

【原著】

Investigating First-Year Students' Perceptions and Knowledge of the CEFR at a Japanese University

Gary Cook and Yukari Rutson-Griffiths

日本の大学 1 年生における CEFR についての意識及び知識に関する調査

ギャリー・クック, ラットソングリフィス 佑加理

Abstract

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has made an impact on language learning and teaching since its inception in the 1990s. In Japan, the CEFR has been implemented at various levels of education, of particular note the inclusion since 2013 of Can Do statements as goals for learners of English at junior and senior high schools by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Universities have increasingly been adopting the CEFR as a reference for curriculum development, materials creation and assessment. At the Bunkyo English Communication Center (BECC), a language center attached to Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University, the CEFR was first employed for the creation of its two-year English communication course. This study investigates what impact the CEFR has had on a cohort of its first-year English language students. 31 students participated in a Can Do statement sorting activity, and answered a questionnaire regarding the CEFR, TOEIC and Eiken. Results showed that students had limited knowledge regarding the CEFR, and that TOEIC is the preferred way of determining English language ability. As a conclusion further CEFR education is suggested for students and teachers, and limitations and future implications are discussed.

概 要

1990年代の発行から、ヨーロッパ言語共通参照枠（CEFR）は言語学習や教育に影響を与え続けている。日本では、様々な教育場面で CEFR が用いられ、とりわけ2013年に、文部科学省（MEXT）が中・高等学校の英語学習における目標設定に Can Do ステートメントを含めるよう提唱したことは特筆すべきことである。大学においては、カリキュラム開発や教材作成、評価に CEFR が参照されることが多くなってきた。広島文教女子大学の語学専用施設である Bunkyo English Communication Center（BECC）では、2年に亘る英語コミュニケーション授業の開発に CEFR が初めて採用された。本研究では、英語学習を行っている 1 年生を対象に、CEFR が彼らに与えた影響について調査した。31名の学生を対象に Can Do ステートメントを仕分けるアクティビティと CEFR や TOEIC、英語検定に関するアンケートを実施した。この調査から、学生の CEFR に関する知識は限られたものととどまることと、自身の英語

力を知る手段としては TOEIC が好まれていることが分かった。この結果から、学生と教員に向けた CEFR に関するさらなる教育が望ましいということが言える。また、本研究の限界と今後の課題について述べる。

1. Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) has been utilized by many language educational institutions around the world since its piloted release in the 1990s. Translated into 40 different languages this adaptable, comprehensive document's international reputation made it the first choice for consideration when the initial planning stages of curricula took place here at the Bunkyo English Communication Center (BECC), located in Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University. The increasing popularity of the CEFR in Japan, most notably the backing given in 2013 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to include CEFR course goals at junior and senior high schools, has reaffirmed its inclusion as a framework for developing curricula.

A major project at the BECC has been the creation of its English Communication course. This two-year course was designed for all first- and second-year students, regardless of major. The CEFR's comprehensive variety of available resources were employed for curriculum planning. The Council of Europe's *Waystage*, (van Ek & Trim, 1990) document provided themes to base units on. The online EnglishProfile (2015), website was used for selecting vocabulary at the levels of A1 to A2 for a lower level stream, and A2 to B1 for the higher level. Can Do statements that were used as lesson goals were chosen from the European Association for Quality Language Services (Eaquals) bank of descriptors (2015), and the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) Can Do project (2002). Assessments and rubrics were based on various CEFR related tests such as *Cambridge English: Key* (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2012a) and *Cambridge English: Preliminary* (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2012b). For more information on this project see Bower, Runnels, Rutson-Griffiths, Schmidt, Cook, Lehde, and Kodate (2017) and Bower, Rutson-Griffiths, Cook, Schmidt, Lehde, Kodate, and Runnels (2017).

The Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) on the second floor of the BECC has also based one of its core activities on the CEFR. Downloadable assignments contain various activities where main tasks, written as Can Do statements, are separated into reading, writing, speaking or listening skills, ranging in level from Pre-A1 to B2. Students taking the English Communication course independently download and complete one of each skill which contributes a total of 10% towards their grades (for more information about the materials, see Kodate, 2017).

It is clear that the CEFR has made a strong impact regarding curricula planning and development at the BECC. However, it is unknown how much of an impact the CEFR has had on BECC students, or how students perceive the CEFR in relation to two notable testing organizations in Japan: TOEIC and Eiken. This prompted the researchers to carry out an activity (CEFR shuffle)

which had students engage with the CEFR self-assessment grid, and answer a brief survey. The purposes of this study are 1) to establish students' familiarity with the CEFR, 2) to gather students' opinions on CEFR levels, Can Do statements and the CEFR shuffle, and 3) to learn how students perceive CEFR levels in relation to Eiken grades and TOEIC scores.

2. Literature Review

CEFR in Japan

The CEFR was created by the Council of Europe in the hope to promote *plurilingualism* in European countries (Morrow, 2004). This stems from the desire to foster European identity and understanding of other cultures among citizens by encouraging them to use the languages of other countries to some degree (Morrow, 2004). The CEFR recognizes six levels of language users with A1 being the lowest level, followed progressively by A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2 being the highest, and it provides descriptions of what people can do at each level. Since its establishment, the CEFR has been used worldwide (Byram & Parmenter, 2012) for among other things, curriculum development, materials creation, independent learning, and assessment.

