Original Paper

The Implementation of China Standards of English (CSE) Framework and CEFR-Based English Test Performance of University Students in China

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Abstract

The study investigates the implementation of the China Standards of English (CSE) Framework in China and its effect on students' English proficiency. The study, involving 250 students and 100 instructors, demonstrated that the execution of the CSE Framework is irregular and deficient, revealing inconsistencies between the prescribed standards and actual practices. The findings reveal an absence of significant link between the degree of CSE implementation and students' test performance, underscoring the disconnect between policy and practice. The results suggest that a more thorough and methodical application of the CSE Framework is crucial for enhancing English language proficiency outcomes among university students in China. The study concludes with recommendations for a comprehensive redesign of the curriculum and instructional methods to improve alignment with the CSE Framework and enhance student performance in English proficiency assessments.

Keywords

China Standards of English (CSE) Framework, CEFR-based English Test, English proficiency, University students, China

1. Introduction

The Chinese government prioritizes the English language to enhance its global influence and participate in international relations, trade, and education. They have implemented measures to improve English language education, including establishing a standardized approach for evaluating proficiency. The Standards of English (CSE) is a comprehensive framework that provides specific guidelines for teaching and assessment of English proficiency, addressing a range of linguistic abilities and degrees of mastery (Wang et al., 2020).

The Ministry of Education and the National Language Standard Committee of the National Language Commission develop and approve China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE). The incorporation of English language instruction into educational curricula has become a fundamental element nationwide, with mandatory inclusion from primary through tertiary levels. English language plays a crucial role in the development of China. Moreover, it holds an important role in the professional lives of numerous Chinese individuals, despite being uncommonly used as a method of interaction. (Lui, 2022; National Education Examinations Authority, 2018)

The program which is CEFR equivalent of China was introduced in 2018 to assess interpreting competence using descriptors. It examines training syllabi, curricular frameworks, assessment scales, and professional codes of conduct, as well as a review of relevant literature and the perspectives of professionals, trainers, and trainees. Its objective to encourage reflection on Chinese interpreting practice and to provide a common reference for developing teaching syllabi, curriculum guidelines, examinations, and textbooks. They contribute to educational reform and innovation by increasing the efficacy of interpreting instruction, learning, and evaluation. (Wang et al., 2020)

According to Foley (2019), the CSE focuses on genres, dialects, registers, idiomatic expressions, and cultural figures of speech. However, issues with descriptors and a narrow focus have been identified. Thus, it is intended for Chinese learners at all educational levels, while the CEFR was designed for foreign language acquisition in a European context.

Thus, China's State Council mandated a new assessment framework for foreign languages, with the National Education Examinations Authority developing it. The China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) was developed as the first full-range English proficiency instrument in China. The CSE aims to support examination reforms, provide a standardized method for test providers, and improve communication between teaching, learning, and assessment. It also enriches existing language proficiency scales for future global alignment initiatives. (National Entrance Examination, 2018)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a reference system that guides language syllabuses, curriculum design, and language materials. It aims to enhance transparency and coherence in language teaching and learning. The CEFR of 2001 revolutionized language education by emphasizing learners' abilities, autonomy, social interaction, and practical language use. It expanded from traditional language skills to four modalities of communication, emphasizing social interactions and multilingualism. (Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021; Piccardo & North, 2022)

According to Zheng et al. (2016), the CEFR scale has not gained significant traction among Chinese English Language Teaching (ELT) educators due to its lack of official recognition and significance in education policies. Chinese English proficiency assessments do not align with the CEFR, and Chinese educational materials do not incorporate its guidelines. Despite introducing foreign English textbooks, these materials undergo adaptation to suit the Chinese context.

With the foregoing literature and studies on the program, the researcher aims to understand the relationship between the Chinese Standard Examination (CSE) and CEFR-based English test

performance among Chinese university students. Furthermore, it aims to assess the effectiveness of the CSE in aligning with international language proficiency standards. The study will provide baseline information for improving the current framework and university English standards and inform curriculum development to better equip students with necessary language skills.

2. Method

This study determines the relationship between the implementation of the China Standards of English (CSE) Framework and the CEFR-based English Test Performance of University Students in China. The research was conducted within a reputable institution with a distinguished track record of delivering high-quality education across various academic disciplines. The university's highly skilled faculty and state-of-the-art facilities allowed for a thorough examination of the level of implementation of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and its impact on the English language proficiency of university students.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select teachers and students, ensuring they met specific criteria relevant to the research questions. A researcher-made questionnaire was developed to assess the extent of CSE implementation in the selected university, focusing on curriculum construction, teaching designs, learning objectives, textbook content, exam evaluation, and teaching and learning strategies. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to measure the extent of implementation and was administered electronically to teacher-respondents.

