quality, validity, accuracy, and credibility of action research and its findings. Rigor is typically associated with *validity* and *reliability* in quantitative studies—referring to the accuracy of instruments, data, and research findings—and with *accuracy*, *credibility*, and *dependability* in qualitative studies (Melrose 2001).”

Rigor, however, must be considered in relation to the intended audience of the research. A presentation for one’s colleagues does not need to meet the standards for a presentation at an international conference. Furthermore, research questions and design that are in an early stage of development (e.g., the first AR cycle) are often “emergent, changeable, and therefore unpredictable” (Mertler 2020: 27), particularly if the AR is intended for more local-level dissemination. The list of ways to ensure rigor listed in Mertler (2020: 27-28) is adapted from Melrose (2001), Mills (2018), and Stringer (2007), and includes:

- *Repetition of the cycle*—it is critical to proceed through a number of cycles, using earlier cycles to inform subsequent cycles.
- *Prolonged engagement and persistent observation* are necessary to fully understand the outcomes of an action research process.
- *Experience with the process*—novice researchers may benefit by working with an experienced researcher.
- *Polyangulation of data*—multiple sources of data and other information need to be included.
- *Member checking*—providing research participants with opportunities to check and review data and analysis.
- *Participant debriefing*—another opportunity for participants to provide insight with more attention paid to participants’ emotions and feelings that might have clouded their interpretations of events.
- *Diverse case analysis*—ensuring multiple perspectives, representing all stakeholders, are included
- *Referential adequacy*—“all aspects of a given action research study should clearly be drawn from and be reflective of the experiences and perspectives of those inherently involved in the study’s setting. This is essentially an issue of *contextualization*. Communications—both during and following a study—should be grounded in the language of the participants to ensure their understanding (Stringer 2007).” (Mertler 2020: 28).

#### 4.6 Step-by-Step Process of AR

Like Mills (2018), the Mertler model (Table 2) has clearly defined stages and steps to ensure their AR project is conducted systematically and rigorously. This does not mean that the researcher follows them in a linear fashion. It is quite possible to repeat (and even skip) certain steps and return to earlier stages. AR is cyclical in nature, not just because the cycle should be carried out at least twice, but AR as an iterative process is possible within a cycle as well.

**Table 2. Mertler (2020: 37) Step-by-Step Process of AR**

Planning Stage	1. Identifying and limiting the topic 2. Gathering information 3. Reviewing related literature 4. Developing a research plan
Acting Stage	5. Implementing the plan and collecting data 6. Analyzing data
Developing Stage	7. Developing an action plan
Reflecting Stage	8. Sharing and communicating results 9. Reflecting on the (entire) process

The **planning stage** involves several activities prior to implementing the action plan.

**Step 1** involves *identifying and limiting the topic* to a manageable size, taking into account time restrictions, the data collection and analysis skill levels of the researchers, and budget. The topic must be meaningful and important for the teacher, and focused on improving classroom practice.

**Step 2**, *gathering information*, includes talking to various stakeholders and collecting documents relevant to your topic. It has been referred to as *reconnaissance* by Mills (2018: 58-60) who argues that teachers should take time to reflect on their own beliefs, describe the situation they want to change, and explain “how and why the critical factors you’ve identified affect that situation” (Mills 2018: 60).

**Step 3**, *reviewing the related literature*, “can help you define or limit the problem, develop an appropriate research design, or select legitimate instruments or techniques for collecting data” (Parsons and Brown 2002, as referred to in Mertler 2020: 39).

**Step 4**, *developing a research plan*, involves stating one or more research questions, identifying observable and measurable variables central to the topic, and deciding the appropriate research methodology and data collection and analysis methods.

The **acting stage** is where the action researcher implements the plan and then collects and analyzes the data.

**Step 5** is where the researcher starts by *implementing the plan and collecting data*, using techniques such as observation, field notes, interviews, surveys, examination and analysis of existing documents, and quantitative measures (e.g., checklists, rating scales, tests and other formal assessments). The use of all types of data collected through a wide variety of techniques is to encourage triangulation of the data and ensure the data’s quality and accuracy.

**Step 6**, *analyzing the data*. Johnson (2008: 63, as cited in Mertler 2020: 42) suggests that “[A]s you collect your data, analyze them by looking for themes, categories, or patterns that emerge. This analysis will influence further data collection [and analysis] by helping you know what to look for.” There should also be a final stage of data analysis once everything has been collected (Johnson 2008).

The **developing stage** is where the revisions, changes, or improvements arise, and the future actions (known as an “action plan”) are developed.

