

Developing a CEFR-Oriented English Language Activities Framework to Improve Student Proficiency in Community Colleges of Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: In the era of globalization, English proficiency has become an essential requirement in various fields. This proficiency does not undermine the importance of the Malay language as the national language but rather strengthens the positions of both languages in the national education arena and employment sector. To evaluate the self-directed Student Learning Time (SLT) through lecture sessions and summative assessments based on curriculum requirements, which do not provide adequate guarantees, a more comprehensive and practical model approach is essential to guide the implementation of these objectives. Therefore, this study aims to develop a set of theories based on scholarly activities to improve the learning methods of higher education TVET students, with a focus on formative assessment aspects. This study employs a qualitative design through triangulation analysis, where researchers develop a more practical model aligned with the levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Community Colleges of Malaysia. The study's findings indicate that the English Easy Model (EEM) is practical and applicable in enhancing students' English proficiency, which is supported by various reasonable and relevant activities based on the students' knowledge and background. Furthermore, a fresh activity refinement was adapted for the learning context of TVET students. It is hoped that this proposed model will help and facilitate the teaching and learning techniques of stakeholders in TVET institutions to elevate the importance of English as a preparation for industrial training. Among the recommendations at the institutional policy level is to implement industry-based English learning courses (EOI) that are more suitable and beneficial to students and alumni over time.

Keywords: *English Easy-Model (EEM), TVET, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Community College of Malaysia*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency is no longer a new issue in Malaysia; instead, it has become a highly relevant topic that is frequently discussed at various levels of education, from primary school to higher education institutions. In the era of rapid technological advancement, the need to master this language has received increasing attention and is considered an essential skill. Moreover, English proficiency is now recognized as a priority on par with the Malay language, especially in the context of education and careers in Malaysia (Suhaili & Mohama., 2021). Within the national education system, English is a medium of instruction for several important subjects or courses. Additionally, English communication skills are seen as a highly valuable asset and one of the main criteria for graduates to meet the demand of the job market. Therefore, efforts to strengthen English proficiency among student-teachers are an urgent necessity that cannot be ignored (Mohammad & Rashid, 2020).

Recognizing this importance, Community Colleges in Malaysia have taken proactive steps to ensure that graduates possess relevant skills that can meet the demands of the industry and

current market. However, the TVET education pattern highlighted at Community Colleges in Malaysia is often misunderstood with the stigma that it only emphasizes or offers skill-based education while neglecting interpersonal skills. In reality, various programs and activities have been implemented to support the holistic development of students and graduates. Interactive activities such as debates, choral speaking, and word of the day, along with initiatives like Language Week Programs and the cultivation of English Day, are among the efforts frequently introduced to help students build confidence and courage in using English in their daily lives.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Despite various initiatives being implemented to enhance English proficiency in Community Colleges, there are several challenges and constraints that hinder the success of these efforts. One of the main challenges is the lack of self-confidence among students in their language skills, which creates a significant gap in their ability to actively participate in the learning process (Abdullah & Mohamad., 2020). The differences in academic backgrounds also pose obstacles to the success of these initiatives. It is undeniable that students in Community Colleges often consider these institutions as their last option for further studies due to the low entry requirements compared to other higher education institutions. As a result, there are varying levels of English proficiency among students, making it difficult for lecturers to design suitable activities that can cater to the needs of all students at the same time (Ker-hsin & Razali., 2023)

Another constraint lies in the students' attitudes and low motivation toward learning English. (Sholihah et al., 2025) Despite receiving various forms of advice and encouragement, some students still perceive English proficiency as an unimportant factor in shaping a better future. Additionally, TVET students tend to focus more on developing technical skills rather than interpersonal skills, as they believe that technical expertise is more valued by employers in the real-world job market. (Dahri et al., 2024) As a result, they struggle to recognize the significance of English proficiency, both in personal and professional aspects. Ultimately, their academic journey often feels like an obligation rather than a meaningful pursuit, leading to a lack of engagement and commitment in their studies.

