

# Curriculum and Localization of CFL Teaching in British Schools Based on the CEFR Framework

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**Abstract:** According to the requirements of the CERF framework for languages and communication abilities, all European citizens should be able to communicate in at least two languages other than their mother tongue. Due to the distance in geography, language, and culture, Chinese language learning in British primary and secondary schools is mainly referred as a foreign language. It is urgent to improve the curriculum of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) and localize Chinese textbooks in the British educational system based on the CERF framework.

**Keywords:** CFL teaching, CERF framework, Curriculum design, Localization & regionalism

## 1. Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) has had a profound impact on language teaching on a European scale, providing a unified reference mechanism for language learning and teaching in the European region. CERF divides language proficiency into three bands and six levels respectively based on the characteristics of language learning and proposes six concepts for teaching foreign languages: action oriented, multilingual ability, communicative ability, language ability, scientific assessment, and lifelong learning, effectively integrating language learning, teaching, and assessment. [1] Hulstijn (2010) focuses his research on vocabulary acquisition, language learning strategies, and the role of attention and memory in Secondary Language Learning (SLA) among other topics, often delving into the complexities of L2 proficiency development and the factors that influence it. [2] Hulstijn (2010) discusses the connection between second language (L2) proficiency and the process of L2 acquisition, exploring how various factors related to L2 acquisition, such as language input, learning strategies, motivation, and individual differences, contribute to the development of L2 proficiency and discussing theories and models of SLA that attempt to explain the relationship between the two. [2] Based on the above core concepts of the CERF framework and the principles promoted by Hulstijn (2010), this research will be concerned with how to combine the characteristics of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) teaching with the Critical Thinking (CT) of British students and in accordance with the requirements of the GCSE Chinese Language Examination. The main purpose of the research is to scientifically establish a teaching system for a CFL curriculum and promote the development of localizing Chinese language textbooks in British primary and secondary schools based on the CERF framework.

## 2. Challenges in CFL teaching and Curriculum Design

According to the scales of CERF framework for language and communication abilities, all European citizens should be able to communicate in at least two languages other than their mother tongue. The CERF framework attempts to describe real-world language proficiency in terms of language activities. [1] However, due to the distance in geography, language, and culture, Chinese language learning in British primary and secondary schools is mainly referred as a third foreign language apart from French & Spanish. As Chinese belongs to a different language system from European languages, the curriculum design of CFL teaching has always been marginalized with minimum course choices, even a few schools offering Chinese language classes, a shortage of faculty to teach Chinese language, insufficient Chinese textbooks, and a tight budget for Chinese teaching supplied by the educational institutions. While specific challenges in CFL teaching and curriculum design can vary, there are some common issues that educators and curriculum designers may encounter. These challenges and problems can impact the

effectiveness of CFL instruction and the overall learning experience for CFL learners. The collaborations between the CFL educators and learners will be crucial to solve the problems in linguistic, cultural, and technological aspects. Even though the linguistic educators and instructors have explored into the issues on CFL teaching, the existing challenges in CFL teaching and curriculum design are as follows:

### ***2.1 Linguistic challenges with diverse backgrounds***

CFL learners in British primary and secondary schools come from different backgrounds with diverse language skills and learning styles. As a result, it is hard to apply one teaching method to fit all. It will be even more challenging to use English as classroom teaching language. For most CFL teachers who especially come from China with Chinese as their mother tongue, classroom language is a major problem, which becomes a barrier to CFL teaching. Also, Mandarin Chinese is a tonal language, which is abstract to explain in language itself. How to overcome the language barrier and incorporate the effective strategies to teach tones will be vital for CFL teaching. According to the core concepts of the CERF framework, it is inseparable in cultivating multilingual abilities to master culture and language and it is more important for CFL learners to develop cross-cultural skills and critical cultural awareness than to transmit static cultural knowledge. In CFL teaching, however, there are several obstacles in cultivating multilingual abilities and cross-cultural awareness. Hulstijn (2010) points out that the CERF framework has no link in language proficiency and language acquisition based on classroom teaching. Thus, CFL teaching provides more challenges to both learners and students with no reference to accuracy of linguistic forms. [1]

### ***2.2 Cultural elements with non-immersive environment***

Chinese language is closely tied to Chinese culture, which is an indispensable part in language teaching. Integrating cultural elements into the curriculum is essential, but it can be challenging to strike the right balance between language and culture. It is even more essential to ensure cultural relevance without overwhelming British students. According to the CERF framework and GCSE Chinese assessment, both communicative and language ability would be measured in the system. However, unlike studying a language in its native country, CFL learners may have limited opportunities for language immersion outside of the Chinese classroom. Creating a conducive learning environment that provides exposure to authentic language use is a constant challenge. The immersive learning may be impractical for CFL learners in such British educational institutions as the primary and secondary schools. A series of researches emerge in explaining how to create the immersive input for CFL learners in terms of learner attributes such as age and level of education. Li Hongyin (2013) believes that CFL teaching must pay both attention to “human nature” (human attributes) and the “human” composed of teachers and students as the active subjects. [4] In addition, Chinese teaching is experiential, which means both teaching and learning are based on human experience. In most of the CFL research, the study of teaching is separated from the study of learners, which compose the focus of human nature. Therefore, the sharing and improvement of teaching experience and skills mainly rely on observation and reflection on the CFL learners and their learning environment to acquire and pass on the tradition of transmission.

