A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of practices

1 OVERVIEW

Project leader(s) contact: Ela Jarosz

Country: Poland

Institution: Gama College, Krakow

Type of context: Programme/school level

Educational sector: Adult (Extensive)

Main focus: Classroom Teacher Assessment; Learning/Self-Assessment
Implementation of CEFR-based assessment

SUMMARY
Name: Eaquals CEFR certificate scheme

Abstract:
Introduction of the Eaquals CEFR Certificate Scheme – to certificate CEFR level reached - into a private language school, which already had a CEFR-based curriculum

Stage: Evaluation

Theme: Assessment

CEFR aspects used: Levels, descriptors, assessment with defined criteria

Main features of this example:
- "Can-do" descriptors for continuous teacher assessment and (simplified) for self-assessment
- Assessment of performance in tasks related to CEFR descriptors, with CEFR-based criteria
- Systematic standardisation training and quality control

Quality principles particularly demonstrated: Validity, Transparency, Coherence, Sustainability

2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background:
The school syllabi were related to the CEFR several years before the accreditation. A "social moderation" technique was applied: the academic director specified "can-do" descriptors of the basic language skills and structures taught at various levels at the school in relation to the CEFR scales of reference and prepared sets of "can-do" communicative objectives for each level. The results for all the levels were compared and the standardisation and validation process was applied through the comparison of students' performance at various levels of language proficiency and data analysis. The final results were presented and accepted during the general academic staff meeting. The "can-do" communicative objectives were included in the syllabi in five categories: speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary.

Stated aims:
- to introduce a CEFR-related assessment approach correlated with the CEFR-related curriculum used in the school
- to offer Eaquals Certificates of Achievement, which help learners to demonstrate their language competence both locally and in other European countries, and also increase the school visibility in the local market

People/roles:
The academic director, directors of studies and teachers

Steps/stages:
The school formally joined the Eaquals Certification Scheme in 2010. The implementation of the Scheme was preceded by a number of changes related to the standardisation training, assessment procedures and moderation techniques described below.

1. **Assessment and self-assessment based on "can-do" checklists**
   "Can-do" assessment checklists most representative for each school level were prepared two years prior to the application for the accreditation. Teachers were asked to assess learners' achievement against "can-do" checklists at key stages of the course in order to focus on learners' practical abilities attained during the course.

   Simplified versions of "can-do" checklists were presented to learners for self-assessment at the beginning of the term in order to make them aware of practical course objectives. Twice a term, the learners ticked the descriptors referring to the actual "can-dos" they believed they managed to attain. The results were compared with the teacher's judgements. When a learner could do more than 70% of the "can-do" statements, they would have achieved the corresponding CEFR level.

   Teachers were strongly encouraged to present lesson aims in term of "can-do" statements and organise brief self-assessment activities during or at the end of the lesson to make learners aware of language competences they gained and practised during a lesson.

2. **Assessment based on performance tasks**
   Sets of sample speaking and writing assessment tasks were created by the academic director and directors of studies for each of the school levels. Assessment based on performance tasks was organised by teachers twice a term during class time. Once a term, speaking and writing tasks were assessed both by teachers and directors of studies in order to moderate the assessment results. Students' proficiency was assessed as follows:
   - four defined, CEFR-based criteria were used to access speaking: fluency, accuracy, range and interaction
   - five defined, CEFR-based criteria were used to assess writing: task fulfilment, organisation, range of appropriate grammar, range of appropriate vocabulary, spelling and punctuation.
   - A simple scale (1 – 5) was used to assess the performance against each CEFR criterion descriptor for the level concerned. Grades were discussed with learners twice a term and were altered regularly according to learners' effort and ability.

3. **Progress tests**
   Teacher assessment judgements were supported by progress tests:
   - mid-term book-based tests
   - end of term and end of year tests prepared centrally for each level
   These tests are conventional grammar and vocabulary tests based upon the CEFR-related syllabus.

4. **Standardisation training and awareness-raising activities**

   a) **Standardisation training for teachers**
      Regular standardisation sessions for teachers were organised three times a year: during the induction weekend at the beginning of the school year and at least once a term during general teachers' or sections' meetings with the academic director or directors of studies. Newly employed teachers had individual standardisation sessions with the academic director at the beginning of their work at the school and with the respective director of studies throughout the first term. Each new teacher was additionally supervised and supported in the assessment procedures by their more experienced colleague teaching the same level.