**Step 7** - *developing an action plan* is the ultimate goal of AR. It is “essentially a proposed strategy for implementing the results” of your AR project (Mertler 2020: 43).

The **reflecting stage** is where plans for disseminating or sharing the results of the project are specified. Furthermore, the researcher reflects on the entire AR process in this stage.

**Step 8 - sharing and communicating the results.**

**Step 9 - reflecting on the process** is a crucial step where the practitioner-researcher reviews what has been done, determines its effectiveness, and makes decisions about possible revisions for future projects.

#### 4.7 Conclusion of AR literature review

The purpose of this section was to provide a brief overview of AR. This is offered as a starting point to guide researchers to the relevant AR literature that aligns most closely with their aims. These reference works, however, need to be reviewed for a more nuanced understanding. By highlighting the differences between different models, we can see two main schools of thought. In the model by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), the action plan is central and found much earlier in the AR cycle. In short, a clear teaching-learning issue is identified, addressed by some sort of intervention, and data is collected and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of this intervention and further refine it. In contrast, for Mills (2018) and Mertler (2020), data collection and analysis are given priority in the *acting stage* (according to the Mertler model) and later used to develop an action plan which is to be implemented in the subsequent AR cycle. While it is still possible to collect and analyze data in relation to an *initial* intervention (which is described as part of the research plan), the term—action plan—is reserved for the (revised) future intervention. Regardless of which approach is taken, it is understood that the results of one AR cycle are implemented in the following cycle.

Section 4 proposes a model for AR in which a concrete solution to a teaching-learning issue is specified in relation to the CEFR in the planning stage. This action plan is then implemented and its effectiveness monitored through data collection and analysis. This is the approach taken in Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). Following the positions taken by Mills (2018) and Mertler (2020), detailed guidance is also provided in the CEFR-focused AR model to ensure the research is conducted systematically and rigorously, and the model is informed by the principles of AR laid out in this section.

### 5 CEFR-focused Action Research Model (CARM)

This section proposes a CEFR-focused Action Research Model (CARM), which is designed specifically for AR that attempts to improve and renovate current practices by following the CEFR's core philosophical concepts and principles. CARM consists of three stages: Plan, Action and Critical Review. Although this model shares essential steps with other AR models, it departs from previous models (Burns 2010; Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; Mertler 2020; Mills 2018) in a number of important ways. The following subsection overviews the CARM model and discusses crucial differences with previous AR models. Then Sect. 5.2 explains steps in each stage.

#### 5.1 The CEFR-focused AR Model (CARM): Three-stage model

The CARM consists of the following three stages:

- Stage 1 Plan: Developing a research plan
- Stage 2 Action: Implementing solutions to problems
- Stage 3 Critical review: Analyzing research data and results and examining the entire AR cycle

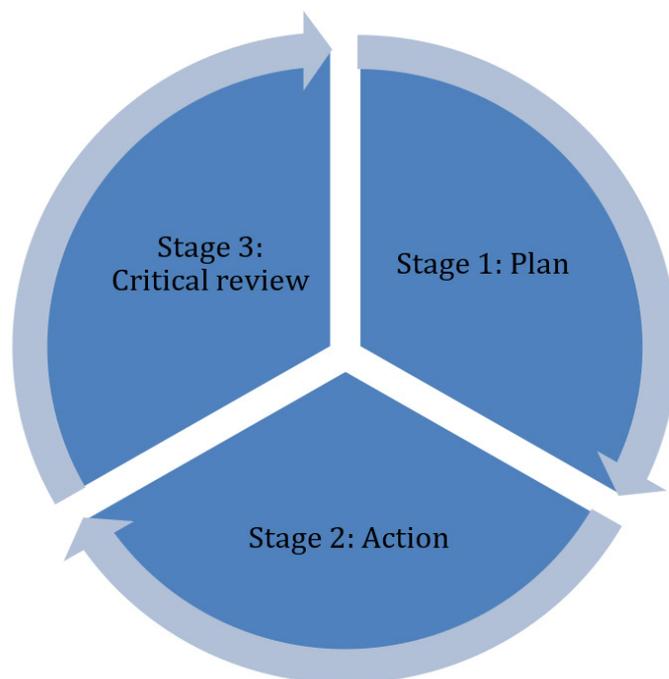


Figure 1. CARM.