The CEFR has also had a positive impact on English education in Japan (Fennelly, 2016; Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011; O'Dwyer, 2015). Noting that the situation and implementation of the CEFR in Japan is different from Europe where *plurilingualism* is more relevant, Nagai and O'Dwyer (2011) argue that the CEFR has made its impact in Japan on the development of curriculum with its transparent and coherent characteristics and by promoting learner autonomy. Including the local practices described in O'Dwyer (2015) and documented in the edited book, *Critical, Constructive Assessment of CEFR-informed Language Teaching in Japan and Beyond* (O'Dwyer, Hunke, Imig, Nagai, Naganuma, & Schmidt, 2017), the CEFR has been increasingly recognized and employed at universities in Japan.

The CEFR is also having an impact on secondary level education in Japan. With usage of the CEFR being rather limited to the tertiary level in Japan, Sugitani and Tomita (2012) argued that a top-down approach from the government is necessary to bring about change at the secondary level. In 2011, the government advocated that all English language learning goals be written in the Can Do format (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2011). Although the CEFR was not explicitly mentioned in the main text, a reference to the framework was given in attached materials. Two years later, MEXT proposed new, CEFR-referenced goals for junior high school students to attain at the level of A1–A2 and high school students at the level of B1–B2 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013a). In the same year, guidelines on how to use Can Do Statements for goal-setting and assessments were released to help secondary school teachers (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013b). This top-down change may lead to a national paradigm shift from traditional teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning as the government also recognizes the importance of improving students' motivation and attitude towards learning and hopes to do so by setting concrete goals; namely, “what you will be able to do” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports,

Science and Technology, 2015). However, O'Dwyer (2015) notes the limitations of a top-down approach especially when it permits little flexibility and autonomy on the part of teachers and goes on to argue that both top-down and bottom-up approaches are the key to successful implementation of the CEFR.

Teacher Training

Despite its contributions reported by researchers and practitioners, the CEFR is not particularly known as a user-friendly tool (Komorowska, 2004; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007; Morrow, 2004). Reporting her experiences as a teacher trainer, Komorowska (2004) attributes the challenges often faced by users to the complexity of the text. Having gone through three cycles of CEFR training with three groups (undergraduate students, MA students acquiring teaching qualifications, and incumbent teachers), she suggests different approaches for pre- and in-service teacher education. In the *Manual* written by the Council of Europe (2009) to help examination developers relate their tests to the CEFR, it is suggested that some familiarization with the CEFR should be attempted before the implementation. At the authors' university, too, some training to help the relevant teachers familiarize themselves with the CEFR was carried out before the major curriculum change implemented from 2012 to 2017 (see Bower, Runnels, Rutson-Griffiths, Schmidt, Cook, Lehde, & Kodate, 2017 and Bower, Rutson-Griffiths, Cook, Schmidt, Lehde, Kodate, & Runnels, 2017 for further information on the training).

Learner Training

Apart from teacher training, learner training may also be necessary when considering how to make the most of CEFR-informed language education. Drawing on the CEFR's recognition of learning how to learn, Mariani (2004) raises the importance of incorporating instruction to help students develop such ability into teaching programs. Mariani (2004) argues that this could be done by, among other things, teaching study skills and helping students become more aware of their own language learning. Glover's 2011 study shows that the use of CEFR descriptors helped to raise learners' awareness of their language abilities. He conducted research among 62 university students in Turkey to investigate how the students use the Common Reference Levels to describe their speaking skills. The students engaged in 12 tasks in one term, which were designed to help them understand and use the CEFR for self-assessment. Having compared the students' reports at the beginning and at the end of the term, it was found that the students were able to produce "longer, more relevant, and more detailed and critical descriptions of their speaking skills" (p. 130). Attributing these results to the Common Reference Levels' provision of the language for assessing one's abilities, Glover (2011) calls for further research on instruction for successful self-assessment.

One of the familiarization activities introduced in the *Manual* (Council of Europe, 2009) is sorting the CEFR descriptors on the CEFR table. Some of the suggestions given in the *Manual* are as follows:

- 1) Prepare the CEFR table with empty cells in A3 size paper.

- 2) To save the participants time indicate which skill category each descriptor belongs to.
- 3) Ask the participants to map the descriptors onto the table.
- 4) Have the participants read and discuss the descriptors in small groups.
- 5) After completing the table, share the answers and facilitate further discussion.
- 6) Have the participants self-assess their own language abilities.

Although this exercise was suggested particularly to help test creators, it was deemed useful to conduct a similar activity for our students considering the importance of raising their awareness of language ability and learning processes.

3. Background and Methods

Two activities were carried out for this research: one activity in which students were asked to sort CEFR Can Do descriptors in order of level, and a survey which investigated students' perceptions about the activity and the CEFR in comparison to two popular English tests in Japan, TOEIC and Eiken. The participants in these studies were 31 first-year students who were enrolled in a compulsory English course at Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University. The students were streamed into two classes according to the results of an in-house placement test administered in April 2017. There were 16 students in the high-streamed class and 15 students in the low-streamed class. Students' overall CEFR levels according to a separate test in July 2017 from an external organization put 40% of these students at A1, 40% at A2 and 20% at B1 levels.

