

The CEFR in Thailand: Reevaluation, recontextualization and integration into language policy and practice

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ABSTRACT

The adoption and implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Thailand and the localized Framework of Reference for English Language Education (FRELE-TH) were part of national efforts to improve Thai students' English proficiency to be aligned with global benchmarks, such as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). This study is an integrative review of policy documents, academic literature, and the CEFR-CV (2018/2020). It examines the utilization of mediation, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and action-oriented learning in the Thai educational context to offer expanded reference levels and descriptors for localizing the CEFR. The review has shown that the adoption of CEFR has encountered challenges in terms of practical application, including teachers' limited familiarity with the framework, overemphasis on high-stakes testing, resource disparities, and a lack of sustained institutional support. Its impact remains constrained by the gap between policy and classroom reality practices. The finding indicates that, although the CEFR is potentially beneficial to be used as a framework to transform the educational system of Thailand, a thoughtful recontextualization that foregrounds teacher agency, inclusive pedagogies, and technological integration is necessary. Hence, a recalibration of language education policy is needed to support CEFR as a pedagogical tool, rather than viewing it merely as an assessment metric. As well, curriculum development, teachers' education, and regional collaboration are essential for a more CEFR-informed approach to innovation across multiple levels of the education system.

Keywords: CEFR in Thailand; Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR); Framework of Reference for English Language Education (FRELE-TH); language policy and practice

Received:

31 October 2025

Accepted:

24 January 2026

Revised:

4 January 2026

Published:

30 January 2026

How to cite (in APA style):

Foley, J., Deocampo, M. F., & Novianti, N. (2026). The CEFR in Thailand: Reevaluation, recontextualization and integration into language policy and practice. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 15(3), 618-629. <https://doi.org/10.17509/rz1bhj53>

INTRODUCTION

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2001) was developed to provide an action-oriented approach that emphasizes communicative competence (Novawan et al., 2023). This framework aimed to provide transparent

proficiency scales specifically for the context of European education. Since its development, CEFR has become a widely accepted reference tool for language learning, teaching, and assessment. It has been adopted by diverse educational systems,

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including those in Asia (Read, 2019; Hamid et al., 2025), as language proficiency has become a cornerstone of education policies worldwide. Although CEFR offers a flexible and comprehensive framework, its implementation in different regions has raised questions about cultural, pedagogical, and linguistic appropriateness, particularly in multilingual and exam-oriented countries in Asia (Read, 2019; Sun, 2023). In Thailand, the CEFR was formally adopted in 2014 as part of Thai educational reform to enhance English language proficiency among teachers and students (Foley, 2019a). An effort that has been driven by several policy imperatives, including regional integration through the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), low national test scores, and international benchmarking via assessments such as PISA (Foley, 2019a; Mahapoonyanont & Songsang, 2024). Despite these efforts, the implementation of CEFR in Thailand faced several challenges, for example, its lack of teacher preparedness, alignment with local realities, over-reliance on standardized testing, and a limited understanding of the CEFR's pedagogical underpinnings.

Prior studies have documented challenges in CEFR implementation in Thailand, such as teachers' limited understanding, policy-practice gaps, and adaptation issues via FRELE-TH. However, it seems that none have systematically integrated the expanded CEFR Companion Volume (2018/2020) constructs of mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural competence into local pedagogical, assessment, and teacher education frameworks. Existing research, including preservice teachers' insights (Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021), in-service reflections (Sriwongsa & Sukying, 2023, 2024), university-level challenges (Chavangklang et al., 2024), CLIL needs analysis (Kaewkamnerd et al., 2023), self-assessment development (Piamsai, 2023), and vocational assessment tools (Phonthawi et al., 2025), predominantly addresses core CEFR levels, action-oriented tasks, and general proficiency alignment but overlooks the relevance of these newer dimensions to Thai multilingual classrooms and curricula.

To fill this gap, this article aims to critically revisit the CEFR's adaptation and application in the Thai educational context through FRELE-TH (Hiranburana et al., 2019), framed by Foley's (2019a) theoretical lens on local implementation. The article also critically reflects on the expanded CEFR Companion Volume (2018/2020) (Council of Europe, 2001/2020; Kremmel et al., 2023; Little & Figueras, 2022), which introduces new dimensions such as mediation and plurilingual/cultural competence, and examines their relevance for Thai classrooms (Savski, 2023). The question posed in this article is: How has the CEFR been reinterpreted and recontextualized in Thailand, and what lessons

can be drawn for its effective integration into language education policy and practice?