CARM is crucially different from previous AR models in three ways. First and most importantly, the model is designed specifically for AR that aims to intervene and improve current practices in accordance with the CEFR's philosophical concepts and core principles. The CEFR functions as a conceptual as well as a reference tool for the AR study. The key concepts of the CEFR, such as the action-oriented approach, coherent alignment of curriculum/course, learning/teaching and assessment, learner autonomy, and learning-oriented assessment, will provide insights into research. The CEFR also functions as a common reference tool. Teacher-researchers will identify the target proficiency levels which their AR studies will focus on, using the CEFR common reference levels and a wide range of scaled descriptors. And then they will localize them for their own research purposes. Problems and issues concerning current practices will become clearer and more readily articulated when taking the CEFR key concepts and common reference levels into consideration. Solutions will be proposed at least partly by selecting the most appropriate CEFR scales and/or more detailed scaled illustrative descriptors and contextualizing them to fit the local needs.

Second, CARM differs from previous models regarding the “Reflection” stage. Previous models typically constitute four stages, having a Reflection stage as a final stage. However, CARM does not contain an independent “Reflection” stage as the final stage, resulting in a three-stage model<sup>7</sup>. We believe reflection is intrinsic not only at the final stage of AR but every stage. Wallace (1998: 1) asserts that one of the most effective ways of solving professional problems and developing as practitioners is through reflection. Burns (2010: 141) claims that “reflection in AR is much more dynamic than simply being the last phase in the cycle”. Our proposed model, which follows Burns’ claim, involves reflection at every stage. At the planning stage, practitioner-researchers reflect on current practices and their personal teaching theories behind the practice. During the acting stage, new trials and interventions are reflected upon systematically and concurrently. The final stage demands a critical reflection on the effectiveness of solutions tried out while examining collected data.

7. The ECML Action Research Community project proposes a three-step model. Note that their “steps” are equivalent to “stages” of our model. The first step, “Breakthrough” is to help language teachers start action research. The second step, “On your way” is to help start action research and the final step, “Going further” is to restart another cycle of AR.

Third, CARM uses simple and descriptive naming for the different stages and steps. All the previous models use similar naming for steps necessary to carry out AR but differ in the classification and organization of stages and steps therein. For instance, the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) does not contain a “Develop” stage, which is included in Mertler’s (2020) model. In the latter model, a step within the “Develop” stage is subsumed in the “Reflection” stage in the former model. We have conducted a critical examination of all the steps in the previous models, set clearer goals for each stage, and specified steps necessary to achieve the goal of each stage, yielding more transparent and concrete descriptive terms for the stages and steps therein.

As with many previous models, our proposed model is cyclical by nature as shown in Figure 1. The final stage points to the first stage of a new AR cycle.

## 5.2 Three stages

### 5.2.1 Stage 1 Plan—Developing a research plan

Stage 1 is to plan action research, most importantly formulating research questions, proposing solutions and contemplating research methodologies. To draw up a concrete research plan, the following eight steps are suggested.

1. Select a CEFR-focused AR theme
2. Reflect on your current practice
3. Gather data (information)
4. Review related literature
5. Identify specific problems/issues and formulate a research question or questions
6. Propose solutions (CEFR-informed teaching, learning or assessment)
7. Decide research methodologies
8. Consider research ethics

It is essential for practitioner-researchers to draw up a comprehensive action research study to be conducted before its initiation. The major goals of the first stage are threefold. The first is to identify problems and issues and formulate sound research questions. To reach this goal, practitioner-researchers undergo steps 1 through 5. The second is to propose solutions to the problems and issues identified, which is step 6. The results of steps 2 through 4 will aid in proposing solutions. The third goal is to consider research methodologies and how to carry out the research and ensure that it is done in an ethical manner. This goal is achieved by undertaking steps 7 and 8. Each step is explained in detail in the following sections.

**(1) Select a CEFR-focused AR theme** Before identifying specific problems/issues, you will determine the focus of your research. Our CEFR-informed AR Model proposes five broad areas of focus for your AR:

- Designing a curriculum or course
- Material development
- Classroom implementation
- Learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio
- Assessment

A focus area may be related to the other areas and intertwined. In designing a course, for instance, when setting up specific learning outcomes for a course, they will be the basis for planning each lesson (Classroom implementation) and used for teacher- and learner-assessment. Hence, designing a course also involves a coherent alignment of the goals for teaching, learning and assessment. In other words, all the five areas listed above will be interrelated. Even if your primary focus is to design a course, this focus subsumes various aspects of the other areas.

If your primary interest is to align daily lesson plans into the CEFR, then your focal area will be on classroom implementation. If you are interested in student learning and motivation, your focal area will be on learner autonomy. You may be interested in developing teaching materials aligned to the CEFR or aligning a prescribed textbook to the CEFR, then your focal area will be on materials development. If you are not sure about the area of focus, you may first think about your concerns even more broadly; for instance, is your interest about your teaching or your students' learning? Then you may further think about specific aspects of your teaching or of student learning and narrow down your focal area.