The first activity (henceforth the CEFR shuffle activity) was conducted in October 2017. It is noted here that two students who were absent from this activity participated in the follow-up survey three months later. The aim of the activity was to familiarize students with the CEFR Can Do descriptors and help them self-assess their language ability based on them. For the first step, eight groups were made: four groups from the high-streamed class and four from the low-streamed class. Each group's average TOEIC score is shown in Table 1. A set containing a blank CEFR self-assessment grid and 30 cards with Can Do descriptors translated into Japanese covering five skills: reading, listening, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing across six levels from A1 to C2 was given to each group. The groups were asked to map the descriptors onto the correct places in the table. Each skill was color-coded, so the students only needed to think of the order of level within the skills. After sorting the descriptors, a picture was taken for later analysis, and the students compared their answers to the actual grid. Then, the students were asked to map three TOEIC scores (225, 550, and 785) and three Eiken grades (Pre-2, 2, and Pre-1) against the CEFR levels. Following the shuffle activity, students were then given time to think of their current CEFR levels and set goals for their four years of English learning at the university. As stated above, the CEFR is used as a reference to create internal tests and class assessments as well as self-access materials. The students were allowed to look at the suggested CEFR levels in the results and feedback given in their English classes, and the levels of the self-access materials they had studied so far when inputting their goals.

Table 1 *Grouping for the CEFR shuffle activity.*

Group	Class stream	Number of students	Average TOEIC score
1	Low	4	300
2	Low	4	232
3	Low	4	315
4	Low	3	268
5	High	4	348
6	High	3	401
7	High	3	398
8	High	4	349

The second activity, a survey about the CEFR and the CEFR shuffle activity, was carried out in January 2018, three months after the activity. The 17-question survey included a mix of multiple choice, four-point Likert scale and open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The questions used in the survey were designed to:

- establish students' familiarity with the CEFR (Q1–Q4)
- find out opinions about CEFR levels, Can Do statements and the CEFR shuffle activity (Q5–Q7)
- elicit students' knowledge about CEFR levels (Q8–Q13)
- elicit students' perceptions about the CEFR against the TOEIC and Eiken tests (Q14–Q17).

All the students who participated in the studies signed a consent form for their data to be used, and the results of the studies will be discussed in the next section.

4. Results

CEFR Shuffle

Two classes of first-year students completed the CEFR shuffle together in one class conducted by both instructors. The results from the lower-streamed class (average TOEIC score=278.8) can be seen in Table 2. Students made 39 mistakes in total with 31 mistakes coming from the upper half of the self-assessment grid (B2 to C2), contrasting with eight from the lower half (A1 to B1). Students made mistakes in all five skills with listening, reading, spoken production, and writing incurring eight mistakes each. Spoken interaction had one less occurrence of mistakes with seven.

Table 2 *CEFR self-assessment grid mistakes of lower-streamed class.*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Total
Listening	0	0	0	3	3	2	8
Reading	0	0	0	0	4	4	8
Spoken Interaction	0	0	0	3	3	1	7
Spoken Production	1	1	0	0	3	3	8
Writing	1	3	2	1	1	0	8
Total	2	4	2	7	14	10	39

The results from the higher-streamed class (average TOEIC score=374.1) in Table 3 show students made 10 fewer total mistakes than the lower-streamed class. 21 mistakes came from the upper-level descriptors (B2–C2) of the CEFR, and eight mistakes were made with the lower-level descriptors (A1–B1). The skills incurring most mistakes were listening ($n=8$), spoken interaction ($n=7$) and reading ($n=6$). Spoken production and writing had four mistakes each.

Table 3 *CEFR self-assessment grid mistakes of higher-streamed class.*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Total
Listening	0	1	2	2	2	1	8
Reading	1	1	0	0	2	2	6
Spoken Interaction	0	1	2	2	2	0	7
Spoken Production	0	0	0	0	2	2	4
Writing	0	0	0	2	2	0	4
Total	1	3	4	6	10	5	29

In Table 4 when the two classes are combined it is apparent that students had most problems with the upper level of the grid. Classification errors in the B2 to C2 range made up 76% of all mistakes. Most students in this cohort are level B1 or lower across the skills. One suggestion as to why students made more mistakes with the upper level descriptors is they had more difficulty conceptualizing the Can Do descriptors which were above their own levels, compared to ones at or below their levels. Another suggestion is students had problems with the complexity of the wording as Komorowska found in her 2004 study.

When looking at the skills there appears to be a somewhat even spread of distribution of mistakes with listening attracting the highest percentage (23.5%), followed closely by reading and spoken interaction with 20.6% each, while the lowest was shared with spoken production and writing at 17.6% each. Students did not make any mistakes sorting seven out of 30 descriptors onto the self-assessment grid. These correct placings occurred across all skills, and were not limited to one level (A1, B1, B2 and C2). When comparing the higher-level stream to the lower, even though this task was conducted in students' native language (Japanese), it appears that students with a higher-level of English performed better on the task.

Table 4 *CEFR self-assessment grid mistakes of combined higher and lower-streamed classes.*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Total
Listening	0	1	2	5	5	3	16
Reading	1	1	0	0	6	6	14
Spoken Interaction	0	1	2	5	5	1	14
Spoken Production	1	1	0	0	5	5	12
Writing	1	3	2	3	3	0	12
Total	3	7	6	13	24	15	68

Survey

The results from the survey are as follows.