The study also examined the four levels of English performance on the College English Test (CET) in China: Excellent, Good, Pass, and Fail. These levels represent the degree of proficiency in English, the level of understanding, and the level of difficulty in communication. The findings contribute to a better understanding of English language teaching and learning in the university context.

3. Result

The study of the relationship between the extent of implementation between China Standards of English (CSE) Framework is used and performance on CEFR-based English tests shows that there is a big gap between what the framework was supposed to achieve and what students did. The data indicate that there is no significant correlation between various constructs of the CSE Framework's implementation—such as curriculum construction, teaching designs, learning objectives, textbook content, exam evaluation, and teaching and learning strategies—and students' overall English test performance. The computed correlation coefficient for curriculum construction and overall test performance is -0.087 with a significance level of 0.388, and designs on teaching have a correlation coefficient of -0.096 with a significance level of 0.340, both indicating non-significant relationships. Similarly, learning objectives ($r = 0.017$, Sig. $= 0.867$), textbook content ($r = 0.165$, Sig. $= 0.101$), exam evaluation ($r = 0.135$, Sig. $= 0.180$), and teaching and learning strategies ($r = -0.002$, Sig. $= 0.983$) also fail to show significant correlations.

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The overall correlation coefficient of 0.055 with a significance level of 0.588 further underscores that the extent of CSE Framework implementation does not significantly impact students' English test performance. However, this does not mean that the CSE Framework is not valuable or effective in other ways. It may still have a positive impact on students' overall language skills, confidence, and motivation. Additionally, further research could explore other variables that may influence English test performance, such as teacher quality, classroom environment, or individual learning styles. Hence, the CSE Framework should be viewed as one piece of the puzzle in enhancing students' English language learning experience.

Table 1. Correlation Between the Extent of Implementation of China Standards of English (CSE) Framework and CEFR-based English Test Performance of University Students

Extent of Implementation of China Standards of English (CSE) Framework	CEFR-based English Test Performance	Computed r	Sig.	Decision	Interpretation
Curriculum Construction	Overall CEFR-based English Test Performance	-.087	.388	Accepted	Not Significant
Designs On Teaching	Overall CEFR-based English Test Performance	-.096	.340	Accepted	Not Significant
Learning Objectives	Overall CEFR-based English Test Performance	.017	.867	Accepted	Not Significant
Textbook Content	Overall CEFR-based English Test Performance	.165	.101	Accepted	Not Significant
Exam Evaluation	Overall CEFR-based English Test Performance	.135	.180	Accepted	Not Significant

Teaching and Learning Strategies	Overall CEFR-based English Test Performance	-.002	.983	Accepted	Not Significant
Overall Extent of Implementation of China Standards of English (CSE) Framework	**Overall CEFR-based English Test Performance**	**.055**	**.588**	**Accepted**	**Not Significant**

4. Discussion

The absence of a significant correlation between the degree of CSE Framework implementation and students' performance on CEFR-based English assessments indicates that the existing strategy for CSE implementation is not effectively improving language proficiency results. This disconnection highlights the necessity for a more substantial and significant incorporation of the CSE into pedagogical methods in the selected university. The institution must concentrate on matching its instructional techniques, curriculum, and assessment strategies with the framework's requirements to guarantee that the CSE effectively enhances student outcomes in English language proficiency.

As the State Council of China instituted a novel evaluation framework for foreign languages, it resulted in the creation of the CSE by the National Education Examinations Authority. Its claim of facilitating examination reforms, standardizing procedures for test providers, and enhancing communication among teaching, learning, and assessment must be fully implemented. (National Education Examinations Authority, 2018). Shi (2017) emphasizes that the implementation of the CSE Framework is intricate and necessitates carefully crafted, scientifically sound educational programs. Wang (2019) also asserts that China's approach to implementing educational standards is characterized by methodical planning and sequential execution.

The outcomes of this study highlight the need for a more intentional and unified strategy that goes beyond formal adoption. It focuses on the actual use of the framework to enhance student learning and performance directly. Without this technique, its impact on English competence will be limited, and the gap between policy and practice will continue to hinder progress in language instruction. Ultimately, although the CSE Framework had the capacity to substantially improve English language instruction in China, its present execution fails to realize this objective.

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