**(2) Reflect on your current practice** To identify problems/issues, reflection on your current practice is one of the most important steps. You need to reflect on what you do in teaching and why you do it the way you do. In other words, you need to become more aware of your own teaching theory which has not yet been critically examined, particularly in relation to the CEFR principles and concepts. You may also reflect on your didactic knowledge and skills through introspection and/or dialogical communication with your colleagues. Objective description of your current practice and rationale for your teaching is an excellent way to identify problems/issues. For instance, you may consider what your daily lessons aim at and what tasks and activities your learners are engaged in to achieve those goals. Through asking such questions you may be able to critically examine what and how you are teaching. Then, you may further ask yourself about the strengths and weaknesses of your current teaching, and perhaps you will notice problems and issues in your teaching.

**(3) Gather data to identify problems/issues** After or while you reflect on your current practice and your teaching theory, you may carefully observe learners' performances and interaction with their peers and you. You will also collect data, such as learners' writings, recordings of spoken production, interviews, test and quiz scores, learners' class evaluation, and any other relevant information. You may also consult with your colleagues and other stakeholders about problems/issues you identified. In this way, you can more objectively confirm the problems/issues that you became aware of and provide evidence for your assertions.

**(4) Reviewing related literature** Reviewing literature is important for two purposes. First, it will help you identify problems and issues as well as formulate research questions. Even if you do not think there are any particular problems in your current practice, you may want to intervene or change it when you acquire new knowledge about teaching, learning and assessment. For instance, when you become acquainted with Mediation descriptors (COE 2020a), you may wonder if the objectives of your CLIL or EMI course may be more explicitly and transparently articulated through adapting these descriptors.

Second, a literature review is also necessary at a later step when proposing solutions to the problems you identified. If you want to adapt the CEFR to your local context, you may need to become more familiar with the CEFR and examine it in detail for your own purposes. Nagai et al (2020), in particular chapters 2 through 5, provide a useful guide for how to utilize the CEFR and CEFR/CV according to various themes of CEFR-focused AR studies.

**(5) Identify problems/issues and formulate research questions** Formulating sound research questions is an essential and crucial step which affects the rest of the AR project (Hubbard and Power 2003). A

research question determines the research methodology and type of data that you will obtain. When formulating research questions, it is important to take into consideration the following points suggested by Mertler (2020: 90-92):

1. One should try to avoid questions that require a simple yes or no answer.
2. Research questions should not be stated in a manner that assumes an answer even before data have been collected.
3. Research questions should not be too broad or too specific in scope, especially when conducting quantitative action research.
4. Research questions should be based in the body of literature that encompasses the topic. Recall that one of the purposes of conducting a review of related literature is to inform the development of research questions. A research question should not consist of a query that you simply develop off the top of your head. It should be well informed by the literature and related information that you have reviewed.
5. A research question must be answerable based on the collected data.
6. You must make sure that your research question is ethical.
7. Finally examine your research question to ensure that it is both important and feasible to answer.

**(6) Propose solutions (CEFR-informed teaching, learning or assessment)** After formulating research questions, you will work out possible solutions to them. In CEFR-focused action research studies, solutions will be derived through careful consideration of its core ideas such as action-oriented approach, learner-autonomy and coherence in teaching, learning and assessment. If you plan to align your current classroom teaching with the CEFR, you need to consider what part of your current practice needs to be aligned to the CEFR and to what extent. You need to select the parts of the CEFR most relevant to your current practice and then adapt them to fit your teaching. You may want to set up concrete learning outcomes for a course or each unit by specifying and modifying the most relevant CEFR illustrative descriptors. If you propose a placement test aligned with certain levels of the CEFR, you will create such a test based on the selected scaled descriptors and reference level descriptions (RLDs).

**(7) Decide research methodologies** You must consider in advance what types of data are necessary for examining the effectiveness of your proposed solutions. In other words, you need to consider what research methodologies you will use for your action research study. Do you need qualitative data such as observation of learners' performance, interviews with learners, and your own reflection on the intervention? Or do you need quantitative data such as quiz and test scores and quantified survey results? Perhaps, you need a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. You need to contemplate which research methodology you will adopt in your AR study, qualitative, quantitative or mixed methodology. As explained in 4.5, the degree of rigor in AR depends on the purpose of a study. To increase the reliability of your AR studies, it is essential to consider the necessary types of data carefully.

**(8) Consider research ethics** While conducting an action research study, teaching and research are tightly intertwined. You must protect the rights of participants in your research, who are usually learners in your classroom where the action research is conducted. You may use learner output, such as their writing, recorded speech, and/or reflection notes. Hence, at the beginning of the research, you need to explain the purposes of your action research and obtain written consent for using learner output.