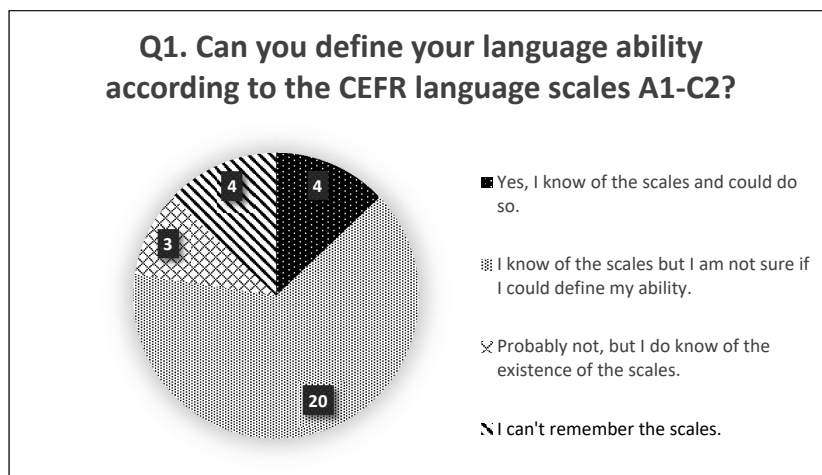


Figure 1 Students' perception of language ability according to CEFR levels.

Figure 1 clearly shows that 65% of students know of the CEFR levels but they are unsure whether they can define their own abilities, whereas only 13% are confident that they could self-assess their language abilities according to the CEFR language scales. The results from this question contrast with Figure 5 where 42–48% of students selected their CEFR levels separated by skills.

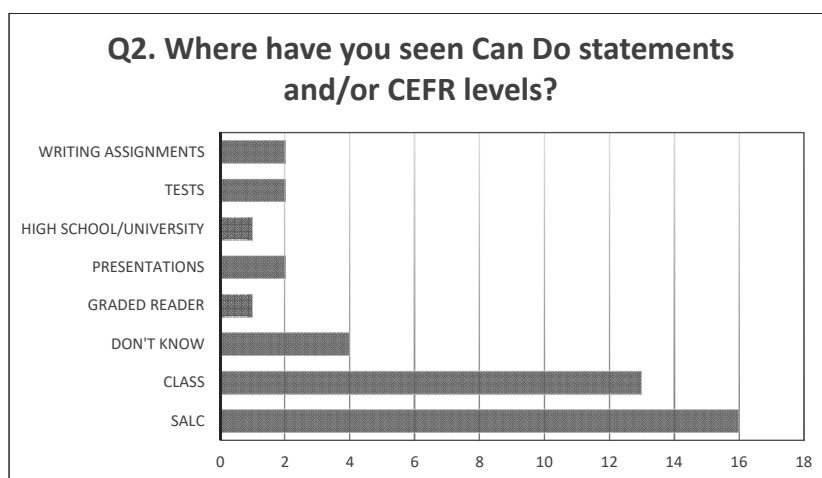


Figure 2 Can Do statement and CEFR level association.

In Figure 2 the majority of students responded that they associated Can Do statements and/or CEFR levels with the SALC/SALC activities ($n=16$) and class ($n=13$). Other responses included graded readers ($n=1$), presentations/writing assignments/tests ($n=2$ each), and 'don't know' ($n=4$). It is surprising that more students had not associated Can Do statements with class due to the fact that in students' English communication class, which they take twice a week for a total of 180 minutes,

students check a Can Do statement at the beginning and end of each lesson. It is equally surprising that, although the most popular answer, more students had not mentioned SALC activities, given to the fact that when they download these activities (four per semester) students must first choose a CEFR level, and then check Can Do statements at the beginning and end of each activity.

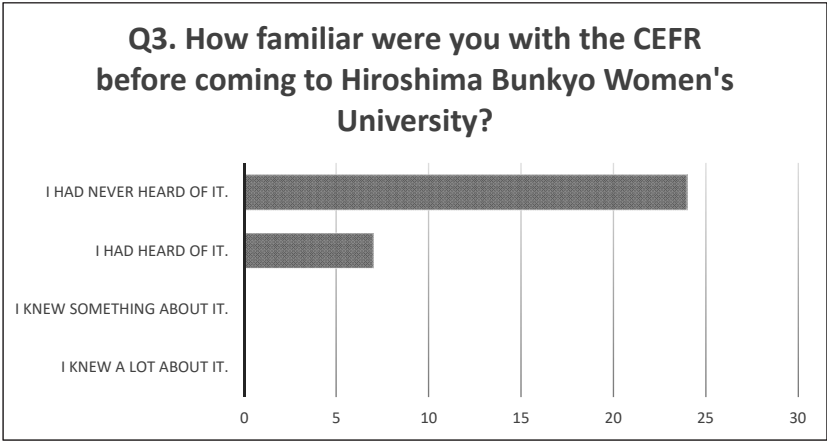


Figure 3 Students familiarity with the CEFR before university entrance.