METHOD

To answer the research question, this study employed an integrative review design to generate a comprehensive and critically synthesized account of how mediation, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and action-oriented learning have been taken up in the Thai educational context. The integrative approach was selected because it allows the inclusion and systematic integration of diverse evidence types, such as policy documents, empirical and theoretical academic literature, and CEFR-CV documentation, so as to move beyond aggregation of findings towards higher-order conceptualization that can inform curricular localization and descriptor development (Cronin & George, 2023; Oermann & Knafl, 2021).

Design and Methodological Framework

The review was structured following the five core stages of the integrative review method (Hopia et al., 2016; Oermann & Knafl, 2021), including: 1) problem identification, 2) literature search, 3) data evaluation, 4) data analysis, and 5) presentation. It also drew on Cronin and George's (2023) emphasis on completeness and thematic synthesis as central quality criteria for integrative reviews aimed at theoretical and practical redirection. In the field of education and educational policy, the choice of integrative review was further justified by demonstrations of the method's applicability for synthesizing heterogeneous sources and supporting transparent procedures in studies of public policy (Alvarenga et al., 2024).

Data Sources and Eligibility Criteria

Three main bodies of material were considered: (1) Thai national and sectoral policy documents related to language education, curriculum, and assessment across basic and higher education; (2) peer-reviewed academic literature (empirical and theoretical) addressing CEFR implementation, mediation, plurilingual/pluricultural competence, and action-oriented learning in Thailand; and (3) the CEFR Companion Volume (2018/2020) as the benchmark framework for mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural descriptors and for the action-oriented approach. Inclusion criteria required that documents explicitly address at least one of the focal constructs and relate to language education policies, curricula, assessment practices, or classroom implementation in the Thai context; studies that mentioned CEFR only tangentially or focused solely on psychometric test validation without conceptual engagement with CEFR-CV constructs were excluded (Alvarenga et al., 2024; Oermann & Knafl, 2021). Policy texts and grey

literature were included when they were issued by official Thai governmental agencies or recognized educational bodies and contained substantive provisions or guidance relevant to the operationalization of CEFR-related constructs in curricula, syllabi, or assessment frameworks (Alvarenga et al., 2024).

Search Strategy and Document Identification

A multi-step search strategy was implemented to meet expectations of completeness and balance in integrative reviews (Cronin & George, 2023; Oermann & Knafl, 2021). Electronic searches were conducted in education- and language-focused databases (e.g., ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and regional indices) using combinations of keywords such as “CEFR,” “CEFR-CV,” “mediation,” “plurilingual,” “pluricultural,” “action-oriented,” “task-based,” “Thailand,” and “Thai education,” with Boolean operators to capture variations and related terms (Hopia et al., 2016). Targeted searches were carried out on the websites of Thai ministries and national education agencies, including the Ministry of Education, the Office of the Higher Education Commission, examination and qualification bodies, to locate policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and guidelines referencing CEFR or related constructs, supplemented by backward and forward citation tracking from key CEFR-CV and Thai CEFR implementation publications.

Screening and Selection Process

All records retrieved from the database and web searches were imported into a reference manager, and duplicates were removed prior to screening. Titles and abstracts (or executive summaries, for policy documents) were screened against the inclusion criteria, with potentially relevant items retained for full-text review. When relevance could not be determined from the abstract, the full text was retrieved (Oermann & Knafl, 2021). Full-text screening and eligibility decisions were performed by at least two reviewers, with disagreements resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, consistent with best-practice recommendations for methodological rigor (Hopia et al., 2016).

Data Evaluation and Quality Appraisal

Because integrative reviews intentionally draw on diverse types of evidence, the evaluation process was tailored to document type while maintaining a common focus on relevance, conceptual clarity, and transparency of claims (Cronin & George, 2023; Hopia et al., 2016). Empirical studies were appraised using criteria adapted from established critical appraisal tools, including clarity of research questions, appropriateness of design and analysis, adequacy of reporting, and alignment between

methods and findings. Conceptual and theoretical pieces were evaluated for the coherence of their arguments and their explicit engagement with CEFR-CV constructs (Oermann & Knafl, 2021). Policy documents were assessed for explicitness, operational specificity, and internal consistency of references to CEFR, mediation, plurilingual/pluricultural competence, and action-oriented or task-based learning (Alvarenga et al., 2024).