### 5.2.2 Stage 2 Action—Implementing solutions to problems

This is the stage where you try out your proposed solutions and collect data which you need in order to critically examine the effectiveness of your intervention at a later stage. Stage 2 consists of the following three steps:

1. Plan for carrying out solutions to the problems
2. Carry out the solutions and reflection
3. Collect data to critically examine the solutions

**(1) Plan for carrying out solutions to the problems** At this step, you will make an action plan for carrying out the solutions. To make a concrete plan you need to decide the following:

- With whom will you try the solutions?
- When will you carry out the solutions?
- How long will you try the solutions, more specifically for an entire semester or only in selected lessons?
- What resources (e.g., supplementary teaching materials) do you need?
- What data needs to be collected, when, and how?

The following table may help you to make an action plan.

**Table 3. Action plan**

Date	What you will do	Resource needed (e.g., teaching materials, assessment tasks)	Data to be collected

It is essential to plan what data is collected and when, according to the decision you made about research methodology (Step 7 in Stage 1). To make a clear plan for data collection is crucial since it is too late when you notice data necessary to examine the effectiveness of your intervention at a later stage.

It is important to make a solid plan and follow it, which will assure rigorous action research. However, it is also crucial to keep in mind that you may alter the plan and refocus the research topic while your AR study proceeds, as Mertler (2020) and Mills (2018) advise. Once you carry out your intervention, you may notice more problematic situations or issues and need to alter the plan. Do not hesitate to change the plan and modify it to better accommodate new situations and concerns.

**(2) Carry out the solutions and Reflection** At this step you carry out the solutions. At the same time, you need to reflect on the action in a systematic way, so that you can analyze your intervention and learners' reactions to it. Although there are a number of ways to record reflection results, to do so in a rigorous and systematic way, you may want to make a list of the points to be reflected on and record the date of the reflection. The following table may be helpful as a sample of written reflection data.

**Table 4. Reflection on action**

Date	Points to be reflected on	Reflection

**(3) Collect data for examining the effectiveness of the solutions** While trying out the solutions, you also need to collect the necessary data for a later critical review. You may collect learner output such as their writings, recordings of their speeches, presentations or conversation with their peers and/or with you. You may also collect learners’ reaction to your teaching through their logs and may keep your own logs.

### 5.2.3 Stage 3 Critical review—Analysis of research results and critical examination of the entire AR cycle

The final stage is a critical review of the effectiveness of solutions you tried as well as the entire process of the AR study, which may lead to a new cycle of AR. The stage consists of the following three steps:

1. Critical examination of the collected data
2. Critical review of the entire AR study
3. Sharing and communicating the results

**(1) Critical analysis of the collected data** At this step, you will critically analyze collected data to examine if the solution worked as you anticipated and solved the problems. You need to reveal the strengths as well as weaknesses of the attempts based on the data collected. While analyzing qualitative data you will conduct an inductive analysis, thereby “identifying and organizing the data into important patterns and themes” (Mertler 2020: 173) so that you can systematically and critically examine the effects of your action. When you analyze quantitative data, you need to describe and display numerical data demonstrating measures of frequency, central tendency and variability on the basis of which you can critically evaluate the solutions and interventions you tried (Mertler 2020: 155, 180-183). The critical examination of your AR study based on qualitative data, quantitative data, or a combination of both, will increase the reliability of your assessment of the intervention. The analysis may also reveal any weakness of your trial and uncover new issues, which may lead to a new cycle of AR study.

**(2) Critical review of the entire AR study** You should also reflect on the entire process and procedure of your AR study and examine if the study was conducted as planned and yielded the expected results. You should note the strengths and weaknesses of the study and plan a new cycle of AR.

**(3) Sharing and communicating the results** At this final step, you will publicize your AR so that your research is shared with practitioner-researchers who face similar challenges. You may choose an oral mode of presentation and/or a written mode. The former for instance includes discussion of your AR with your colleagues, and in workshops and conference presentations. The latter includes brief reports or fuller articles.

### 5.3 Summary

This section proposed a CEFR-focused Action Research Model and explained the three stages of the model and steps therein. At the time of writing (the end of year 1 of the Kaken project), invited researchers had been guided through Stage 1 of the CARM model. Table 5 includes a brief overview of four research plans that had been developed. Currently, these projects and others are being implemented as a part of Stage 2 in the 2021 academic year, but it is too early to report preliminary findings. However, the projects in Table 5 do exemplify the types of research plans we envision being produced when using CARM as a guide. Participants' experience with the model and the project in general will be commented upon in the following section after a brief introduction to the project itself.