In Figure 3 only seven students had heard of the CEFR before entering university, while the remaining 24 students of this cohort had never heard of it. No students responded that they knew something, or a lot about the CEFR, which nullified the follow up Question 4 (*If you knew anything about the CEFR, what did you know?*). The researchers note that this question will be interesting to follow up with future cohorts of students as the CEFR is utilized more in the Japanese high school system over the coming years.

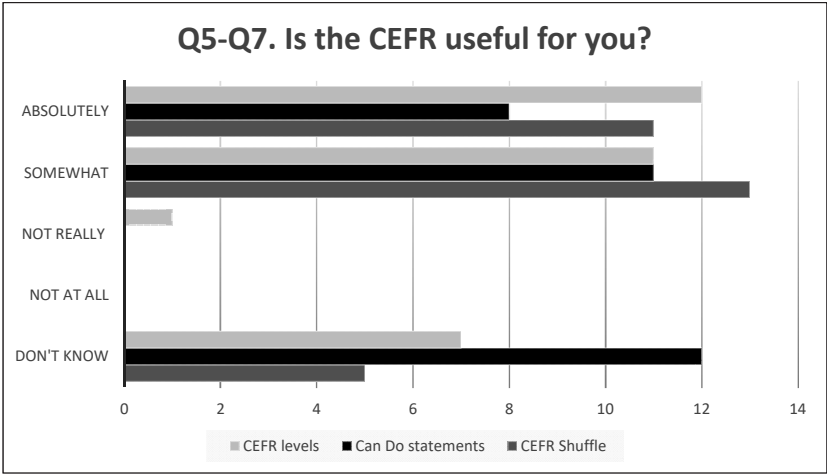


Figure 4 The usefulness of the CEFR for students.

Figure 4 shows that most students find the CEFR shuffle (83%), CEFR levels (74%), and Can Do statements (61%) have some degree of usefulness. Five students did not know how useful the

CEFR shuffle was, seven students did not know how useful CEFR levels were, and twelve students did not know how useful Can Do statements were. Only one student thought CEFR levels were not really useful. Two students' answers were ignored for the CEFR shuffle question as they were absent on the day of the activity. 12 students responding that they did not know how useful Can Do statements were warrants further investigation, considering these are integral components of students' lessons at this university, and are becoming more integrated within the Japanese education system in general.

The purpose of Question 8 was to determine if students could distinguish between a student with a C1 CEFR level, a student with a TOEIC score of 280, and a student with an Eiken Grade 2. 19 out of 31 students correctly estimated the correct order of responses: 1) C1 level student having the most proficient language skills, followed by 2) Eiken Grade 2 student, and 3) 280 TOEIC score. Students had done a similar task three months prior to taking this questionnaire during the CEFR shuffle, where they were asked to sort Eiken grades (Pre-2, 2, and Pre-1) and TOEIC scores (225, 550, and 785) onto the self-assessment grid. Excluding two students who didn't do the CEFR shuffle activity, the responses to this question suggest that 38% of the students were still unfamiliar with the relationship between such tests and CEFR levels.

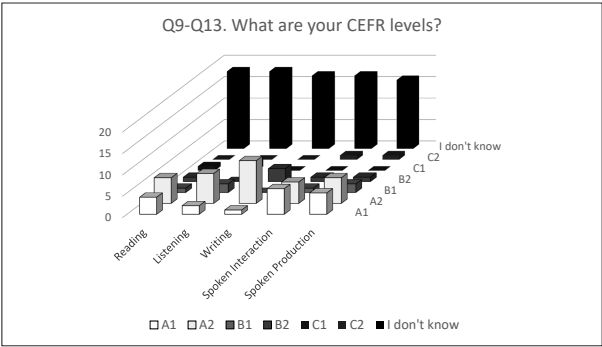


Figure 5 Student self-assessment of CEFR levels.

Questions 9 to 13 asked students to give their CEFR levels according to each of the separate five skills. In Figure 5 we can see that more than half of the cohort could not give estimates for each skill. 58% could not give their listening or reading skills, 55% could not give their writing or spoken interaction skills, and 52% could not give their spoken production skills. The skill which received most CEFR level responses was spoken production ($n=15$). The collective band and skill which received the most responses was A2 writing ($n=10$). A feedback system had been piloted by some teachers during this semester where students received CEFR-based feedback after completing class assessments, e.g. a CEFR level on the writing scale for a writing assignment. This feedback could have influenced students' self-assessment. From 69 total responses where students tried to estimate their level, the band that most students thought they were at was A2 (49%), followed by A1 (26%), B1 (9%), B2 (9%), C1 (4%) and C2 (3%). It appeared that one student made a mistake with her responses by selecting C2, C1 and B2 levels when she would be closer to an actual A2 level. This student's TOEIC score was 295. As stated previously, the overall CEFR levels given by a separate

test in July 2017 from an external organization put 40% of these students at A1, 40% at A2 and 20% at B1 levels, which would suggest that students were somewhat accurate in estimating their own CEFR levels. Although this set of questions was asked to see if students could currently self-assess their language skills according to the CEFR, we note here that to individually examine whether students are able to accurately assess their levels or not will be of interest in future replications of this research once all teachers are giving consistent CEFR-related feedback on assessments.

