

## Reviewing the Common European Framework of Reference for English Language in Thailand Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

In the last 15 years, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has become very influential for the design of language curriculum and assessment of the language learning outcomes around the world. This article presents a basic introduction to the CEFR that has arisen by Thai government and educational authorities have set out to apply the framework in the education in Thailand; especially in Thai university students.

**Keywords:** CEFR, English, Thailand Higher Education

### INTRODUCTION

English is a global language and it is an important tool used to communicate with the inter-national community. English is the medium of exchange of information and dissemination of knowledge in various fields. Thus, it is crucial for the development of all the countries. It is important to develop the potential of the country's population in the knowledge and ability to communicate in English. Thai people are aware of the importance of the importance of the English language as we can see in the management of education which includes various levels of English in the education program, as Lie (2002) stated:

“English has become the language of the elite in many developing countries and tends to perpetuate the social stratification in the community. In many parts of the world it is the wealthiest and best educated people who can readily access English. The knowledge of English has become a significant vehicle for accessing valued resources and elite positions. This is accentuated by the fact that most of the knowledge on which the global communication and economy operate is knowledge in English; and English is the main language of international institutions”

Problems in learning and teaching English are so important for teachers and those involved. We have to be concerned about improving learning and teaching efficiency. The most important thing is to meet the needs of learners. It is well known that teaching English in Thailand is not as successful as it should be. Most students lack knowledge and the ability to communicate. There are several reasons, such as a lack of confidence in speaking, a lack of understanding native culture, a lack of motivation to learn English, and a lack of opportunity for practicing in the real world.

The CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) was previously used for European citizen language study in 1989-1996. The objectives of CEFR are to evaluate qualities of teachings in all English language institutes in Europe and all major European languages. In 2001, ministers of European Union used CEFR as a standard to check language skills. Until now, CEFR has been widely accepted and used as an evaluation tool for individual English language capacity. Therefore, this standard of evaluation is applicable for all nonnative English learners.

Thailand's education system is moving towards using the CEFR framework to evaluate English language proficiency in schools starting with English teachers. The Thai Ministry of Education has announced a policy to reform the teaching of English in primary education, so all sectors recognize the necessity to accelerate the upgrading of the education quality and students development. This will lead to increase the competitiveness of the country. Preparing for entry into ASEAN in 2015 by policy reform, teaching English in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is universal paradigm in the teaching English. Including the ability to elevate teachers' capacities in English communication, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) will be the main idea of CEFR.

So the objectives of this study are to study using European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Thailand and to suggest ways to use European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in English teaching so that relevant sectors can help improve teaching and learning in Thailand.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To study using European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Thailand.
2. To suggest ways to use European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in English teaching.

## **Scope of the study**

1. The study is focused on using framework of the European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Thailand.
2. The study is focused on document reviewing on the European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Thailand.

## **Review of related literature and study**

### **The Common European Framework**

The Common European Framework describes a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn in order to use language for communication, and what skills the learners have to develop to be able to use it effectively. It provides a common basic for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc., in Europe. The Common European Framework is intended to overcome the barriers to communication among professionals from different educational systems in Europe. There are divided levels of proficiency in the Framework for learners' progress to be measured their communicative skills. The Framework provides a common basis for explicit description of objectives, content and methods enhancing the transparency of courses, syllabuses and qualifications.

### **Communicative Language Competence**

Linguistics, Sociolinguistics and Pragmatic are components of Communicative Language.

First, Linguistic competencies are lexicon, phonology, syntax and skills and other dimensions of language system. Second, Sociolinguistic competencies refer to the socio-cultural conditions of language use such as rules of politeness, norms governing relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups, linguistic codification of certain fundamental rituals in the functioning of a community. Third, Pragmatic competencies are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources, for example, production of language functions and speech acts. It also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody.

### **The Common Reference Levels**

The outline framework of the Common Reference Level consists of six broad levels; Breakthrough, Way-stage, Threshold, Effective Operational Proficiency, and Mastery. These six levels are respectively higher and lower interpretations of the classic division into basic, intermediate and advanced, such as A, B and C. It is a worldwide framework describing language proficiency from A1 which is for beginners, up to C2, which is for those who are masters in a language. The Common European Framework of Reference was presented in a “can do” framework and it can be used by institutes or organizations as a reliable standard of language ability all over the world.

|                         |           |   |
|-------------------------|-----------|---|
| <b>Proficient User</b>  | <b>C2</b> | Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.  |
|                         | <b>C1</b> | Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.                                       |
| <b>Independent User</b> | <b>B2</b> | Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. |
|                         | <b>B1</b> | Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.                     |
| <b>Basic User</b>       | <b>A2</b> | Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.                          |
|                         | <b>A1</b> | Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.   |

Figure 1: The framework based on the Common European Framework of Reference.

As shown in Figure 1, the details of the CEFR are described from level A1 to level C2. More tasks and skills in language proficiency will be added in the higher levels. Language learners have to be evaluated to pass the level test.

### Presentation of Common Reference Levels

The CEFR can be used for the different sectors in different cultural pedagogy. The users can choose and organize suitable levels and modules with the set of its common reference points and the wording of the descriptors. According to the summary of the proposed Common Reference Levels in the Figure 2, the representation shows an easier communicative system to non-specialist users, and it provides teachers and curriculum planners with orientation points.