      The following topics were covered during standardisation sessions in the two years preceding the accreditation:
      - familiarisation with the CEFR descriptors for speaking and writing - workshop based on the Eaquals CEFR standardisation packs
      - illustrative samples with DVD and scripts (adults and teenagers) - workshop based on material available on the Council of Europe webpage
      - "can-do" statements in the school syllabi compared with classroom reality - teachers compared sets of "can-dos" in the syllabi with the abilities attained in their groups, first with their directors of studies and then in the plenary discussion

- "can-do" statements in the schemes of work – prepared by teachers teaching the same levels
- "can-do" assessment and self-assessment checklists
- sample assessment tasks for speaking and writing developed by the academic director and directors of studies
- presentation of the assessment criteria and grading forms
- development of more activities for assessing speaking and writing by teachers

b) **Standardisation sessions for directors of studies**
   The directors of studies had standardisation sessions with the academic director. The content included:
   - the revision of "can-do" course communicative aims in the context of "can-do" statements developed by Eaquals
   - guidelines for teachers regarding "can-do" statements in the schemes of work
   - exchange of post-observation comments on assessment activities carried out in class
   - preparation of standardisation workshops for the teachers

c) **Awareness-raising sessions for administrative staff**
   Administrative staff participated in sessions on the general application of the CEFR and the system of "can-dos" in the school programmes.

d) **Awareness-raising activities for students**
   - The CEFR general scales and summary "can-do" descriptions of the school levels were translated into the students' native language and displayed on notice boards in all classrooms.
   - "Can-do" communicative objectives were introduced in progress reports, certificates and publicity materials.
   - The ALTE/EAQUALS Portfolio for adults was piloted among the corporate students and the national version of the Portfolio for Children 10 – 15 was introduced to teenage learners.

Quality Assurance procedures
The standardisation and awareness-raising activities reported above are in themselves quality assurance procedures. In addition, moderation and formal quality control ensures that the system operates in practice after the training.

1. **Inter-subjective moderation techniques**
   - As tandem teaching was a prevailing system at the school, grades were negotiated and calculated between two teachers teaching the same group. If necessary, grades were additionally discussed with the directors of studies.
   - Grades entered on progress reports and certificates were always approved by the respective director of studies who signed the certificates together with the teachers.

- Once a term, the directors of studies visited all teachers in their sections and assessed selected learners' speaking and writing against "can-do" descriptors together with the teacher.

2. **Administrative quality control**
   - End of term tests were prepared centrally by the academic director and directors of studies.
   - Directors of studies acted as second assessors during set activities at least once a term.
   - Final grades were confirmed by the directors of studies.
   - Grades were stored in the school filing system individually for each course participant.
   - The school policy regarding "can-do" statements for each term was set up during the management team meetings.

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:

North, B. and Jaroscz, E. (2013): Implementing the CEFR in teacher-based assessment: approaches and challenges. In: Galaczi, E. D. and Weir, C. J. (eds.) *Exploring Language Frameworks: Proceedings of the ALTE Krakow Conference, July 2011*, Cambridge. Studies in Language Testing Series 36, Cambridge University Press: 118–134.

3 RESULTS

What was achieved:

A common CEFR-based curriculum is in place, integrating ongoing assessment by both students and teachers with "can-do" descriptors.

In addition, a more formal assessment scheme including both CEFR-rated performance tasks and progress tests, backed by standardisation training and quality control techniques, ensures that the CEFR levels students receive on their certificates are accurate.

Impact:

- Students feel more confident about their learning outcomes. They see the link between classroom activities and what they will be able to do with language in real life. They can identify language abilities they acquire in class and they learn to assess how good they are at using these abilities in real-world contexts.
- Teachers have changed their approach to assessment: they see the benefits of "can-do" assessment for students. They have learnt to integrate assessment and self-assessment activities in their lesson plans and use them for both assessment and teaching purposes.
- Parents are satisfied that they not only see the results of progress tests but also understand what their children have learnt. Some parent claim this is exactly why they have chosen the school.
- Eaquals Certificates of Achievement add extra value to school certificates and showcase students' abilities to use language in real-world situations. They help with job advancement and are respected by potential employers.

Resources on this theme
https://www.eaquals.org/our-expertise/cefr/our-work-practical-resources-for-language-teaching/assessment-and-standardisation-materials/

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

- Organise regular standardisation training based on illustrative and locally recorded samples.
- Make sure the assessment and moderation procedures are practical not too lengthy (e.g. "can-do" checklists)
- Introduce short "can-do" self-assessment checklists to make learners aware of their progress at various stages of the course.
- Make sure all "can-do" descriptors are clear to learners.