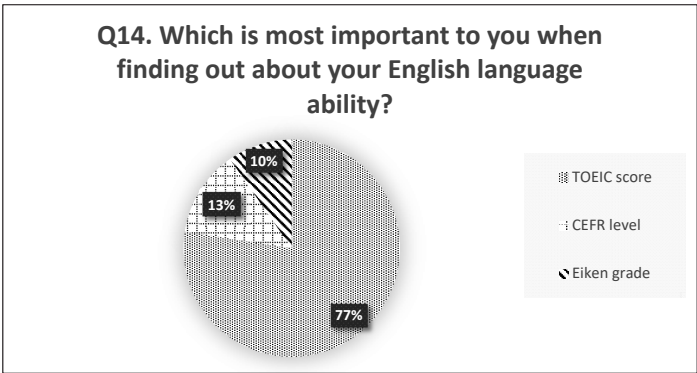


Figure 6 *Preference for knowledge of English language ability.*

As can be seen in Figure 6, 77% of students responded that TOEIC was the most important for them when finding out about their English language ability. The next highest response was 13% of students who thought that the CEFR levels were most important, followed by 10% of students who preferred Eiken as their number one choice for determining English language ability. These students must take the TOEIC as part of their course requirements, so it is not surprising that most chose this as their first choice. However, 13% of students preferring CEFR levels is an interesting result, considering in Figure 3 we can see that no students responded that they knew anything about the CEFR before coming to this university.

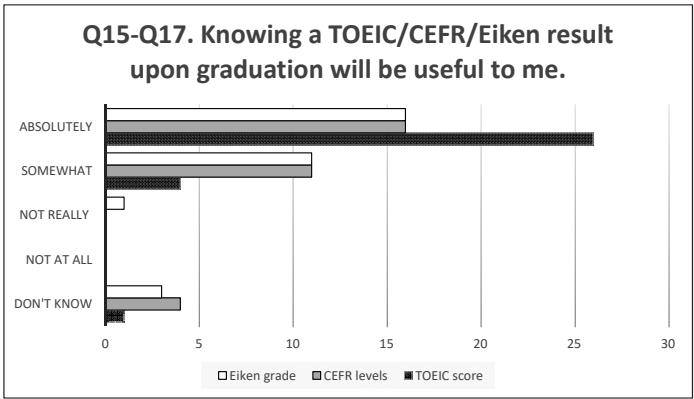


Figure 7 *Comparison of graduation result preference.*

Figure 7 shows the results of three questions asking whether students knowing their TOEIC score, CEFR levels, or Eiken grade will be useful to them after graduation. The strongest response

was 26 students answering ‘absolutely’ regarding TOEIC scores. Responses for knowledge of CEFR levels and Eiken grades were very similar for all students, with 16 each indicating ‘absolutely’ and 11 each indicating ‘somewhat.’ It is well known that TOEIC is held in high regard for English learners in Japan, which the results from this question confirm. However, it is worthy to note that both CEFR levels, and Eiken grades are also seen as desirable by most students.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to establish students’ familiarity with the CEFR, gather students’ opinions on CEFR levels, Can Do statements and the CEFR shuffle, and learn how students perceive CEFR levels in relation to Eiken grades and TOEIC scores. Based on our results from the CEFR shuffle activity and the survey, it is clear that most students were not familiar with the CEFR, nor its Can Do descriptors. As indicated by the results of the CEFR shuffle, students had difficulty placing the Can Do statements within their correct level. In particular, students made more mistakes interpreting the correct levels of Can Do descriptors in the higher level range, from B2 to C2, which we suggest is possibly due to students having difficulty conceptualizing levels of tasks that are above their current levels of English (predominantly A1 to B1), and/or the complexity of the wording in the Can Do descriptors. Data from the survey showed that students knew little to nothing about the CEFR before starting their university education (Question 3), and the majority could not define their language ability according to the CEFR after one semester of study at the BECC (Questions 1, 9–13).

As a starting point to improve students’ awareness further CEFR shuffle activities have been planned in the future for these students and successive cohorts. Students’ responses to Questions 5 (74% expressing support for knowledge of CEFR levels) and 7 (83% expressing support for the CEFR shuffle) justify this decision. Furthermore, as a result of the BECC’s increasing involvement with the CEFR as a tool for language reference, teachers at the BECC have started adapting rubrics and assessments with the CEFR in mind. Students should become more aware of their CEFR levels as teachers give feedback on assignments utilizing CEFR-informed rubrics. In addition, various CEFR information has been created in-house in Japanese to help students better understand what the CEFR is, and how it relates to studying at the BECC (see Appendix B). Additional projects regarding the coordination of compulsory courses for the department will see the inclusion of CEFR levels in vocabulary lists, which is expected to further raise awareness of the CEFR to students.

An interesting finding as a result of keeping students separated by level in their high- and low-stream classes for the CEFR shuffle activity was an indication that sorting descriptors was somewhat dependent on English language level. Groups with higher average TOEIC scores fared better by correctly placing more descriptors than groups with lower scores. This was the case even though the task was done completely in Japanese. However, this study was done with a low number of students, so whether students with a higher ability of English do perform better on this task than lower-level students warrants further investigation with a larger sample size of

language learners.

The responses to Question 6 where twelve students indicated that they did not know how useful Can Do statements were poses the question of whether students understood that Can Do statements can be language learning goals. This highlights the need for clarification that Can Do statements are goals in courses and SALC materials at the BECC. Further education regarding goals in language learning may also be beneficial to students. As educators in the language field we are aware of the importance of clear, relevant course goals for students. The CEFR not only provides goals in the form of Can Do statements, but a platform for discussing what goals students should be able to attain through our courses. Establishing a clear link between Can Do statements and language learning goals may help more students see them as being useful.