Data Extraction and Coding

For all included sources, a structured data extraction form was developed to ensure consistent capture of information across heterogeneous materials. Extracted fields included bibliographic details, document type, educational level and sector, focal constructs, explicit references to CEFR or CEFR-CV, descriptions of how these constructs were defined and operationalized, and any stated or implied reference levels and descriptors (Oermann & Knafl, 2021). Data extraction was piloted on an initial subset of documents, refined to improve clarity and capture of CEFR-CV-specific elements, and finally applied to the full corpus (Hopia et al., 2016).

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data analysis followed the iterative, inductive-deductive logic recommended for integrative reviews, combining within-source analysis with cross-source comparison to generate higher-order themes and integrative insights (Cronin & George, 2023; Hopia et al., 2016). Thematic coding focused on (a) conceptualizations of mediation, (b) understandings of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and (c) representations of action-oriented learning and tasks in Thai policy and practice, with codes informed both by CEFR-CV constructs and by emergent categories grounded in the Thai materials. Themes were compared across policy documents, academic studies, and the CEFR-CV itself to identify convergences, divergences, gaps, and contextual reinterpretations, generating contextually grounded proposals for expanded local reference levels and descriptors (Alvarenga et al., 2024; Oermann & Knafl, 2021). Throughout the process, the review adhered to recommendations for enhancing methodological rigor, including explicit documentation of decisions at each stage, protocol-guided procedures, and careful reporting of search, selection, appraisal, and synthesis steps (Hopia et al., 2016; Oermann & Knafl, 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

CEFR and its global adaptation

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was first introduced by the Council of Europe in 2001 as a comprehensive tool

to support language learning, teaching, and assessment across diverse national contexts in Europe (Council of Europe, 2001). It aimed to provide a shared understanding of language proficiency through a set of descriptors across six reference levels (A1 to C2), facilitating transparency and comparability in language education (Council of Europe, 2001). In short, this is a framework that promotes an action-oriented approach, which views learners as “social agents” who use language in real-life tasks. CEFR was intended to assist in curriculum design, language policy formulation, textbook development, and language test construction.

Since its inception, CEFR has undergone both formal revisions and informal reinterpretations as it expanded beyond Europe. The publication of the CEFR Companion Volume (CEFR-CV) in 2018 and an updated version in 2020 marked a significant expansion of the framework (Council of Europe, 2020). Notable additions included plus levels (e.g., A2+, B1+), a new pre-A1 level, and detailed descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competence, mediation skills, online interaction, and literary appreciation (Council of Europe, 2020). According to North (2014) and Little and Erikson (2015), these innovations were prompted by critiques that the earlier version lacked specificity and failed to accommodate the increasingly multilingual and digital realities of learners worldwide. CEFR has been adopted or adapted in various regions, including East Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East (Raza & Chua, 2022). Often, this adaptation is based on differing degrees of localization (Zheng et al., 2016). For example, Japan introduced a branching model with intermediary levels, such as A1+ and A2+. It aims to better align with learners’ gradual progress (Foley, 2019b).

In contrast, China linked CEFR with its high-stakes testing systems (Zheng et al., 2016). While CEFR has been widely praised for promoting international transparency and learner-centered pedagogy, its transplantation into new contexts, however, requires careful consideration of local linguistic ecologies, learner identities, and institutional constraints. Noticeable are the challenges in Thailand, where the adoption of CEFR has intersected with national reforms, local test development, and efforts to raise English proficiency benchmarks. As Jones and Saville (2009) cautioned, CEFR’s utility as a global framework depends not on a wholesale adoption but on a thoughtful adaptation, particularly in non-European contexts where language use, educational traditions, and sociopolitical histories differ significantly.

CEFR and the Thai Educational Context

The adoption of CEFR in 2014 marked a significant milestone in its national efforts to enhance English

language standards in response to regional integration and global competitiveness (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017). The Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced CEFR as a central component of educational reform, citing concerns such as Thailand’s consistently low English proficiency rankings (Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021), particularly in the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), and the need to align with international benchmarks like the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Foley, 2019a; Franz & Teo, 2018). The announcement by the then Minister of Education, Dapong Ratanasuwan, in 2016 reflected this national urgency. One of the most notable moves was the nationwide CEFR-referenced placement test administered to over 42,000 government English teachers. The results indicated that 94% failed to meet the B2 level targeted for secondary school instruction (Franz & Teo, 2018). This assessment underscored two key issues: (1) a disconnect between the CEFR-based assessment instrument and the sociolinguistic realities of Thai educators, and (2) the broader lack of systematic teacher training and conceptual familiarity with CEFR across the school system.