**Table 5. Stages**

Stage 1 Plan			Stage 2 Action	
Theme	Aims	Research questions	Action and Implementation	Data collection & Expected outcomes
Course design	Localize illustrative Can Do descriptors to each course in General English program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do teachers plan and conduct classes using CEFR can dos as lesson objectives?</li> <li>2. How do teachers localize Can Dos to reflect classroom activities?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Collaborative localization of Can Dos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys at the workshops</li> <li>• Teachers' reflections</li> <li>• Institution-wide CEFR-informed learning objectives in general English program</li> </ul>
Classroom Implementation	Navigating meaning in a mixed-level class in an EMI context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How can the illustrative scales of the CEFR/CV be applied to mixed-level classes?</li> <li>2. How can meaning from texts and lectures be co-constructed (navigated) for students?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptation of teaching materials</li> <li>• Classroom activities</li> <li>• Classroom interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of the students</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• CEFR/CV-informed objectives for strategies</li> <li>• Insight in strategies used by students to gain understanding</li> </ul>
Language portfolio	Evaluate implementation of eELP in a university class	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How effective is the e-portfolio to help students become an autonomous learner?</li> <li>2. Can students become a more autonomous learner if they are engaged in the goal-setting of the class?</li> <li>3. Is autonomous learning stimulated more if students share the e-portfolio with each other in the class?</li> <li>4. Is the use of the e-portfolio also effective to change the students' positive attitude towards the class?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement e-portfolio to provide opportunities for (1) self-assessment and (2) goal setting based on self-assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-survey</li> <li>• Measure how students feel about self-assessment, goal setting and learner autonomy using survey by Macaskill and Taylor (2010)</li> <li>• Implementation of the e-portfolio in classes</li> <li>• Cycle of implementation involves <i>Identify goal - Plan - Agreement - Action - Review</i></li> <li>• Post-survey</li> <li>• Same contents of pre-survey.</li> <li>• Elicit impressions of the e-portfolio using ELP pilot survey (Scharer 2000).</li> </ul>

Stage 1 Plan			Stage 2 Action	
Textbook	Select the most appropriate CEFR-informed textbooks for the researcher's classes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What criteria are suitable for choosing CEFR-informed textbooks?</li> <li>2. What weighting should be given to each textbook selection criteria?</li> <li>3. What are the strong and weak points of current CEFR-informed textbooks on the market for typical Japanese University English courses?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review literature on textbook selection.</li> <li>• Review literature on CEFR-informed curriculum design.</li> <li>• Make a list of CEFR-informed textbook selection criteria.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order all Pre-A1 to A2 CEFR-informed textbooks on the Japanese market.</li> <li>• Evaluate the textbooks using the weighted checklist of selection criteria.</li> </ul>

## 6 Discussion and challenges of the project

This section presents an outline of the first year of a three-year research project as well as some preliminary findings. As a core concept the project sees the CEFR as a reference and conceptual tool for educational reform and incorporates it into an action research model. The proposed CARM model itself is being put into action through a major collaborative research project funded by Kaken. Practitioners are asked to conduct CEFR-informed interventions in small-scale projects to reflect on and research their classroom teaching. There are basically three facets to the Kaken project: (1) to promote AR as a tool to improve a learning-teaching situation using the CEFR, (2) to help teachers develop the ability to conduct AR systematically and rigorously in their teaching context, and finally (3) to examine the viability of the CARM model.

As part of the Kaken research project, various AR studies are being conducted in parallel in different areas (curriculum design, materials development, classroom implementation, assessment, learner autonomy among others), using the CEFR as an informing framework. These projects will serve as the basis for a meta-study on CEFR-focused AR. The outcome will involve a thorough reflection on both aspects of the endeavor—a collection of classroom-based CEFR research projects and a pilot study of the effectiveness of the CEFR-focused Action Research Model (CARM) to guide these projects. With this dual focus and multiple layers, the researchers will strive to ensure that the procedures are methodologically rigorous and transparent at all stages.

### 6.1 Action research on CEFR implementation: The JSPS Grant-in-Aid research project (Kaken)

The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) Grant-in-Aid research project—*Foreign language education reform through action research: Putting CEFR educational principles into practice* 「アクションリサーチの手法を用いた言語教育改善: CEFRの教育理念を参考にして」(JSPS Kaken project no. 20K00759)—was granted in April 2020. The schedule of the research project is planned for three consecutive years, ending March 2023. This section summarizes the first year of this research project.