The results from our survey clearly show that a TOEIC score is the most desired benchmark for determining language ability for these students. Within Japan a TOEIC score is seen as standard for obtaining work in an English related profession. However, decisions made by MEXT which support the inclusion of Can Do goals in Japanese junior high school and high schools may see CEFR levels becoming more common for working in an English related profession in the near future. If the CEFR does gain prominence in the workforce, such as the TOEIC currently has, students would likely see more value in the CEFR and knowing their CEFR levels.

6. Conclusion

The research conducted here is not without its limitations. First, the study was conducted among one grade of students (first year of university), from one department, and among only 31 participants. Increasing the sample size to include different years and departments would give more data to analyze and subsequently stronger conclusions could be drawn from the results. Secondly, the methods of obtaining data were limited to an observation and analysis from the CEFR shuffle activity, and a survey. Conducting interviews with students would give more informative data on why they chose Can Do descriptors in the levels they selected in the CEFR shuffle and provide reasons to answers given in the questionnaire eliminating some need for speculation from the researchers which has an influence on the conclusions drawn.

While the CEFR has had a strong influence at the BECC with its framework being utilized by teachers creating curricula, the impact on the students reported on in this study seems to be somewhat limited. The CEFR shuffle appeared to be well received by students as indicated in their responses to the subsequent questionnaire. However, students' knowledge of Can Do statements with associated CEFR levels and their ability to assess their own CEFR levels at this stage of their learning is limited. Further education and training is necessary to improve understanding of the CEFR and its Can Do statements, and enable students to self-assess their English ability. This education and training is not limited to students as teachers are also gradually being required to inform students of their CEFR levels when giving feedback on assessments.

This study has implications for current and future students and teachers alike. A replication study will be conducted with the same students who are now in their second year at the BECC. It will also be conducted with current first year students, and future cohorts. Two particular points of interest for the researchers are 1) how well education about the CEFR at the BECC is being understood by students, and 2) what CEFR knowledge future students possess from their high school education. In terms of teachers, future CEFR workshops will be planned to reaffirm and improve their knowledge, and highlight opportunities to further educate students. Continuous investigation of such education and training will be crucial as we believe awareness about one's own learning can lead to successful language acquisition.

References

- Association of Language Testers in Europe. (2002). *The ALTE Can Do Project: Articles and Can Do statements produced by the members of ALTE 1992–2002*. Retrieved from <https://www.alte.org/Materials>
- Bower, J., Runnels, J., Rutson-Griffiths, A., Schmidt, R., Cook, G., Lehde, L. L., & Kodate, A. (2017). Aligning a Japanese university's English language curriculum and lesson plans to the CEFR-J. In F. O'Dwyer, M. Hunke, A. Imig, N. Nagai, N. Naganuma, & M. G. Schmidt (Eds.). (2017). *Critical, Constructive Assessment of CEFR-informed Language Teaching in Japan and Beyond* (pp. 176–225). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bower, J., Rutson-Griffiths, A., Cook, G., Schmidt, R., Lehde, L. L., Kodate, A., & Runnels, J. (2017). The key questions in Bunkyo. In F. O'Dwyer, M. Hunke, A. Imig, N. Nagai, N. Naganuma, & M. G. Schmidt (Eds.). (2017). *Critical, Constructive Assessment of CEFR-informed Language Teaching in Japan and Beyond* (pp. 247–266). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Byram, M., & Parmenter, L. (Eds.). (2012). *The Common European Framework of Reference: The globalisation of language education policy*. Bristol: Multilingual matters.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Council of Europe. (2009). *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR): A Manual*. Strasbourg: Language Policy Division. Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/relating-examinations-to-the-cefr>
- EnglishProfile. (2015). *The CEFR for English: English Vocabulary Profile*. Retrieved from <http://www.englishprofile.org/wordlists>
- European Association for Quality Language Services. (2015). *Eaquals Bank of Descriptors*. Retrieved from <https://www.eaquals.org/resources/revision-and-refinement-of-cefr-descriptors/>
- Fennelly, M. G. (2016). The influence of CEFR on English language education in Japan. *Shikoku Daigaku Kiyo (Bulletin of Shikoku University)*, 46, 109–122. Retrieved from <http://id.nii.ac.jp/1456/00000378/>
- Glover, P. (2011). Using CEFR level descriptors to raise university students' awareness of their speaking skills. *Language Awareness*, 20(2), 121–133.
- Kodate, A. (2017). Developing ELP-informed self-access centre learning materials to support a curriculum aligned to the CEFR. In F. O'Dwyer, M. Hunke, A. Imig, N. Nagai, N. Naganuma, & M. G. Schmidt (Eds.). (2017). *Critical, Constructive Assessment of CEFR-informed Language Teaching in Japan and Beyond* (pp. 226–247). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Komorowska, H. (2004). The CEF in pre-and in-service teacher education. In K. Morrow (Ed.), *Insights from the common European framework* (pp. 55–64). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mariani, L. (2004). Learning to learn with the CEF. In K. Morrow (Ed.), *Insights from the common European framework* (pp. 32–42). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Martyniuk, W., & Noijons, J. (2007). *Executive summary of results of a survey on the use of the CEFR at national level in the Council of Europe Member States*. Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/documents>

- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2011). *Kokusai kyotsugo toshite no eigoryoku kojo no tame no itsutsu no teigen to gutaiteki shisaku (Five proposals and specific measures for developing proficiency in English for international communication)*. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/shotou/082/houkoku/1308375.htm
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2013a). *Gurobaru ka ni taio shita eigo kyoiku kaikaku jisshi keikaku (English education reform plan corresponding to globalization)*. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/25/12/1342458.htm
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2013b). *Kaku chu koto gakko no gaikokugo kyoiku ni okeru can do risto no katachi de no gakushu totatsu mokuhyo settei no tame no tebiki (Guidelines for setting learning goals in the Can Do format for foreign language education at junior and senior high schools)*. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kokusai/gaikokugo/1332306.htm
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2015). *Seito no eigoryoku kojo suishin puran (Plans on promoting improvement in Japanese students' English proficiency)*. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kokusai/gaikokugo/1358906.htm
- Morrow, K. (2004). Background to the CEF. In K. Morrow (Ed.), *Insights from the common European framework* (pp. 3–11). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nagai, N., & O'Dwyer, F. (2011). The actual and potential impacts of the CEFR on language education in Japan. *Synergies Europe*, 6, 141–152. Retrieved from <https://gerflint.fr/Base/Europe6/noriko.pdf>
- O'Dwyer, F. (2015). Toward critical, constructive assessments of CEFR-based language teaching in Japan and beyond. *Studies in Language and Culture (Gengo Bunka Kenkyu)*, 41, 191–204. Retrieved from https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/repo/ouka/all/51427/slc_41-191.pdf
- O'Dwyer, F., Hunke, M., Imig, A., Nagai, N., Naganuma, N., & Schmidt, M. G. (Eds.). (2017). *Critical, Constructive Assessment of CEFR-informed Language Teaching in Japan and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sugitani, M., & Tomita, Y. (2012). Perspectives from Japan. In M. Byram, & L. Parmenter (Eds.), *The Common European Framework of Reference: The globalisation of language education policy* (pp. 198–211). Bristol: Multilingual matters.
- University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2012a). *Cambridge English Key: Key English Test (KET) CEFR Level A2 Handbook for Teachers*. Cambridge: UCLES.
- University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. (2012b). *Cambridge English Preliminary: Preliminary English Test (PET) CEFR Level B1 Handbook for Teachers*. Cambridge: UCLES.
- van Ek, J. A., & Trim, J. L. M. (1991). *Waystage 1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—平成30年 8 月10日 受理—

APPENDIX A.

CEFR Impact Survey

Q1: Can you define your language ability according to the CEFR language scales A1–C2?

- Yes, I know the scales and could do so.
- I know of the scales but I am not sure if I could define my ability.
- Probably not, but I do know of the existence of the scales.
- I can't remember the scales.

Q2: Where have you seen Can Do statements and/or CEFR levels? Write as many ideas as you can.

Q3: How familiar were you with the CEFR before coming to Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University?

- I had never heard of it.
- I had heard of it.
- I knew something about it.
- I knew a lot about it.

Q4: If you answered, "I knew something about it" or "I knew a lot about it" in Question 3, what did you know about it, and how did you know about it?

Q5: CEFR levels are useful for me.

Absolutely - Somewhat - Not really - Not at all - Don't know

Q6: Can Do statements are useful for me.

Absolutely - Somewhat - Not really - Not at all - Don't know

Q7: The task I did in the joint class, which is to identify CEFR Can Do statements according to their respective levels, was useful.

Absolutely - Somewhat - Not really - Not at all - Don't know - Don't remember it

Q8: Among these 3 different students' scores, who has the highest English ability? Rank them in order of their language abilities.

A student with C1 CEFR level / A student with TOEIC 280 / A student with Eiken Grade 2

Q9: What is your reading CEFR level?

C2 - C1 - B2 - B1 - A2 - A1 - I don't know

Q10: What is your listening CEFR level?

C2 - C1 - B2 - B1 - A2 - A1 - I don't know

Q11: What is your writing CEFR level?

C2 - C1 - B2 - B1 - A2 - A1 - I don't know

Q12: What is your spoken interaction CEFR level?

C2 - C1 - B2 - B1 - A2 - A1 - I don't know

Q13: What is your spoken production CEFR level?

C2 - C1 - B2 - B1 - A2 - A1 - I don't know

Q14: Rank the following in order of importance for you when finding out your English language ability. (1 being most important, 3 being least important)

CEFR levels / Eiken grade / TOEIC score

Q15: Knowing my Eiken grade will be useful to me when I graduate university. (For future jobs and/or future study after university)

Absolutely - Somewhat - Not Really - Not at all - Don't know

Q16: Knowing my CEFR level will be useful to me when I graduate university. (For future jobs and/or future study after university)

Absolutely - Somewhat - Not Really - Not at all - Don't know

Q17: Knowing my TOEIC score will be useful to me when I graduate university. (For future jobs and/or future study after university)

Absolutely - Somewhat - Not Really - Not at all - Don't know

APPENDIX B.

What is the CEFR?

