

A Comparative Study Between the Lebanese English Language Curriculum and Objectives at Grade 9 Level with the Common European Framework of Reference

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

CEFR, EAQals Core Inventory, Plurilingualism, Cultural Awareness, Intercultural Awareness, Communicative Approach-task-based Approach

ABSTRACT

This comparative study evaluated the alignment of the Lebanese Grade 9 English language curriculum with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) 2001 for teaching foreign languages. Using a quantitative content-analysis method, the study tracked the main CEFR principles and descriptors at B2 level within the 1997 Lebanese general principles and curriculum for teaching English by the end of Grade 9 level. Guided by a CEFR-based codebook, official documents were coded and mapped based on conceptual similarity, linguistic complexity, skill domain, and percentage overlap. Inter-coder reliability was verified by testing 20% sample coded by both a human researcher and large language model (ChatGPT Plus) achieving a Krippendorff's alpha of 0.82. Results have shown broad alignment (81-95%) between the curriculum principles with CEFR, highly represented in the communicative, cultural, and task-based principles but falling short in areas related to plurilingualism, self-assessments, and autonomous learning. As for Grade 9 competencies and objectives, the six domains (reading, speaking, writing, reading, topics, and grammar) were coded. Results have indicated strong and high alignment: listening (93%), reading (93%), writing (83%), Oral communication (95%), topics (92%), and grammar (81%). The findings suggest that the Lebanese curriculum reflects some basic parts in the CEFR principles but still requires revisions to meet the full expectation of the CEFR framework, especially with the integration of the updated components of CEFR 2020.

1. Introduction

Lebanon's results in The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015, 2018, and 2022, placed the country among the lowest-performing systems in reading literacy with an average scores of 347, 353, and 375 in reading literacy, respectively. (See Appendix A.)

Despite this modest improvement, Lebanon remains 101 point below the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries (OECD) average in reading literacy in the

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Cite this article as:

Naanouah, R. H. (2026). A Comparative Study Between the Lebanese English Language Curriculum and Objectives at Grade 9 Level with The Common European Framework of Reference. *European Journal of Teaching and Education*, 8(1): 59-85. <https://doi.org/10.33422/ejte.v8i1.1679>

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most recent report. Table 1 shows the average distribution of reading proficiency levels, showing 61.3% of Lebanese students scored below level 2 compared with 26.3 % in the OECD countries.

Table 1. Students at Reading Proficiency Levels in Both Lebanon and OECD Countries

	Lebanon	OECD average	Percentage point difference
Below level 1c	4,1%	0,2%	3,9%
Level 1c	11,4%	1,9%	9,5%
Level 1b	21,0%	7,6%	13,4%
Level 1a	24,8%	16,6%	8,2%
Level 2	21,0%	24,4%	-3,4%
Level 3	12,5%	25,3%	-12,8%
Level 4	4,5%	16,9%	-12,4%
Level 5	0,7%	6,0%	-5,3%
Level 6	0,0%	1,2%	-1,2%

Similarly, results from the English Proficiency Index (EPI) showed that Lebanon scored 496 in 2025 four points lower than in 2024- level compared as low if compared to countries scoring 600 or above (See Appendix B).

These results highlight the need to investigate the factors underlying these low scores. In the field of education, test washback has proved to have various impacts on teaching and learning. As Hung and Huang (2019, p.1) stated, “With detailed information and consideration of different aspects of washback, stakeholders-including instructors, school administrators, and language policymakers, can make informed decisions when formulating language-related policies.” Previous studies have consistently viewed language testing as a powerful tool policymakers use for implementing changes in curriculum and instruction (Shohamy,1993, Pearson, 1988, as cited in Kuang, 2020, p. 10). For instance, international tests as PISA have had a direct impact on Fangshan local educational system, improving their local quality of education and policy making in the country (Ding & Tasara 2024, p.471).

These findings indicate the need to examine the Lebanese foreign language curriculum to determine whether it meets international English proficiency standards and to identify areas requiring further development.

Local research has focused on several strengths and weaknesses found in the Lebanese curriculum for teaching English as a foreign language, yet limited progress has been made to address the gaps. Some local researches have studied the Lebanese foreign language curriculum and found that “Lebanon’s multicultural and multilingual profile has made it a country of cultural and lingual diversity. Its language educational system and policies reflect this profile.” (Bacha & Bahous, 2011, p.1326). However, other local studies have attributed ineffective curriculum to “the poor implementation of the curricular reforms ... and the use of more traditional teacher-centered practices of teaching instead” (Saba Ayon, 2012, as cited in Shaaban, 2013, p.33). Other studies have also indicated that standardized foreign language tests are not aligned with terminal secondary- level assessments, resulting in increased pressure on students and teachers (Dabaga, 2014, p. 131). These misalignments could leave Lebanese students, particularly those in public high schools, at a disadvantage when attempting to pass language proficiency tests for university admission. Similar challenges are faced by students who prefer to migrate and study abroad.

According to Eaton (2010), there has been a global shift towards benchmarking systems and frameworks in the last two decades, with more than 40 countries adopting the Common

European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which may eventually become an international standard (p.12). Accordingly, this study aims to:

1. align the curriculum objectives of teaching English language to international standards mostly adopted by college exams and internationally accepted proficiency tests as PISA, English Language Proficiency Test, IELTS, etc.
2. evaluate whether *The Lebanese English language teaching curriculum* and objectives prepare students for international language proficiency expectations.
3. identify curriculum gaps , especially those related to plurilingualism, both communicative and task-based approach, self-assessment, and other CEFR characteristics.

With the CEFR, “you are able to provide a clear set of standards for describing language ability that is mutually recognizable across time and contexts. It, also, serves as a way to plan transparent and realistic learning objectives and map learners' progression” (Beler, 2013, p. 5).

1.1. The Common European Framework of Reference

1.1.1 Background

After extensive research and testing from 1993 to 1999, the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe in 2001 established The Common European Framework of Reference, CEFR. It came as a translation to the recommendations of the community of ministers “to achieve greater unity among its members by the adoption of common action in the cultural field” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 2). As a result, the Council for Cultural Cooperation(CDCC), in its education and modern language part, has tried to implement these recommendations in the language field. These efforts were the outcomes of political factors that aimed to achieving cooperation in the fields of education, culture, trade, industry, while reinforcing respect, preserving, and enriching cultural diversity among European countries. In doing so, the CEFR sought to facilitate communication in the multilingual and multicultural Europe, and to reduce discrimination against those lacking the linguistic knowledge and skills required for cross-European interaction (p.3).

1.1.2 Characteristics of CEFR

The common European Framework of Reference has the following characteristics.

The Plurilingual Approach This concept stands as a central principle of the Council of Europe's approach to language learning. Unlike multilingualism, plurilingualism emphasizes that learning language increases within its cultural context. Based on this vision, the purpose of acquiring language has no longer become the attainment of the ideal native-like speaker . Instead , emphasis is placed on developing a “linguistic repertoire” that enables learners to draw on diverse language resources and diversify language competences based on the situation and needs (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 4-5).

Having more than 50 languages across Europe has prompted the adoption of a more practical approach of language learning that prioritizes efficient use of time and resources. In this context, Trim, 2001 argues:

Successive Council of Europe projects has been based on the belief that it is of crucial importance to define carefully worthwhile, appropriate and feasible objectives which correspond to the communicative needs of individuals in society. Since these needs reveal

themselves only in the course of adult life, language learning must be organized in a flexible manner in a lifelong perspective (p. 10) .

This key principle of the CEFR emphasizes that learning language learned does not occur in isolation from other languages. As noted by the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, (2011), “Studying a foreign language inevitably involves comparisons with a first language. It becomes easier and easier to pick up at least partial competence in new languages.” (p. 14).

The Action-oriented Approach. The CEFR adopts the general view of language use and learning named as "the action-oriented approach". It views learners as “social agents” using language not only for itself but rather to accomplish tasks within a certain environment. This approach takes into consideration all the cognitive, emotional, and optional domains and abilities used by the learner as a social agent.

Language use, which also includes language learning, comprises the actions performed by individuals acting as social agents who develop a range of competencies, both general and specifically communicative. These agents draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains. Through the selection of the appropriate strategies to carry out the tasks, learners continuously reinforce or modify their competences (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9).

According to this perspective, all the components of language use and learning are interconnected . However, " The claim that everything is connected doesn't mean that the objectives cannot be differentiated." (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 10)

The Communicative Approach. One of the main pedagogical principles in the CEFR is the communicative approach. It emphasizes the communicative needs behind learning languages which are considered as purposeful and require communication as well as language to achieve goals (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2011, p. 14).

