Guest Editorial

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The ten articles published in this special issue of the *CEFR Journal* are based on papers given at the conference *Responding to the CEFR Alignment Handbook: Sharing experience of alignment activities and reflecting on lessons learned*, hosted by the GREDA Research Group on Education, Didactics and Learning at Blanquerna—Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona in October 2024 (for a report on the conference, see Figueras et al. 2025).[1] Discussion at the conference recognized

- the need for adaptation and localisation of the CEFR and CEFR/CV;
- the critical importance of context and its impact on the use of the CEFR and alignment processes in Europe and beyond;
- the importance of shared understanding, language and discourse;
- the CEFR and CEFR/CV as instruments of social justice;
- the role technology may play in the near future; and
- the need to encourage dissemination initiatives and collaboration.

These issues recur in the ten articles in a variety of ways; some of the articles also reflect on the usefulness of the *Alignment Handbook* (British Council et al. 2022).

Differing from one another in focus and scope, the articles fall into three broad categories: language testing and assessment; pedagogy and materials; policy and curricula.

1 Language testing and assessment

The five articles in this section are all concerned with high-stakes exams: Italian for immigrants in Italy, English for university students in Cuba, English in two international tests, and German for the workplace in Germany.

Diego Cortés Velásquez and Elena Nuzzo report on a project that partially aligned Certit (the certification of Italian as a second language developed at Roma Tre University) with the CEFR. Concerned with written production at level B1, they focus in particular on the test's construct validity, paying particular attention to the concept of tasks as it is elaborated in Chapter 7 of the 2001 CEFR. Having followed the step-by-step procedures recommended by the *Alignment Handbook*, they note the positive impact of training on

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1.   The conference presentations can be accessed here: https://ealta.eu/members-resources/#CEFR%20 HANDBOOK%20Conference

the creation of assessment tasks that seek to reflect the CEFR's conception of language users/learners as social agents. Although the activities they describe are only part of a broader alignment process, they have led to professional awareness raising and improved test documentation, and provide a basis for ongoing evidence-based validation of Certit's writing component.

Nathaniel Owen and Oliver Bigland report on the design, development and CEFR-alignment of an innovative intertextual reading-into-writing summary task for the Oxford Test of English Advanced, targeting CEFR levels B2-C1. The task requires test takers to read two texts on the same topic and synthesise the information they contain into a 100-word summary. The authors used the *Alignment Handbook* to inform methodological decision-making throughout the development and alignment process, adopting an examinee-centred approach to validation. Analysis of data from a CEFR alignment panel and a pilot study indicated strong reliability for the summary task and demonstrated its effectiveness in distinguishing between B2 and C1 performances.

In 2015, the Ministry of Higher Education in Cuba adopted the CEFR as a proficiency framework and level B1 as the exit requirement for proficiency in English. Claudia Harsch and Yoan Martínez Márquez describe the first phase of a CEFR alignment project that entailed familiarization and training for 42 representatives of all centres of higher education in Cuba, the development of test specifications and tasks by the representatives, piloting of tasks on a small scale, and standardization and benchmarking of local examples.

Whether test developers first create a test and then align it with the CEFR or use the CEFR to guide test development, established approaches to alignment entail a complex and protracted process. In their article, Voula Kanistra and Jayanti Banerjee propose an alternative approach that streamlines alignment procedures. They amalgamated three standard-setting methods, the Dominant Profile Judgement method, the Item Descriptor Matching method, and the Body-of-Work method as a way of structuring and informing content creation and the preparation of standard-setting. They found that this process expedited panel alignment and contributed to panellist agreement, both within and between panels. The alignment process was carried out online. The authors argue that this is preferable because it allows novices to work individually at their own pace, and they cannot be influenced by more experienced peers.

In the last of the articles on high-stakes tests, Sibylle Plassmann reports on the alignment of workplace-oriented writing tasks with the CEFR at levels A2, B1, B2 and C1 in the context of the German Tests for Work (Deutsch-Tests für den Beruf, DTB) developed by telc for the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The standardised exams serve as final assessments in vocational language courses. The article describes the process of defining learning objectives based on authentic workplace communication needs and the adaptation of CEFR descriptors to fit vocational contexts. It also discusses the design of writing tasks that reflect real-world professional communication, the establishment of rating criteria tailored to workplace requirements, and the standard-setting process.