### ***2.3 Technological challenge with lifelong learning requirement***

In addition to the learning environment, the high-quality, authentic learning materials for CFL teaching can be vital. Many Chinese textbooks are compiled by Chinese educators in the UK and may not adequately reflect real-life language use or may not cover modern and relevant topics in the current society. Furthermore, some connotations of Chinese characters may vary with the social media. Most learners are reported to be learning Chinese on TikTok and YouTube, which are popular among young learners and may provide new vocabulary for the followers as language is changing in its meaning and implicature with the arrival of information technology. Hulstijn (2010) observed large variability in the accuracy and speed with the native speakers of Dutch, differing in age and education. Consequently, a considerable number of Chinese netizens will produce a variety of new vocabulary violating some traditional grammatical rules. If textbooks break away from the real world, it will be outdated and cannot keep up with advancements in educational technology. Therefore, how to integrate them effectively into CFL instruction can be a challenge to CFL instructors. However, information technology can offer valuable tools for language learning, and it is crucial for CFL educators to be well-informed to teach CFL effectively with the help of AI technology. This is also required by the CERF framework to be lifelong learners. The CERF contains more than 50 scales, all in the same six level symbols with minimal reference to linguistic accuracy. It is required by B1 level of the global scale to understand the main

points of clear standard input on familiar matters encountered regularly in work, school, and leisure.

### **3. Measures for Curriculum Design and Textbook Localization in CFL Teaching**

This study aims to explore into the curriculum design and localization development of Chinese textbooks in CFL teaching based on the CERF framework. However, according to Li (2013), it is more essential to design Chinese curriculum as human, experiential and narrative to meet the British language assessment system. In addition to conducting static systematic inspections of the textbooks, a dynamic survey should be applied to language teaching by way of questionnaires and interviews with front-line teachers at home and abroad. [4] The results of the previous study could not only be confirmed, but also present suggestions for the localization of the textbook development in accordance with the British learners' needs. The learner-oriented profiling research will breathe new life into theories and developments in CFL teaching. In view of the theoretical research, some measures are proposed to improve the curriculum design and localization of CFL teaching in British schools to incorporate learners' intellectual functioning into the proficiency scales promoted by the CERF framework.

#### ***3.1 To reinforce the Inter-cultural communicative competence and increase the creative classroom activities***

For many years, teaching Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) has attached great importance to the linguistic attributes of curriculum design. Curriculum design and textbook writing emphasize the scientific and systematic nature of language, which has promoted the rapid development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. With the development of the times, especially, with the great changes brought about by the AI technology, it is not enough to focus exclusively on its linguistic attributes, which move forward based on the experience. Instead, it is necessary to explore and focus on its pedagogical attributes. In designing Chinese curriculum as a foreign language, the priority relies on cultivating Inter-cultural communicative competence (ICC), strengthening the pertinence of the existing textbook structure in teaching theory, arranging for teaching activities and learning contents based on Chinese teaching theory, and paying attention to the characteristics of English language used in classroom communication. The curriculum design fully considers the learning characteristics of CFL learners and increases creative classroom activities. [5] Moreover, CFL teaching is also narrative, which signifies that the expression of knowledge and information should be more appropriate through narrative methods such as storytelling and case presentation. All these attributes contribute to reinforce the Inter-cultural communication competence and increase the creative classroom activities which are implemented in CFL teaching. [3]

In the teaching process, CFL teachers combine teaching contents and Chinese cultural characteristics to set creative activities, assign learning tasks as localization, and effectively apply group cooperative learning methods to classroom instruction. Undoubtedly, it is conducive to reinforce the action-oriented classroom teaching and improve the teamwork in classroom. For example, in Chinese speaking, it is desirable to present the videos of the giant pandas for multi-modal teaching. By creating digital cards and playing movie clips of Kung Fu pandas, the narrative attributes can help learners learn numbers and gain an insight of unique elements of Chinese culture such as Kung Fu and giant pandas. Collaborative learning is an activity that takes group work as the main body, achieving cooperation and mutual assistance among students. In the implementation process, teachers should use teaching strategies reasonably to ensure the effectiveness of learning. [6] According to the concept of CERF framework, CFL teachers select topics of common concern to British students, form cooperative learning groups reasonably, fully participate in guiding students in the learning process, create a unique classroom culture, and comprehensively display and scientifically evaluate Chinese learning achievements. In turn, the target of reinforcing Inter-cultural Communication Competence for CFL learners promotes the intercultural ability and mutual-lingual ability required by the CERF framework.