The CEFR descriptors specify what actions learners can do, and how perfect these actions are performed. Within this approach, proficiency levels are determined according to learner’s ability at this stage. Accordingly, a learner can do a task as it should, yet with some faults. (p.14)

Communicative language competence comprises “the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic” fields each presented in terms of knowledge skills, and know how. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 13). Importantly, an emphasis on purposeful communication doesn’t disregard the linguistic form. As CEFR notes, the reference level can provide useful guidance on the linguistic competences learner can get at each level until they reach mastery, making it more realistic to achieve.

The common European Framework of Reference(CEFR) emphasizes learners’ communicative needs in everyday life such as business interactions, sharing information, and getting a deeper cultural understanding. All these are addressed by considering the needs, motivations, and available resources of learners. (Council of Europe, 2001). More recent versions of the CEFR, The CEFR Companion, have expanded its illustrative descriptors to include enhanced listening and reading scales with more creative text engagement, and Pre- A levels that would reflect the evolving communicative realities such as online and sign language within gender- neutral and modality-inclusive language. The CEFR Companion Volume has focused on calibrating descriptors for mediation, plurilingualism, and pluriculturalism ,enabling learners to draw on multiple mediation, languages and cultural resources activities to facilitate group understanding (Europe, 2020). This study focuses on the 2001 CEFR, as the Lebanese national curriculum adopted in 1997 remains in use in official schools. Consequently, comparison with

later descriptor updates would raise methodological concerns especially when they are still remaining underrepresented in the current curriculum.

1.1.3 Common Reference Levels

Because the CEFR is planned to accommodate a wide range of learners, its standards were broad rather than detailed, yet they are adaptable to different contexts and accessible to both learners and practitioners (Trim, 2001, p. 21). Proficiency levels were divided into 3 main categories that represent progression in different areas: A(basic User), B(Independent User), and C(Proficient User). Each category is further subdivided into two levels for more precise description of learner progression (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 23).

With reference to the labels presented in Figure 1, The Core Inventory for General English finds that:

The CEFR avoids the use relative labels like “intermediate” because these terms can carry different meaning across contexts, neither schools nor publishers apply these terms consistently ,and they are also used differently in different educational sectors and languages. The analysis conducted in this study confirms that the relationship between the CEFR levels the labels used by EFL publishers is approximate with the clearest correspondence between B1 and C1 (North, Ortega, & Sheehan, 2010, p. 6).

					Proficiency
				Advanced	
			Upper Inter		
		Intermediate			
	Pre-inter				
	Elementary				
Beginners					
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

Figure 1. The CEFR Relation to EFL Labels. Reprinted from *A Core Inventory for General English*, British Council/EAQUALS, 2010, P.6

It is important to note that the Core Inventory for General English(CIGE) aims to inform teachers about the levels at which learners of English master certain aspects of the language by outlining the linguistic features – classified as functions, grammar, discourse markers, vocabulary and topics – associated with CEFR levels from A1 to C1(North et al., 2010).

According to Eaton (2010) “It is not impossible that one day the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages may evolve into a common global framework.” In this sense, the present study represents a step toward aligning the English language curriculum with international language proficiency standards mostly adopted by college exams, both locally and globally. The CEFR provides “a clear set of standards for describing language ability that is mutually recognizable across time and contexts. It, also, serves as a way to plan transparent and realistic learning objectives map learners' progression” (Beler, 2013, p. 5).

Beyond the European context, different educational systems have initiated curriculum reform aligned with CEFR descriptors and levels. For instance, Zorba & Arikan (2016) study that conducted a document analysis of the 9th grade English language curriculum to examine its alignment with CEFR principles. Similarly, in the Gulf especially in The United Arab of

Emirates, where CEFR implementation began in 2019, researchers have studied the effect of adjusting the CEFR descriptors for more learner engagement (Cummings & Anderson, 2025). Within the Lebanese context, a study conducted by Dbaibo (2016) investigated the alignment of the Lebanese Grade 4 English language reading curriculum with basic literary skills at the CEFR criteria framework. Another local comparative study was conducted to explore the alignment of English language textbooks, workbooks, and teacher's guides of grades 1-3 with the Lebanese official curriculum and TESOL PreK-12 international standards (Zreim, 2020).

Taken together, existing studies within the MENA region indicate a growing interest in benchmarking English curricula against international language proficiency standards on CEFR, yet local studies reveal the absence of a systematic CEFR alignment across all cycles. This underscores the significance of the current study which seeks to align Grade 9 English language curriculum with international standards.

1.2. The Lebanese Curriculum

According to Educational Reform Plan (1994) and the New Framework for Education in Lebanon (1995), the stated aim set in learning foreign language education was "creating a citizen who is proficient in at least one foreign language in order to promote openness to and interaction with other cultures." (CERD, 1997, p. 1).

Based on this vision, the Lebanese education system adopted the teaching of two foreign languages. The first language is introduced at the kindergarten level, whereas the second begins in Cycle 3. Taking into account all modern theories and trends of language acquisition, curriculum design, and methodology, the Lebanese curriculum was developed around core principles emphasizing the idea that learning languages are means for interaction, self-expression, and acquiring new information. It is context dependent, shaped by the communicative situations and participants involved, and the people involved.

Moreover, exposure to a new language familiarizes learners with new cultures, values, and ways of thinking, encouraging comparisons and contrast that foster more understanding and respect for the other culture. These learning processes are mostly effective when learners are engaged in "meaningful, purposeful activities of social and cognitive nature in the context of the classroom (content-based instruction) and outside it (social settings)." (CERD, 1997, p. 1)

Engaging in such activities prompt the integration of various skills including listening, reading, writing, and speaking, as well as other paralinguistic resources nature such as body language, facial expression, the pitch of voice. These activities also aim at enhancing skills that foster learner autonomy.

Guided by those principles, CERD (1997) identifies three main aims of language learning: social, academic, and cultural which can be achieved through:

"The adoption of a thematic, integrated, content-based approach to teaching and learning is emphasized. The curriculum embodying this approach is designed to be spiral in nature. The same concepts and skills will be taught at various times across the grades, but with increasing levels of complexity and sophistication as we move up" (p. 2).

Within this curriculum, learners will learn information (content), language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and thinking skills needed for academic purposes. Emphasizing both fluency and accuracy, the curriculum introduces formal grammar instruction beginning in Grade 4. In line with this, it also promotes openness to cultures, cooperative learning, and learner autonomy. As summarized by CERD (1997), "The curriculum moves from a system of language education based on rote learning, linguistic correctness, and

cramming of information to a system that promotes autonomous learning, thinking skills, and communicative competence.” (p. 2)

Several recommendations were outlined to ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum (p. 2).

1.3. General Objectives

Drawing on the recommendations of The Educational Reform Plan(1994) and the New Framework for Education in Lebanon (1995), CERD (1997) outlines the following general objectives:

1. Enabling students to communicate effectively in different situations and settings with native and non-native speakers alike using authentic, appropriate, and correct linguistic forms.
2. Enabling students to communicate effectively in subject matter areas in general, and mathematics and sciences in particular.
3. Developing students' critical thinking skills (analytical, synthetic, critical).
4. Developing intercultural understanding and appreciation.
5. Promoting students' positive attitudes toward the target language and culture.
6. Enhancing students' abilities to work with others. (p.3)

The curricular objectives across all cycles, including Grade 9 in Cycle 3, were developed in alignment with these general objectives.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

Secondary data constituted an important source of information. It can be used to get deeper insights, back up findings, or refute them (Heaton, 1998, as cited in Cohen et al., 2018, p.86). Secondary data may include official documents, institutional records from government and others. In this study, secondary data consisted of official curriculum documents and institutional documents issued by governmental and educational bodies and were used exclusively for document analysis to support the coding and alignment process.

Although the CEFR Companion Volume (2020) expanded descriptors related to mediation, plurilingualism, and multimodal communication, the current study relied primarily on the CEFR(2001) illustrative descriptors. This decision was based on the fact that the Lebanese curriculum under review was issued in 1997 and has not undergone substantive revision since that time. Accordingly, using the 2001 CEFR version ensured construct validity and historical comparability, as it aligned the theoretical and pedagogical assumptions that were contemporary with the curriculum. Similarly, The British Council- EAQUALS Core Inventory (2010) was incorporated selectively to provide domain specific descriptors in grammar and topics not detailed in the CEFR (2001) text. The methodological combination of CEFR (2001) and the Core Inventory 2010 allowed a balanced alignment framework consistent with the curriculum's time frame and content structure.

