THE ROLE OF FRAMEWORK IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) IN ASEAN: VOICES FROM REGIONAL ENGLISH EDUCATORS

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Abstrak

This study examines the role of a framework in English Language Teaching (ELT) in ASEAN countries through the lens and experiences of regional English educators. Utilising a qualitative research design to examine three central questions: the frameworks used, the challenges of implementation and integration of the framework in classroom practice. The data collection was conducted through interviews with approximately 18 English educators from multiple regions in ASEAN countries. Findings bring attention to the frameworks which are commonly referenced, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The implementation is often shaped by contextual constraints, including facilities and infrastructure, educators' competencies, learners' proficiency and institutional or national policy. Additionally, the discussion reveals a diverse range of approaches influenced by local, national, and international ELT models. Teachers reported both benefits, such as improved clarity and coherence in lesson planning, as well as challenges, including mismatches between framework assumptions and classroom realities. The study highlights the importance of critical reflection in adapting the frameworks, emphasising the need for localised pedagogical strategies that empower educators to make context-sensitive decisions. These insights contribute to ongoing discussion on responsive ELT practices in linguistically and culturally diverse settings.

Keywords: english language teaching (ELT); frameworks; qualitative study; regional english educators

INTRODUCTION

The definition of a framework can vary across disciplines; nevertheless, the common agreement based on the Cambridge dictionary is " a foundational or structural element that provides the basis for something larger or more complex" It is a pre-defined set of rules, ideas, or patterns that guide the creation of a system, application, or project (Lowell & Ureña-Rodríguez, 2023; Partelow, 2023), which in teaching context would refer to a set of standards that specify the content to be learned, in other words, 'what' to teach instead of 'how' to teach (Teig et al., 2024). Frameworks in ELT serve as structured guides that inform curriculum design, instructional strategies, and assessment practices

(Richards & Rodgers, 2014), while also aiming to standardise teaching approaches while allowing for adaptation across diverse learning environments. Prominent frameworks, such as CLT, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), also commonly referred to as Task-based Instruction (TBI), and the CEFR, have significantly influenced pedagogical discourse and practice worldwide. These models propose theoretically grounded pathways for language acquisition, which often emphasise communication, learner autonomy, and real-world application (Ellis et al., 2020; Little, 2006). Nevertheless, while such frameworks provide a structured and standardised approach, their practical application often encounters constraints in the realities of classroom contexts, especially in under-resourced or linguistically complex regions (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Low & Ao, 2018).

In the context of ASEAN, English educators are tasked with implementing externally developed frameworks, such as the CEFR, which may not align with the non-Western context, sociocultural, and institutional situations. This dissonance can result in selective adaptation, hybridisation, or resistance to the frameworks altogether (Ha, 2008; Holliday, 2005; Matsuda, 2012). Teachers often find themselves negotiating between top-down policy demands and bottom-up classroom realities, leading to what some scholars describe as a "pedagogical compromise." (Barrett & Scott, 2014; Brubaker, 2012; Pennycook, 1990). Despite this, there is limited qualitative research that centres the voices of educators who work in these dynamic, diverse settings and must make daily decisions about how to adapt or reject elements of prescribed frameworks (Lefstein & Perath, 2014; Linville & Vinogradova, 2022).

This study addresses this gap by exploring how English educators in the Southeast Asian regions, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, understand, implement, and adapt frameworks in English Language teaching in their specific teaching contexts. Through a qualitative, reflexive thematic analysis approach, this study examines the following research question: (1) What frameworks are used for ELT in different contexts? (2) What are the challenges and benefits of implementing ELT frameworks in diverse classrooms? (3) How can teachers effectively adapt and integrate different ELT frameworks into their teaching practices?