In the first year (2020), the core research team was to develop an action research model that fits the needs of practitioner-researchers, to initiate and plan AR projects with a wider team of researchers and to help them identify their research foci. Based on a thorough review of the AR literature, the team planned to develop an AR model that facilitates the adoption of CEFR principles. The model proposed is the CEFR-focused Action Research Model (CARM). The next step was to build a larger research team by gathering collaborators willing to conduct research using this model. In the Kaken research proposal, these members are primarily from the JALT CEFR and LP SIG, invited to participate during a forum and a workshop. At the end of the first year, each member was to develop a research plan using a specially designed workbook that follows Stage 1 of CARM. It was envisioned that the researchers would work together in groups based on the predetermined themes mentioned in Sect. 5.2.1.

In the second year (2021), AR projects are being initiated and carried out, and data is being collected and analyzed. Some of the planned interventions will be implemented in the Spring term (in Japan the beginning of the academic year), others in the fall term. Several workshops are being held throughout the second year to give participants the opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences with CARM.

The third year will be devoted to reflecting on the AR projects. Participants will further analyze their data, critically reflect on their AR study, and both aspects will be discussed in workshops and presentations, and finally, research reports and results will be written up for publication. The expected outcome will hopefully support the initial assertion that CEFR and AR are a perfect match. To do so, we plan to publish these research reports in either an edited volume or in a journal to provide evidence exemplifying how to conduct research and offer best practice case studies of CEFR-informed action research. We will also include a discussion of the viability and applicability of the CARM model and insights gained from this multi-layered research project.

## **6.2 Reflection and Challenges from the first year of the Kaken project.**

The call for collaborators for this project was met with enthusiasm and there are currently more than twenty researchers taking part. As mentioned, it was anticipated that the teams would be grouped thematically around the five central themes: (1) designing a curriculum and / or course, (2) materials development, (3) classroom implementation, (4) assessment, and (5) learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio. These categories roughly follow the chapters of Nagai et al. (2020). Yet, feedback from the introductory forum, workshop and a review of the participants' workbooks revealed a more complex and diverse scenario than expected. Not all of the proposed research topics fit neatly into the predetermined categories. These topics, ranging from those that have a close relationship with the themes to those with only a tenuous link, include: *reading, writing, listening, task creation, learning goals, student-centered learning, self-assessment, vocabulary, phrases, students' self-esteem, and leadership*. Furthermore, most participants touched upon several interrelated areas—a point taken up in Sect 5.2.1. *Reading*, for example, can be discussed in relation to teaching materials, classroom implementation, or assessment. Teachers at an early stage of defining their research focus may not have a clear idea which of these areas should be given priority.

During the workshop, one participant even argued that teaching, learning, and assessment (and by extension our themes) should not be seen as separate categories, instead they should be seen as a central thread within the CARM model. It was suggested that a better way to think of the themes would be to start from the agents in the AR. If these are teachers, for example, then the focus would be on practices, beliefs, and so on. If these are learners, the focus would be on learner development. The other foci would then include our categories (e.g., curriculum design).

As seen in the above examples, how best to guide or help participants develop and formulate specific research questions from broad areas of CEFR-related research foci is the challenge we are faced with. It requires that we think clearly about broad areas and at the same time define the specific issues within the areas that we would like to research. At this stage, the beginning of the second year of our Kaken project, it is unclear whether the participants' reluctance to commit to one of the original categories is a natural part of the process of defining one's research focus, which will resolve itself with time, or if a reconceptualization of the themes is required. It is an issue we will continue to investigate in discussion with all participants in this project.

Concerning the participants of the project, there seems to be a significant hurdle to getting involved, even though the participants are interested in the project, the CEFR, and AR. This was not anticipated in the beginning but emerged during the last three months of the first year. Participants need to acquaint themselves with the CEFR and AR in general, and with the AR model suggested here, the CARM model. This is a significant challenge and affects the participants' level of readiness. Throughout the second

year, we hope to be able to use some projects as model cases to demonstrate the process of starting an AR project and to point out that some flexibility is necessary as it might not be possible to proceed through the first stage of CARM in a linear fashion (or any AR model as discussed in Sect. 4).

The project also aims to provide collaborative peer-support with opportunities for participants to exchange their experiences and learn from each other as they progress through the stages of CARM. The small-scale projects, however, will not be conducted in parallel as previously thought as not only starting times, but also progress will vary considerably. Participants will proceed through the stages at different speeds and in different periods during the second and the third year, some researchers taking longer and some taking less time. Some may even initiate mini AR cycles within a larger one or feel the need to repeat certain steps.