In this study, the Lebanese official documents were analyzed in relation to the CEFR using qualitative content analysis. It mainly aims at reducing the amount of information through classifying them into different divisions or groups by means of coding them. Coding is defined

as simply labelling a piece of information into different labels so that one is able to compare, analyze, comprehend data, and categorize information. Recent studies have discussed the importance of coding as a tool in qualitative studies that requires “more than just labeling text: it is a reflexive interpretive practice that shapes research questions, refines theoretical insights, and illuminates subtle social dynamics”(Xiao et al. ,2023).

Moreover, combining GPT3 with expert drafted codebooks has achieved significance results compared to expert-coded results in the field of analyzing qualitative results in largely, increasing datasets (p.77).

2.2. Coding Scheme

At this stage of the research, official documents were coded and analyzed to track the CEFR principles and objectives within the Lebanese educational data (the plan, the objectives and the assessments). Document analysis requires tools used for collecting and analyzing data by means of coding. It requires intensive reading and rereading to understand the meaning and key issues line by line: sort data, list and group them, and finally comment on the groups. (Cohen et al. 2018, p.681-682-683). For this task, each official document related to the Lebanese curriculum was analyzed line by line based on the common European framework principles. Each code was clearly defined from the CEFR to help in coding. The study looked for key features that mainly constitute the CEFR. Worldwide research has revealed some basic concepts of the European framework such as: plurilingualism, communicative language teaching, task-based approach, interculturalism, self-assessment, learners’ autonomy, and the use of ELP Each code was clearly defined from official documents and provided with examples to ensure transparency in the coding process (See Appendix C).

2.3. Unit of Analysis

Each statement in the General principles of teaching foreign languages was treated as a single unit for analysis. The number of statements reached 29. In the same way, each learning competency along with its objectives at the end of Grade 9 level in the official CERD 1997 curriculum was included and considered as a separate unit of analysis. In total, 3 listening, 3 oral communication, 3reading, and 3 written communication competencies were examined covering 14 listening objectives, 12 oral communication objectives, 19 reading objectives,16 written communication objectives,13 topics, and 14 grammar areas were explored. This allowed a systematic mapping of the CEFR principles as well as CEFR B2 skill descriptors. When a single statement expressed multiple dimensions (e.g., communicative and intercultural), multiple codes were assigned to the same unit.

2.4. Mapping Rules to CEFR B2 Descriptors

In this study, B2 proficiency level was selected as a reference level for alignment. Despite the fact Grade 9 is often labeled as *intermediate*, most of its communicative tasks, such as summarizing extended texts, constructing arguments, interpreting implied meaning, and engaging in an oral interaction, correspond to B2 competencies in the CEFR. At the upper B1 to B2 range, learners start dealing with extended texts, summarization, argumentation, and interpreting implied meaning (Council of Europe, 2020). This choice is further supported by international benchmarking practices for assessments. PISA reports the English proficiency of students at the age of 15 using CEFR levels from Pre A1 to C1, thus including B2 level as a key benchmark (OECD, 2021). Similarly, international examinations as Cambridge B2 First for Schools is designed to assess learners at the “upper intermediate” B2 level. This alignment

is pedagogically justified as 15-year-old learners are mostly assessed at B1-B2 on most proficiency school exams, making B2 the most used reference point for curriculum benchmarking.

For the four skill domains (listening, reading, writing, and speaking), the alignment relied on the CEFR(2001) illustrative descriptors as they provided performance expectations suitable for B2 level benchmarking. However, for grammar and thematic topics, the CEFR(2001) descriptors were insufficiently granular. To address this limitation, the British Council-Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality in Language Services(EAQUALS) Core Inventory (2010) was used selectively to provide validated B2 descriptors in the areas of topics, grammar, functions, discourse markers and vocabulary (North et al., 2010). For this study, grammar and topics at B2 level were analyzed and studied from the Core Inventory to maintain methodological coherence as well as domain appropriate comparison.

Within the CEFR, speaking is divided into two domains-oral production and oral interaction. The Lebanese curriculum, however, presents a unified “Oral Communication” domain without distinguishing between them. To maintain structural equivalence, descriptors in the CEFR speaking domains were merged into a single comparative category. This ensured comprehensive coverage of speaking competencies without imposing external structural divisions not found in the Lebanese curriculum.

Each Lebanese English language curriculum was compared and matched to the illustrative descriptors found in the CEFR for listening, oral communication, spoken interaction/ Production, and writing. Grammar and topics were mapped exclusively using the Core Inventory, which provides empirically validated lists of B2 structures and thematic areas. Objectives related to cultural, thinking, and study skills in the Lebanese curriculum were not compared as the CEFR does not define discrete objectives for these domains. Such skills aim at preparing students for tests. As for cultural awareness objectives, in particular, they were embedded in the descriptors and not treated as a separate skill. Accordingly, cultural awareness skills were compared at principle level as both the general principles of the Lebanese curriculum and CEFR principles tackled the cultural and intercultural awareness skills in its introduction. Because the Lebanese curriculum speaking skills are grouped under oral communication domain, CEFR descriptors for spoken interaction and production were combined into one for alignment. Those adjustments ensured construct validity by restricting comparisons to domains covered in the CEFR.

Alignment decisions were guided by content-validity approaches commonly used in curriculum alignment research, including conceptual similarity, linguistic and discourse difficulty, skill domain matching, and degree of overlap (Webb, 1997).

Conceptual similarity was prioritized, as the CEFR emphasizes the underlying meaning and function of Language rather than formal or linguistic similarity. In parallel, linguistic and discourse complexity were considered within each objective across different proficiency levels. Moreover, skill-domain matching (listening, reading, speaking, writing, etc.) was restricted to comparable skills to ensure valid comparison. Hence, skills such as thinking, study skills, and cultural awareness skills that were mentioned in the curriculum were only compared at the general principles level. As for the domain overlap, it was operationalized quantitatively by dividing the number of aligned objectives by the total number of objectives and then multiplying the result by 100 to get a percentage. A match was recorded when the semantic and functional similarity between the CEFR descriptors and the Lebanese objectives exceeded a threshold of 80% based on domain, communicative purpose, and linguistic demands. For instance, if the listening objective, “Understand increasingly complex and varied audio input..” is compared with the CEFR B2 illustrative descriptor “Can understand extended speech and

lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar, (CEFR, 2001, p. 27)”, one finds that both statements belong to the same domain (listening), serve the same communicative purpose (understand a varied spoken text), and require the same linguistic demand (internalize information). A quantitative standard of alignment expressed numerically as follows: $\geq 80\%$ = full alignment, $50\text{--}79\%$ = partial alignment, $< 50\%$ = no alignment). The alignment strength was calculated to determine the content overlap between the two frameworks. To support the comparison between the objectives and descriptors, ChatGPT Plus was used as an assistant to facilitate extracting and matching both objectives, Grammar, Topics, and descriptors. All the generated alignments were manually reviewed before final scoring for accuracy and methodological integrity.

2.4.1 Operational Application of Mapping

Each Grade 9 objective was compared manually to their corresponding CEFR B2 skill descriptor, and where relevant, to B2 items in the Core Inventory grammar and topics. A three-point alignment scale was considered, labelled as full alignment (1), partial alignment (0.5), no alignment (0). Each objective under aligned headings was compared using Excel. Percentages of alignment were calculated for each skill using the formula:

Percentage of alignment to each skill = $\frac{\Sigma \text{aligned objectives}}{\text{total possible aligned objectives}} \times 100$. When a single objective corresponded to more than one CEFR descriptor, it was recorded with the strongest match to avoid double counting.

2.5. Inter-coder Reliability

To ensure reliability, an inter-coder reliability check was conducted. The unit of analysis for this process was each extracted sentence in the general principles and features of the Lebanese curriculum. A randomly selected 20% sample of the whole extracted 29 sentences was independently coded between a trained human coder and AI assisted coder, ChatGPT Plus. Recent studies have shown the feasibility of using Large language models in qualitative analysis compared to expert coding, especially in deductive coding task when a codebook with clear definitions and examples are provided (Xiao et al., 2023), (Tai et al., 2024). Before coding, both coders reviewed the CEFR-based codebook. Results were compared and discrepancies were considered to make sure that coding and alignment judgements were unbiased and consistent. (See Appendix D)

Minor terminological variations as task-based learning and task-based approach, cultural and intercultural awareness were standardized to ensure consistency in comparison Agreement between the results was calculated using Krippendorff's alpha α . Seven out of eight sentences had identical codes, while one was conceptually overlapping (task-based approach vs. cooperative learning). Human coder was used as a final decision. Krippendorff's alpha was calculated for nominal data. While the observed disagreement $D_0 = 0.1333$, and expected disagreement $D_e = 0.74$. Krippendorff's alpha is computed as follows:

$$\alpha = 1 - (D_0 / D_e) \quad \alpha = 0.82$$

This shows strong and high inter-coder agreement, and that AI-assisted coding largely mirrored human interpretation.