By focusing on educators' lived experiences and reflexive insights, this research seeks to contribute to a more grounded understanding of how frameworks function not only as pedagogical tools but also as negotiated constructs shaped by local realities. In doing so, it supports the call for more context-sensitive, teacher-informed ELT practices (Bozkurt & Zehir Topkaya, 2023; Floris & Renandya, 2020; Smolcic, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, the research design will be rooted in the principles of reflexive thematic analysis, a method that acknowledges the researcher's active role in shaping the interpretation of data (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). This approach facilitates a deep exploration of the subjective experiences and perspectives of regional English educators, recognising that their understanding and implementation of ELT frameworks are shaped by their unique contexts and individual interpretations (Runesi et al., 2022).

This study employs interviews to gather the voices of English educators in ASEAN on the English language teaching frameworks and the extent to which they are integrated into their classroom practice. The study involved approximately 18 participants, comprising 13 females and five males. Although they did not represent all ASEAN countries, they covered the majority of countries in Southeast Asia. The common attributes of these English educators are their extensive teaching experience in the field, with more than 10 years of professional teaching experience in both general English and English for specific purposes at the higher education level. Participant demographics by country are presented in Table 1, while gender is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Country distribution of research participants

No	Country	%	Count
1	Indonesia	16.67%	3
2	Malaysia	16.67%	3
4	Thailand	22.22%	4
5	Phillipine	0.00%	0
6	Brunei Darussalam	0.00%	0
7	Vietnam	11.11%	2
8	Laos PDR	5.56%	1
9	Cambodia	5.56%	1
10	Singapore	0.00%	0
11	Myanmar	22.22%	4
	Total	100.00%	18

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach (2021b), which supports interpretive engagement with the data and facilitates the identification and analysis of recurring patterns or themes. The six-phase process of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke was carried out: (1) familiarization with the data through reading notes and transcripts; (2) systematic generation of initial codes; (3) development of preliminary themes; (4) review of refinement of those theme; and (6) reporting of the analytical findings (Byrne, 2022).

Table 2. Gender distribution of research participants

No	Gender	%	Count
1	Female	72.22%	13
2	Male	27.78%	5
3	Prefer not to answer	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	18

Using NVivo 15 as the data analytical tool, following Braun and Clarke's framework, the researchers began by transcribing the interview data, followed by the coding of features and the identification of key themes aligned with the research questions and emergent patterns. The next phase involved continuous analysis to refine and clearly define each theme. The final stage consists of synthesising the findings, with the emergent themes forming the basis of the discussion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research examines the diverse perspectives of English educators concerning the pedagogical approaches that influence their professional activities. The primary objectives are to explore educators' understanding of ELT frameworks and how this understanding impacts their professional development. The data highlights three main themes that correspond to the research questions. One prominent theme that emerged is that English educators' understanding of the framework influences how the framework is implemented in their classroom teaching and learning process. Another theme that calls for our attention is the challenges they faced when attempting to incorporate the framework at both the institutional level and within the broader educational environment. Lastly, the theme that emerged from the data is their attempt to incorporate the framework into their teaching, with a primary focus on improving their communicative skills through an authentic approach that meets the needs of the job market.

ELT Frameworks in Different Contexts

The findings indicate that the use of frameworks in higher education across ASEAN countries was driven by the need to enhance the competitiveness of graduates in the job market, particularly in the context of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) (Choomthong, 2014; Thanamaimas & Soonthonnarurangsee, 2021). Thus, the data indicate that national and regional frameworks are utilised, particularly in ELT, as part of the ASEAN integration pillar. These frameworks serve as standards and guidelines for educational institutions. Specific framework mentioned in the interview data included the national qualification framework (NQF) and Common European Framework (CEFR), which several research

participants referred to as the framework that links with the national educational policy, such as Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF), Thai Qualification Framework (TQF), and Vietnamese Qualification Framework (VQF), or CEFR-like Indonesian context or IQF (Yusra et al., 2022), which they closely tied up with ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework (AQRF). Meanwhile, the CEFR is commonly used as a standard or criterion for teaching and assessing learners, incorporating the levelling of English proficiency according to the CEFR standard.