Aware of the global importance of English language proficiency, the Ministry of Education has continuously revised and reformed the syllabus, culminating in the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) into the Malaysian education

system since 2017. The CEFR scale is designed to ensure that students achieve the target level of proficiency appropriate to their age (Nawawi et al., 2021).

The four main language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, are used to assess proficiency levels following this framework (Zaki & Darmi., 2021). However, considering the diverse academic backgrounds and language abilities of students, the syllabus implemented by JPPKK for Community Colleges of Malaysia is currently set to achieve the A2 level, which corresponds to the basic user category.

To enhance the effectiveness of English language proficiency, particularly in TVET institutions, it is essential to develop and introduce a practical model that caters to students' proficiency needs based on the aligned CEFR target levels. (Fuangfungsuk et al., 2024)

It is widely recognized that ESL teachers and lecturers have made continuous efforts to support this aspiration (Saminathan et al., 2020). However, a model that effectively integrates the Integrated Curriculum English Language Activities with CEFR levels will provide educators with a structured framework for lesson planning, ensuring a more comprehensive and effective teaching and learning experience in Community Colleges across Malaysia.

Research Objective

- i. To develop a practical model for Integrated Curriculum English Language Activities (CELA) aligned with the CEFR target level in enhancing students' language proficiency in Community Colleges of Malaysia.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The research design is a qualitative method, utilizing data collection methods through qualitative content analysis (QSA). This study differs slightly from previous literature reviews, as the researchers propose a more systematic approach compared to past studies that are still somewhat vague. Thus, the methodology fully addresses the evaluation of documents related to the research title to produce a more practical theoretical model, referring to widely used global or national guidelines.

The content analysis approach is prioritized in this study by examining relevant and sufficient past documents as primary research data. The reliability of the information is also supported by the accessibility of online documents that are believed to focus on the study's dependent variables (DV).

The main research sample consists of journal articles taken from easily accessible online databases based on the most recent five-year period. References are also expanded to include published or unpublished proceedings through relevant conferences.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of communication skills among TVET students plays a pivotal role in shaping industrial progress. English, as the primary international language, is significant in developing interpersonal skills. According to Azhar J. et al., (2019), four main clusters are crucial to be strengthened, besides interpersonal skills of language, namely oral, writing, and research skills. This idea was emphasized by Rajamanickam, S. et al., (2024) that a more systematic evaluation of the four main aspects, namely career development and employability, pedagogy and teaching approaches, digital transformation in education, and competency and training, is essential.

This review should begin with an emphasis on the need for ongoing research and collaboration in TVET education to meet the growing workforce demand. Research findings by Mingdan Luo et al., (2022) suggest that existing English courses are inadequate in addressing the development of technical communication skills. They tend to focus more on grammar mastery rather than practical application. Mary Mmatsatsi Madileng (2022) in her study on vocational English curriculum shows that the outcome-based approach still has content ambiguity and lacks a solid theoretical foundation in practical aspects. The researcher also emphasizes the need for clarity in English courses in the TVET context as opposed to purely theoretical aspects.

Findings from a study at Politeknik Bandar Valenzuala, Philippines, show a more effective approach in English communication, particularly in speaking, grammar, writing, and reading skills. The study sample also highlights the necessity for comprehensive curriculum design based on field norms. Identified negative impacts include lack of confidence, weak reading comprehension, and insufficient learning materials, which hinder students' motivation to learn

English (Tividad, M. J., 2024). Furthermore, Mohamad, et al., (2019) also suggest that communication elements should not neglect soft skills such as teamwork and leadership. This is essential for producing higher education students who are more qualified and competent in any field.

Therefore, this study discussed a more inclusive approach to strengthening the main elements of English proficiency. This model is also aligned with CEFR-based categories to ensure student methods and assessments are guided effectively. Significantly, the area of this model is applicable only to the students in the certificate level of the Community Colleges of Malaysia.