An ethics protocol was conducted through which human coder voluntarily provided informed consent before participation. No personal identifying data were included in the coding task. The AI assisted coder was used as a secondary support tool, and all results were manually reviewed and verified before the final scoring.

As an additional verification step, a subsample of Grade 9 listening objectives was double – coded to confirm consistency of alignment decisions. This procedure served only as a reliability check and a methodological validation of the coding process. The given objectives in the listening domain were given to a human coder who independently aligned the objectives to descriptors. In the same way, they were assessed through ChatGPT Plus. Human coded alignments reached 11.5 out of 14 with an alignment percentage $(11.5 \div 14) \times 100 = 82.14\%$, whereas the AI generated output was 13 out of 14, reaching 92.85%. To assess the consistency of the results, Krippendorff’s alpha α was calculated by using the formula $\alpha = 1 - D_0 \div D_e$. The result was 0.82, indicating high inter-coder reliability (initially accepted). Following a reconciliation discussion and consensus was achieved on all items after they were clearly presented in table forms. (See Appendix E)

3. Results

3.1. Comparing the General Principles of the Curriculum

Multiple readings of *The English Language First Foreign Language Curriculum* issued in 1997 have revealed the existence of most of the CEFR principles. (Appendix is available upon request)

Codes are stated in the following summary Table 2:

Table 2. Distribution of CEFR-Aligned Principles in the Lebanese English Language Curriculum

CEFR Principle	Count	Normalized Percentage
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)	10	23.8
Interculturality	8	19.0
Task-Based Learning (TBL)	6	14.3
Learner-Centeredness	6	14.3
Learner Autonomy	4	9.5
Pluriculturalism	4	9.5
Plurilingualism	2	4.8
Self-Assessment	2	4.8
Total	42 coded instances	100

Note. Percentages were normalized to a 100% scale to show the relative dominant principle targeted in the Lebanese English Language curriculum.

Table 2 reveals that the communicative language teaching and interculturality were most represented, while plurilingualism and self-assessment were least mentioned. This imbalance suggests uneven emphasis of the CEFR principles in the curriculum.

3.2. Grade 9 Objectives and Topics

Comparing the Lebanese first foreign English language competences and objectives issued in 1997 by the end of Grade 9 level to the CEFR illustrative descriptors and the EAQUALS Core Inventory (2010) at B2 revealed a generally high level of alignment across all skill domains (Table 3):

Table 3. Alignment Summary of Grade 9 Lebanese English Curriculum with CEFR B2 Descriptors Across Domains

Domain	No. of Competences	Competence Alignment (%)	Objective Alignment (%)
Listening	3	100	93
Reading	3	100	93
Writing	3	100	83
Oral Communication	8	100	95
Topics	13	—	92
Grammar	13	—	81

Listening and reading competencies demonstrated full conceptual alignment (100%) with CEFR descriptors, with objective – level alignment reaching 93% in both domains. Partial alignment was observed in a limited number of objectives related to dramatization, dictation tasks, high –order inferential and critical understanding of written discourse (See Appendix F).

Writing competences also showed full conceptual alignment with the CEFR descriptors at B2 level (100%), while at the objective- level, alignment reached 83% , as descriptor 2 related to argumentation and report writing were underrepresented. Similarly, The three oral communication competences at Grade 9 level showed total alignment with the descriptors (100%), with objective coverage scoring 95% as minor gaps related to fluency in spontaneous relation . (Appendix is available upon request)

Analysis of the thematic topics covered at Grade 9 level indicated strong alignment, with 11 out of 13 topics corresponding to the Core Inventory atB2 level (92%). Partial alignment was detected in themes like Old age and Death, as such themes could be related to human and social experiences. (Appendix is available upon request)

Grade 9 grammar coverage aligned at 81% in structural topics like: tenses, modals, passives, relatives, and reported speech .However, three areas were partially aligned in mixed conditionals, split phrasal verbs, and inversion. (Appendix is available upon request)

Overall, results indicate that Grade 9 Lebanese Curriculum showed substantial alignment with the CEFR skills that are consistent with B2 learning outcomes in almost all fields except for some areas that will be discussed in the conclusion and recommendations.

4. Discussion and Recommendations

The findings in the study unfold many implications for stakeholders in educational policy and curriculum development to take into consideration for better alignment with language proficiency international standards as the CEFR:

4.1. General Objectives and CEFR Principles

The findings indicate that the Lebanese foreign language curriculum incorporates many CEFR principles despite not formally adopting the framework. These principles are reflected in the emphasis on cultural and intercultural awareness, communicative and task-based activities, and the promotion of learner autonomy. The Lebanese foreign language curriculum frames grammar within its social context developed where writing, reading, listening, and speaking

are developed integratively. Language forms or grammar are expected to develop naturally through the exposure to situations through which learners are supposed to work in pairs or groups (CERD, 1997, p. 3).

Document analysis, however, reveals uneven representation. While communicative language teaching and cultural openness are strongly emphasized, plurilingualism and self-assessment receive limited attention. In particular, the Lebanese English language curriculum mentions that it tends to “develop native- like proficiency in English”, which contrasts the concept of plurilingualism in the CEFR that clearly states “Having the ideal native-like speaker is no longer a requirement for learning languages”. Similarly, developing self-learning or autonomous skills is one of the educational plan aims that was translated in the form of promoting study skills, yet the plan focused only on assessments like exams with a slight mention of self-assessment and other forms as reflections or portfolios.

These findings are consistent with Bacha& Bahous (2011) in their article “Foreign Language Education in Lebanon: A Context of Cultural and Curricular Complexities” who found that the Lebanese multicultural and multilingual profile has been reflected in its language educational policies, and language learners are produced to communicate on the global arena. At the same time, the underrepresentation of plurilingualism and reflective assessment practices suggest a partial divergence from the CEFR’ realistic view of language development. This highlights the need for essential curricular revision that preserves the communicative strengths while strengthening the alignment with contemporary CEFR principles.

International language proficiency test results reveal gaps between Lebanese learners’ performance and that of students in high performing countries. Previous studies have identified a mismatch between what was written and taught in the curriculum, often attributed to limited responsiveness to the demands of advanced language proficiency, insufficient teacher content and pedagogical knowledge, inadequate instructional resources and ongoing professional development programs . Consequently, curriculum revision should be considered carefully so it would preserve its most effective characteristics. This particularly important given that the Lebanese Ministry of Education did launch a plan in 2022 to change its national curriculum by the year 2026 to become more aligned with international standards and 21st century skills including artificial intelligence to prepare young generations to a rapidly changing world.

4.2. Grade 9 Level English Language Objectives vs. the Core Inventory

The analysis of Grade 9 English language competencies and objectives with the CEFR B2 descriptors indicate a high level of alignment with CEFR B2 descriptors across all domains, suggesting that the curriculum broadly reflects much of the B2 upper intermediate language proficiency level.

At the competency level, all the learning outcomes fully align with similar domains in the CEFR. This suggests that the curriculum depicts the CEFR main principles in communicative approach, learner –centeredness, functional use of language, and interaction. However, at the objective level, alignment is uneven. While reading and listening objectives reflected relative B2 descriptors , yet some tasks listening focused on reproduction rather than authentic interpretation and provided limited opportunities for inferential and evaluative comprehension questions.

In the writing, process- oriented and creative tasks are well represented, yet argumentative and analytical writing receive less emphasis. Oral communication objectives demonstrate strong interactive aims but still lack the objectives of extending discourse, Justification, and spontaneous narration. With respect to content, the curriculum matches most of the thematic

topics covered in the core inventory. Still, abstract themes as old age and death are less visible in the CEFR. Similarly, while the core grammar is largely covered, more complex forms as mixed conditionals, inversion with negative adverbials seemed overlooked, suggesting limited exposure to grammatical flexibility at this level.

These findings are consistent with other previous local study results in the field. Dbaibo (2016) found weak connection of reading texts to real-life contexts, little use of multimedia resources, and the absence of criteria related to digital literacy. In the light of these observations, CEFR-aligned curriculum reform should consider integrating diverse digital media, (documentaries, film, podcasts), real-world texts with personal interests and intercultural relevance to better support advanced language development.

5. Recommendation

Since 1997, Lebanon has faced substantial challenges influencing the implementation of the curriculum. During the COVID-19 lockdown, distant learning exposed weaknesses in the Lebanese educational infrastructure to provide quality teaching and learning (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020). Until 2021, no systematic curriculum revisions were undertaken, apart from temporary curriculum adaptations introduced in response to the pandemic. These measures included prioritizing selected objectives, maintaining exam specifications, and reducing curricular content, resulting in the removal of nearly half of the objectives, including several related to cultural awareness. Such reductions highlight the need for systematic revisions to ensure that CEFR principles are preserved rather than diluted.