2 Pedagogy and materials

The articles in this section are concerned with two very different contexts: the British Council's English courses for young learners, which are offered in 25 countries, and courses in Italian for foreigners at levels A2 and B1. Certification is attached to the Italian but not to the British Council courses, which nevertheless require assessment procedures that are transparent and yield results that are easy to interpret.

Carolyn Westbrook and Aidan Holland report on a project in which assessment researchers worked with teachers to standardise the approach to assessment in the British Council's global language programme for secondary-age learners. Teaching materials comprising 120 magazines were mapped to the CEFR following the procedures set out in the *Alignment Handbook*; standardised set-up notes were created for assessment tasks; assessment tools and training were developed; and the approach was

then implemented by teachers. The project was informed by the concept of the Comprehensive Learning System, so assessment was developed in close interaction with curriculum and delivery. Feedback showed that the new system improved objectivity and clarity in assessment, though challenges around feasibility and alignment with the CEFR/CV remained.

Published in 2020, the CEFR/CV assigns a new prominence to mediation and includes a large number of illustrative scales for different kinds of mediation activity. To date, however, little research has been published on aligning proficiency tests with mediation descriptors. In their article, Sabrina Machetti and Giulia Peri present the initial findings of a project to align CILS exams (Certification of Italian as a Foreign Language) with mediation descriptors at levels A2 and B1. The exams are aimed at foreign students learning Italian at school in Italy and abroad. The project has found that the exams have had a positive impact on syllabuses in some Italian high schools abroad, bringing them into alignment with the principles of learning-oriented assessment.

3 Policy and curricula

The three articles in this section deal with policy and curriculum reform, the first in the Netherlands, the second in Japan, and the third in Costa Rica, and they provide three very different approaches to alignment with the CEFR and CEFR/CV. The first two are founded on empirical work, the third less so.

Daniela Fasoglio describes a review of national learning objectives undertaken by the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) on behalf of the Ministry of Education. Focusing on three key educational domains—qualification, socialisation and subjectification—the review sought to integrate the CEFR into the national learning targets while ensuring alignment with broader curriculum principles. A case study involving language teachers applied the methodology outlined in the *Alignment Handbook* to identify attainable proficiency levels for upper secondary education. As the process moves beyond the design phase, a key priority is to maintain curriculum quality, which depends on close collaboration between curriculum developers, school leaders, teachers, educational publishers, and test developers. Constructive alignment between learning goals, pedagogy and assessment is considered essential, and it is hoped that assessment will promote coherence between the CEFR's vision of language learning and language use and the goals of the national curriculum.

Masashi Negishi and Yukio Tono describe the influence of the CEFR on language teaching in Japan, comparing its impact on the teaching of English and Japanese. Drawing on a framework that operationalises key CEFR and CEFR/CV concepts—the action-oriented approach to teaching promoted by the CEFR/CV, the language user/learner as social agent, and the proficiency levels—their study analyses curriculum documents, textbooks and assessment tools. They show that there has been a marked difference in the adoption strategies: a cautious, laissez-faire approach in the teaching of English and a more top-down, mandated approach in the teaching of Japanese. The case of English reveals inconsistent alignment, with some progressive teachers and materials developers filling gaps left by national curricula, while the case of Japanese is characterized by a strong, though not yet widespread, alignment in accredited institutions. The authors conclude by discussing the inherent "power" of the CEFR, not as a prescriptive standard, but as a framework that can drive reform; they highlight the need for targeted training and support to achieve a broader and more uniform impact.

Ana C. González-Ramírez and Walter Araya-Garita report on the impact of the CEFR on Costa Rica's system of foreign language education. Adopted by the Ministry of Public Education in 2016, the CEFR has prompted a shift from traditional content-based teaching focused on grammar and vocabulary to a student-centred communicative approach. This has brought about improvements in students' proficiency levels and professional training for teachers, though challenges remain, including unequal resource distribution and lesson-time constraints. The article emphasises the need for systematic teacher training, the ongoing adjustment of policy, and implementation in higher education.

4 References

British Council, EALTA, UKALTA & ALTE. 2022. *Aligning language education with the CEFR: A handbook*. https://ealta.eu/documents/resources/CEFR%20alignment%20handbook.pdf (accessed 18 November 2025.

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