As the national framework, one of the research participants stated: "In Malaysia, MQF is the national qualification framework that all higher education institutions adhere to. My understanding of it is quite limited to the specific aspects that have a direct influence on my teaching duties" (Interview, Educator 1), in which, the statement is similar to the one stated by another research participants, "It is evident that the TQF has been integrated into the English program curriculum through various components, including the qualifications standards, program specification and course descriptors" (Interview, Educator 9). The use of NQF was also echoed by the participants from Vietnam which highlights the English language teaching framework used "it was designed to be compatible with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF), laying a foundation for higher education institutions to prepare appropriate training programs and help Vietnamese laborers get more opportunities to seek jobs in the ASEAN block." (Interview, Educator 6). From these statements, although it was not explicitly mentioned, the objectives of implementing a specific framework were to enhance the quality of graduates to meet the job market's needs, especially in ASEAN countries. With the urgency of improving quality of education to face the ASEAN economic community (AEC) in 2025, English language teaching has been much influenced by the policy, which resulted in the increased focus on English language instruction and acquisition in ASEAN nations to prepare individuals with the requisite competencies for engagement in the AEC with an emphasis developing practical communication skills (Choomthong, 2014; Jindapitak, 2018).

The other frameworks explicitly mentioned were the use of the 'localised' CEFR framework (Foley, 2019; Hamid et al., 2025), which in many countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, has been adapted to meet local needs. The framework of reference for English Language Education in Thailand (FRELE-TH), CEFR-M and CEFR-V was part of the adapted version of CEFR used in English language teaching and learning. The argument that CEFR adaptation, such as FRELE-TH, was used due to the competitive job market and ASEAN integration. Thus, FRELE-TH helps "enhance the English ability of Thai people to cope with and perform effectively in this changing context" (Foley, 2019, p. 361). Similarly,

the research participants highlighted the ELT framework used: "We (in Vietnam) are using an adapted CEFR as stipulated by the Ministry of Education as the criteria for teaching and assessing English language learners in our institution" (Interview, Educator 6). The main objectives are to improve the quality of education to meet the international standard, thus the students are more motivated since "they have a set of criteria and clear objectives to follow to achieve the level" (Interview, Educator 7).

Indonesia, on the other hand, use CEFR as a reference in many educational institutions, although not officially mandated by the Indonesian government (Foley, 2019). On the contrary, the Kurikulum Merdeka stated,

The minimum learning outcomes for these six English language skills refer to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) and are equivalent to level B1 (Kemendikbudristek BSKAP, 2022)

This highlights the crucial role of CEFR levels in assessing Indonesian students across various levels and in multiple languages taught at the school level. In addition, for an advanced level or senior high school level, the targeted learning outcome would be B2. Based on the CEFR levels (Europe, 2001, 2018), B1 and B2 refer to a scale of competencies that indicate learners as independent users. The B1 level indicates that speakers can hold conversations in a common setting and articulate ideas comprehensively. Meanwhile, B2 level, categorised as upper intermediate level with common characteristics, are able to understand complex ideas, including holding a technical discussion in their field confidently. As in the Kurikulum Merdeka, this reference to the CEFR was also apparent in other languages taught, such as German, Arabic, Mandarin, and Korean (Musthofa, 2022). This situation has raised an issue since the CEFR, although unofficial, as the apparent acknowledgement of implementation has been reflected in official government documents for the curriculum. Previous studies on CEFR used in the Indonesian context highlighted the challenges and issues, among others, the limited understanding of the underlying principles of the framework and the idea that CEFR may necessitate modification to align with local requirements and cultural context within Indonesian educational institutions (Cakrawati et al., 2024; Dwinalida et al., 2024), which is similar to the adaptation of CEFR in other countries, such as Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia.