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 Topic and Assessments in Community Colleges of Malaysia

The implementation of the English curriculum Community Colleges of Malaysia centres on basic interpersonal communication and rudimentary workplace interaction skills. These are aligned with the CEFR A1-A2 levels, the fostered topics are inclined to real-world communicative functions since community college students are preparing for the industrial market. However, the lecturers are also expected to foster thematic learning experiences that appeal to students' interests. This *modus operandi* practically aligns with the intended learning outcomes of the certificate-level programs, which prioritize the development of learners' capacity to function in predictable commonplace scenarios.

The curriculum may competently concentrate on functional, context-specific communication and interaction, but its current execution raises a concern about the lack of continuity and integration. The occurrence of students remaining at the level of rehearsed responses and difficulties in participating in spontaneous settings may put students at risk of developing passive knowledge. On another spectrum, the heterogeneity of learners further compounded this pedagogical challenge. This variation highlights students' differing linguistic backgrounds; for some, even to greet and enjoy simple daily conversations can be a hurdle, whilst others may already possess moderate conversational fluency. As educators, for enhanced English exposures, a one-size-fits-all instructional or assessment model is insufficient. Consequently, continuous trials and errors must be conducted to identify the optimal convergence of specified

teaching and learning (T&L) models that enhance the likelihood of delivering the curriculum successfully and meaningfully to the learners.