In response to these challenges, The National Student Learning Assessment Framework (NSLAF) was developed by the ministry of education in collaboration with The Center of Research and Development in Pedagogy (CRDP), internationally funded programs (QITABI), and Cambridge Assessment International. The framework emphasizes the use of evidence-based evaluation to support policy makers in monitoring, assessing and informing curriculum decisions (NSLAF, 2020). Integrating the CEFR alignment findings of the present study with such national initiative could provide a clear pathway toward designing a data-driven, CEFR grounded, and pedagogically coherent curriculum.

5.1. Recommendations Related to General Principles

Based on the alignment analysis, the Lebanese curriculum strongly reinforces the communicative and intercultural approaches, while underrepresenting plurilingualism, learner's autonomy, and self-assessment. In light of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The CEFR holistic approach of plurilingualism should be reflected in the Lebanese curriculum by teaching English alongside other existing languages(like Arabic, French,..etc). This can be achieved through comparative language analysis, translanguaging practices, and interlingual projects that help learners build awareness of cross-linguistic connections among languages.
2. Curriculum designers should strengthen learners' autonomy by engaging students in decision making processes, goal setting, and reflective activities that reinforce their awareness of their learning.

3. The limited representation of self-assessment and portfolio-based practices suggests a need to develop students' metacognitive skills and evaluate their learning progress.

In addition, considering the expanded focus of the new updated CEFR companion volume (2020) on mediation, online interaction, plurilingualism, pluriculturalism, and modality – inclusive and gender- neutral formulations, future curriculum revisions should consider incorporating mediation across languages, multimodal forms of interaction (digital and online such as: emails,, social media, and sign languages) to promote inclusivity and relevance.

5.2. Recommendations Related to Grade 9 Competencies and Objectives

Based on the alignment of Grade 9 competencies and objectives to those in the B2 core descriptors, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Enrich listening and reading objectives by incorporating more inferential, interpretive, and evaluative tasks.
2. Expand the writing scope to include argumentation to strengthen learners' critical skills.
3. In oral communication, greater attention should be given to extended discourse, justification of viewpoints, and spontaneous narration.
4. Refine thematic topics to ensure closer alignment with the communicative and cultural domains emphasized in the CEFR.
5. Reinforce advanced grammatical structures could support students' fluency and facilitate the attainment of full B2 proficiency and communicative competence.

5.3. Directions for Future Research

Future research should focus more on triangulating the results of this study with quantitative and qualitative data, such as surveys, focus group interviews and class observation, in order to examine curriculum implementation and inform policy makers of the curriculum gaps and instructional challenges that hinder Lebanese students' language development.

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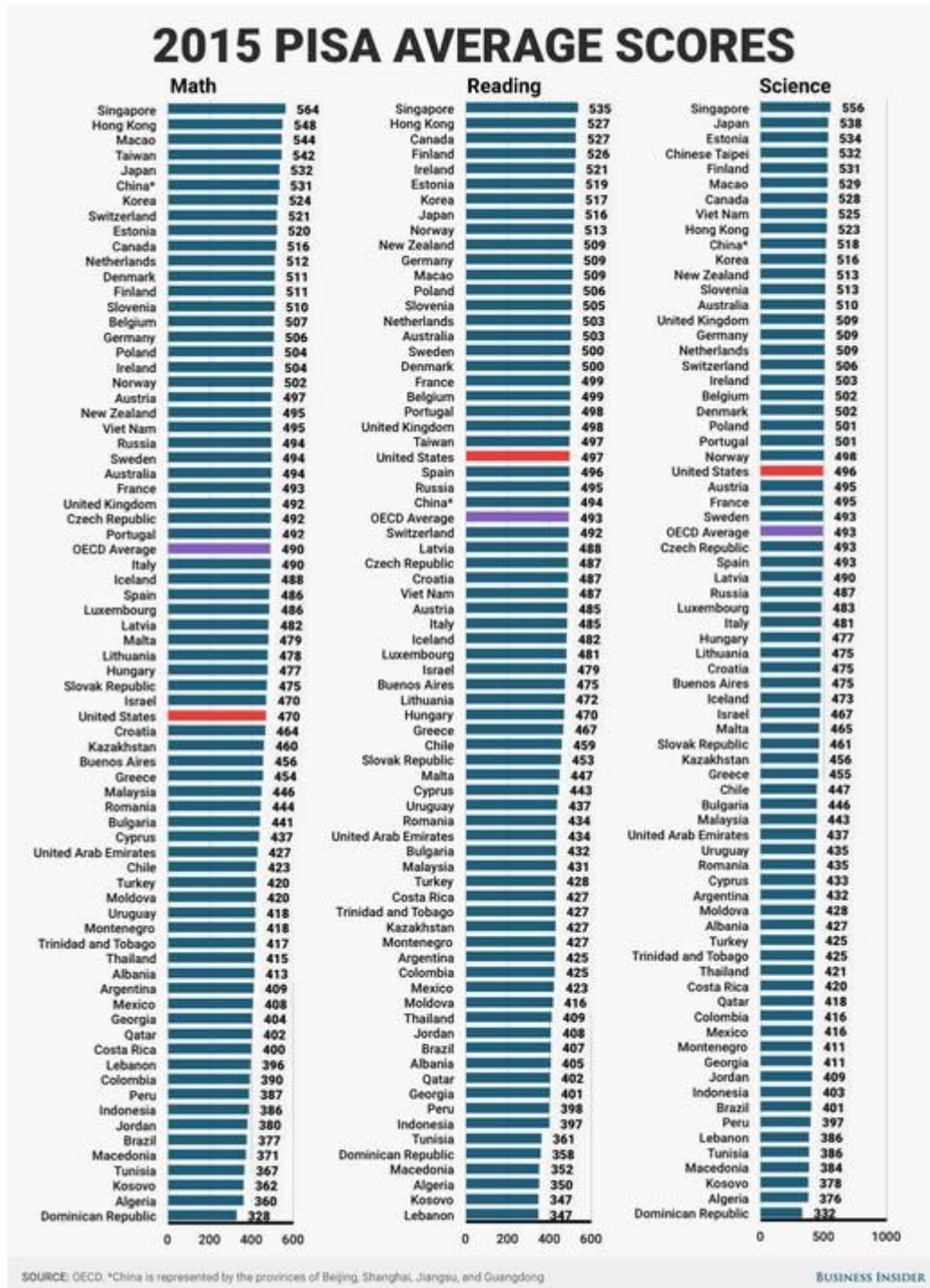
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Appendix A