Challenges and Benefits of Implementing Different ELT Frameworks

According to the data, the implementation of these frameworks in ELT programs is seen to have both benefits and challenges. The benefits, among others, are: improved quality and accountability, standardisation and uniformity,

guidance for curriculum design and implementation, and international compatibility. On the other hand, the prominent challenges uttered by the research participants were teacher quality and training, student-related issues, and implementation complexity. Although most of the research participants mentioned that the teachers' competence is the main issue (Runesi et al., 2022; Waterworth, 2016), other aspects are also prominent as the challenges. As stated by the research participants, "poor performance of learners on their English proficiency" (Interview, Educator 6) and "facility and infrastructure, in addition to the teachers' workload" (Interview, Educator 4) were the significant challenges they face in implementing ELT frameworks in their respective countries, as participants from countries that officially implement CEFR adaptation, the educators' limited understanding of the guiding principles presents an issue. The CEFR differs from standardised tests, such as TOEFL or IELTS, even though the proficiency test result is often used as a comparison variable for students' English proficiency.

Another crucial challenge of implementing ELT frameworks, such as CLT, is that "despite regional and area-specific differences, implementing a top-down policy remains a significant hurdle" (Interview, Educator 7). For educators teaching in remote or suburban areas, the level of English proficiency is another stumbling block. Although it was admitted that the frameworks provided structure for educators to follow, "it would be advisable to have the Western context framework adjusted to a local context with a more sensitive and culturally nuanced approach to meet the specific needs of the country" (Interview, Educator 8). For instance, there is an urge to promote a localised English-speaking assessment framework in Vietnam, called the Vietnamese Standardised Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP), to suit local teaching needs while meeting international standards (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020; Truong et al., 2021). Moreover, the use of frameworks, such as the CEFR, should be adapted to the field or context of the students' learning (Yusra et al., 2022).

The issue of a lack of professional development programs was part of the hurdle raised, as many research participants highlighted the varying degree of competencies in general as one of the biggest challenges. The call to improve teaching quality through a continuous training program was agreed upon by most educators. While the data also indirectly highlight the "diverse classroom" through references to students' areas (e.g., rural, remote, mountainous) and the need for adaptation to different learners, the direct impact of diversity on implementation challenges is not explicitly detailed beyond the issue of varied students' proficiency levels.

Integrating ELT Framework into Teaching Practice

The research participants stated that they integrate and adapt ELT frameworks in several ways, often guided by institutional or national directives, among others, on the curriculum and syllabus alignment, methodology, and learning outcomes by reviewing and adapting to learners' needs. As previously mentioned in other sections, the main learning objectives for these English educators are to prepare the students for the job market for ASEAN integration (Choomthong, 2014; Stroupe & Kimura, 2015) As Educator 3 stated, "I create various class activities to enhance four skills which students can apply to their real-life situations". Similarly, Educator 4 asserts that integrating the ELT framework for her was by "reviewing the curriculum to meet local needs, regional or international level. One way is by promoting student-centred teaching and learning as well as adjusting assessment methods", such as promoting local proficiency assessment framework such VSTEP of adapted framework as in FRELE (Truong et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2023)

In this context, some educator, however, indicates that their integration is limited, primarily impacting general course planning rather than specific course content or classroom-level activities.

CONCLUSION

This study provided an in-depth analysis of how educators involved in ELT across ASEAN nations perceive the framework that underpins their practices. It explored the intricate relationship between teachers' comprehension of these concepts and their application within the classroom setting. The investigation highlights the dynamic nature of language education and the challenges instructors face when attempting to implement the framework in their professional practice. By examining various countries, the study offers a comprehensive perspective on ELT throughout the Southeast Asia region. The findings revealed three main themes concerning educators' perceptions of ELT frameworks: their understanding of the framework and its elements, the considerable challenges they face during implementation, and their strategies for implementing the framework in their classroom practice. For the research implications, this study highlights the crucial connection between policy and the practical applications of ELT frameworks at the classroom level across ASEAN nations. The findings reveal a strong need for professional development programs that not only enhance teachers' understanding of core concepts but also equip them with the necessary resources to adapt these frameworks to meet the varying needs of students for their future employment. As a result, subsequent research could examine how different classroom environments

specifically influence the challenges and successful adaptations of ELT frameworks. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to further examine the enduring effectiveness of localised framework improvements, such as VSTEP and FRELE-TH, together with their influence on graduates' employment opportunities.

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