Despite these challenges, the CEFR was formally incorporated into national policy documents such as the National Scheme of Education (2017-2036) and the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021). English language learning was framed within the broader goals of developing human capital, enhancing employability, and preparing students for participation in a global economy. However, while the policy discourse emphasized economic imperatives and global standards, it often lacked concrete pedagogical pathways for classroom implementation (Theppanya et al., 2025). This orientation is often presented in close association with concepts such as ‘employability’ and ‘skills’ (Savski, 2019). Teachers frequently reported receiving minimal support for integrating the CEFR into curricula, assessments, or instructional practices (Chartrakul & Damnet, 2021; Eiadkaew et al., 2025; Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021). Moreover, the centralized decision-making processes within the Thai educational system have further complicated the implementation of the CEFR (Siripol et al., 2025). While the MoE produced manuals and promotional materials such as “What is the CEFR?”, these efforts were not matched with sustained professional development or institutional incentives. For many educators, CEFR remained a distant policy concept rather than a transformative pedagogical tool.

In this context, the adoption of CEFR in Thailand reflects a familiar pattern in global education reform, where international frameworks

are adopted top-down with limited localization or stakeholder engagement. Such a top-down approach encourages the 'English Language Teaching (ELT) Industry (Block et al., 2012), which has seen CEFR being used by the ELT industry in the production and marketing of textbooks, materials, and tests.

The next section will explore one attempt to bridge this gap: the development of a localized framework known as FRELE-TH (Hiranburana et al., 2017) which sought to adapt CEFR principles (Council of Europe, 2020) to the specific needs and realities of Thai learners and educators.

FRELE-TH as a Localized CEFR Framework

Recognizing the limitations of direct CEFR adoption, Thai education stakeholders initiated a localized adaptation known as the Framework of Reference for English Language Education in Thailand (FRELE-TH), developed in 2017 by Hiranburana et al.,. FRELE-TH was designed to contextualize the CEFR's core principles within the Thai educational system (Hiranburana et al., 2017) and address criticisms regarding its cultural misalignment and limited applicability in Asian classrooms. Drawing inspiration from CEFR (2001), FRELE-TH sought to align teaching, assessment, and curriculum with a competency-based model that better reflected the linguistic realities of Thai learners. A central innovation in FRELE-TH was the introduction of ten reference levels, expanding CEFR's original six. These included "plus" levels (e.g., A1+, B1+, B2+), intended to capture more nuanced learner progression and to provide realistic milestones for teachers and learners with low-to-intermediate proficiency levels. This adaptation reflected similar efforts in Japan as previously indicated. FRELE-TH added a finer-grade form of assessment that was particularly significant in Thailand, where standardized test results often reflected a disconnection between learners' receptive and productive skills (Foley, 2019b).

Moreover, FRELE-TH adopted a task-based, action-oriented perspective, focusing on what learners can do in real-life situations, a move away from traditional, content-heavy instruction often based on native-speakerism. The framework incorporated 'Can Do' descriptors that linked language proficiency to professional and social domains. For example, recommended proficiency levels for immigration officers ranged from B1 to B2+ in receptive skills and from A2 to B1+ in productive skills. In contrast, English teachers were expected to achieve a level of C1 or above in all four skills (Hiranburana, 2020). This alignment of language competence with occupational roles illustrated a significant shift towards functional language use and workplace relevance. Action-oriented FRELE-TH attempted to counterbalance the test-oriented culture that had dominated Thai language education, rather than relying solely on

multiple-choice formats or grammar-heavy assessments, such as the O-NET. The framework advocated for a performance-based assessment, emphasizing oral communication, an area often neglected in national exams. This was in line with CEFR's original goal of promoting communicative competence over linguistic accuracy. FRELE-TH, however, was not immune to criticism. Some educators and commentators viewed it as another top-down initiative with limited grassroots engagement (Wudthayagorn, 2019). Others questioned whether the framework was sufficiently distinct from CEFR to address the systemic issues facing English language teaching in Thailand. In response, Hiranburana (2020) emphasized that FRELE-TH was never intended to be prescriptive; instead, it was envisioned as a springboard for reflection and pedagogical reform, supporting a shift from declarative knowledge to applied communicative competence.

FRELE-TH, therefore, represents a meaningful attempt to localize the CEFR within the Thai context (Hiranburana, 2017). It expands proficiency benchmarks, integrates occupational needs, and encourages more dynamic forms of assessment and instruction. However, its impact remains contingent on consistent institutional buy-in, teacher training, and the ability to navigate the tension between international frameworks and local educational realities.

Challenges in Implementation

The practical implementation of these frameworks in Thailand has encountered significant challenges. These challenges span systemic, pedagogical, cultural, and resource-related dimensions, often undermining the transformative goals of CEFR-inspired reform, despite the promise of CEFR and its localized adaptation through FRELE-TH.