As the second year is underway, we have four projects which have initiated Stage II (the intervention) (Table 5) and may even enter Stage III (reviewing) during this research year. Five additional projects are in Stage I and these research plans will be implemented in the next term. This dynamic development was not anticipated in the project proposal, but it could gain momentum as the project proceeds. Readers are probably interested in learning more details about how projects are evolving. However, as this is ongoing research, describing projects, giving preliminary findings or predicting outcomes are not possible at this stage. Sharing findings and outcomes will be the task for a later stage. We are looking forward to providing insights uncovered from these small-scale projects. Furthermore, we are continually encouraging others to get involved in this project. If you are interested, please contact us.

In summary, the goal of the project is to support numerous small-scale action research (AR) projects related to foreign language teaching in Japan and beyond, in which practitioners reflect on and find ways to improve their teaching practice using the CEFR as a reference tool and CARM as a guide. As this is a JSPS Kaken project, the outcome aims to contribute substantially to foreign language education (English and other languages) in Japan.

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## 8 Biographies

**Gregory Birch**, a Professor at Seisen Jogakuin College in Nagano, Japan, holds a MSc Degree in TESOL from Aston University and a MA in Japanese Language and Society from Sheffield University. His current research concerns the implementation of the European Language Portfolio in Japan. He has also presented and written articles on Task-Based Learning, in-service teacher training for Japanese teachers of English, and the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme.

**Jack Bower** is an associate professor at the Education Development Center at Tezukayama University in Nara, Japan. He received his PhD in Linguistics from Macquarie University. His research interests include language test design and validation, curriculum design, and putting the CEFR into practice.

**Noriko Nagai**, a Professor of Ibaraki University, received her Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Michigan. Her research interests lie in cross-linguistic influence, explicit instruction of English grammar based on comparative analyses of English and Japanese, criterial lexical and grammatical features, and the implementation of the CEFR to English education in the Japanese higher education context.

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# CEFR JOURNAL—RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

## VOLUME 4

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### News

We are happy to receive reports on events, conferences or projects concerning CEFR, CEFR/CV or Language Portfolio related themes.

**COE** <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/home>

**ALTE** Association of Language Testers in Europe <https://www.alte.org/>, <https://www.alte.org/Events>  
*ALTE Introductory Course in Language Testing – March 2022 (14th to 25<sup>th</sup>)*

Online course presented by Professor Anthony Green (CRELLA, University of Bedfordshire) and Jane Lloyd (Cambridge Assessment English). <https://www.alte.org/event-4485077>

**ALTE CEFR SIG** <https://www.alte.org/CEFR-SIG>

**EALTA** European Association for Language Testing and Assessment <https://www.ealta.eu.org/>  
EALTA Annual conferences <https://www.ealta.eu.org/conferences.htm>

**18th EALTA Conference: When: June 2-5, 2022, Where: Budapest, Hungary**

**EALTA CEFR SIG** <https://www.ealta.eu.org/sig.html>

*Pre-conference workshops: 31 May – 1 June 2022*

**ECML** European Center of Modern Languages

**VITbox project:** CEFR Companion Volume implementation toolbox

<https://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Programme2020-2023/>

[CEFRCompanionVolumeimplementationtoolbox/tabid/4299/language/en-GB/Default.aspx](https://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Programme2020-2023/CEFRCompanionVolumeimplementationtoolbox/tabid/4299/language/en-GB/Default.aspx)

**ADiBE Project** <https://adibeproject.com/>

Link to the Project Card: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2018-1-ES01-KA201-050356>

The ADiBE project brings together key figures with ample experience in the field of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) from six countries (Spain, Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, and the UK).

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- CERF & LP SIG: <https://cefrjapan.net>
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global framework, impacting a variety of aspects of language learning, teaching, and assessment across countries and continents beyond the context for which it was originally created. As such, there is a pressing need to create a quality forum for sharing research, experiences, and lessons learned from applying the CEFR in different contexts. This journal provides such a forum where people involved or interested in processes of applying the CEFR can share and learn from one another.

We are continuously seeking contributions related to foreign language education, the CEFR, other language frameworks, and the European Language Portfolio. We are particularly interested in specific contextual adaptations.

Currently, we have a new Call for abstracts out. Due to current necessities and demand, we are looking to give your experiences with online, remote, and e-learning in conjunction with the CEFR, the CEFR/CV, or portfolio work the spotlight it deserves. In these months many practitioners are accruing valuable best and potentially also worst practice experience. We would like to offer a forum to share such valuable insights in future volumes. Until 28 February 2022 we are looking for abstracts at: [journal@cefrjapan.net](mailto:journal@cefrjapan.net).

Please contact the editors with any queries and submit to:

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