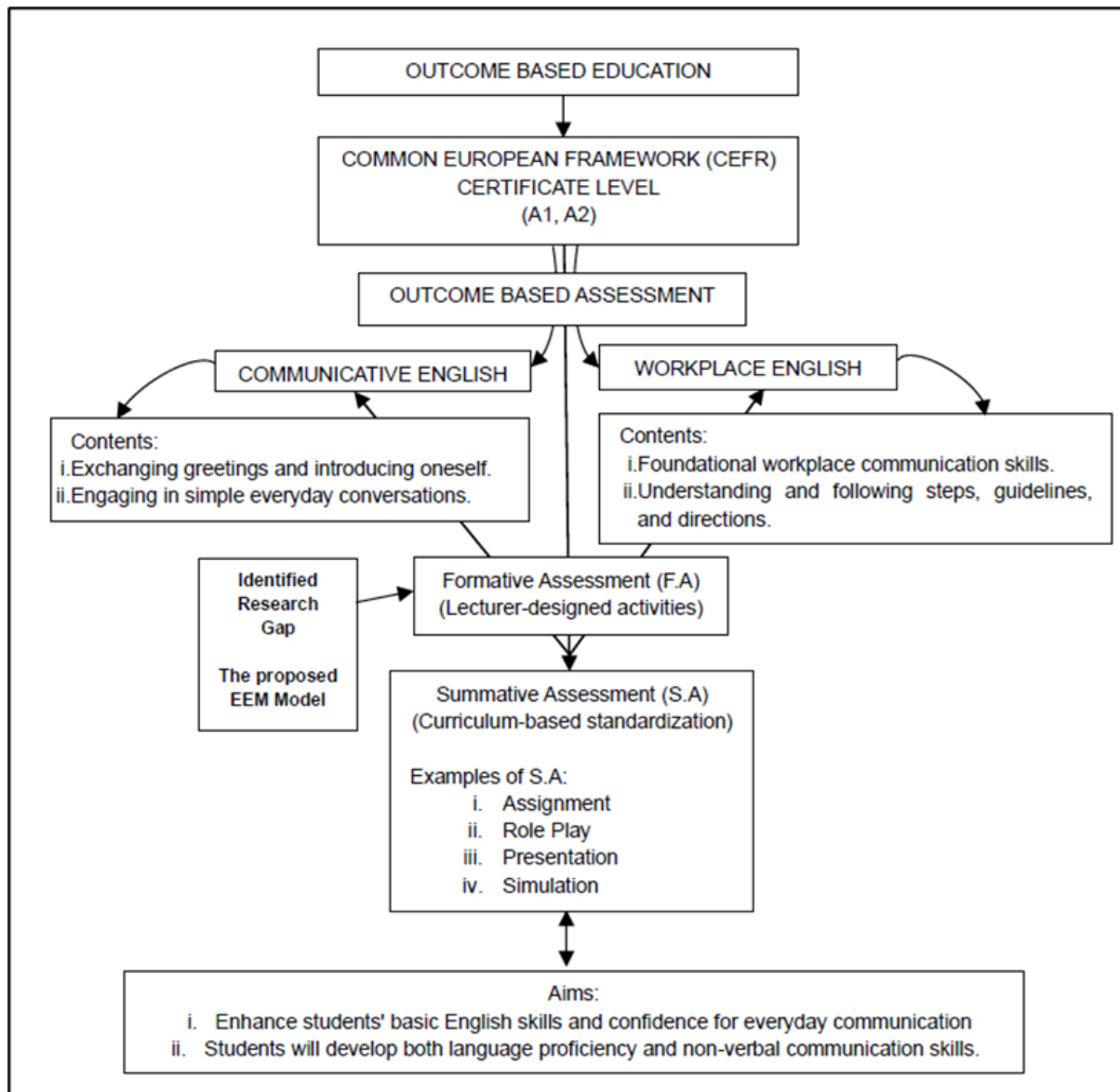


Figure 1: *The General Overview of the Integration of the English Language in the Community College of Malaysia Curriculum.*

The selection of assessments in English courses is steered by a dual structure, as can be seen from Figure 1: Summative Assessments (curriculum-mandated) and Formative Assessments (lecturer-driven). SA encompasses assignments, role plays, presentations, and simulations. All are utilized to assess students' level of CEFR proficiency in practical communication, both in general and workplace contexts.

These prescribed assessments are designed to reflect CEFR-based proficiency levels principally at the A1-A2 range and validate an outcome-based education (OBE) framework. The summative assessments (SA) may often distress learners' readiness because of their instrumental intention to capture their proficiency in applied settings such as role plays, presentations, and simulations. Without sufficient rehearsals and enriched lessons, students may become more performative than conversational, where students memorize scripts rather than engaging in spontaneous language. It is believed that summative assessment corresponds to students' readiness to apply their acquired knowledge in designated contexts.

Formative assessment (FA), on the other hand, favours lecturers to be autonomous and flexible to suit the needs of their students. Although designing FA is ingrained with creativity and engagement in mind to encourage participation and learning experience among students, usually the feedback tends to be general rather than diagnostic because of the distinction between the lecturers and students' heterogeneity.

In many cases, FA are seen as "practice" but lack clear indicators of what constitutes improvement or success, which directly influence their outcomes in SA. The formative value ideally includes ongoing feedback loops and coherent, scaffolded learning paths. Into the bargain, the current practice does not fully reflect the real communicative demands students will face during industrial training or early employment. Shifting towards a more valid and supportive assessment ecosystem, CEFR-aligned criteria, and a stronger integration between formative and summative tools will ensure the continuity in student learning and evaluation.

4.2 The English Easy Model (EEM) as a Structured Formative Assessment (SFA)

Structured Formative Assessment (SFA) is a systematic evaluation approach designed to assess and enhance students' understanding and skills throughout their learning journey. This method prioritizes ongoing feedback, enabling educators to refine their teaching strategies to better meet students' needs and support more effective learning outcomes. By continuously adjusting instructional methods, educators can ensure that students receive the necessary guidance to develop their abilities progressively (Tomlinson, C. A., & Jarvis, J. M., 2023).

Widely applied in education, SFA ensures that students not only grasp the subject matter but also develop the ability to apply their knowledge efficiently in various contexts. Through structured assessments and real-time feedback, students become more adaptable in problem-

solving and decision-making, reinforcing their comprehension and communication skills. This process ultimately strengthens their readiness for academic and professional challenges. Therefore, the EEM model, as designed, aligns with SFA as follows:

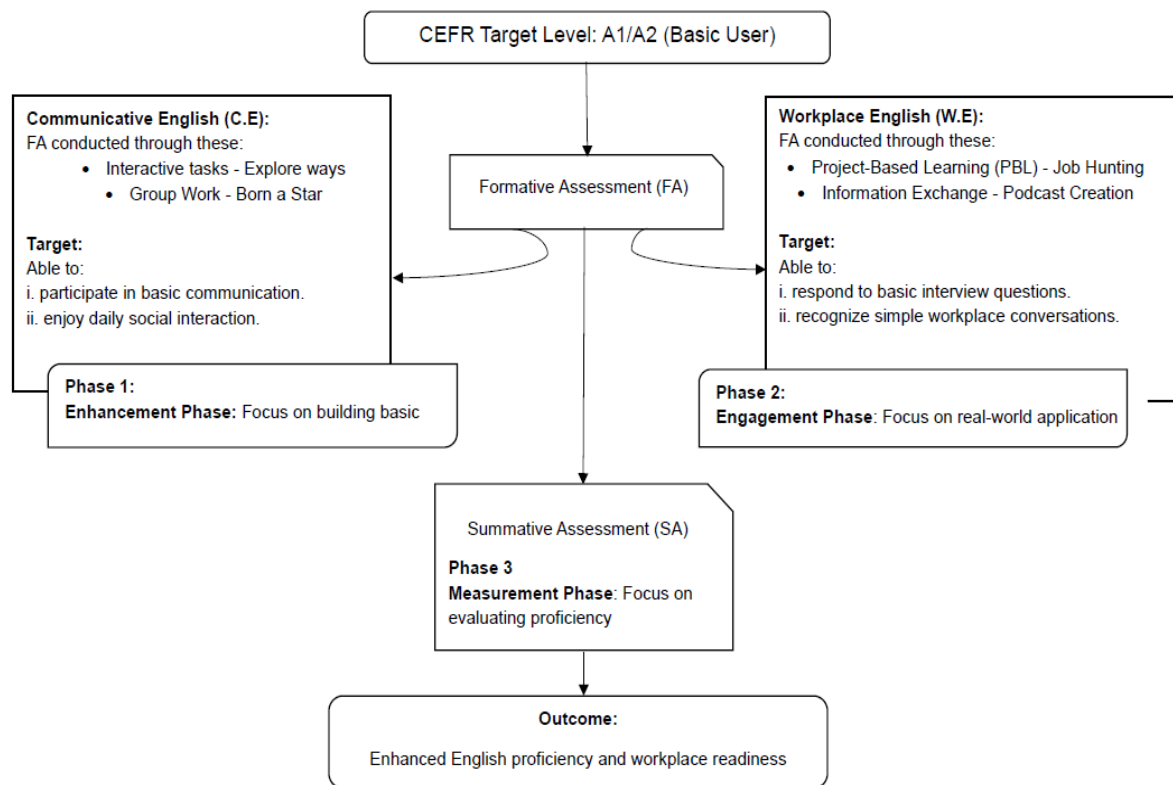


Figure 2: Bridging The Gap Between Formative Assessment (FA) and Summative Assessment in English Language Course

6.2 (a): Enrichment Phase of English Easy Model (EEM)

Table 1: Enrichment Phase Activity

Activity	Concept	Methods of Implementation
EXPLORE WAYS	Theme: Appropriate Introduction/Direction to places/Describe objects@places Duration: 15 – 30 minutes/session Medium: Face to Face	The theme is determined based on the appropriate timeline of the teaching and learning session. Each group is given an instruction card that guides them to a location or to meet an individual/object described. Each station contains a sentence fragment that will be collected to complete a full statement at the final station.

		Lecturers act as supervisors to ensure students understand the instructions provided on the cards. At the end of the activity, students will read aloud the complete statement they have gathered.
BORN A STAR	Theme: Information, Invitation, Apologize and Permission Duration: 15 to 20 minutes per group Medium: Face to Face	The performance is carried out in groups through staged presentations. The assigned themes follow the established course framework. Scripts are developed openly as long as they adhere to the designated theme and do not touch on third-party sensitivities (3R). The activity takes place in suitable venues such as lecture halls, tutorial rooms, open stages, and multipurpose rooms. A reflection session by lecturers is conducted after each group's performance.

i. Activity 1: Explore Ways (EWs)

The first proposed activity is titled *Explore Ways* (EW). Inspired by the *Explorace Race* concept, EWs is a communication training set conducted for the Communicative English course in the Community College Certificate program. Generally, this type of module encourages students to understand instructions for assigned tasks (Yulia et al., 2023).