PISA Test Results year 2015, 2018, 2021



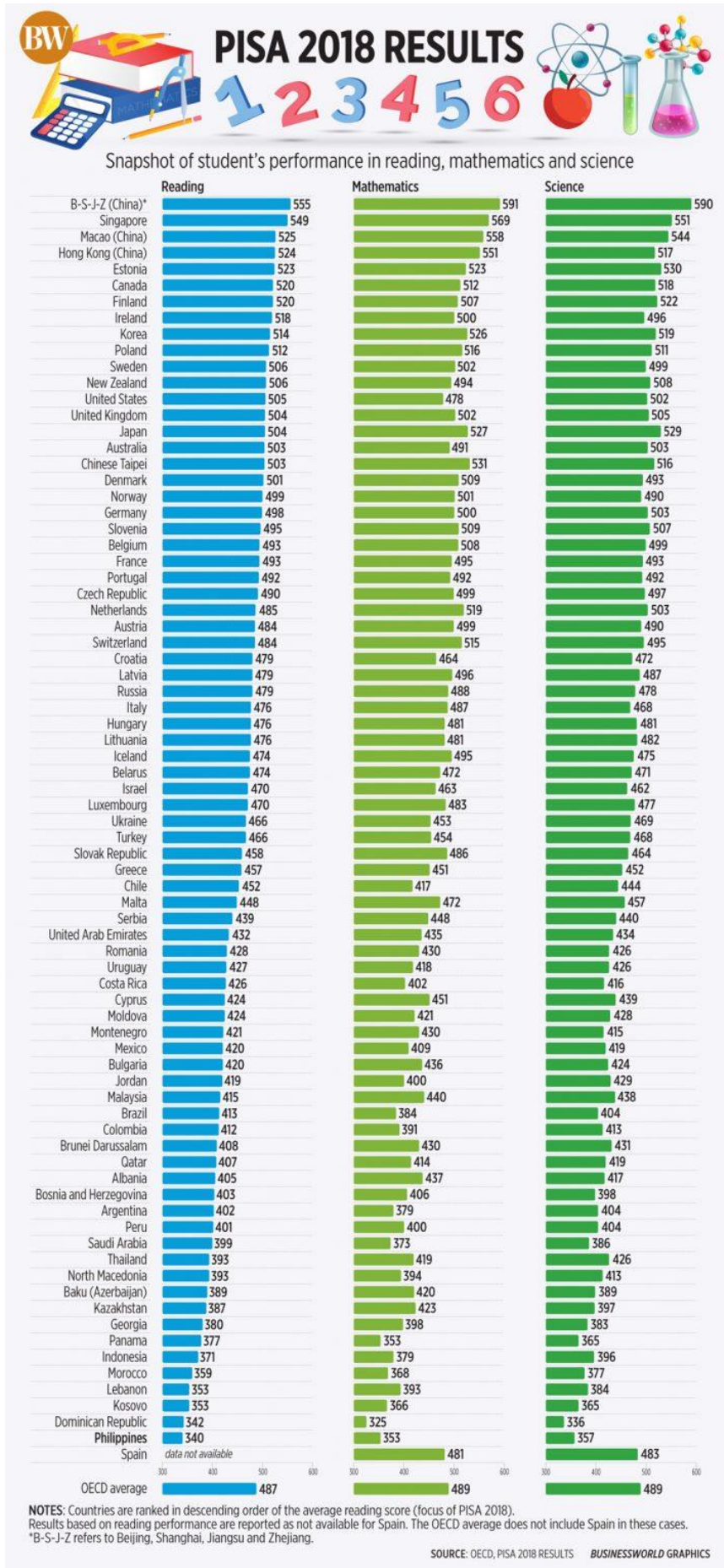
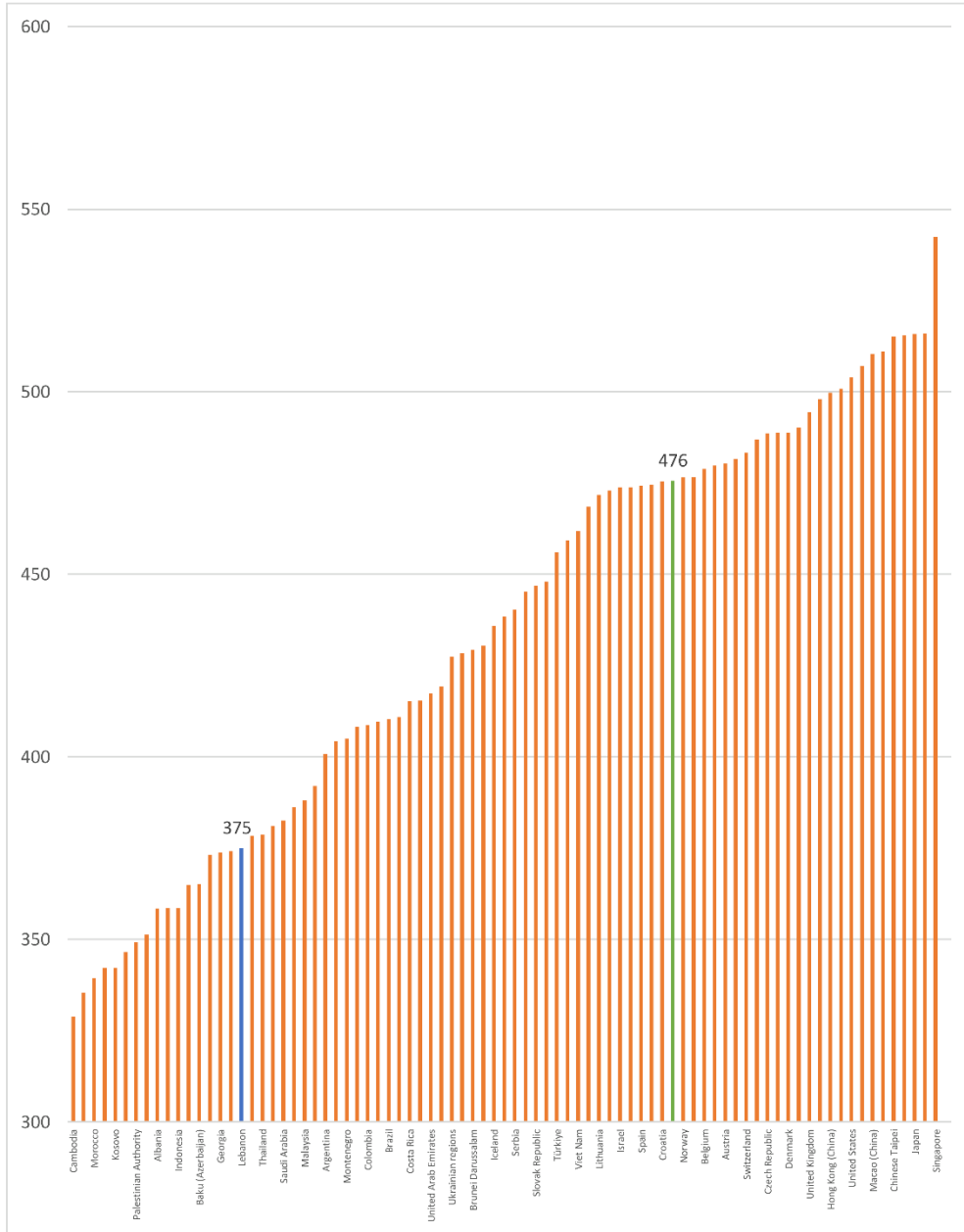


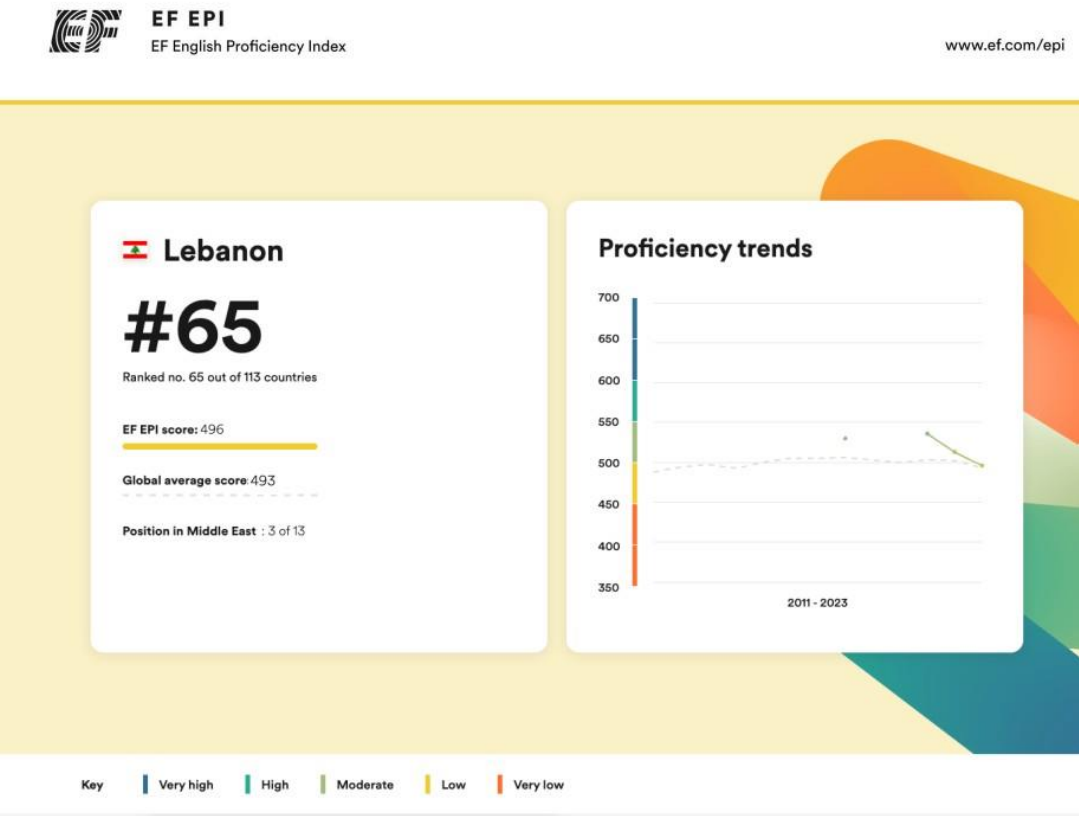
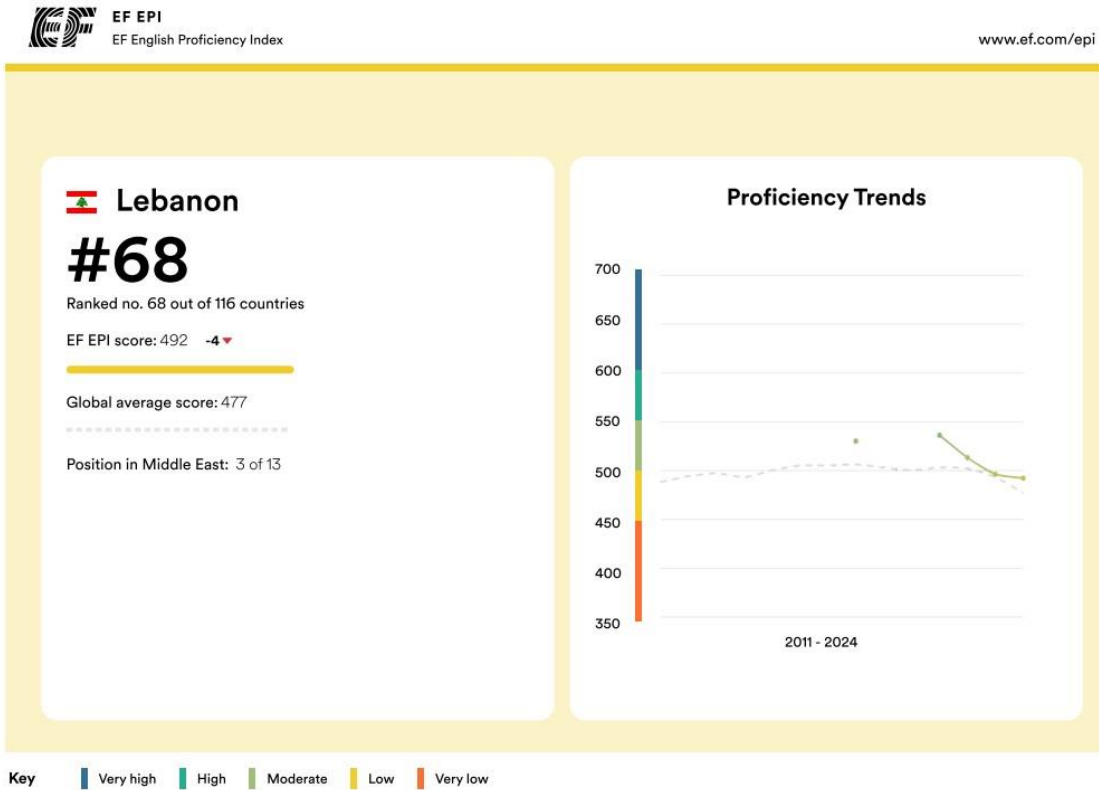
Figure 4.1. Average performance in reading in PISA 2022