Limited teacher familiarity and professional development

One of the most pressing challenges lies in teachers' limited understanding of CEFR principles and their practical application. Studies have consistently shown that many Thai EFL teachers recognize CEFR primarily as an assessment scale but lack a deeper grasp of its pedagogical foundations, such as the action-oriented approach, plurilingual/pluricultural, and mediation (Kanchai, 2019; Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021). Although the Ministry of Education has disseminated CEFR-related manuals and held introductory workshops, these efforts have been top-down and have not been sufficiently integrated into ongoing professional development programs. This knowledge gap has contributed to a superficial engagement with the CEFR, where teachers rely on outdated grammar-translation methods while nominally aligning their instruction with CEFR levels.

Overreliance on high-stakes testing

Another barrier to effective implementation is the entrenched culture of high-stakes testing. National assessments, such as the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET), continue to emphasize multiple-choice formats that test grammatical knowledge and reading comprehension, while largely neglecting productive skills, including speaking and writing (Wudthayagorn, 2018). This creates a mismatch between CEFR's communicative, holistic approach and classroom realities in which assessment drives instruction. Using CEFR levels as a metric for testing learners' language proficiency is unrealistic (Fleckenstein, Leucht, & Koller, 2018). Teachers under pressure to prepare students for exams often feel compelled to teach to the test, sidelining CEFR-based competencies and descriptors. In Thailand, higher education institutions were mandated to implement a CEFR-aligned English proficiency examination (Cheewasukthaworn, 2002). Consequently, there has been a development and implementation of local 'standardized' English proficiency tests. Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency (CU-TEP), Prince Songkhla University, Test of English Proficiency (PSE-TEP), Thammasat University General English Test (YU-GET), Srinakharinwirot University Standardized English Test (SWU-SET), and Walailak University Test of English Proficiency (WUTEP) (Waluyo et al., 2024). However, these remain inconsistently validated and often lack robust frameworks for assessing productive and intercultural competencies (Waluyo, et al., 2024). The absence of a national CEFR-aligned speaking test has further exacerbated this imbalance. Although oral assessment is important, it is by nature incomplete. A more holistic perspective may be a more effective choice, such as the Language Portfolio, which consists of a Passport, Biography, and Dossier, a form of assessment recommended by CEFR. The tendency in Thailand to view CEFR as another form of assessment has revealed a limited understanding of what it is. The CEFR acknowledges that it alone cannot guarantee that different institutions will use the CEFR and arrive at comparable interpretations of its proficiency scales (Harsch, 2018). Indeed, adopting the CEFR at the policy and assessment levels without subsequent implementation in teaching and learning has the potential to create anxiety and widen the gaps between expectations and reality related to language competence (Novawan et al., 2018).

Structural and Resource Disparities

Significant disparities between urban and rural schools characterize Thailand's educational landscape. Many schools, particularly in remote or under-resourced areas, struggle with large class

sizes, limited internet connectivity, insufficient access to CEFR-aligned materials, and a lack of qualified English teachers (Sriwongsa & Sukying, 2023). These systemic inequalities inhibit the consistent application of CEFR or FRELE-TH. Teachers in such settings may lack both the time and support to redesign lessons around Can Do descriptors or to adopt more learner-centered methodologies.

Cultural and conceptual misalignment

The philosophical orientation of CEFR, which foregrounds learner agency, intercultural communication, and plurilingual and pluricultural, can be challenging to reconcile with Thailand's exam-oriented, teacher-fronted classroom culture. For instance, the concept of mediation, a core element in the CEFR Companion Volume (2018/2020), is seldom incorporated into classroom activities or assessments, as it requires a level of learner autonomy and collaborative learning often absent in traditional classrooms (Piamsai, 2023). Similarly, the notion of plurilingual/pluricultural competence remains underutilized in official discourse, despite Thailand's richly multilingual society (Premsrirat, 2011; Kosonen, 2016).

Lack of policy continuity and institutional support

Implementation efforts have also been hampered by shifting political priorities and inconsistent policy follow-through. Initiatives such as ERIC (English Resource and Instruction Centres) and CEFR-based teacher training programs often rely on the leadership of individual schools or regional directors, resulting in uneven dissemination and limited long-term sustainability. Without institutional backing, such as integration into preservice teacher education, performance appraisal systems, and textbook evaluation mechanisms, the CEFR is at risk of becoming a symbolic rather than substantive reform (Chartrakul & Damnet, 2021).