#### ***3.2 To enhance the localization level of Chinese language textbooks and integrate teaching into the real-life learning.***

The selection of Chinese language textbooks is an indispensable part of CFL education. Currently, Chinese language textbooks of HSK act as the main language testing purposes which focus on the evolution and reasoning of Chinese characters, while the contents cannot adapt to the reality of teaching Chinese to the beginners in British schools, which apply a GCSE assessment. Also, the structure of traditional Chinese textbooks is not suitable for British primary and secondary school students with

analytical thinking. In the context of the new trend in Chinese language teaching, whether the construction of Chinese language textbooks can meet the needs of overseas CFL teaching, and how to meet the needs of overseas CFL learning have gradually become important indicators to restrict the improvement and progress of overseas Chinese language teaching. According to Geng (2017) “Nationalization” and “Localization” are two important ways for Chinese language textbooks to go abroad. [3]

Traditionally, international Chinese language textbooks are mostly designed for vocabulary, grammar, and phonetics, and do not fully reflect the characteristics and measures that should be taken to address differences in linguistic and cultural environments. In the local language and cultural environment of UK, students at the primary and secondary schools have a lively and active personality, an active mindset, and a more challenging thinking by asking abstract questions. In response to the student-oriented classroom teaching in UK, the design of Chinese textbooks increases the immersion, challenge, and fun of language teaching, making it appealing to British students. Integrated teaching is a new type of three-dimensional language teaching method, which is based on meeting the premise of students participating in cross-cultural Chinese communication and interaction. It fully integrates local students into the language-oriented environment, takes Chinese real social life as the scene, integrates language and cultural elements, and guides students to explore unknown Chinese cultural knowledge and skills in the form of practical tasks, forming a critical cross-cultural awareness. Liu states that Chinese language teaching is not only to teach language and culture, but also to help learners break cultural barriers and improve cross-cultural communication awareness. [5] Only by achieving these teaching purposes, can we achieve the localization of Chinese language teaching materials. The integrated teaching method may be a solution to enhance the localization level of Chinese textbooks, and then to encourage the real-life learning environment. In general, it meets the scales of CEFR framework to be qualified with communicative and lingual ability.

### ***3.3 To emphasize the regionalism of tasks through language practice and maximize the utilization of British resources***

Application is the purpose of language learning, so practice is an important way of language learning and an indispensable key in language teaching. The practical aspect of CFL teaching often becomes a thorn in the side, lack of standardized implementation, strict supervision, and systematic evaluation methods due to such factors as the unified teaching hours, funding, resources, and management. Recently, the demand for Chinese language practice among the students at the primary and secondary schools in the UK has been increasing, and the principle of writing textbooks should be aimed at language practice, increasing the practicability of classroom activity designed in textbooks. CFL teaching includes two basic sections: language practice and cultural experience. For regionalization, it is crucial to avoid the over-generalization of language practice while it is more effective to analyze and compare the cultural differences at different CEFR levels in terms of the uniqueness of Chinese language, instructors, and learners. According to Geng (2017), the compilation of textbooks should fully consider the requirements of combining language and cultural practice and follow the principles of clear goals, feasible operations, and effective evaluation. [6] The design of practical tasks is the core of CFL teaching, which takes both CFL teachers and students into full consideration. Although CFL teaching is a matter of gradual progress, it appears that a surplus of CFL researchers focus on the utilization of British resources in compiling the textbooks, which fully embody the regionalism of textbooks. For example, some local textbooks designed for GCSE exams will combine the typical British game of Bingo into the classroom activities. Meanwhile, some will also design the traditional Chinese game of Fruits go in teaching the vocabulary of fruits. This is an effective attempt to break the barriers to cultural differences. In the perspective of practical effects, on the one hand, regionalism should be greater than universality, maximizing the exploration and utilization of British social and cultural resources, strengthening the feasibility of tasks, and emphasizing the scalability of tasks. On the other hand, it can enhance practical effectiveness, expand the scope of textbooks and extend its lifespan. In general, the aim of CFL teaching is to emphasize the regionalism of tasks through language practice and maximize the utilization of British resources, which is helpful to enhance the interests of CFL learners and meets the requirements of lifelong learning advocated by the CERF framework.

## **4. Conclusion**

According to the scientific evaluation of the CEFR framework and the core principles of lifelong learning with sufficient big learner corpora and software tools, the teaching method is vital in designing

the curriculum and localization of CFL teaching. How to design different inspection and instruction methods for different practical tasks, while balancing objective and subjective elements, integrating ICC target into creative classroom activities, and emphasizing the regionalism of practical tasks and maximizing the utilization of British resources to individual and group evaluation, are all urgent issues that need to be addressed in the curriculum design and localization research of CFL teaching. In other words, CFL teaching might undergo some fundamental changes in curriculum design and textbook localization by way of reinforcing the ICC competence to maximize the utilization of British resources. Therefore, this viewpoint has the reference value for the curriculum design and localization research of CFL teaching since it emphasizes the essentials of CFL teaching to be humane, experiential, and narrative. It will make a big difference in examining at which level of the CEFR framework the language proficiency of CFL learners at British schools can be assessed and tested and then a bright future will be envisaged for CFL teaching.

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