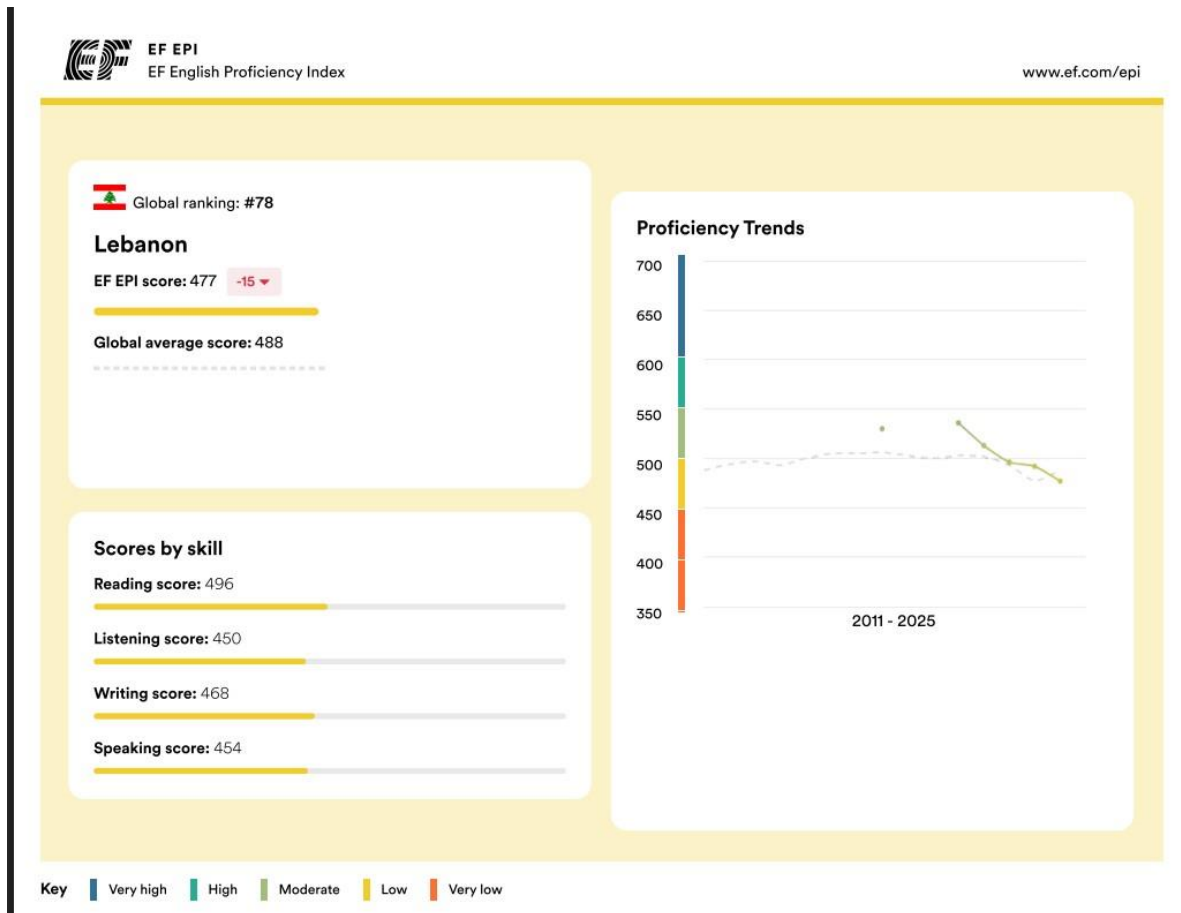


Source: OECD (2023a), Table I.B1.2.2

Appendix B

English Proficiency Index 2023,2024,2025





Appendix C

A Code book of CEFR(2001) Principles

Principle	Definition	Indicators / Key Phrases to Look for in Curriculum
<i>Plurilingualism</i>	The development of learners' ability to use more than one language for communication and learning purposes. It values the coexistence of languages and encourages diversification in language offerings so that learners can draw upon all linguistic resources in communication.	Mentions of "multiple languages," "language repertoire," "using more than one language," "integration of other languages," "diversity of languages taught," "multilingual competence."
<i>Pluriculturalism</i>	Recognition that languages are integral to their cultures and that learning a new language involves engaging with the beliefs, values, and practices of other cultures. Promotes cultural coexistence and participation in multiple cultural contexts.	"Respect for cultural diversity," "participation in different cultures," "understanding other people's customs," "values and traditions," "cross-cultural appreciation."
<i>Interculturality</i>	The capacity to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Involves intercultural awareness, attitudes, and skills that promote openness, tolerance, and understanding of cultural differences in communication.	"Intercultural communication," "openness to other cultures," "respect for difference," "cultural awareness skills," "intercultural exchange," "understanding values and beliefs of others."
<i>Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)</i>	A learner-centered teaching approach emphasizing communication as both the means and the goal of learning. Focuses on functional	"Real-life communication," "interaction," "speaking and listening activities," "use of language in

Principle	Definition	Indicators / Key Phrases to Look for in Curriculum
	use of language in authentic contexts, fluency over accuracy, and development of communicative competence.	context,” “fluency,” “meaningful use of language,” “communicative competence.”
<i>Task-Based Learning (TBL)</i>	An action-oriented approach viewing learners as social agents who perform tasks to achieve communicative goals. Tasks serve as the main unit of instruction, promoting active learning through meaningful use of language.	“Learning through tasks,” “project-based activities,” “performing actions in language,” “problem-solving tasks,” “experiential learning,” “goal-oriented communication,” “real-life scenarios.”
<i>Learner Autonomy</i>	Learners’ ability and willingness to take charge of their own learning by planning, monitoring, and evaluating progress. Encourages independent decision-making and self-direction, supported by teacher guidance.	“Independent learning,” “student responsibility,” “self-directed,” “lifelong learning,” “planning their own study,” “setting goals,” “taking initiative in learning.”
<i>Self-Assessment</i>	Learners’ reflective evaluation of their language competences, strengths, and weaknesses using established CEFR descriptors or equivalent frameworks. Aims to enhance awareness and guide self-improvement.	“Self-evaluation,” “reflection on progress,” “identifying strengths and weaknesses,” “personal progress,” “learning journals,” “portfolios,” “monitoring one’s development.”
<i>European Language Portfolio (ELP)</i>	A Council of Europe tool enabling learners to document and reflect on their language learning experiences. It supports plurilingualism, autonomy, and self-assessment while showcasing language achievements.	“Language portfolio,” “record of learning experiences,” “tracking progress,” “documenting language achievements,” “personal learning record.”
<i>Learner-Centeredness</i>	A pedagogical approach placing learners at the core of teaching, integrating their needs, goals, and interests into instruction and assessment. Emphasizes interaction, participation, and adaptability to learners’ contexts.	“Learners’ needs,” “student-centered,” “participation,” “interaction,” “individual differences,” “responsive teaching,” “personalized learning,” “learner involvement.”