CEFR-CV (2018/2020): Mediation and Plurilingualism and Pluriculturalism

The CEFR Companion Volume (CEFR-CV), published in 2018 and updated in 2020, represents a significant evolution of the original 2001 framework, expanding its conceptual and pedagogical scope. Key additions included more detailed proficiency descriptors, the introduction of new proficiency levels (e.g., pre-A1 and "plus" levels), and most notably, the formal inclusion of mediation, plurilingual, and pluricultural competencies (Council of Europe, 2020). These developments respond to increasing recognition of the complexity of language use in multilingual societies and digital environments, an area particularly relevant to Thailand's diverse linguistic landscape and evolving educational goals.

Mediation as a core competency

Mediation in CEFR-CV refers to the learner's ability to facilitate understanding between individuals or groups, whether by translating, paraphrasing, summarizing, or co-constructing meaning in interaction. Unlike traditional communicative tasks that focus solely on language production or reception, mediation emphasizes negotiation, cooperation, and meaning-making within and across languages. This aligns with 21st-century skills, including collaboration, critical thinking, and adaptability. In Thailand, however, the integration of mediation into curricula and assessment remains in its early stages. Few textbooks or classroom practices explicitly incorporate mediation tasks, and most teachers are unfamiliar with how to design or assess such competencies (Charttrakul & Damnet, 2021). This gap may stem from the longstanding focus on receptive grammar-based instruction and the lack of training in pedagogical innovation. Moreover, mediation requires instructional shifts toward learner autonomy and cooperative learning practices, which are still underdeveloped in many Thai schools.

Nevertheless, the concept of mediation offers a powerful pedagogical tool for encouraging learner agency, critical engagement, and intercultural sensitivity. For example, activities such as collaborative problem-solving, bilingual project work and interpreting visual or multimedia content align well with the mediation descriptors. These can be integrated into both digital and face-to-face modalities, offering flexibility in resource-constrained settings.

Plurilingualism and Pluricultural Competence

The CEFR-CV also reaffirms the value of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, emphasizing that language learners draw on multiple linguistic and cultural resources simultaneously. Unlike monolingual paradigms that treat languages as separate entities, the plurilingual model supports fluidity, code-switching, and translanguaging, particularly relevant in Thailand's sociolinguistic context, where multiple local and immigrant languages coexist alongside English and Thai (Kosonen, 2016; Premsrirat, 2011). Despite this, plurilingualism has received limited attention in Thai language education policy and curriculum development. English, as previously noted, continues to be narrowly framed as a language of economic utility and international mobility, rather than as part of a broader multilingual repertoire. Textbooks and assessments rarely acknowledge students' prior linguistic resources or invite cross-linguistic comparison and integration. As a result, students are discouraged from leveraging their full communicative potential. Incorporating translanguaging pedagogy and plurilingual tasks,

such as multilingual portfolios, comparative text analysis, or digital storytelling in multiple languages, could foster learners' reflective and strategic use of language. Such practices not only validate students' linguistic identities but also align with global shifts toward inclusive and equity-based language education (Chaisiri, 2022; Weber & Horner, 2012).

IMPLICATION FOR THAI EDUCATION

Adopting the mediation, plurilingual, and pluricultural dimensions of CEFR-CV in Thailand would necessitate a significant shift in language teaching and teacher education. Teachers must be trained not only in what these constructs mean but also in how to operationalize them through task design and inclusive classroom interactions. Furthermore, educational stakeholders must recognize that mediation, plurilingualism, and pluriculturalism are not peripheral competencies but essential to preparing learners for communication in globalized, multilingual, and digitally mediated environments. In short, the CEFR-CV presents a timely opportunity for Thailand to reimagine the CEFR not merely as a testing instrument but as a transformative framework for intercultural communication, social inclusion, and pedagogical innovation. Its full realization depends on systemic alignment between policy, practice, and professional development, a theme explored further in the next section.

Pedagogical innovation and teacher education

For CEFR and its Companion Volume (CEFR-CV) to effect meaningful change in Thai language education, pedagogical innovation must be foregrounded alongside systemic reform. Central to this shift is the reconfiguration of teacher education, both preservice and in-service, to equip educators with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to implement CEFR's action-oriented, plurilingual, and mediation-based principles in real classrooms (Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021).

