

A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of practices

1 OVERVIEW

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Country: Finland

Institution: Foundation Innove

Type of context: National

Educational sector: Upper secondary

Main focus: Testing

SUMMARY

Name: Bi-level school-leaving examination

Abstract:

Developing a new national, bi-level examination in English linked to the CEFR (B1/B2)

Stage: Planning; Evaluation

Theme: Assessment

CEFR aspects used: Levels, Descriptors, Assessment with defined criteria

Main features of this example:

- Thorough test development process including specifications and piloting
- Using the Council of Europe's Manual for relating tests to the CEFR
- Consultation with ECML experts
- Collaboration with different stakeholders
- Feedback from external experts
- A cyclical process

Quality principles particularly demonstrated: Validity, Transparency, Coherence



2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background: Following the introduction of new curricula which were more closely related to the CEFR, there was a need to include and further develop assessment in the process.

Stated aims: To develop a new bi-level national examination in English closely linked to the CEFR in order to evaluate the Estonian school leavers' level of English.

Steps/stages:

a. Planning stage:

- The specifications for the new examination were developed.
- On the basis of the specifications, new tasks were developed for speaking, listening and reading.
- The speaking tasks were tried out on a small number of students and the recordings were used for developing and trialling of the rating scale as well as for the training of the examiners and raters.
- New rating scales for the writing paper were developed and trialled.
- The listening and reading tasks were developed.
- Two standard-setting sessions were held to choose from among the developed listening and reading tasks the ones that would be used in the pilot examination.

b. Piloting stage:

- A pilot examination was held to determine the levels of difficulty of the developed listening and reading tasks, to see how the new format worked in the case of these two skills and how the results related to the results of the old examination. When piloting the examination, we made sure our population was representative in order to generate reliable results.
- Two more standard-setting sessions were held to determine the cut scores for the listening and reading comprehension tests.

c. Test administration – the new examination was administered

d. Evaluation: exam results were analysed, feedback was asked for, the level of success of the whole process was evaluated, plans were made for the next period.

Timeline:

2012 – meetings with the Ministry and both ECML and local testing experts. The specifications for the new examination were developed

2013 – piloting and standard-setting sessions, statistical analyses of the results; consultations with local and foreign experts

2014 – test administration and evaluation; planning for the next testing session

People/roles:

Co-operation with different target groups (Ministry of Education, experts, teachers, students)

Consultation with local and foreign experts before, during and after the whole process.

Training of people involved

Statistical analysis

Quality Assurance procedures employed:

- Using consultants – meetings with both ECML and local testing experts who gave feedback on the process
- The procedures recommended in the Manual for relating language examinations to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2009) were used with the focus on the familiarization, standardization training and benchmarking, and validation stages.
- Piloting and inviting feedback from teachers and students
- Statistical analyses were used while planning and piloting the project

- Questionnaire to interviewers and raters for the new speaking test. The results revealed ambiguity about the CEFR levels among the respondents, which suggested a need for a training sequence.

3 RESULTS

What was achieved: A compulsory CEFR-related exam that shows what level the upper-secondary school students reach. This clearly shows that approximately 20% of upper-secondary school students do not reach B-level although the curriculum states that they should reach it in two foreign languages. This requires action on the part of people in the field of education.

Impact: Teachers were sceptical at first but have got used to the new exam and they generally like it more than the previous one. Students benefit more from the fact that they receive a certificate that states their language level in English. Students understand that they benefit from the new exam.

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

- <http://arhiiv.rakenduslingvistika.ee/ajakirjad/index.php/aastaraamat/article/view/ERYa10.01>
- https://issuu.com/kat3z/docs/open_43-web (pages 4–15)
- <http://uahost.uantwerpen.be/linguapolis/LT-CEFR2013/Book%20of%20Abstracts%20'Language%20Testing%20in%20Europe%20-%20Time%20for%20a%20New%20Framework'.pdf> (p 108)
- https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/est_upper_secondary_nat_cur_2014_appendix_2_final.pdf
- <http://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/#Manual>

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

Advice on this theme; things to remember:

Consult people with expertise and experience and exploit networks (e.g. here: EALTA). When it comes to testing and relating tests to the CEFR, following principled qualitative procedures and quantitative procedures (statistical analysis) is always advisable.

The whole process requires good teamwork so the team working on the project should be gathered with careful thought.

It is a rather long process that requires enough time and careful consideration of different aspects throughout the whole process. We had a tight schedule so we kept a close watch on our progress. We had meetings where we discussed our progress and we had to work hard to meet the deadlines throughout the whole process.

Getting help from people with necessary expertise and experience is a must. However, there are differences between different countries and their resources so it is important to learn about different experiences but final decisions should be made taking into account the resources and possibilities available.

Advice on this theme; pitfalls to avoid:

Don't create parts of exams if there is a lack of resources: the results of the speaking part of the exam are not as valid and reliable as the results of the written part of the exam.

Lessons learnt/Issues to watch out for:

Carrying out projects like this is extremely time-consuming and change does not happen overnight. Taking enough time, being patient and involving different experts is vital.