Specifically, students need to identify directions and locations of objects or places that serve as targets for mission completion. However, this is not the actual objective, as the main goal is to provide communication training for students at each planned station. The implementation is conducted in groups, depending on the number of students, while college facilities must be considered by lecturers before carrying out the activity internally or externally. By the end of the activity, students will understand and practice fundamental communication skills, especially when completing tasks in a structured or unstructured manner.

ii. Activity 2: Born A Star (BAs)

Next, EEM model focuses on mid-level empowerment within the same semester. Students' ability to engage in social interactions in daily life becomes the primary focus toward fundamental strategy to improve English proficiency inside classroom (Shawaqfeh et al.,

(2024). They are required to participate in producing short dramas that incorporate everyday conversations, guided by predetermined themes.

As explained in the table before, these themes are crucial for enhancing formative assessments to evaluate students' communication skills. Furthermore, group implementation is not bound to any specific storyline. Instead, it is assessed based on the interaction and social values demonstrated as a meaningful message within a story. With the freedom of execution format in *Born A Star*, students will be more excited and confident in delivering content using available mediums, making communication training more significant (Biynazarova et al., 2024).

4.2 (b): Engagement Phase of English Easy Model (EEM)

The next phase applies fundamental communication skills as achieved in the *Engagement Phase*. This medium is implemented to expose students to the values of comprehension and the ability to provide effective feedback within the designated context.

Table 2: Engagement Phase Activity

Activity	Concept	Methods of Implementation
JOB HUNTING	Theme: Industrial Mock Interview Duration: 5 minutes per session (individual) Medium: Face to Face	Interviews are conducted individually. Preparation before, during, and after the session is assessed comprehensively. A rubric-based evaluation for communication skills is provided if available. The panel consists of program lecturers, subject matter experts (SMEs), industry players, and strategic partners. Panel selection includes both internal and external members, conducted twice per semester.
	Theme: Related Industry Fieldwork Duration: 5-7 minutes per group	The session is conducted in groups based on suitability. Theme selection is open, taking into account the background of certification programs at the institution, whether based on

PODCAST CREATION	Medium: Face to Face	concepts, issues, implications, or challenges. Discussions take place in an informal yet intellectually guided manner. The content must remain free from sensitive elements (3R). A reflection session by lecturers is held after the podcast program for each group.
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iii. Activity 3: Job Hunting

The job search activities are also integrated into this model. This training set is essential to prepare students for career applications, especially for industrial training and post-graduation employment. This session can be freely conducted by educators individually or in groups. Subsequently, the interviewers consist of subject matter experts, lecturers, and strategic partners from the industry.

After the interview session concludes, a bilateral reflection session is conducted to identify weaknesses or adjustments aligned with industry requirements, ensuring student readiness for their future career journey. Overall, this session is crucial for analyzing students' level of knowledge and generic communication skills as well as building self-confidence and engagement before entering training placements or starting their careers (Asgawanti et al., 2025).

iv. Activity 4: Podcast

Unlike forum-based activities, podcasts highlight informal conversations on relevant topics or themes. These sessions are crucial for early-stage students to master communication skills related to processes, procedures, and general instructions in a workplace (Budiyanto, K. K. et al., 2024).

Specifically, podcasts in EEM follow a forum-like format, incorporating a moderator and invited panelists. The chosen topics are guided by fields related to the study program. Early exposure allows students to familiarize themselves with essential workplace situations, especially when dealing with clients or company stakeholders. Consequently, podcasts directly create an effective communication space over time.