### The Influence of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in the Asia-Pacific Region

There is a concern of establishing standards for English language teaching in the terms of international benchmarks in many countries around the world, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing on the

internet-based TOEFL (iBT), giving a broad indication of the level of English proficiency achieved among the country’s population.

| CEFR Level | TOEIC     | TOEFL Paper | TOEFL CBT | TOEFL IBT | IELTS     |
|------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| A1         | 0-110     | 0 - 310     | 0 - 30    | 0 - 8     | 0 - 1     |
| A2         | 110- 250  | 310 - 343   | 33 - 60   | 9 - 18    | 1 - 1.5   |
| B1         | 255 - 400 | 347 - 393   | 63 - 90   | 19 - 29   | 2 - 2.5   |
|            |           | 397 - 433   | 93 - 120  | 30 - 40   | 3 - 3.5   |
| B2         | 405 - 600 | 437 - 473   | 123 - 150 | 41 - 52   | 4         |
|            |           | 477 - 510   | 153 - 180 | 53 - 64   | 4.5 - 5   |
| C1         | 605 - 780 | 513 - 547   | 183 - 210 | 65 - 78   | 5.5 - 6   |
|            |           | 550 - 587   | 213 - 240 | 79 - 95   | 6.5 - 7   |
| C2         | 785 - 990 | 590 - 677   | 243 - 300 | 96 - 120  | 7.5 - 9   |
|            | Top Score | Top Score   | Top Score | Top Score | Top Score |
|            | 990       | 677         | 300       | 120       | 9         |

Figure 2: The example of other proficiency tests compared with the CEFR test.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Documents and news about the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Thailand were descriptively summarized and presented in topic of trends of CEFR in Thailand in both English learners and English teachers and researchers of CRFR in Thailand.

## RESULTS

According to the announcement of Office of Higher Education Commission titled “Policy of Rising English Standard in Higher Education” on 12 April 2016, it was stated that the government has the policy of education to reform the education and learning in Thailand for being able to develop the potential of learners and teachers. The standard of English in all curriculums will be higher to develop English teaching. Learners can use their English skills as the tools for searching universal knowledge and being up to date for the ASEAN community. Moreover, this will increase the country’s potential in competition in the future.

All students in higher education have to be tasted in English proficiency according to their institutes’ English tests which should be compared with the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (CEFR) or other standards. The test results may be presented in the institute’s announcement or certification. This project has begun since 2016 academic year from now on.

This policy will be not only used at the higher education level, but also at the vocational education level and basic education level. It seems that the CEFR will be used exclusively for being the standard framework of English teaching and learning in Thailand. Therefore, students in all education levels have to be tested by using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to know their English proficiency.

In 2015, the Office of the Basic Education Commission and the Institute of the English Language communicated an understanding to teachers about the use of the CEFR in English teaching and assessment. There will be a survey of the amount of English teachers that need to be evaluated for English competence. These results will be collected in the database, to develop teachers' capacities according to their ability and interest.

It was concluded that, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) will be used as the model to reform English teaching as follows:

1. The goal of English proficiency was specified by Ministry of Education in basic education as Level 1 for those who graduated Prathomsuksa 6, Level A2 for Matthayomsuksa 3, and Level B1 for the ones who graduated Matthayomsuksa 6 or with a vocational certificate.

2. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) will be used for English curriculum developing and proficiency in each level. Description and details of the CEFR at each level will be used in teaching as the model to achieve the goal.

3. Evaluation will be held in testing or the same standard testing which can be compared to the same level. This will be done to know the proficiency of language users and to reach the project goal and nation standard.

## DISCUSSION

There are three points of discussion in using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as the model in Thailand.

1. To make this project perfect, there should be public relation efforts or workshops to help everyone understand the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in the country. There is a lack of understanding in its details these days in each education level.

2. There should be progress in this project continuously using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for both learners and teachers. The results of the CEFR test should not only be the record. For those who are under the standard level, there should be seminars or training to reach the standard practically and continuously.

3. There are many foreign text books based on the CEFR, like text books of Oxford press and Cambridge press. In Thailand, there is not a curriculum or English text books which are suitable in a Thai context. So, there should be a standard curriculum and text books according to the Ministry of Education policy.

4. There is little research about the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Thailand. Some of them were related to CEFR in some points but no one has completely used CEFR as the model in research. For example, “Development of Online Diagnostic English Reading Test” was done by Vanijdee(2009). In this research, the tests were designed based on the reading process and the reading evaluation process, with the reading performance level based on the CEFR levels. In the near future, if the use of CEFR as the model of the Minister of Education will be continuously progressed in Thailand, there will be more and more research adopting or using the CEFR more.

## CONCLUSION

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has become very influential for the design of language curriculum and assessment of language learning outcomes around the world and in Thailand as well. Many institutes have adapted and used this framework as the model to develop English proficiency of learners and teachers according to the announcement of the Ministry of Education. To achieve the goal of this policy, there should be the progress in practice continuously with the cooperation of all relevant sectors.

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