The CEFR envisions teachers not simply as transmitters of grammatical knowledge, but as facilitators of authentic, interactive language use. This requires a departure from traditional lecture-style instruction toward learner-centered, task-based pedagogies. However, existing teacher education programs in Thailand often continue to emphasize formal language knowledge and exam preparation, with limited exposure to curriculum design based on Can Do descriptors, mediation tasks, or integrated skills development (Franz & Teo, 2018; Sriwongsa & Sukying, 2023). To address this gap, teacher education curricula must be restructured to include CEFR-focused modules that explore its theoretical underpinnings, practical applications, and context-specific adaptations. Such modules should be

accompanied by opportunities for hands-on implementation through lesson planning, material development, and classroom-based inquiry.

In parallel with pedagogical reform, digital literacy has emerged as a vital component of 21st-century teaching competence. The integration of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) into CEFR-based instruction enables teachers to use technology not as an add-on, but as an embedded tool for promoting interaction, collaboration, and language development. CEFR-CV supports this shift by including descriptors for online interaction, digital communication, and collaborative mediation. Platforms such as Google Classroom, Moodle, and Microsoft Teams offer opportunities for blended learning, self-assessment, and digital portfolio building (Chen & Wu, 2023). However, research indicates that many Thai teachers, especially in rural areas, face challenges such as limited infrastructure, lack of confidence in selecting digital tools, and insufficient training on integrating technology into language instruction (Lee & Song, 2022; Yoon & Kim, 2023). In order to foster innovation, teacher training programs must explicitly address these challenges by offering:

- Workshops on CEFR-aligned digital lesson design.
- Exposure to open educational resources (OERs) that incorporate plurilingual and multicultural perspectives.
- Training in the use of online assessment tools, digital storytelling, and collaborative writing platforms.

Translanguaging and Inclusive Pedagogies

Another promising avenue for pedagogical innovation is the incorporation of translanguaging practices, which align with CEFR-CV's emphasis on plurilingualism. Translanguaging enables learners to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire, including Thai, local dialects, and English, to construct meaning, negotiate tasks, and express their identity (Chaisiri, 2022). This is particularly important in multicultural regions of Thailand, where students may speak languages such as Malay, Chinese, Khmer, or Hmong at home. Teachers can integrate translanguaging through:

- Bilingual word walls or glossaries.
- Multilingual writing journals.
- Group projects that allow the use of multiple languages for content creation.

Such practices challenge the traditional monolingual norm and promote a more inclusive classroom environment, aligning with the CEFR's holistic vision of the user/learner as a social agent.

Sustainable pedagogical change depends not only on individual teacher agency but on institutional support and peer collaboration.

Initiatives such as the English Resource and Instruction Centres (ERIC) provide a potential model for fostering regional professional learning communities. These centers, when adequately supported, can host workshops, share CEFR-aligned materials, and mentor teachers on assessment and classroom strategies. Moreover, the use of social media networks (e.g., LINE, Facebook groups) among teacher cohorts has shown promise in Thailand as informal channels for professional development. Harnessing these platforms for CEFR-related collaboration and reflective practice can empower teachers to experiment with new methodologies and exchange localized insights. A successful integration of CEFR and CEFR-CV in Thai classrooms thus hinges on a multi-tiered approach, one that strengthens teacher education, supports digital and multilingual pedagogies, and builds collaborative ecosystems for sustained professional growth.

The following section provides a more comprehensive discussion of these insights and their implications for national language policy and curriculum reform.

Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

The preceding analysis reveals that the implementation of CEFR and its localized adaptation through FRELE-TH in Thailand represents a complex intersection of global frameworks, national policy, institutional structures, and classroom realities. While significant efforts have been made to align English language education with CEFR standards, challenges in policy execution, pedagogical adaptation, and resource allocation continue to hinder its transformative potential. This section discusses key implications across three interrelated domains: policy and governance, curriculum and assessment, and teacher development and classroom practice.

Thailand's decision to adopt the CEFR was primarily driven by external benchmarks and global competitiveness, particularly within the ASEAN region, and in response to international assessments such as PISA. However, policy adoption has often been top-down, with apparently limited consultation with local educators, school leaders, and curriculum developers. As highlighted by Franz and Teo (2018), the lack of contextualization and teacher agency has resulted in fragmented and uneven implementation.

To move forward, language policy must embrace a bottom-up model of reform that:

- Engages stakeholders at all levels, including teachers, learners, and local communities.
- Recognizes the plurilingual realities of Thai society, moving beyond English as a purely instrumental or economic asset.

- Establishes long-term national strategies for CEFR adaptation that integrate curriculum, teacher training, and assessment reform.

Policy efforts, therefore, must also shift from symbolic alignment with CEFR to substantive integration of its pedagogical values, including learner agency, communicative competence, and intercultural understanding.