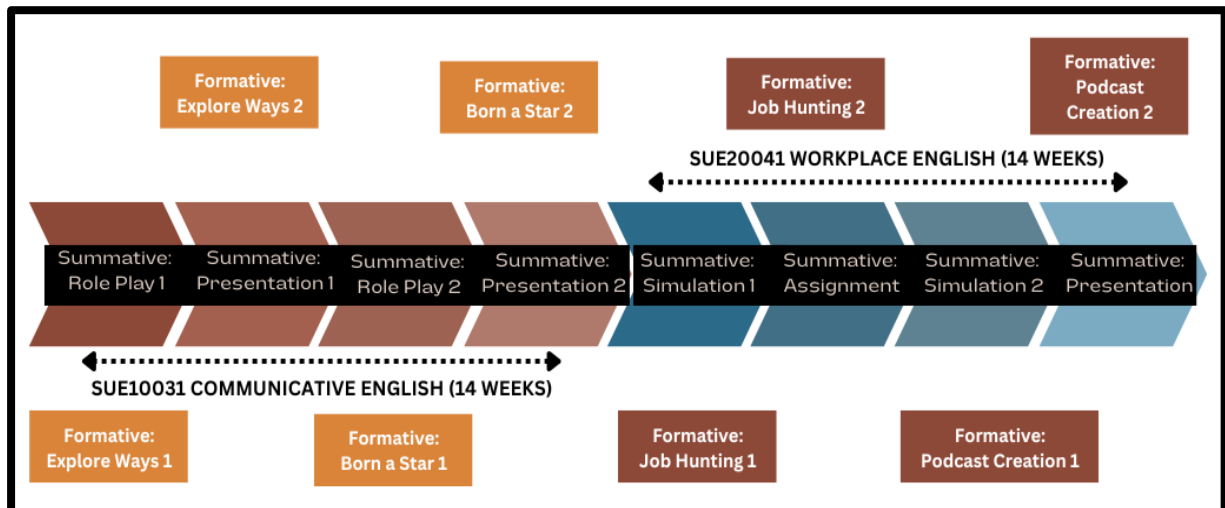


Figure 3: Structured Formative Assessment of English Easy Model (EEM)

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study affirms that there is a relevant tension between the existing English curriculum on how it plays out on the ground in Malaysian Community Colleges and the theoretical objectives of CEFR-aligned instruction. If we look closely at how things unfold in classrooms, the students often struggle to apply the language meaningfully, particularly at the lower proficiency levels, although the curriculum officially promotes functional language use and workplace preparedness as key priorities.

Diversity in teaching approaches and a lack of sustained scaffolding have caused limited continuity in formative learning and prompt students to repeat memorised responses without understanding how to apply them in real conversations. In a heterogeneous classroom, a single rigid model simply cannot deliver consistent outcomes.

To address the gap, the English Easy Model (EEM) offers lecturers and students a more tailored and functional alternative. Instead of treating assessments as one-time events, it nurtures them into everyday learning. The proposed activities are simple, relatable and map out to help students practise language that feels genuine to them. It is somehow less about perfection but more about progress.

By anchoring formative assessment as part of the learning process, students gradually grow their language skills with continuous feedback. Thus, this model answers the central aim of the

study, which is a workable and scalable framework that bridges the curriculum expectations with the real capacities and needs of certificate-level students in community colleges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Referring to the research objectives, this paper recommends further study to examine the level of English communication proficiency among TVET students at the diploma level or equivalent in any higher education institution or accredited professional bodies. A more comprehensive study is also suggested, covering TVET education that prioritizes artificial intelligence scope in the curriculum. This is crucial for identifying areas of improvement in the education system, both fundamentally and curriculum-wise, to align with the vision of internationalizing TVET institutions and graduates globally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research team extends its highest appreciation to Kolej Komuniti Semporna, Sabah, through the Research Innovation and Commercialization Unit (UPIK) for approving the conduct of research under the institution's allocation as per KPI 17, KPI Dictionary 2025, JPPKK. It is hoped that the findings of the study will positively impact institutional practices and that the Polytechnic Education and Community College Department (JPPKK) will play a more significant role in enhancing the overall quality of the community college system as needed over time.

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