Appendix D

The Inter-Reliability Check of 20% of the General Principles between Human and ChatGPT Coding

ID	Sentence	Human Coder (from your QDA table)	ChatGPT Coding (from CEFR codebook)	Alignment
1	In the area of foreign language education, there was emphasis on creating a citizen who is proficient in at least one foreign language in order to promote openness to and interaction with other cultures.	CULTURAL AWARENESS / Intercultural Awareness	Intercultural Awareness	✓ Aligned (identical meaning)
9	The emphasis on teaching English for academic purposes entails the development of thinking skills. It is for this reason that the new curriculum, in addition to promoting the development of traditional skills, has also emphasized the development of thinking skills.	Autonomous Learning	Learner Autonomy	✓ Aligned (same construct under CEFR)
10	The new curriculum attempts to develop native-like proficiency in English. More specifically, it stresses both fluency and accuracy, in that order.	Communicative Approach	Communicative Approach	✓ Aligned
13	The purpose of this is to develop cross-cultural openness, tolerance, and understanding. It is for this purpose that the proposed curriculum highlights foreign language literature at all grade levels and includes a special section on cultural awareness skills.	Intercultural Awareness	Intercultural Awareness	✓ Aligned
17	Close cooperation between EFL and subject matter teachers becomes a necessity. The content area teacher will help make the content more comprehensible, and the language teacher will help language become a facilitator rather than an obstacle to comprehension.	Task-based Approach / plurilingual approach / professional development (overlaps)	Co-operative Learning	⊗ Partially aligned – both stress collaboration, shared tasks, and interdependence.
22	Developing intercultural understanding and appreciation.	Intercultural Awareness	Intercultural Awareness	✓ Aligned
23	Promoting students' positive attitudes toward the target language and culture.	Intercultural Awareness	Intercultural Awareness	✓ Aligned
28	Continuous evaluation will thus incorporate the latest trends in testing and assessment such as oral and written tests, group tests, peer evaluation, self-evaluation, portfolios, observations, interviews, and conferences.	Self-Assessment	Self-Assessment / Learner Portfolios (ELP Use)	✓ Aligned (same CEFR concept)

Appendix E

Inter- Reliability Check of Grade 9 Listening Objectives Between Human Coder Vs. ChatGPT Coding

Grade 9 Listening Objective	Chat-GPT Coding (Alignment Level)	Human Coding (Alignment Level)
Answer factual and referential questions based on what is heard	1	1
Fill out forms	1	1
Take notes and/or outline what is heard	1	1
Dramatize what is heard	0.5	0
Participate in conversations about what is heard	1	1
Identify syntactic and semantic cues to meaning, adjectives and linguistic markers	1	1
Identify participant(s), situation(s), topic, tone, etc.	1	1
Complete partial transcript of what is heard	1	1
Identify types of authentic listening texts	1	1
Summarize the main points in a text	1	1
Provide plausible conclusions / explanations	1	1
Propose an alternative to a plan / viewpoint / course of action / solution presented by a speaker	1	1
Relate intonation patterns to corresponding emotions and traits	1	1
Write dictated material and rearrange it	0.5	0

Appendix F

Grade 9 Listening Domain – CEFR B2 Alignment

CEFR B2 Listening Descriptors

No.	Descriptor
1.	Can understand standard speech spoken at a normal rate and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar.
2.	Can understand the essentials of lectures and most TV news and current affairs programmes.
3.	Can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.

Alignment of Grade 9 Competences

Grade 9 Objective (Competence)	Closest Matching B2 Descriptor (with detail)	Justification (Meaning / Reasoning)	Alignment Level (1 / 0.5 / 0)	Coverage Status of Partially / Uncovered Descriptors Elsewhere in Domain
<i>Understand increasingly complex and varied audio input.</i>	(1) Can understand standard speech spoken at a normal rate and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar.	Reflects comprehension of extended, authentic speech and understanding of main and supporting ideas.	1	Fully covered through note-taking, summarizing, and inference objectives.
<i>Recognize and discriminate aspects of spoken discourse.</i>	(2) Can understand the essentials of lectures and most TV news and current affairs programmes.	Focuses on identifying essential features, tone, and structure in academic and informational listening.	1	Fully aligned with Descriptor 2 through recognition of structure and language markers.
<i>Demonstrate critical understanding of what is heard.</i>	(3) Can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	Captures inferential and critical listening skills related to tone, attitude, and emotion.	1	Fully covered in relational objectives involving emotion, tone, and alternative viewpoints.

✔ Competence-Level Alignment: 3 / 3 → 100%

All competences match one of the three CEFR B2 descriptors, ensuring complete conceptual coverage.

Alignment of Grade 9 Objectives

Grade 9 Objective	Closest Matching B2 Descriptor (with detail)	Justification (Meaning / Reasoning)	Alignment Level (1 / 0.5 / 0)	Coverage Status of Partially / Uncovered Descriptors Elsewhere in Domain
Answer factual and referential questions based on what is heard.	(1) Can understand standard speech spoken at a normal rate and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar.	Involves comprehension and recall of factual and referential details from extended discourse.	1	Fully covered.
Fill out forms.	(2) Can understand the essentials of lectures and most TV news and current affairs programmes.	Applies comprehension in structured, practical tasks typical of real-world listening contexts.	1	Fully covered, supports Descriptor 2.
Take notes and/or outline what is heard.	(1) Can follow extended speech and extract key ideas and structure.	Demonstrates academic listening and organization of information.	1	Fully covered.
Dramatize what is heard.	(3) Can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	Develops expressive understanding and empathy with speaker tone and emotion.	0.5	Partial alignment, complements Descriptor 3 indirectly.

Grade 9 Objective	Closest Matching B2 Descriptor (with detail)	Justification (Meaning / Reasoning)	Alignment Level (1 / 0.5 / 0)	Coverage Status of Partially / Uncovered Descriptors Elsewhere in Domain
Participate in conversations about what is heard.	(2) Can understand the essentials of lectures and most TV news and current affairs programmes.	Shows comprehension sufficient to respond and discuss content meaningfully.	1	Fully covered.
Identify syntactic and semantic cues to meaning, adjectives and linguistic markers.	(2) Can understand the essentials of lectures and informational texts.	Enhances comprehension through grammatical and lexical awareness.	1	Fully covered.
Identify participant(s), situation(s), topic, tone, etc.	(3) Can understand films and detect tone and context.	Focuses on pragmatic and inferential listening beyond literal meaning.	1	Fully covered.
Complete partial transcript of what is heard.	(1) Can understand standard speech and extended discourse.	Reinforces detailed comprehension and accuracy in decoding speech.	1	Fully covered.
Identify types of authentic listening texts.	(2) Can understand lectures, news, and authentic informational sources.	Promotes awareness of text types and varied listening genres.	1	Fully covered.
Summarize the main points in a text.	(1) Can follow extended argument and extract key ideas.	Encourages synthesis and global understanding.	1	Fully covered.
Provide plausible conclusions/explanations.	(1, 3) Can interpret complex argumentation and recognize implied meaning.	Integrates critical reasoning and inferential comprehension.	1	Fully covered.
Propose an alternative to a plan/viewpoint/course of action/solution presented by a speaker.	(1) Can follow and evaluate complex argumentation.	Reflects high-order reasoning and comprehension.	1	Fully covered.
Relate intonation patterns to corresponding emotions and traits.	(3) Can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	Focuses on paralinguistic cues—tone, attitude, and emotion.	1	Fully covered.
Write dictated material and rearrange it.	(2) Can understand the essentials of lectures and news.	Tests detailed perception and retention more than interpretive understanding.	0.5	Partial, complements Descriptor 2 but lacks analysis.

✔ Objective-Level Alignment: 14 total → 13 fully aligned, 2 partially aligned = ~93%