Curriculum and assessment reform

One of the most pressing needs is the development of coherent, CEFR-aligned curricula that are localized, feasible, and oriented toward learning outcomes beyond grammar and vocabulary recall. FRELE-TH provides a foundation; however, it requires systematic integration into instructional materials, syllabi, and institutional learning standards.

Reforms should include:

- Development of curriculum frameworks that use Can Do descriptors as progression markers across educational levels.
- Creation of localized assessment tools that balance receptive and productive skills and incorporate mediation and plurilingual competence.
- Use of formative and performance-based assessments, such as digital portfolios, group tasks, and project-based learning, to capture learner development over time (Little & Erikson, 2015).

Additionally, alignment between national standardized tests and CEFR principles should be carefully managed to avoid distorting teaching practices and ensure a meaningful assessment of communicative skills.

Teacher Training and Classroom Practice

As the primary agents of CEFR implementation, teachers require targeted support and ongoing professional development to implement the CEFR effectively. This includes:

- CEFR-informed teacher education curricula in universities.
- Practical workshops on task design, digital tool integration, and differentiated instruction based on CEFR profiles.
- Access to exemplar materials and model lesson plans that incorporate CEFR-CV descriptors, mediation tasks, and translanguaging strategies.

Furthermore, a culture of reflective practice and collaboration must be cultivated through professional learning communities, digital networks, and school-based mentoring systems. This means empowering teachers to adapt the CEFR to their

local contexts, rather than merely complying with policy. This notion will be crucial to ensure its sustainability and relevance (Koleeyoh et al., 2024; Phaisanan et al., 2019; Piamsai, 2023).

As Thailand's experience reflects broader patterns in Asia, CEFR is increasingly used as a tool for internationalization and educational accountability. Comparative studies with countries such as Japan, Vietnam, and Malaysia reveal similar tensions between global frameworks and local needs (Foley, 2019b; Foley, 2022; Savski, 2019). These comparisons underscore the importance of adaptive translation, where the CEFR is not imposed wholesale but rather reshaped to align with socio-cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical conditions. As such, Thailand can contribute to the regional and global discourse on CEFR by:

- Sharing localized practices (e.g., FRELE-TH, task design models) through regional research networks.
- Participating in collaborative CEFR-alignment studies and benchmarking projects.
- Advocating for inclusive, multilingual approaches to language education in ASEAN policy forums.

The successful localization and implementation of the CEFR in Thailand requires a coordinated, context-aware, and teacher-empowering approach. The framework's value lies not in its ability to standardize, but in its flexibility to support reflective, equitable, and dynamic language education.

CONCLUSION

The adoption and adaptation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Thailand reflects a broader trend in global education reform, one that seeks to balance international standards with local pedagogical needs. Initially introduced as part of national strategies to enhance English proficiency and align with global benchmarks such as ASEAN integration and PISA, CEFR's implementation in Thailand has been both ambitious and uneven.

This article has examined the evolution of the CEFR in the Thai context through different perspectives: historical and policy developments, the emergence of the localized FRELE-TH framework, ongoing challenges in classroom integration, and the potential of the CEFR Companion Volume (2018/2020) to reshape pedagogy through constructs such as mediation, plurilingualism, and multiculturalism. While Thailand has made commendable efforts in contextualizing CEFR, most notably through its expanded proficiency scales and occupationally anchored descriptors, the practical uptake remains

hindered by systemic barriers, including limited teacher training, centralized decision-making, and a persistent focus on high-stakes testing. The findings underscore that the CEFR's significant promise lies not in its adoption as a metric for standardization, but in its capacity to facilitate pedagogical transformation. This requires reimagining teacher education, assessment, curriculum design, and digital integration in ways that reflect learners' linguistic realities and communicative needs. Frameworks such as FRELE-TH, when paired with sustained professional development and local ownership, have the potential to bridge the gap between policy and practice. However, disappointingly, in a recent article (Wudthayagorn, 2025) outlining what directions lie ahead for CEFR does not consider the CEFR Companion Volume on mediation, plurilingual and pluriculturalism, as major directions to be taken for the future in a Thai context.

As Thailand continues to grapple with the demands of globalization, technological change, and sociolinguistic diversity, CEFR should not be viewed merely as a European export or administrative tool. Instead, it should engage critically and creatively, as a flexible, evolving, and context-responsive framework that can support more inclusive, reflective, and meaningful language education. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of CEFR implementation at the classroom level, investigate regional comparisons within ASEAN, and evaluate the transformative potential of CEFR-CV across multilingual and multicultural education systems.

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